

LABOUR MIGRATION OF HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILY STABILITY IN EBONYI STATE

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ABSTRACT: Labour migration of heads of households has multifaceted impacts on families, influencing emotional well-being and traditional gender roles. While migrant remittances can enhance family income and stability, the accompanying challenges are noteworthy. This paper examines the effects of labour migration on family stability in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. A sample of 125 family members, selected through purposive sampling, participated in the study by completing a self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Chi-Square analysis were employed for data analysis. The study found that families experienced significant disruption, and frequent communication breakdown due to the heads of household's absence, the heads of household's migration have a positive impact on families' financial well-being. Family members also experienced heightened emotional distress, lack of social support and increased workload due to the head of household's migration as well as children in the family face challenges in their development. Interestingly, despite prevailing cultural norms, affected families did not substantially experience social stigma. This study implies that families are negatively affected by the head of household's migration and that cultural norms and values do not shape the perception of the impact of migration. Concerted policy efforts are essential to mitigate the negative outcomes of labour migration. This includes establishing robust social support systems for families left behind and promoting family-friendly migration practices for migrants.

Keywords: Labour Migration, Family Stability, Migrants, Social Support

INTRODUCTION

Labour migration is the movement of persons from one state to another or within their own country of residence, for employment. It is a fundamental aspect of globalization and has a significant impact on both countries of origin and receiving countries. International migrants in the world in 2020 were estimated over 281 million. The percentage of migrants in the global population is about 3.6% (International Organization for Migration, 2023). The number of people migrating from their country of origin or one region to another has been growing dramatically in recent decades. The UN estimates that about 232 million people live and work outside their country of birth and that 763 million people live and work outside their region of birth within their home country. Since 2000, the international migrant stock has been growing faster than the total world population, and it now accounts for 3.2% of the world population. International migrants and internal migrants together account for one in seven people worldwide (Demuger, 2015). In 2021 the migration rate in Nigeria stood at -0.29 per 1000 population. This means that the number of people leaving Nigeria is slightly higher than that of those entering the country. Between 2000 and 2021, the migration balance stayed negative (Sasu, 2023).

Family stability can be conceived as the ability of a family unit to maintain cohesion, resilience, and functionality despite external stressors or challenges. In the Nigerian context, family stability holds significant cultural, social, and economic importance, as it serves as the cornerstone of society, providing emotional support, socialization, and economic security for its members (Omeje, 2019).

In Nigerian culture, the family is often regarded as the fundamental unit of society, with strong emphasis placed on kinship ties, interdependence, and mutual support (Njoku, 2016). Family stability is closely intertwined with concepts of respect for elders, filial piety, and communal responsibility, shaping social norms and behaviours within communities (Ogunfowora & Odebiyi, 2017).

The significance of family stability in Nigeria extends beyond cultural values to economic well-being and social cohesion. Research indicates that stable family structures contribute to improved educational outcomes for children, better health outcomes for family members, and increased economic productivity (Amoateng & Oduaran, 2018). Moreover, stable families serve as a buffer against societal challenges such as poverty, crime, and social unrest, promoting social harmony and community resilience (Ezeh, 2015).

In the Nigerian context, factors such as urbanization, economic instability, and labour migration pose challenges to family stability, disrupting traditional family dynamics and social support systems (Okojie, 2018). Additionally, cultural transitions, changing gender roles, and generational differences influence perceptions and practices related to family stability (Odebiyi & Ogunfowora, 2019). Promoting family stability in Nigeria requires multifaceted approaches that address both structural and cultural factors. Interventions aimed at strengthening family bonds, enhancing parental skills, and providing social support can contribute to greater resilience and cohesion within families (Ajayi et al., 2020). Furthermore, policies and programs that address economic inequalities, improve access to education and healthcare, and create employment opportunities can mitigate stressors that undermine family stability (Adejumo et al., 2021).

