



## Health of Left behind Families of Overseas Migrants

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**Abstract:** Health education is least prioritized, in economically sustained households. To measure the influence of migration on the wellbeing of the rural community District Rawalpindi. In qualitative study, purposive sampling was used. Key informant, in-depth interviews, participant observation carried out. Disease prevalence, found observable. International remittance reflected impact on nutritious diet in sickness but people seemed careless about health despite of sustained financial resource. They seemed to become decisively conscious about healthy life and its value unless any family member went through severe disease consequences and sickness. Remittances broadened choices to seek health care preferences among modern medicines and traditional healing methods. Lack of awareness to manage sickness and diseases, people found deprived of health education. Remittances accelerated the reduction in disease financial burden but least productive behaviors towards health. The study revealed health education and disease awareness is mandatory for rural dwellings to achieve Sustained Development Goals (SDGs- 2030).

**Key Words:** Migration, Left Behind Families, Health, Rural Households, Remittances, Pakistan

### Introduction

Pakistan is a developing country and also owns enriched, diverse socio-cultural landscape. Great variations are noticeable throughout the country, particularly in Punjab and most specifically in the Potohar region. Potohar is a segment of northern Punjab. It is most populous arid zone of Pakistan. Rain serves as a major source of water. About 2600 rural communities dwell in this arid zone and it is a famous region for international migration for remittances. The money remitted from different countries in this region influenced various aspects of rural life but the present work

revolves around the impact of overseas migration on the health of left behind families. To Overseas, migration is a strong source to bring improvement in living standards of poor dwellings. (Clemens, 2011).

Pakistan reflects migration and human mobility for money in the shape of remittances. Overseas migration for remittances represents 6 billion workers, serving outside the country ranking Pakistan at 9th position worldwide for remittances (Ahmed, *et al*, 2009). Labor migration is about moving to a foreign country for earning purposes. It has been well developed

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phenomenon in poor countries. People in deprived areas remain eager to earn for survival of households. They have been developed a source of earning by means of remittances through international labor migration. Better earning opportunities for livelihoods, attract a skilled and unskilled workforce of Pakistan, especially belonging to economically deprived rural households. "Migration has been used as one of the important income sources and actively adopted as a household strategy in the region"(Hisaya, H. 2007). They are more like foreign workers than immigrants because they don't settle in host country permanently.

Geographically Potohar is a region, with uneven land and less favorable environment to generate suitable income to support households. Limited natural resources and less productivity in agriculture never satisfied the native communities. Climatically it is an arid zone, and the life of the villagers has been much dependent on rain. When the sole purpose of international migration revolves around earning money, migration may contribute to further development and improved economic as well as social condition (Castles, 2000). With variable levels of intensity climatic, geographic, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political, caste and clan, human resource, natural or man-made indemnities and above all, a continuous struggle by man for him and his kin survival, has served as vital stimulus. The conscious and subconscious of people keep on grasping the concept of availing the opportunity of remittances.

The focus of the present study is a small rural dwelling of district Rawalpindi. History has played an important role in this small community to encourage people for overseas migration. The first ever migrant departed in the 1950's with the reason of economic well-being. After being settled in Europe, he supported his family and relatives for overseas migration. Step for earning has opened minds to think for a foreign land. Through the exchange of foreign experiences,

telling facts about life in a new country and the handsome amount of money that he succeeds to earn always served as an exciting story with a happy ending in the form of remittances. Foreign money has seemed major driving force behind overseas migration in the area. Better earning opportunity for livelihoods were attracted by the skilled and unskilled workforce of deprived households. The picture cleared 52 households exclusively those members have migrated for economic-wellbeing of natives. The locale portrait that the majority of migrants with 61.5% have been living in Europe, while 38.50 % in the Middle East.

Overseas migration for remittances has an expensive endeavor. Constraint in meeting the basic need of life stimulates household members to explore ways to raise income. As "Non-resident members of the household constitute a significant income source for a high proportion of these send remittances in cash or kind to support their dependents in the village" (Naseem, 1986). Labor migration has been adopted for socio-economic uplift for the dependents. For economic and social welfare, people started moving in mass numbers over time. Passing years resulted increasing behavior to adopt overseas migration. People met an attractive volume of money in the shape of remittance helpful in reducing economic pressure. The poverty of household has been debilitated through up-ward income mobility. When the sole purpose of overseas migration revolves around earning money, migration may contribute to further development and improved economic as well as social conditions (Castles, 2000). People have believed remittances as a good income source "remittances represented the main source of income" (Vladicescu, 2008). Destination countries hold promising employment opportunities and boosted economic conditions thus serve as incentives for migration. (Ahmad, *et al.* 2008).

