

**EXPLORING HOW MIDDLE EAST PARENTAL MIGRATION AFFECT THE
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AGED 6-17 YEARS
OF NTINDA PARISH IN KAMPALA, UGANDA**

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DECLARATION

I, Chatelekela Sandra, Registration Number S23/MUC/BSW/057, hereby declare that this dissertation has been written by me and that all references used in this study have been declared.

Signature.....

Date.....14th 05. 2026

APPROVAL

This is to acknowledge that this study topic “Exploring how Middle East Parental Migration Affect the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Children Aged 6-17 Years of Ntinda Parish in Kampala, Uganda” done by Chatelekela Sandra, Registration number S23/MUC/BSW/057 has been done under my supervision and is now ready for submission to the school of social sciences for examination.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how parental migration to the Middle East affects the social and emotional wellbeing of children left behind in the care of relatives or guardians in Ntinda Parish. The study was guided by three objectives, which are to explore the lived experiences of children left behind, to examine the effects of parental migration on their social well-being, and to assess its influence on their emotional experiences. The study was anchored in Attachment Theory and adopted a phenomenological qualitative research design. The study involved 15 children and 15 caretakers/guardians, all selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using interviews and analyzed thematically, with findings presented verbatim.

The findings reveal that children left behind experience profound emotional disruption characterized by loneliness, anxiety, sadness, and feelings of abandonment, largely due to weakened parent–child attachment and irregular communication. Socially, parental migration affects children’s relationships, school participation, and peer interactions, often resulting in withdrawal, reduced confidence, and strained social adjustment. Furthermore, the findings reveal that while caregivers provide basic needs, they often fail to offer consistent emotional support and parental warmth. However, some children demonstrate resilience by adapting through peer support and coping strategies. Overall, the study concludes that parental migration extends beyond economic benefits to significantly reshaping children’s social relationships, emotional stability, and sense of belonging.

The study recommends that migrant parents need to maintain consistent and meaningful communication with their children through regular phone or video calls that go beyond financial updates to include emotional support, active listening, and involvement in children’s daily lives and decisions, so as to strengthen attachment and reduce feelings of loneliness and insecurity. It further recommends that families and caregivers strengthen substitute caregiving arrangements by preparing and supporting caregivers before migration, while schools enhance counseling and psychosocial support services to help children manage emotional distress and improve social adjustment. In addition, government and child welfare stakeholders should develop and strengthen policies addressing the emotional and social effects of parental migration, including pre-departure training for migrant parents, expansion of community-based support systems, and child protection programs to promote resilience and safeguard the wellbeing of children left behind.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the introduction, background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, the study scope, justification, significance, theoretical framework.

1.2 Background

Migration has also become a norm of life in most families in the modern world that has been intertwined. Throughout the world, individuals leave the country of origin to seek better employment in other countries in the hope that they will have a better living and take care of their families back at home. International labour organization estimates that there are over 169 million international workers today. The majority of these migrants are the citizens of low- and middle-income countries with the lack of available jobs, which encourage people to find a job in foreign countries. Although migration can assist families to bring income via remittances, as well as enhancing access to education, health services, and housing, it may also lead to hard social and emotional facts in family members. Parents are forced to leave their children in most instances and leave them without coming back. UNICEF (2019) observes that this division implies that their relatives or guardians rather than their parents raise a number of the children. Research in other regions of the globe indicates that emotionally, children in such situations might have difficulties with loneliness, the sense of being abandoned and with the greater responsibilities at home (Lu, 2014).

The migration of African countries to the Middle East has been increasing very fast in the last decade. To a significant extent, this tendency is motivated by the need of hiring domestic employees and other types of low skilled labour in the Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman. The International Organization of Migration estimates that thousands of the youths in Africa and particularly women travel to these countries annually under the employment agreements, which in most cases exceed two-three years in duration. To a large part of families, such migration is an opportunity by which one can gain income and avoid poverty. It, however, also implies that parents and children can be separated at a long time. Workers who are migrants in the Middle East tend to have heavy workloads and have little time

to interact with their families at the home country. These conditions, according to Valentina Mazzucato and others (2015), may further increase the emotional distance between parents and their children, where many children may grow up deprived of the regular parental intervention in their developmental stages of growth. Uganda has increasingly gotten into this wider trend of migration. As a solution to the high rates of unemployment and underemployment, labour migration is now a feasible option by many families in Uganda as a means of survival and living standard. According to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, over 220,000 Ugandans immigrated to the Middle East in 2016-2022, with the majority of them employed as house-workers and service providers. The home remittance by these migrants has also become a major income otherwise to most of the families and has an effect on the economy of the nation. As per the bank of Uganda, remittances to the country stood in excess of US 1.4 billion in 2023. To the families struggling economically, these incomes would be used to pay school fees, construct houses and to satisfy all day-to-day needs.

