

## **"THEY WANT TO LIVE A GOOD LIFE": NARRATIVES OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS' FAMILIES IN DISTRICT GUJRAT, PAKISTAN**

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### **Abstract**

*The present study aims to explore how the family members of the irregular emigrants who were left behind in Pakistan describe their narratives regarding the purpose of irregular migration of their male family members. This study is based on a qualitative research design by employing a constructivist epistemological standpoint. The current research's target population comprises the male family members of the irregular emigrants in the rural areas of district Gujrat, Pakistan. For the present study, a snowball sampling technique has been used to select the respondents because it was challenging to identify irregular emigrants due to their hidden nature. In the first phase of the data collection, some male family members of the emigrants were contacted working in a public sector organization in district Gujrat with the principal researcher. Later on, these initial contacts facilitated the primary researcher to approach various family members of the irregular emigrants in the peripheral villages of Gujrat city. The fieldwork comprised in-depth interviews, which were started with a broader discussion on the issue of irregular migration. The initial four in-depth interviews were analyzed*

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*parallel, which led to the emergence of new themes for further interviews. A total of thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted until saturation. Three major themes emerged from the data as poverty, inequality and migration; social class and competition; and Europe as a dream land.*

**Keywords:** Irregular migration, Poverty, Social Class, Livelihood, Pakistan

## **Introduction**

Like a pendulum, the debate on migration and development has swung in the 1950s and 1960s in the developmental perspective (de Hass, 2018, p. 227). Many empirical findings confirm that migration is usually used as a strategy to expand livelihood or income at individual and household levels throughout the globe (Koczan et al., 2021; Shah, 2020; Wheeler et al., 2008). Furthermore, many other conditions, such as deprivation or relative poverty, particularly rural poverty, and labor-replacing technology as a result of societal revolution, support the livelihood approach (Kunwar, 2021; Ndegwa et al., 2007). Adjusting to favourable conditions in urban regions or conflict in native villages could also be important causes (Mianabadi et al., 2022; Pomeroy & Jacob, 2004; Schafer & Black, 2003). The level of social inclusion or exclusion, as indicated in interaction with and management of resources, is likewise linked to migration as a strategy for expanding livelihood (Kothari, 2002).

Some studies also observed that international migration in developing countries could significantly alleviate the level and severity of poverty (Mahmood et al., 2022; Rahim et al., 2022; Adams & Page, 2005). In this perspective, the importance of remittances to poor countries cannot be overstated. The migrants send remittances to the land of their origin, especially when their spouse and children are left behind and they have to meet immediate consumption needs (Gopinath & Poornappriya, 2020). In general, migration generates material resource flows from migrants to their home countries (Jijin et al., 2022; Javed et al., 2017). People's rising geographical mobility is linked to the development of economies (Kayani, 2021; Gul et al., 2021). Those who moved to generate chances for their wellbeing or in reaction to certain options would be better off than those who were unable to relocate (Kousar et al., 2014; Friedli, 1986). As World Bank (2005) highlighted in its global development finance report, Mexico, India, and the Philippines stood as the first three largest remittances-receiving countries. These countries' remittances have also grown rapidly in the last eight years, according to the report.

Pakistan is also an essential developing country in the South Asian region, with an approximately 215.25 million population (Government of Pakistan, 2021, p. 237). There is also an increasing tendency in Pakistani migration to Gulf countries and Europe. According to Khan et al. (2009) it has been one of

the primary countries exporting labour to the Middle East. Gazdar (2003) discussed various migration channels from Pakistan to Europe, North America, and East Asia. Firstly, some people use the formal or legal channel, for example, through proper application for a visa of the desired destination country. Secondly, some people go to technologically advanced countries as students. After completing their study or during study, they searched for some jobs and prolonged their stay. Thirdly, a significant number of people entered Europe by using illegal means with the help of human smugglers. They also use their social networks in search of manual jobs in the host country. The ultimate motive behind this third category is to improve their socio-economic conditions.

