

Echoes of Home: The Impact of Male Migration on Left- Behind Women, Tadla-Azilal Villages as a Case Study

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Abstract

Researchers have focused their study on migration issues for several decades; however, there is a dearth of academic studies on the effect of this migration on women left behind. Male migration is the most widely practiced rural strategy to overcome agricultural risks and diversify incomes. There are numerous reasons for the increased migration of rural manpower, such as underdevelopment, job losses, reduced availability of non-agricultural jobs, population increase, and also family pressure. Morocco's rural areas have the largest number of migrants. Long-term absence of men has a variety of consequences on women left behind. Yet, literature is lagging behind on the effects of this migration on this specific social category. The present study is attempting to fill in this gap. The target is to explore the different socioeconomic and psychological impacts of masculine -migration on left-behind women. To reach this goal, 160 women from migrant households were surveyed using snowball research methods in two deliberately chosen Tadla Azilal region villages. This paper will investigate the current situation of Moroccan women in order to measure the effects of migration on them, and how it serves to cause various lasting gender hierarchies and generational power structures. By uncovering these aspects, this paper also aims to explore how, in the absence of their husbands, the ' left-behind ' women eventually ended up becoming economically and socially strengthened. To put it differently, this paper will provide a gender perspective on the effect and consequences of male migration on women, as well as trying to understand this phenomenon and seek solutions to some of the issues it raises.

Keywords: Migration, Women left behind, rural areas, impact, empowerment, Morocco

Introduction

Research focus has progressively switched from male migration to females migrating for work (Cohen, 2010), and there has been an extensive academic studies that targeted gender and migration relationships and aspects (Aysa , 2012 ; Massey,2013) .Nevertheless, The research on women who do not migrate themselves, rather they stay behind to take care of their homes, children, in laws and relatives, is still very sparse. Additionally, few studies have dealt with the case of Morocco as a country with distinct and clear, economic, historical, political, and social specificities and highly patriarchal cultural particularities (Bracking, 2010). While immigration broadens income and decreases the potential risks related to agricultural and labor market shortcomings in rural households (Singh, 2014), the effect of this massive male

departure has enormous consequences on left-behind women. While Tadla-Azilal region has a massive number of male migrants, there is a scarcity of studies on the effect of male migration on women left behind in the villages of its suburbs. Hence, this paper attempts to fill this gap and to explore how women suffer or feel empowered when their husbands move out to work. The study will illustrate how male migration has changed women and their roles and responsibilities within both their homes and rural communities. This study's goals are twofold: 1. Analysis of the socio-economic background of the migrants' homes and respondents. 2. To assess the different effects of male migration on left behind women.

Data and Methodology

A comprehensive review of literature was conducted to extricate available literature on the effect of male migration on left behind women. In order to meet and strengthen the literature's hypotheses and main findings, the research undertakes a critical survey of 160 women in two Tadla-Azilal Region villages, namely Sidi Jabar and Oulad si Mimoun, (near Fkih Ben Salh), whose partners have migrated to Europe. There are 256 households in the village of S.J and 479 dwellings in the village of Oulad si Mimoun according to the 2014 census. With the assistance of central informants (the village head and some well-informed people), 80 migrant homes from each village were monitored using snowball methodology. In order to collect data from participants, the direct questionnaire approach was used. By definition, the analysis is both qualitative and exploratory. For data collection, standardized questionnaires were used along with focus group conversations, in-depth interviews and main informant technique. Simple statistical methods were used to tabulate and analyze the data collected. For ethical and privacy considerations, I decided not to mention the full name of the villages I examined, and also because when I was conducting my field work, I promised most of my interviewees and respondents that their names and even the specific names of their sub-villages will be unidentified (only the names of the main villages are mentioned in this article).