Family stability, characterized by cohesive relationships, emotional support, and the well-being of family members, holds paramount importance in Nigerian society. Families are regarded as the cornerstone of the social fabric, playing a pivotal role in shaping individual values, community connections, and overall societal health. According to Law Insider, family stability means the characteristics of a family that support healthy child development, including parental mental health, stable relationships, and a supportive, flexible and nurturing home environment. It is the consistency of family activities and routines (Ivanova et al., 2006), as it opposes “family instability” which refers to changes in parents’ residential and romantic partnerships, such as marriage, divorce, and romantic partners moving in or out of home (Briggs et al, 2019). Family stability is crucial for overall social well-being, and the potential impact of labour migration on family stability is a significant issue.

The effect of a family member’s migration on those who stay behind can be either positive or negative, depending on individual circumstances. When people migrate, they do not always move with their entire family. More often, they leave the rest of their family behind: their spouse, children, and parents. Rigid migration policies, uncertain living conditions in the destination country or region, and the high cost of migration are among the reasons why many

people migrate alone. The impact of migration on sending communities, especially on family members left behind, has long been debated. On one hand, labour migration is viewed as economically benefiting the family in the home country through financial transfers. Remittance can ease liquidity and budget constraints and thereby improve households' long-term welfare through investments in health care and education. On the other hand, many studies have pointed out the social cost that migration imposes on families left behind. In particular, the physical absence of the migrant may have multiple adverse effects on family members' education, health, labour supply response, and social status. Thus, identifying the impact of migration on family members who remain is an open empirical question with inconclusive evidence (Demuger, 2015).

However, labour migration can also pose challenges to family stability. The physical separation of family members due to migration can lead to emotional strain, loneliness, and the inability to fulfil familial roles and responsibilities. Migrants may experience feelings of homesickness and disconnection from their loved ones, which can impact their mental well-being. Children may grow up without one or both parents, which can have adverse effects on their emotional and psychological development (Mao et al., 2020).

The absence of a parent due to labour migration can also disrupt family dynamics and relationships. The remaining family members, typically the spouse and children, often have to assume additional responsibilities and roles in the absence of the migrant. This can lead to changes in power dynamics, roles, and expectations within the family, potentially causing stress and tension. Additionally, the prolonged separation between partners can strain marital relationships, leading to misunderstandings, difficulties in communication, or even marital breakdown. (Tong et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Labour migration, particularly when the head of the household is involved, has been a prevalent phenomenon globally, significantly affecting family structures and dynamics. In Ebonyi State, Nigeria, labour migration is a common occurrence, often driven by economic, social, and political factors. However, the implications of such migration on family stability remain underexplored within the context of this region.

The labour migration of the head of the household presents a multifaceted challenge to family stability in Ebonyi State. While existing literature acknowledges the adverse effects of migration on families, particularly in terms of emotional strain, financial instability, and disrupted familial roles, there is a notable gap in research specific to Ebonyi State. Additionally, current studies tend to focus on either the impact of migration on the migrant or the broader economic implications, neglecting the intricate dynamics within the family unit.

Previous studies on labour migration and family stability have predominantly been conducted in other regions, such as urban areas or other states within Nigeria. For instance, Afolayan and Azuh (2019) explored the effects of male migration on left-behind wives and children in Nigeria, highlighting challenges such as emotional stress and increased responsibilities for the remaining family members. Similarly, Adewale et al. (2021) examined the impact of rural-urban migration on family cohesion in Southwest Nigeria, revealing strains on marital relationships and parent-child interactions.

However, these studies fail to provide insights into the unique socio-economic context of Ebonyi State and the specific challenges faced by families in this region. Moreover, there is a lack of research that delves into the coping mechanisms adopted by families in Ebonyi State to mitigate the adverse effects of labour migration, as well as the potential opportunities that migration may present for family empowerment and development.