Keeping in view the detail mentioned above, by taking an emic approach, the present study is an attempt to explore how the family members of the irregular emigrants who were left behind in Pakistan describe their narratives regarding the purpose of irregular migration of their male family members, how they construct their realities in their context. We assume that these family members are the appropriate group who can describe the motives behind irregular migration because, in the context of Pakistani society, elder members of the joint families play a significant role in the decision-making process of various household issues (Sahar & Muzaffar, 2017, p. 47). It is further assumed that this irregular migration directly influenced these family members as they had to suffer a lot during that period and were held responsible for looking after all the matters concerning the process of irregular migration.

## **Review of Literature**

This section reflects on the current state-of-the-art available in migration and development. In Thailand, Osaki (2003) conducted a study on the use of migrant remittances. He used data from Thailand's National Migration Survey, conducted in 1992 by Mahidol University's Institute for Population and Social Research. The survey was performed during the rainy season, when seasonal migrants were most likely to be at home with their families. Two questionnaires were employed in this study; a household questionnaire and an individual questionnaire. The data collected from the household questionnaire was evaluated for this study. The data show that sending remittances back to family members in Thailand's native villages is considered a social norm. It also allows them to maintain long-term personal contact with their ancestral relatives. This method is based on altruism, which encourages out-migrants to feel a sense of sacrifice toward their homeland and family members. Regardless of the household's financial needs, this practice is often implemented. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that out-migration is an effective way for low-income families to quickly overcome income deficiencies. He went on to say that remittances play an important part in

nourishing disadvantaged households and that meeting their nutritional needs would be difficult without them. Remittances can help to level the income distribution among out-migrating households. He came to the conclusion that remittances are extremely responsive to the economic needs of their home country's household.

Wheeler et al. (2008) researched the relationship between migration and poverty in Ghana and Egypt. They looked into issues such as whether migrants could gain from their migration experience because such benefit may enhance their financial situation and that of their family members. Moreover, they have used microeconomic data from Ghana and Egypt on migrants and non-migrants. This data was based on a special-purpose migration survey on international migration's push and pull factors. The Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute coordinated the study. They have analyzed the impacts of migration on poverty, using subjective financial poverty as an outcome variable. The data reveal that migration has a major impact on contemporary personal poverty in Ghana and Egypt. In comparison to the non-poor, the poor and very poor were more likely to migrate internationally. The poor in Egypt were more likely than other groups to migrate. It was a startling discovery, according to the researchers. It defies popular belief that poor individuals have fewer opportunities to migrate because of their severe financial constraints. The findings support the concept that migration is the last resort when all other options have failed. They further described that migration choice was also affected by age, occupational status, marital status, and household size. The findings also depict that migration enables poor people to move out of poverty in Egypt. Migration makes sense for poor people as a livelihood strategy. Compared with other groups, both the very poor and poor could have had a livelihood improvement due to migration. In Ghana, poor people at the moment of migration were less likely to be poor after migration. So, it may be concluded that migration has a moderating effect on past and current poverty.

In Gujrat, Pakistan, Khan et al. (2009) investigated the effects of remittances on the living standards of emigrant households. The primary goal of the study was to look into how immigrants' families used remittances to better their socioeconomic condition. The questionnaire was utilised as a data collection tool and the survey was employed as a data collecting technique. Because there was no proper list of emigrants from tehsil Gujrat, purposeful sampling was used. The findings show that emigrants aim to improve their families' socioeconomic standing in their home country. Their main goals were to raise socioeconomic standing in terms of food security, grand house construction, and company investment. The study also discovered that migration is more common among those who are less educated, unskilled, and have fewer resources. The majority of those emigrants were inexperienced and relied on monthly income to sustain their families, even if it meant cutting back on their costs. The researchers came to the conclusion that emigration

was favourably associated with the economic progress of the emigrants' households.