Migrants' Households, profile and backgrounds

To realize the depth of the impact of masculine migration on left behind women, we first need to be aware of the Moroccan living standards, the immigrant's profile, the circumstance of women and how they survive in the socio-cultural context of Morocco as a whole. Moroccan women are a diverse group in which different variables are at stake, such as geographical origin, literacy, socio-economic status, abilities, household size and the duration of the migration of their family members (Chattou, 2006). This section offers a short overview of both the background of migrant's households and women left behind before exploring different dimensions of the impacts of male migration on women left behind in the sample villages mentioned above. Table 1 provides an overview of the numbers of male out-migration households and rates. S.J village's out-migration rate is 64 per 100 males and O.M 79 per 100 males. Table 2 outlines the socio-economic background of sample migrant households examined in two villages, Sidi Jabar and Oulad si Mimoun.

Table 1. Selected Migrant and non-migrant homes in two sample villages in the region of Tadla Azilal (in percentage)

Name of the village	Total Number of inhabitants	Total number of homes examined	Total male migrants	Rate of male migrants
Sidi Jabar	256	80	113	64
Oulad si Mimoun	497	80	208	79
Total	740	160	321	73

Source; Field work 2019

It is shown that, in both villages, the largest numbers of migrants in households are male (64% and 79%). Sidi Jabar and Oulad si Mimoun’s standard household size is 7 up to 9. One of the major reasons for men migration might be a big household size. Remittances are a main source of income for the village of S.J while agriculture is the main source of income in Oulad SidiMimoun. In both villages, the monthly revenue is almost the same. Most of the migrant's households own lands in both villages (up to one hectare). In Oulad Sidi Mimoun, households with larger land sizes are vastly higher. Over 77% of households own farm animals in both villages, but Sidi Jabar has a smaller percentage.

Table 3 shows a general background of the female respondents. Different demographic characteristics such as schooling, average number of kids, total years of marriage, and age have been evaluated. Table 3 indicates that migrant wives seldom join their husbands in their destinations. This also confirms that migration in rural areas of Morocco is still highly gendered, as one of the female respondents explained “it is a men-affair”

Table2: Migrants’ profile overview

Village Name	Village Name	
	Sidi Jabar	Oulad si Mimoun
Household head		
Males	39 (78)	32(66)
Females	14 (26)	19(34)
Average household size	9	7
Main source of income	remittances	Remittances
Secondary source of income	farming	Farming
Average monthly income per House, remittances in MAD	5000 Mad	8000 Mad
Owned land 1 hectare -	40	14
2 Hectares +	60	80
Migrant’s house who owns farm animals	55	90

Source; Field work 2019

Table 3. Details of migrants’ women surveyed in Tadla-Azilal region

Village name	Sidi Jabar	Oulad si Mimoun
Schooling and literacy	55	65
Average age of wives	28	32
Average age of Husbands	30	43
Average Number of kids	3	4
Average Marriage duration	10	12
Husband ‘s migration (in years)	10	10

Source: field work 2019

Financial independence and remittances

This study cannot be completed without shedding lights on the financial freedom and independence of these women. Sixty percent of women surveyed reported that men's migration has enhanced and improved their spending power and household liquidity through remittances; 30% of respondents reported that remittances are not sufficient for living expenses, so women find themselves obliged to also search for or help in the available rural jobs. Most female respondents reported that remittances transferred by their spouses are sent in the name of one of the husband’s parents that is their parents in law and not theirs (59%) and only 38 % of women respondents declared receiving money in their name. As far as transaction control is concerned, most women reported having partial and limited control over money received and other household financial resources (60%), while only 18 % of women reported having complete control over remittances and 22% of female women surveyed reported having no control over household financial sources including that of remittances. These women also have no power over the income generated from the farms owned by their husbands either. Although several women (84 %) reported an eventual increase in financial autonomy after their husbands' migration, older family members often need caring and therefore hand over their duties and responsibilities to young females. Participants reported that they had more financial power and Freedom than women whose spouses are working in the village. Concerning money spent, much of the money received was spent on daily living expenses (79%) and women themselves freely determined what to spend the cash on. The majority of participants (80%) had to consult their husbands or other male relatives when spending a huge sum of money on gold purchases, agricultural machines and equipment or any other property. With regard to keeping some money without informing their husbands, most women respondents (61%) stated that they do save some money without the awareness of their husbands. Some of the women from higher castes and wealthy parts of the villages reported that migration helped in

building homes, purchasing gold and investing in liabilities and other assets. The negative aspects of remittances listed by women were reliance of other family members on these remittances and risks related to the instability and insecurity of these remittances such as job losses, injuries and abrupt male migrant sickness. Women living in joint families have less accessibility to remittances, and in other cases (12%) females did not even know how much money their husbands usually send.