Nevertheless, economic gains of the migration process are usually accompanied with significant social outcomes. Among the most obvious consequences, one can name the growing population of children left in Uganda as one or both their parents leave to work in other countries. Such children are usually left with their grandparents, relatives or other people, who end up taking care of them. The studies that have been carried out in Uganda indicate that the children left by migrant parents might face a lack of parental supervision, emotional instability, and disruptions in family bonds (Nabunya et al., 2020). Having the emotional stability of children, their behaviour and their belonging in the family can be shaped by growing up without the constant company of parents during the crucial stages of their lives. These experiences speak of the challenging tradeoff between the economic benefits of migration and its possible social costs.

In order to comprehend the impact of parental migration on children better, it is useful to refer to the theoretical views that underline the significance of family relationships in the development of children. Among these approaches is the Attachment Theory developed by John Bowlby, where it is stressed that effective and steady emotional connections between children and their major caregivers are the key to proper psychological growth. These relationships and bonds can be broken long-term, which can make children anxious, insecure, or emotionally withdrawn. The other perspective that is useful is Family Systems Theory which considers the family as a unit

and when one member of the family is affected, the whole unit is affected. In this perspective, the migration of parents is one of the significant changes that family structures have undergone, as a result of which families are forced to redistribute the functions of caregivers, communication systems, and sources of emotions.

In Uganda, there is growing social impact of migration at community level. There is a consistent increase in the number of people willing to work in the Middle East in cities like Kampala. One of such communities that have become accustomed to this trend is Ntinda Parish in Nakawa Division. The neighborhood is composed of individuals of varying social and economic standings. The past few years have seen more and more children living with their guardians or extended family members as their parents go to work in other countries. Such care giving arrangements vary with each house hold based on family relations, finances as well as the support systems in the community.

Parental migration in Uganda is increasingly becoming rampant; however, little studies have been done to investigate the impact that it has on the psychosocial well-being of children in a given local community. The available literature has primarily dwelled on the economic gains of migration including remittances, reduction of poverty, and national development. The only aspect that has been underemphasized is the life of children left behind and how parental absence affects their emotional lives, social relations and stability. This is especially evident in community-based research studies that examine the coping process of children and caregivers in response to the experiences of having parents who have moved away on an extended basis.

It is against this background that there is need to conduct a thorough research on the impacts of labour migration to the Middle East on the lives of children who are left behind in communities like the Ntinda Parish in Kampala. Through the analysis of the care giving systems, emotional experience and coping strategies of such children, the given research will explore the extended social impacts of migration. These experiences should be understood in relation to policies and community-based interventions that safeguard the welfare of children in transnational families to ensure that the benefits of migration to other countries are not compromised with emotional and social growth of children.

1.3 Problem statement

In the past decade, labour migration from Uganda to the Middle East has increased significantly, particularly in domestic and care work. By 2023, approximately 340,000 Ugandans had migrated for employment in the region (MoGLSD, 2024), and for many households, this migration has improved income levels and created new economic opportunities that were previously unavailable locally.

However, this economic benefit is accompanied by less visible social challenges, especially for children left behind. Many of these children are cared for by relatives or guardians who may have limited emotional and financial capacity, often resulting in reduced parental bonding, inconsistent communication, and weakened family attachment (Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2024; Faulk et al., 2024). Evidence further shows that prolonged parental absence is associated with poor academic performance, behavioural difficulties, and reduced psychological well-being (Lu, 2014; Mazzucato et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2023). Despite the growing body of knowledge on parental migration, little research has focused on the lived experiences of children left behind in urban areas along side with how parental migration affects their social and emotional wellbeing of children left behind. This study therefore sought to address this gap by exploring how parental migration to the Middle East affects children aged 6–17 years in Ntinda Parish in Uganda.

1.4 General research objective

The general objective of this study was to explore how parental migration to the Middle East affects the social and emotional wellbeing of children left in the care of relatives or guardians.