This research seeks to address these gaps by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the labour migration phenomenon in Ebonyi State and its implications for family stability. The labour migration of heads of households poses significant challenges to family stability in Ebonyi State, yet there remains a dearth of empirical research addressing this issue. By filling this gap, this study aims to contribute to both academic scholarship and practical interventions aimed at supporting migrant families and promoting sustainable development in the region. As a result, this study seeks to assess and analyse the public perception regarding the impact of labour migration by heads of households on family stability. Specifically, the objectives of the study are: (i) to examine the effects of labour migration of heads of households on family stability in Ebonyi State, and (ii) to identify the socio-cultural factors that impact perceptions of labour migration of heads of households on family stability.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs the family system theory as a framework for its study. Family Systems Theory is a theory that views the family as an emotional unit, with members interconnecting and influencing each other's behaviour (Watson, 2012). In the context of labour migration and its effects on family stability, the theory suggests that the absence of a family member due to migration can have both positive and negative impacts on the remaining family members, depending on individual circumstances (Demurger, 2015). Public opinion on labour migration varies depending on factors such as the migrants' country of origin, occupational profile, or reason for migration (Fernandez-Reino, 2021). However, research has shown that public opinion is generally more positive towards migrants with high levels of education and/or who work in essential jobs (Fernandez-Reino, 2021).

Labour migration can reduce labour force participation for family members left behind, especially for women (Demurger, 2015). The impact of migration on sending communities, especially on family members left behind, has long been debated. On one hand, labour migration is viewed as economically benefiting the family in the home country through remittances, which can ease budget constraints and improve households' long-term welfare. On the other hand, the migrant's absence might also have negative effects on family stability and dynamics (Demurger, 2015).

Family Systems Theory highlights the interconnectedness of family members and the emotional impact of labour migration on family stability. Public opinion on labour migration varies depending on the characteristics of the migrants, and the effects of migration on family members left behind can be both positive and negative.

METHOD

Research Design

To achieve the above objectives, the study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design. A selected sample from the total population of Ndufu-Alike Ikwo residents was selected and distributed with a questionnaire. This research technique was applied due to its variability in using a sample drawn to represent the element within the local government area of Ikwo, Ebonyi State.

Participants

One hundred and twenty-five respondents from Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State participated in the study. Participants for the study were selected purposively to ensure that only families whose heads of household are on labour migration participate in the study. Therefore the inclusion criterion is labour migration of heads of household. The snowballing sampling technique helped the researcher to enrol more participants in the study. The snowballing process typically begins with the researcher recruiting a small number of initial participants who possess knowledge or experiences relevant to the research topic. These individuals are then asked to refer others who might also meet the study criteria or provide valuable insights. As each participant refers to additional individuals, the sample size grows organically, resembling the accumulation of snow in a rolling snowball.

The process may continue until thematic saturation is reached, indicating that new participants no longer offer substantially novel information or insights related to the research questions. Snowball sampling is particularly useful when studying hard-to-reach populations, marginalized communities, or sensitive topics where traditional sampling methods may be impractical or inadequate. It was through this method that a total of one hundred and twenty-five respondents were obtained and considered appropriate by the researcher.

Data collection techniques and instrument

Following the total population of participants obtained from the use of the snowballing approach. A total of 125 questionnaires were distributed to participants selected from the Ikwo Local government area of Ebonyi state. Among the questionnaires distributed, 120 were retrieved, 5 were not properly filled and thus were considered invalid. Therefore, the analysis is based on the retrieved copies of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection for this study. The questionnaire contains two sections. The first section is on the Socio-demographic/economic characteristics of the respondents and the other sections elicited information on the effects of labour migration of heads of household on family stability in Ikwo, Ebonyi State. Two research assistants were engaged in this research, which helped in the administration of the questionnaires to the respondents. Family instability was measured using one instance of family instability or no instability. Here, family instability is recorded if the participant reported having experienced divorce, separation or total breakdown of the family.

Method of data analysis

The data generated from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics. The stated hypotheses were tested using chi-square (χ^2) test statistics, maintaining the 0.05 level of significance. This statistic was used because of the nominal cum categorical nature of the data. Also, the various percentages reported from the responses could be tested inferentially through the use of a chi-square.