Jokisch (2002) analyzed the effect of international migration on agricultural production and land use in two regions of Ecuador. To measure the role of migration on agricultural output, the researcher developed some typology by conducting focus group discussions and initial household interviews. The nuclear household was selected as the primary unit of analysis which did not participate in any type of migration. Further, he chose those households with a minimum of one immediate family member in America as a comparison group, and it was classified as an international migrant household. The results were fascinating and raised many questions regarding the importance of migration for the development of agriculture. It was also a challenge to what the literature predicted in previous studies. Regardless of a large loss of labor and considerable inflow of remittances, it was observed that there was no effect on agricultural development. Findings further explore that remittances were utilized in other critical socioeconomic fields like health, perpetuated emigration, education, pay-off debts, and noticeable consumption, especially the construction of large houses.

Orozco (2008) investigated globalization, migration and its link with the impact of family remittances in Latin America. He has examined the significance of remittances in the economic development of Central America and the Caribbean. The findings showed that remittances have significantly transformed the economic conditions of Central America and the Caribbean. Now, these states turned to labour exporting nations instead of agro-exporting nations. He further stressed that globalization is also increasing due to international migration and remittances. International migration has fostered the process of globalization through the establishment of linkages between sending countries and receiving countries. Remittances also helped improve the national income of the Latin American countries and promoted a rapid economic change in this area.

In Nigeria, Osili (2004) studied the relationship between migration and housing investment. The study's major goal was to determine the benefits of remittance investment in migrant communities' native communities. He emphasised that remittances have been utilised to buy assets, mostly houses and land. The findings reveal three potential decision-making elements that influence housing and land investment. Firstly, remittances invested in homes and land may benefit migrants' family members. As a result, they invest in real estate to maximise their profits. Secondly, house investment may create a sense of community membership security. Thirdly, emigrants in the United States of America (USA) are increasingly investing their remittances on houses. Following the receipt of remittances, the emigrants' families relocate. It could also be linked to the migrants' family's social position. Emigrants often demonstrate their emotional attachment by sending money back to their home country.

Singh (2007) investigated the remittance patterns of Indian emigrants in Australia. He claimed that remittances could be a useful tool for poverty reduction and development. He went on to say that the volume of remittances to developing countries is more than the World Bank and Asian Development Bank's help. The findings also suggest that migration is on the rise as a result of its link to remittances, which are directly tied to the affluence of emigrants' native families. He described the methods used by emigrants to send money back home. There were two avenues in his opinion official and informal. Casual remittance transfers, which account for over 15% of total remittances, were not included in the permitted data. The researcher advocated for creating suitable remittance channels and emphasised the need of governments in enacting such rules.

From the literature mentioned above, we can infer that migration is linked with various spheres of the lives of the migrants and their families. For example, it helps emigrants to retain personal contact with their family of origin for an extended time. They are supposed to send remittances back home as this practice is rooted in altruism which promotes the sense of sacrifice among the out-migrants with their country and family members. It would reduce external borrowing and empower the country's economy. Moreover, remittances become a strong indicator of the development finance in the countries of migrants' origin, and remittances were positively associated with poverty reduction. The majority of the emigrants were unskilled, and they supported their families with monthly income even by reducing their expenses. In the present study, we assume that the families of the migrants in district Gujrat have similar expectations from their family members living abroad to support families back home. In the analysis section, we further assume that we would again come back to these themes for further discussion based on the empirical data from the field of the present study. The following section considers the materials and methods employed in the current research.