The importance of health is undeniable in every society. It is a common notion that health bodied keeps healthy minds. Overseas migration involves a real time absence of a member of the household who exclusively strives for better income. The overall well-being of a household is dependent upon a variety of factors, though the release of economic stress is a major factor. Antman (2010b) in his series of research articulated reported that parents suffer and he further named a few medical problems like physical and mental health including heart diseases. Antman (2010c) provides evidence that the parents left behind, live with poor health. Antman (2010c) deduced deterioration of the mental health of parents, social isolation and other health problems. It is obvious that the major focus of large-scale studies till to date is net effect of overseas migration on the economic outcome and living standard of households. There is a growing need to decompose different mechanisms involved in Overseas migration that influence the fine integrated fabric of the host as well as the home countries of labor migrants.

## Locale

The study was conducted in the rural community of district Rawalpindi. This region is known as Potohar and is administrative segment of northern Punjab. The geographic coordinates of this zone are 32.5°N to 34.0°N Latitude and from about 72°E to 74°E Longitude. The geological diversity of the Potohar is massive. This piece of land lies between tow rivers (Indus and Jhelum) from Salt Range northward to the foothills of the Himalayas. Soil diversity is reflected in the word Potohar which means “Soil of rough and uneven land”. Attack, Rawaat, Rotas forts and worldwide famous civilization Taxila highlights its archaeological significance. Potohar land is administratively divided in four districts (Rawalpindi, Chakwal, Attack and Jehlum). Rawalpindi is largest populated district with a total area 5,285 square kilometers and 43, 95,000

populations (2006). On the east it is boarded by Jammu Kashmir across river Jhelum while on the north Abotabad of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On the west Attack while Jhelum and Chakwal on the south. Rawalpindi is situated at 517 meters above sea level. Potohar is renowned for remittances and interconnections with many countries of developed world. The rural community of the present study is part of Rawalpindi. The community is a cultural and socio-economic hub as it serves union point for peripheral villages for transport facility. The locale holds emerging trend for international migration and the potential impact of the flow of foreign money on the social and economic well-being of rural households.

## Research Methodologies

Research methodologies constitute efficiency in Anthology. Research methodologies are a combination of study tools and techniques used to collect data during field work. Present ethnographic research based on qualitative research methodologies. The anthropological research work systematically reaches deep down in places where humans and their cultures, both influence each other in a contiguous manner. The people of village have high consideration for international remittances. Information and facts collected through judgmental, accidental, and Snowball sampling and observed details of the daily life of the community. key informant, in-depth and structure interviews carried out. Participant observation and socioeconomic senses survey were part of the methodology. 300 households covered that represented 104 migrants while 196 non-migrant. The households with members as migrants and received international remittances regularly were focused in the present work. Therefore, 52 households were selected. Information and facts collected through judgmental, accidental and Snowball sampling and observed details of the daily life of the community. key informant one

male and two females were selected from a locale that was a first hand source of gathering information. In-depth and structure interviews carried out. Participant observation and socioeconomic senses survey were part of the methodology. The technique applied in the present study ensured to observe details of the routine life of targeted international remittances receiving households.

## Findings

### Overseas Migration Dynamics

#### A: Demographic Features of Locale

According to the information collected from office of union council about 3% male population exceeds over females. The population of the locale is represented in the following table.

**Table 1.** Demographic Features of Locale

S. No	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	1300	53
2	Female	1150	47
3	Total	2450	100

Source: Union Council.

#### B: Time Line of Overseas Migration

In order to focus overseas migrants of the village a timeline of the trend of migration was tabulated as follows. The timeline depicts an increasing

trend of overseas migration. The time period has been rounded 1971 to 2012. The consistent increase reflects the intimate relationship of migrants with their native region.

**Table 2.** Time Line of Overseas Migration

S. No	Years	Frequency	Percentage
1	1971-2000	21	32.3
2	2001-2012	44	67.7
3	Total	65	100.0

Socio-Economic Census

#### C: Global Distribution of Overseas Migrants for Labor

European countries seemed to be more favorable for labor migrants as compare to the Middle East region for the villagers of the present locale. In

order to analyze the reason or factor involved in such kind of distribution, need to explore details of the nature of labor that migrants opt. The dynamic of overseas migration for labor with respect of the global distribution of migrant is given in the following table

**Table 3.** Global Distribution of Labor Migrants

S. No	On Globe	Frequency	Percentage
1	Middle East	25	38.5
2	Europe	40	61.5
3	Total	65	100

Socio-Economic Census

### D: Skilled and Unskilled Labor

Although skilled and unskilled are generalized terms to understand the supply and demand relation of labor, the present study revealed that

about 3/4<sup>th</sup> of labor migrants of the locale are skilled. The broader division of labor migrant of the locale as skilled and unskilled is represented in the following table.