RESULTS

Table I: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	21	17.5
Female	99	82.5
Age		
21 to 30 years	54	45.0
31 to 40 years	42	35.0
41 to 50 years	15	12.5
50 years and above	9	7.5
Is the head of your household currently away on labour migration?		
Yes	120	100
No	0	0
Have you or your family experienced any instance of divorce, separation or breakdown due to labour migration?		
Yes	3	2.5
No	117	97.5

Source: *Fieldwork 2024*; N = 120

Table 1 above shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. 21 respondents representing 17.5% are male, while 99 respondents representing 82% are female. This implies that most of the respondents are females. The table equally shows that 54 respondents representing 45.0% are within the age bracket of 21 to 30 years, 42 respondents representing 35.0% are within the age bracket of 31 to 40 years, 15 respondents representing 12.5% are within the age bracket of 41 to 50 years, while 9 respondents representing 7.5% are within the age bracket of 50 years and above. From the table, 117 representing 97.5% of the respondents reported having never experienced any instance of family instability while 3 (2.5%) reported experiences of family instability

Table II: Labor migration by heads of households on family stability in Nigeria

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total agreement	Decision
1	We have experienced domestic work overload since the migration of the head of our household	71 (59.2%)	30 (25%)	0 (0.0)	16 (13.3%)	3 (1.9%)	101 (84.2%)	Accepted
2	Communication breakdown occurs frequently due to the head of household's absence.	70 (58.3%)	44 (36.7%)	3 (2.5%)	3 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	114 (95%)	Accepted
3	The head of household's migration has a positive impact on families' financial well-being	27 (22.5%)	72 (60.0%)	6 (5.0%)	3 (2.5%)	12 (10.0%)	99 (82.5%)	Accepted
4	Family members experience heightened emotional distress due to the head of household's absence.	50 (41.7%)	60 (50.0%)	6 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (3.3%)	110 (91.7%)	Accepted
5	Children in the family face challenges in their development due to the head of household's migration	74 (61.7%)	19 (15.8%)	4 (3.3%)	20 (16.7%)	3 (2.5%)	93 (77.5%)	Accepted
6	The head of household's migration can lead to a lack of social support for the family.	71 (59.2%)	31 (25.8%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (10.0%)	6 (5.0%)	102 (85.0%)	Accepted

Source: fieldwork 2024; N = 120

Table 2 above displays the respondents' opinions on the effects of labour migration by heads of households on family stability in Nigeria. It shows that the majority of the respondents 101 representing (84.2%) reported having work overload at home due to the head of household's migration. The table also shows that the majority of the respondents 114 representing (95.0%) reported that communication breakdown occurs frequently due to the head of household's absence. It also displayed that the majority of the respondents 99 representing (82.5%) reported that the head of household's migration has a positive impact on families' financial well-being.

The table portrayed that the majority of the respondents 110 (91.7%) reported that family members experience heightened emotional distress due to the head of household's absence. It also shows that the majority of the respondents 93 representing (77.5%) reported that children in the family face challenges in their development due to the head of household's migration. Finally, the table showed that the majority of the respondents 102 (85.0%) reported that the head of household's migration can lead to a lack of social support for the family.

Table III: Socio-cultural factors in Nigeria that impact public perceptions on the influence of labour migration of head of household on family stability

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total Agreement	Decision
1	The head of household migration contradicts traditional family values in our community	40 (33.3%)	62 (51.7%)	3 (2.5)	9 (7.5%)	6 (5.0%)	102 (85.0%)	Accepted
2	Our community provides a strong support system for families experiencing labour migration.	12 (10.0%)	26 (21.7%)	3 (2.5%)	36 (30.0%)	43 (35.8%)	38 (31.7%)	Rejected
3	Religious beliefs influence how families interpret and cope with the challenges of labour migration	12 (10.0%)	9 (7.5%)	9 (7.5%)	47 (39.2%)	43 (35.8%)	21 (17.5%)	Rejected
4	Cultural norms can affect the way people see the issue of labour migration other heads of household.	68 (56.7%)	49 (40.8%)	3 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	117 (97.5%)	Accepted
5	There are no social stigmas attached to families dealing with labour migration in our community.	56 (46.7%)	52 (43.3%)	3 (2.5%)	6 (5.0%)	3 (2.5%)	108 (90.0%)	Accepted