## **Materials and Methods**

The present study is based on qualitative research design by employing a constructivist epistemological standpoint. The current research's target population consists of the male family members of the emigrants in the rural areas of district Gujrat, Pakistan. The respondents were contacted through the snowball sampling technique because it was challenging to identify irregular migrants. Moreover, no official data about the details of irregular migrants in district Gujrat was available. In the first phase of the data collection, some male family members of the emigrants were contacted working in a public sector organization in district Gujrat with the principal researcher. Later on, these initial contacts facilitated the chief researcher to approach various family members of the irregular emigrants in the peripheral villages of Gujrat city. All research ethics were followed as informed by renowned academic

bodies regarding informed consent, prior permission, recording of interviews, and place of consultation (American Sociological Association, 2018). The fieldwork comprised in-depth interviews that were started with a broader discussion on the issue of irregular migration. The initial four in-depth interviews were analyzed parallel, and it led to the emergence of new themes for further interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Jerolmack, 2007). A total of thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted until saturation (Charmaz, 2006). These in-depth interviews were conducted in the Punjabi language and, later on, transcribed and translated into English. The data analysis of the present study is based on various stages as informed by Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2006), for example, data preparation, data exploration, data reduction, and data interpretation.

## Results and Discussion

The following text highlights the empirical findings of the present research. The data is analyzed under various themes identified during data analysis as discussed in the section mentioned above of materials and methods.

### Poverty, Inequality and Migration

Some scholars argue that people take migration as a livelihood strategy, and it is linked not only with poverty but also with inequality in the broader social structure (McDowell and de Hann, 1997, p. 17). The remittances sent by the immigrants are an essential source for the families living behind and for the home country's economy. However, the flow of remittances depends upon the skills of migrants; for example, unskilled and semi-skilled migrants are less likely to earn money than skilled or professional migrants (Siddiqui, 2003, p. 5). In the present research, poverty and inequality emerged as significant themes during data analysis. The respondents talked about their understanding of international migration and explained their narratives. As one respondent described:

*Due to poverty, the condition of our family was terrible. When we observed those people who went abroad illegally and became wealthy after some time, they changed their lifestyle and constructed beautiful houses. Then we decided that we must send our boy abroad illegally.*

During interviews, most of the respondents pointed out that the primary reason for their family members' irregular migration was poverty, and increasing inflation rate, and a lack of job opportunities in Pakistan. In the past few years, the energy crisis adversely affected the country's economy at the micro-level. Especially in textile and other local industries, the factory owners fled the country, establishing operations in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and

Dubai. It reduces job options, particularly for factory workers who are less educated and trained. In such conditions, it was complicated to meet the survival needs of the household. As one respondent said:

*We sent our brother abroad because of the socioeconomic circumstances of Pakistan. Due to the lack of opportunities for good jobs, it is very difficult to survive here, and life is very hard for those who belong to the lower economic class.*

The results also depict that people wanted to eliminate poverty and inequality prevailing in their families through generations. They decided to opt for the migration of at least one of their family member, and this decision was taken with the consent of the household as another respondent told his story as follows:

*Our family was suffering from poverty. Our parents spent their life in the same situation. We tried to get rid of this condition but all in vain. We decided to send our brother abroad. First, we agreed to migrate to Saudi Arabia, but my brother refused it and said that in Saudi Arabia, he could earn 10 to 15 thousand by some manual work. This amount would not be sufficient to get rid of poverty. We do not have many economic resources, so unanimously, it was decided to send him to Europe through illegal means.*

The present study's data also reflects the literacy rate and professional skills of irregular migrants. The majority of these irregular migrants were semi-literate and did not possess any professional training or diploma. There was a significant hurdle to getting a better job in Pakistan. It is reflected in the conversation of a father who told about his son as follows:

*My son was an employee in a public sector organization in a lower grade. He worked in this position for five to seven years on daily wages because he was not a permanent employee. As he was a daily wager, he sometimes did not get his salary even for two to three months. It was a worse condition for our family, and day by day, our economic status fell. Under these circumstances, we decided to send our boy abroad.*

The present study's findings also highlight an interesting point that the trend of international migration in district Gujrat and surrounding areas also accelerated the competition within the local community. People take international migration as a symbol of prestige and social status, discussed in the following section.