**Table 4.** Skilled and Unskilled Labor

S. No	Nature of Job	Frequency	Percentage
1	Skilled labour	46	70.7
2	Unskilled	19	29.3
3	Total	65	100

*Socio-Economic Census*

Migration to a strange land with the aim of giving the best part of their life to unseen geographic regions of the world, facing different socio-cultural fabric of strange human societies with the sole aim of earning money is a very rich phenomenon. Earning potential is not a static ability of humans. They learn and educate themselves and gain skills to serve and earn. Health and physical fitness, technical skills, professional education and even communication

skills are always need of every human society for growth and development. Thus the nature of the job has a significant effect on earnings.

### E: Nature of Work Force in the Middle East

Findings of the present study further details the trend of skilled and unskilled labor in the Middle East and Europe. Details are reported in the following tables.

**Table 5.** Nature of Work Force in the Middle East

S. No	Nature of Job	Frequency	Percentage
1	Skilled labour	14	36
2	Unskilled	11	32
3	Total	25	100

*Socio-Economic Census*

**Table 6.** Nature of Work Force in Europe

S. No	Nature of Job	Frequency	Percentage
1	Skilled labour	32	80
2	Unskilled	08	20
3	Total	40	100

*Socio-Economic Census*

The distribution trend of skilled verses unskilled labor in the Middle East and Europe represented in table 5, and table 6 respectively. Europe is the potential region for skilled labor as compared to

the Middle East. There is a minor variation within the Middle East between skilled and unskilled labor while there is a highly significant difference within Europe.

## F: Age Range of Migrants

Age is an important contributing factor in earning potential. Therefore, present research

also focused on age of migrants serving abroad. The following table provides stats about the age range, number and percentages of the workforce serving in the Middle East and Europe.

**Table 7.** Age Range of Migrants

S. No	Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
1	20-30	16	24
2	31-40	29	45
3	41-50	14	22
4	Above 50	06	09
5	Total	65	100

*Socio-Economic Census*

The findings of the above table inform that a major portion of the work force is young blood while a considerable number of migrants is also of greater age. It is important to note that from 20 years of age up to 50 years they provide their services to overseas countries. We can perceive that labor migrant above 50 years return to their homeland after spending a major part of their life outside the native land.

## G: Livelihoods of Overseas Work Force

The nature of employment is an important factor in order to get a deep insight about exploiting new earning opportunities in a foreign land. Labor migrants of the locale, gain skills and apply through agents for livelihoods. The following table reflects the nature of the jobs of migrants.

**Table 8.** Livelihoods of Overseas Work Force

S. No	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Daily wages	03	4.6%
2	Shop Keeper	04	6.2%
3	Factory Labor	20	30.7%
4	Electrician	02	3.1%
5	Driver	08	12.3%
6	Labor construction	14	21.5%
7	Plumber	05	7.7%
8	Tailor	01	1.5%
9	Patrol Pump	04	6.2%
10	Waiter	02	3.1%
11	Business	02	3.1%
12	Total	65	100%

*Socio-Economic Census*

The observations of the present study revealed the nature of the skills of labor migrants. People

of the locale spend their time with people of the locale who have experience in different skills and

learn from them in an informal way. Meanwhile, remain in contact with local agents to apply for overseas.

### H: Educational Trend among Labor Migrants

Education is a basic right of every human being on the Globe. The education level in the form of the literacy rate of labor migrants of the villages

is represented in table 9. Education has a significant role in exploring earning opportunities and preventing oneself from negative exploitation. Education helps to gain knowledge, absorb it and intermingle in the social fabric of a strange community. The following table provides us stats about education level.