Controlling and managing the household and decision-making roles

In rural areas, decision-making is usually done by household male members. This study revealed that only a few females controlled their household's matters on their own (71%), while others (29%) relied on others' instructions such as the husband, close relatives, or in-laws. Respondents reported that, compared to women whose husbands worked in the village, they feel more empowered in decision-making and managing family and household issues. The majority of women reported having decisional freedom in daily household decision making such as living expenses, the purchase of clothing and other basic daily needs of children and old people in the households, and the taking and picking out of children for visits in the village or elsewhere. Females had to seek permission and directions from their husbands, father-in-law or other male family members in major decisions such as land sales, farming investments, and taking elderly people and children for medical care within or outside the village. In addition, 90% of respondents reported that they were unable to make decisions regarding important matters on their own even after taking guidance from the above-mentioned household members. Women claimed that despite being empowered after their husbands' migration, they were unable to make major decisions on household matters; however, women felt empowered because they had all the freedom and power to make decisions on daily household matters that had previously fallen to their husbands.

Changes in family structure and household systems and arrangements

Another interesting finding of this study is that migration in sample villages has led to alterations in the family structure of a few households. There are complicated relationships between migration, family relationships, and women. In sample villages, the structure of families and living arrangements is changing due to constant internal-family conflicts over income. Young male family members migrated and all household members shared the remittance and other income generated from local sources. Women's attitude towards sharing remittances has changed; wives of migrants are reluctant to share remittances with other household members. This leads to two households emerging under a single roof. With households with less property and in poorer parts of the village, this is particularly more intense. Migration also increases the number of nuclear homes in villages where the majority of households were shared households before migration. As one woman explained, "My husband has done all the hard work and yet all the financial autonomy has been with my parents in law. In order to make better use of remittances in the education of my boys and to avoid any unnecessary conflicts and quarrels, we agreed to stay in the same households as

different houses with two kitchens." This assertion also indicates that the person controlling remittances is not willing to share them with family members who are not economically productive.

Migration 's Psychosocial Impact

Men's migration has the worst influence on the psyche and well-being of the left-behind women. 98% of participants indicated suffering from persistent feelings of loneliness, and 87 % of women reported suffering from severe anxiety and constant feelings of fear and confusion. Some women also stated that they are suffering from continuous fear of being abandoned by their spouses or that their husbands could start another family in the host country. As one of the informants said: "I am really concerned about my kids' future, and I have a continuous intuition and suspicion that my husband has or will have another family in Spain." Their husbands' lengthy absence often impacted their social relationship with family and relatives. For some kind of work, they usually have to rely on male relatives, parents' in-law or other male household members. Moroccan society is patriarchal par excellence, which intensifies the situations of left behind women who end up having tense and often hostile relations with their husbands' family. Financial matters and lack of basic communication and understanding are one of the key reasons for having rough disputes with their husbands' relatives (mainly parents in laws). Sixty-three percent of women said they find it hard to adapt to living with the last mentioned.