### **Social Class and Competition**

Social class is an essential indicator of a person's socioeconomic status in a particular society, measured by power, prestige, and property (Henslin,



1997). Sufficient empirical literature reflects on how migration is positively associated with excellent living standards throughout the world; for example, Khan et al. (2009) argued that the most crucial consideration of migration is to earn more and more money for better living standards in the country of origin. People spend a lot of money to achieve and maintain a luxurious lifestyle. The present research data also highlights the importance of improving standards of life through international migration. As one respondent described that:

*People go abroad because they want to live a good life. The good life means that your primary need must be fulfilled. For example, here in Pakistan, we need money to arrange our children's marriages, especially when you have to put dowry on your daughters. One must construct comfortable houses because we must live according to the social status of the surrounding area. Due to this factor, we sent our brother abroad illegally.*

According to their neighbours or village fellows, people also want to maintain their lifestyle in the context mentioned above. As a result, in the rural settings of Gujrat, people make comparisons with their extended network of the relative in terms of material comfort. Material comfort like a big comfortable house, a car, agricultural land ownership, etc. They consider such facilities as a status symbol in the community. Moreover, everyday people of that particular community pay regard to such affluent people. As one respondent narrated:

*People living here in Pakistan consider themselves competing with relatives who have settled abroad. They also want similar socioeconomic status; as a result, they try to send some family members abroad regardless of legal or illegal means. They think that if they earn five to six hundred Euros [per month], it is sufficient for a luxurious life in Pakistan.*

There is a major migration tendency to European countries in Gujrat and the nearby district of Mirpur in Azad Jammu & Kashmir. It began when many people in Mirpur were forced to leave their homes due to the construction of the *Mangla Dam*. As a result of government policy, these persons were relocated to the United Kingdom. When those emigrants sent remittances to Pakistan and their surviving family members improved their socioeconomic condition in the neighbourhood, their village neighbours looked up to them as role models. They tried to track them down, whether they were travelling legally or illegally. As one of the respondents put it:

*There are some successful case studies in this area. Those people who illegally went abroad became prosperous. They have lavishly arranged the marriages of their family members, constructed beautiful houses, and bought expensive cars. Due to this factor, my*

*brother insisted on going abroad illegally, and from his point of view, it was the shortest way to be a rich person.*

Another person told a similar story:

*So many people of this area are permanently settled in America, Japan and other European countries. On our site, every person dreams of luxurious life and for this purpose, they wish to go abroad because we cannot afford all such expenses in Pakistan. So, every family try to send at least one family member abroad and even in some cases, the whole family is settled abroad.*

Other than the context mentioned earlier of the social class and competition, the present study's data also depicts that from the lavish lifestyle of the migrants' families living back home, the youth gets a false impression regarding the culture and economic system in the Western countries. They consider Europe a dream land that can fulfil their desires for prosperity, which is discussed in the following section.

### **Europe as a Dream Land**

Another critical theme that emerged from the present study's data is that most people consider Europe a dreamland without getting proper familiarity with its geography and legal requirements to get a residence permit of any member state of the European Union. They believe it is quite simple to make money in Europe without putting in any effort. It's a common misconception regarding European life. They always look to spiritual forces for assistance. People in Gujrat's rural areas dislike manual labour because they believe it is demeaning to the community. They are, nevertheless, eager to conduct such work in Europe. Another advantage to work in Europe is the European currency's robust worth. The findings also depict that though the respondents were not familiar with the geography, socioeconomic, and legal aspect of life in Western societies, they are familiar with the difference between the Pakistani currency and the Euro. People prefer to go to Europe, whether legally or illegally, when they change this money into Pakistani rupees. Because of the significant wage disparity, some respondents believe that working in Greece for two to three years is preferable to working in Pakistan for the rest of one's life. Another respondent described his brother like follows:

*Since his childhood, he has planned to go abroad because he thought that life in Europe was very comfortable. One can easily earn handsome money by doing menial work over there. He considered that one could make money even by getting charity in Europe, taking it for granted. Before completing grade ten, he dropped from school and learnt some skills in manual work like [fixing of] furniture, electricity, and sanitary but ignored his career here in Pakistan because he was mad for illegal migration towards Greece.*