**Table 9.** Educational Trend among Labor Migrants

S. No	Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
1	Uneducated	00	00.0
2	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	03	04.6
3	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	18	27.7
4	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	27	41.5
5	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	13	20.0
6	Bachelor's Degree	04	06.2
7	Total	65	100.0

*Socio-Economic Census*

### Impact of Overseas Migration on Health

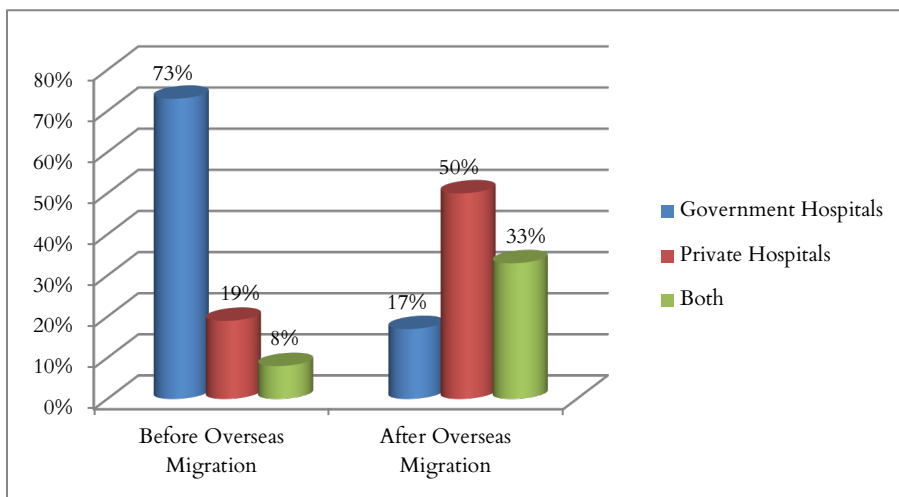
Health is a basic human right like education. Healthy and educated people are valuable assets of every human society. Present study focused on this aspect with its relation to labor migration. For health facilities, there is no government hospital, dispensary and public health center within the village. A retired midwife provides the first initial health facility to the child and mother at her own home. Otherwise people went to hospitals, nearby village at a distance of 5 km but they mostly prefer to go to a nearby city for better health services, they also go to the government and private hospitals of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Basic health facilities are not available in the locale. The prevalence of various diseases among men, women and children is noticeable. Diabetes, hepatitis B, C and Cardiac diseases are common among both males and female. Female suffer from hypertension, blood deficiency and arthritis. Children have been caught with measles and seasonal temperature. Hereditary or genetic

diseases are also found in a village like Thalassemia and mental retardation. Accessibility of health facilities and adequate diet in the migrant household is a ramification of financial growth via remittances. In the early stages of the disease, people mostly seemed reluctant for proper check-up and health treatment from a specialist due to financial constraints. Therefore, they mostly rely on healing, homeopathy treatment and government hospitals. Remittances improved the tendency of private medical treatment more than from government's hospitals. They can manage modern medicines then other primitive treatments for cure. The affordability of private hospitals elevated 50% in the locale. A poor can enjoy a better income status, he can provide a basic livelihood to his family best education good health which lead better living standards all these things increase the social status of the poor in society.

In the village generally people were careless about their health. They did not bother about

regular medical check-up and intake of nutritional diet with proper treatment of diseases. During the socio-economic survey, conducted in 2012 it has been identified that a considerable number of diseases are prevalent in the village. The percentage of migrant's households with the burden of disease has been presented in a given graph. The presented study highlighted the most prevalent disease in households are Cardiac disease. Elders above 50 of their age have more inclination towards this disease. The other diseases included Diabetes with 10% households, whereas 14% households facing Blood Pressure issues, which were mostly face by females mainly caused by low-level nutrition and unresolved pregnancy complications, depression and epilepsy also prevailed at the household level. Along with these 8% households are facing a reproductive health problem. 14% households are

suffering from Arthritis. Hepatitis and Renal diseases. 4% households are affected by Asthma and physical disability whereas Tuberculosis are prevalent in 2% households. Migrant's households have to deal with these diseases through regular treatment and medication. Bulk of money in the form of remittances provided opportunities to the families to avail better way of treatments. Life style towards health have seldom considerations in daily life until to appear any disease. Suffering due to disease and pain people pay the attentions for better health even remittances give way to afford a better way of treatment to reduce illness sufferings. Remittances improved the propensity of private medical treatment more than from government hospitals. In this reference following graph highlight the observation.



**Graph 4:** Preference of Health Treatment before and After Overseas Migration  
*Socio-Economic Census*

The above graph clearly articulate the expediency of altering preferences of health treatment in migrant's household. Evidently affordability and inclination to improved health facilities is a ramification of raised income through remittances. Before overseas migration 73% households were reliant on government

hospital while after migration only 17% prefer government hospitals. Before migration 19% households prefer private hospitals, whereas the tendency to private hospitals elevated to 50% after overseas migration. There is also a notable figure of households which exercise both,



government and private hospitals according to the needs.