Source: *Fieldwork 2024*; N = 120

Table 3 above displays the respondents' opinions on socio-cultural factors in Nigeria that impact public perceptions on the effect of labour migration of head of household on family stability. The table showed that the majority of the respondents 102 representing (85.0%) reported that the head of household migration contradicts traditional family values in our community. It also shows that the majority of the respondents 79 representing (65.8%) reported that the head of household migration contradicts traditional family values in our community. The table also showed that the majority of the respondents 90 representing (75.3%) reported that religious beliefs influence how families interpret and cope with the challenges of labour migration. Again, the table showed that the majority of the respondents 117 (97.5%) reported that cultural norms can affect the way people see the issue of labour migration of the head of the household. Finally, the table displayed that the majority of the respondents 108 representing (90.0%) reported that there are no social stigmas attached to families dealing with labour migration in our community.

Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H₁: There is no significant association between labour migration of the head of household and family instability.

Hypothesis 2

H₂: Cultural factors do not significantly influence perceptions of the impact of labour migration on family stability in Nigeria.

Table IV: Chi-square Tests of association of the influence of labour migration and cultural factors on family stability

Variables	χ^2	df	p-value
Labour migration of the head of household and family instability	40.307	3	0.000
Cultural factors and labour migration of heads of households	1055.409	12	0.000

The table above displays the result of the Chi-Square analysis to test the claim that labour migration of the head of household is not one of the major causes of family instability. From the result obtained, the p-value (0.000) is found to be lesser than the level of significance (0.05).

Decision rule: reject the null hypothesis if $\chi^2=40.307$, $df=3$ and the p-value (0.000) is lesser than 0.05; we then conclude by accepting the alternate hypothesis that labour migration of the head of household is one of the major causes of family instability.

Hypothesis 2

The table above displays the Pearson Chi-square analysis to test the null hypothesis (H_0) that cultural factors do not significantly influence public perceptions of the impact of labour migration on family stability in Nigeria. From the result obtained, the p-value (0.000) was found to be less than the level of significance (0.05).

Decision: from the above, since $\chi^2=1055.409$, $df=12$ and p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, thus we reject the null hypothesis and conclude by accepting the alternate hypothesis that cultural factors do not significantly influence perceptions of the impact of labour migration on family stability in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

In examining the influence of labour migration by heads of households on family stability in Nigeria, this study found that; families experience significant disruption due to the head of household's migration, communication breakdown occurs frequently due to the head of

household's absence, the head of household's migration has a positive impact on families financial well-being, family members experience heightened emotional distress due to the head of household's absence, children in the family faces challenges in their development due to the head of household's migration and the head of household's migration can lead to lack of social support for the family.

This work agrees with Lucas and Stark, (1985) who observed that the primary motivation for head-of-household migration is often to improve the family's economic well-being. Migrant remittances can contribute to increased income, improved access to education and healthcare, and enhanced household assets (Lucas and Stark, 1985). This can strengthen families and foster stability. When the head of household migrates, the burden of childcare, domestic work and decision-making often falls on the remaining family members, typically women and children. This can lead to increased workload, stress, and potential neglect of children's education (Adepoju, 2005).

Similarly, Hugo, (2010) identified that separation from the head of household can create emotional strain and feelings of loneliness, especially for children and spouses. This can affect communication, relationships, and mental health within the family (Hugo, 2010). In some cases, migration can expose families to risks like exploitation, trafficking, and unsafe living conditions, further destabilizing family life (Adesina, 2019). Prolonged migration can lead to changes in family roles and responsibilities. Children may grow up without daily guidance from their fathers, potentially affecting their development and relationship with authority figures. Spouses may take on new leadership roles, altering traditional gender dynamics.