In the above-mentioned text, the notion of "childhood" is fundamental as it explains how the social environment of the community and chain migration influence the youth in the rural areas of district Gujrat. Due to this influence, the child does not take an interest in completing their education or acquiring other professional skills that may be helpful to get a job in Pakistan or some decent work in Europe. They just wander here and there and wait for the irregular migration through some agents or human smugglers in their areas. The youth is so crazy about migrating to Europe that even they do not like to stay in the Gulf countries for manual labour. For example, one respondent narrated the passion of his brother for migration as follows:

*My brother went to Europe for a better future. He was a driver in Pakistan, and he left this profession and went to Dubai and worked as a manual labourer for three years. Then he came back to Pakistan. After the renewal of his visa, he went to Libya. Last year, after a radical political movement in Libya, he left that place and went to Europe through an agent.*

Another respondent described his experience:

*Due to the lack of literacy rate, there are fewer work opportunities in Pakistan than in Europe. Another significant difference between Pakistan and Europe is the number of salaries. An educated person can earn up to fifty thousand [per month] in Pakistan while an uneducated [but] skilled person can earn up to one hundred thousand in Europe [per month]. There is a trend in this area of Kharian, Lala Musa and Gujrat to go abroad. As a child aged 18, he applied for a national identity card and tried to go overseas.*

Moreover, during interviews, it was reflected by some of the respondents that in the rural areas of district Gujrat specific and Pakistani society in general, sons are considered responsible for earning for the whole family. They are responsible for managing the dowry for their sisters' marriage. They must assist their younger brothers with their education, business, and other daily activities. In this regard, they need a handsome amount of money, which is impossible to earn in Pakistan as the youth is semi-literate and unskilled; as a result, people consider international migration as the only possible way to make money. Sometimes it is very hard to make a decision regarding migration especially by the help of human smugglers. Moreover, such type of migration is hazardous and a question of life and death. But for the well-being of the whole family they take risk. As one respondent told about his experience:

*We were not so happy when we have sent our boy to abroad illegal. Due to weak economic conditions of the family we did so. We thought that from abroad we may able to live a good life because one*

*cannot survive if he works here in Pakistan. We are not sure about some permanent employment here in Pakistan because salaries are not sufficient for the survival of a family, especially when one has to arrange dowry for the marriage of his daughters. We took this decision due to some social pressure.*

Another respondent replied:

*In Pakistan, salaries are not sufficient for good survival, and one must think for the better future of his family. So, my brother decided to go abroad for a better family's future. He thought that through handsome income from abroad, our socioeconomic conditions would be changed in near future.*

In this section, an important notion "family" emerged as most of the respondents talked about family's well-being. It reflects that in the rural areas of district Gujrat, joint family system is strong and people want to serve their families. Moreover, the role of elder family members in migration decision-making is very important. This finding is also confirmed by some previous research in which elder members of the family were reflected as an important source of household decision-making, example, Sahar and Muzaffar (2017).

## **Conclusion**

The results of the present study reflect on various dimensions of irregular migration from the rural areas of district Gujrat, Pakistan. The family members of the irregular emigrants said that they took this initiative due to poverty and social inequalities embedded in the broader structure of the society. Moreover, due to the increasing trend of international migration, the youth is impressed by the material well-being of the emigrants' families living back home. As a result, they make a comparison, and it further led to irregular migration toward Europe. Likewise, the emigrants are mostly semi-literate and unskilled youngsters. They are allured by a false impression of Europe as a dreamland to earn money without becoming familiar with Western societies' socioeconomic and political structures. Similarly, a huge difference between the Pakistani currency and Euro also attracts them to irregular migration. In the rural context of district Gujrat, young male family members considered themselves responsible for their families' social and economic uplift.

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