Women mentioned that they frequently experience physical and verbal abuse in both their family household and community. 39% of women reported that, in the absence of men as members of the community, they have experienced verbal harassment in family and society, frequently abusing women because they believe that women are fragile beings, and that they need constant protection and male surveillance or that they were abandoned by their husbands and have another family at their place of work. One of the women expressed "a woman without a husband is like a chicken without feathers". In addition, within the family and community, 20 % of females reported physical forms of abuse. Such women are considered by society as weak and unprotected, while male members spend all their time at their place of work. A further major problem is that few lower-caste women (29%) explained receiving very little and leftover sums of money from remittances as most of them are being spent by male family members on alcohol. Women's mobility has been expanding, as male figures in the rural communities are becoming more supportive of mobility. However, 69% of women said that in the absence of their partners they find it hard to travel or visit their parents' home or any relatives. Acculturation and exposure to the outside world is one of the most positive aspects of male migration. 75% of participants reported that migration of their husbands brought about socio-cultural changes and changes in the behaviors and attitudes of left-behind women and household members, as well as changes in the culture. Another significant change felt by left behind women is the improvement of their social position within the village. Sixty-three percent of women confirmed that their Post-migration social status has eventually grown in their community.

Additional workload; the feminization of farming

First of all, we should acknowledge that as migrant workers flocked to European countries, women became increasingly responsible for agriculture and farming life. This worldwide phenomenon is dubbed the “feminization of agriculture” (Sadiqi, 2004). Nevertheless, in Morocco, strong voices supporting liberal narratives and debunking patriarchal perceptions (mainly in human science, economics, and politics) challenged and criticized the increasing proportion of female labor in Moroccan agriculture (Bureau de statistiques, Rabat). For them, women farming work was essentially invisible, as much of it focuses on household livelihood and other types of unpaid, home-based work. But as more studies have emerged, these critics have been pressured to accept this fact in Morocco as well (Belarbi, 2008). This demonstrates how undervalued the work of rural women is. What is more, and far more importantly, is that this mindset still exists nowadays, as many sorts of women-produced or offered products and services are poorly paid tasks (Bourquiba, 2004).

The majority of respondents (55%) reported a great increase in the work burden after the migration of a male family member. Only 35 % of female respondents reported that migrants’ remittances decreased their workload as they resolved their missed workforce impact by hiring a village worker with the sum sent by migrants as remittances. In the long absence of men, most of the respondents (70%) listed expanded workloads in the house, farming and care for the elderly and farmhouse. Migration obliged women to work in sectors and functions previously kept and well-reserved for household male members. In addition, bringing up children in the complete absence of the father figure is the most emotionally and socially tough task to do; it was difficult for 90 % of women to raise their kids alone. Because of the migration of male family members, women from very poor households have to go through severe hardships. Owning one acre of land or less in the households surveyed, very few female respondents reported hiring agricultural workers for their lands.

In the households surveyed which possessed less than one hectare of land, very few women respondents reported that they hired agricultural labor for their fields. Another important finding of this study is that women of migrant households had to handle all the responsibilities in the fields, from seeding to harvesting, especially in lower castes, and in some cases, they were seeking help from youngsters or relatives. There is therefore some degree of feminization of farming in the two villages. It was even harder for women engaged in the village in farming activities or as casual workers. These women also claimed that remittances were not sufficient and used for basic livelihoods. Richer parts of the villages, i.e. the upper class, had no migration difficulties or concerns as they rented out their land prior to migration and employed farm laborers to work in their lands. Therefore, women's workload in farmland differed according to family structure, status and economic class.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that migration has both positive and negative impacts on migrants’ households. It revealed that there can be no general consensus as to whether male migration is a bonus or a threat to women's status. This paper shows

that the impact of male migration on the 'left-behind' women is complicated to investigate. Migration has boosted their household income, thus raising their village social status. But financial gains are sometimes offset by increased household and agricultural workloads of women. While migration contributed to strengthening women's decision-making capacities, at the same time their empowerment is impeded by a lack of financial autonomy and an inability to take decisions on important issues. Other major issues are loneliness and vulnerability, followed by hurdles and difficulties to full or little access to remittances. In the absence of men, women are more likely to be physically, socially and verbally abused. Therefore, in order to maximize the positive advantages of migration, rural women should be empowered by supplying them with techno-related agricultural knowledge. Also, a huge change in the old patriarchal mindset should be promoted. Given all these empowering and disempowering forces, rural women in Morocco are not at all passive; they combat rejection by trying to force their way into male-dominated public areas and by helping their households, sometimes by themselves, as breadwinners.

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