In a similar vein, Munshi and Rosenzweig, (2006) noted that children in households with absent fathers may have lower educational attainment and higher rates of child marriage (Munshi and Rosenzweig, 2006). However, other research indicates that remittances can improve overall child well-being through better access to resources (Dustmann & Kirța, 2005). The experiences of families affected by migration can have lasting impacts on future generations. Children may grow up with different expectations about migration, family roles, and economic opportunities, shaping their own decisions and experiences.

In identifying unique socio-cultural factors in Nigeria that impact public perceptions on the influence of labour migration of head of household on family stability, this study found that; the head of household migration contradicts traditional family values in our community, cultural norms can affect the perception of people regarding the issue of labour migration of head of household, and there are no social stigmas attached to families dealing with labour migration in our community.

This work agrees with Akpan, (2011) who claimed that the strong tradition of extended families in Nigeria can act as a buffer against the negative impacts of migration. Grandparents, siblings, and other relatives often step in to provide childcare, emotional support, and financial assistance, mitigating the burden on remaining family members (Akpan, 2011). However, over-reliance on extended families can create tensions and strain resources. Patriarchal norms often expect men to be the primary breadwinners, leading to social pressure on heads of households to migrate for work even if it affects family stability. Conversely, some communities view female-headed households negatively, creating a stigma for families where the male partner migrates (Okafor, 2017). The emphasis on respect for elders and filial piety may lead

communities to prioritize economic benefits from remittances over the potential downsides of migration on family life. Conversely, religious beliefs promoting family togetherness may create disapproval of prolonged separation caused by migration.

Consequently, Nwanko, (2018) posited that different regions in Nigeria face varying economic and social challenges, influencing attitudes towards migration. Communities with limited local opportunities may view migration more favourably as a necessary escape, while more prosperous regions might see it as detrimental to family cohesion. Migration often follows established ethnic networks, creating communities of origin with shared experiences and perspectives on its impact. However, ethnic tensions and competition for resources can also colour perceptions, leading to negative judgments of specific migrant groups. Popular media plays a role in shaping public opinion, often portraying migration through sensationalized narratives that may not reflect the full spectrum of experiences. Local media coverage can influence community-level perceptions and attitudes towards different migration patterns.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study on labour migration provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of labour migration on individuals, families, and communities. It highlights the various factors that contribute to labour migration, the effects of migration on family dynamics and stability, and public perceptions of labour migration and its effects on family stability. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding public opinion on labour migration and its implications for policy development, social support programs, and the enhancement of services for migrant families. It also offers potential solutions to address the negative migration balance in countries like Nigeria, emphasizing the need for policy changes, education and training programs, and community support systems. Overall, this study serves as a valuable resource for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted impact of labour migration on individuals, families, and communities. To mitigate the negative effects of labour migration on family stability, governments, policymakers, and organizations must adopt measures that support migrant families.

Given the findings from this research, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Enhance Social Support Systems:** Implement programs that provide social and emotional support to families affected by labour migration of household heads in Ebonyi State. This could include establishing community support groups, counselling services, or online platforms for sharing experiences, and communication between migrants and their families. Strengthening these support systems can help mitigate the negative impacts of separation on family stability.
2. **Promote Skill Development and Local Employment Opportunities:** Invest in vocational training and skill development programs within Ebonyi State to empower individuals with marketable skills, reducing the necessity for labour migration. Additionally, encourage the creation of local employment opportunities through initiatives such as small business support, agricultural cooperatives, or infrastructure projects. By providing viable alternatives to migration, families can remain together, fostering greater stability.
3. **Facilitate Access to Financial Services:** Improve access to financial services and resources for families affected by labour migration, particularly for those left behind in

Ebonyi State. This could involve establishing community-based savings and credit associations, microfinance institutions, or mobile banking solutions tailored to the needs of rural communities.

4. Develop family-friendly migration policies: Implement migration practices to facilitate family reunions. This can include the provision of family reunification visas, flexible work arrangements, and support for migrants to return to their home countries after a certain period. These measures can help maintain family bonds, facilitate the reintegration of migrants into their communities, and ensure the well-being and stability of families affected by labour migration (IOM, 2022).

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