Attributable to available remittances, maternity health improved due to the preference of deliveries in the hospitals over *dar*(TBA) and giving birth at home. Prior to that, they relied on their limited resources. In savior circumstances they have to take a loan from relatives. For instance, during an interview a female shared that before migration her in-laws took loan from relative on her first childbirth. But after overseas migration of her husband they managed the treatment and regular checkups by their own. On health treatment, the average migrant's households spend Rs.1545 per month apart from unexpected health expenses. In this way remittances reduced the sudden economic pressure regarding health care and diseases. Along with basic required medication, households have to combat with genetic diseases. The economic stability persuaded migrant's households for regular health treatment of family members. The average households spend Rs.20000/- per month for food consumptions. Results of present research show that remittances are a very important part of income of a household in Pakistan.

## Conclusion

The people of the rural part with limited natural resources, medium, patchy pieces of land, dry weather and limited ground water resources; found Overseas migration a good fortune to support their households. Thus overseas migration served as landscape maneuverer for the village. Within about half of a century a rural part of an arid region transformed from mud or "Kacha" houses to "PakaMakan". Even the infrastructure and construction patterns changed at an observable level because of the remittances that is outcome of labor migration. The remittances served as a multifold phenomenon in the lives of the villagers. Strong bilateral exposure and experiences of migrants within native as well

as region of migration facilitated the population of the village to ponder and strive for overseas migration. Rural lifestyle is a binding force where people spend lives under the shade of interdependent socio-cultural, caste and kin ties. Therefore, a few migrants became local agents to facilitate the young males of the village. The service provision as local agent also helped the experienced migrants in establishing another income elevating source within the native region.

Rural life with integrated enriched networking of human relations kept villagers interdependent. Parents often arrange a bulk of money and send their children to live the most productive part of their life in foreign countries and earn a good amount of money that would otherwise not possible by putting effort in the native region. Thus, it was observable that males of young age as 20 become migrants, with an education level about a metric by and large. Do not spend time to further their education, with reference to the nature of the job even less botheration was observed. They migrate with skill or even without any skill in the hands when they leave their country. With a thought sooner they go, the better it would be. Overseas migration made it possible that the poor enjoyed a better income status, provided a basic livelihood to their family best education good health, and better living standards. Rural households with labor migrants not only developed a choice between traditional and modern medicines, but also preferred private hospitals for treatment. Overseas migration enabled household to cope with sudden economic shocks of savior diseases faced by household members. In the present work it is noticeable that a considerable disease load was present in left behind families of the labor migrants. In the village people believe that due to foreign money left behind seldom dies without treatment even in case of an incurable medical problem.

Along with enhanced socio-economic status, physical absences of the migrant from the

household persuaded the sentiment of kin and affinal relations. His social relations like the family-friends and core relations face the absence of that person. He could not directly represent his presence in the family and social affairs. The social networks, social tie and relations feels a lack of his personal contribution and sharing feeling and care. He tries to earn more money for his family, but is unable to perform social obligations directly. Social obligations and economic resource management directed the dependency among household members and non-resident member as a migrant. Hence, added responsibilities on left behind family members. Households shared responsibilities among the members and supported the matrimonial relations despite of the fact that the spouses live a considerable period of life in separate regions and the mother has to serve as a strong legitimate relation to the children. The people of the locale are related through consanguine and affinal relations and remain engaged in mutual cooperation of an altruistic nature on migrants in the provision of remitted money and reciprocal sharing develops a relative absence of dominance. Further, the relationships suffered instability

concerning migrant and non-migrant relatives due to economic inequality.

The present study suggests extending it to a large scale to different regions of Pakistan in particular with a significant number of overseas labour migrants. It would incorporate a valuable concern and focus on education and the health of left-behind families. It is well established in the present work that economic uplift and remitted money should be diverted to the education and health section. There should be ways and means developed by the home as well as host countries as a policy to focus education and health of left-behind families. It would be a promise in the improvement in the quality of life of migrant families and the growth and development of the conscious and subconscious of left behind families. Improved health would further contribute to economic uplift while education would help to reduce all sorts of exploitation of labour migrants. In the present global scenario not only left behind families, but labour migrants themselves should be equipped with education in order to prevent from exploitation and also a better understanding of common diseases as a preventive control.

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