1.4.1 Research objectives

- i. To explore the lived experiences of children left behind when their parents migrate to the Middle East.
- ii. To establish how parental migration to the Middle East affects the social well-being of children left behind.
- iii. To describe how parental migration to the Middle East affects the emotional experiences of children left behind by parental migration to the Middle East.

1.4.2 Research questions

- i. What are the lived experiences of children left behind when their parents migrate to the Middle East?
- ii. How does parental migration to the Middle East affect the social well-being of children left behind?
- iii. How do children left behind experience and describe the emotional impacts of parental migration to the Middle East?

1.5 Scope

1.5.1 Content scope

This research aimed at learning the effect of parental migration to the Middle East on the social and emotional well-being of 6-17 years old children in Ntinda Parish. Specifically, it explored the normal lives of children who have to stay at home as their parents go out to work in foreign countries. The research was keen on the caregiving arrangements that manifest upon the migration of parents like when children are taken under the care of their grandparents, relatives or guardians, and the effects that such arrangements have on the day-to-day activities, experiences and general wellbeing of children.

The study also focused on the missing parents and their impact on the relationship of children with the individuals surrounding them. This involved their relationships with their caregivers at home, their associations with their peers and their associations with their teachers at school. Moreover, the research examined the ways in which these children were involved in social and school-based events in their respective neighborhoods, and how the migration of parents influenced their feeling of identity and participation in these settings.

1.5.2 Geographical scope

The research used Ntinda Parish in Nakawa Division in the urban area since it made it representative to monitor the effects of labour migration on families in the urban area. Ntinda is an established residential suburb and is situated between 7-8km of central business district of Kampala and is a constituent of the booming urban societies of Kampala Capital City Authority. Population, about 9,094 people live in the parish, and the territory area it covers is about 263 hectares, is one of the means of admitting the socially diverse community where a variety of

different family structures can be observed (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Such urban pressures along with economic realities are likely to cause parents to find the employment opportunity in other countries. As the characteristic urban community, in which the labour migration (at least to the Middle East) is becoming an ever-growing phenomenon, Ntinda provides a perfect setting, in which the impact of the parental migration on the social and emotional health of the remaining children can be addressed.

1.5.3 Time scope

This research examined the last five years as the period enabled the study to thoroughly examine the latest and the most pertinent experiences of children whose parents have moved to the Middle East. The span of five years was sufficient to track the short and medium-term outcomes on the social and emotional well-being of children, such as caregivers, parent-child communication, and coping mechanisms (Fauk et al., 2024; Al-Azzeh and Diab, 2024).

Concentrating on this time also means that the experiences of the kids capture the current trends of migration, economic factors, and the social support present in Ntinda Parish and minimize chances of memory bias that might arise when remembering events that happened much longer ago (Wang et al., 2024). As well, it is consistent with the recent statistics on the population and migration in the region, which helped the study to place the experience of children in the context of the current social and economic conditions of the city of Kampala (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Kampala Capital City Authority, 2023).

1.6 Justification

In most families, the role of parenting remains to the family and the guardians when one of the parents emigrates. These setups are usually a source of much needed care and stability but they also bring with them variations in parenting styles, discipline and emotional support. There are those children who adapt quite well, and others can become lonely, confused, or emotionally distant towards parents who although send financial help are at a distance. They are usually indirect and unarticulated but significantly influence the way children learn about the relationship in the family and parental love and support.

Even though the concept of migration has received extensive research in Uganda, most of the current studies are either on economic outcomes or larger migration trends. Less focus has been placed on the life of children whose parents immigrate in the Middle East particularly in towns like Ntinda Parish. Urban children are also exposed to special stressors, such as the changing family set up, more powerful peer pressure, and increased dependence on online communication to stay connected with absentee parents.

1.7 Significance

This study is significant as it illuminates on a relatively little-duplicated dimension on the issue of labour migration in Uganda: the psychosocial and emotional health of children who are left behind by their parents who migrate to the Middle East. Although migrant worker remittances are important in sustaining the income of the households and other national developmental factors, the emotional and social conditions of children who grow up without parents remain not well comprehended. This study raises the importance of the urban caring conditions and economic pressures coupled with the changing family dynamics that influence the emotional lives of children in a complex and yet challenging way. Such insights are crucial to social workers, child protection officers, community leaders, and policymakers aiming to create an intervention that can assist the children to cope with permanent absence of parents.

Academically, this research fills a huge gap in the literature about migration and child welfare in Uganda. Most of the earlier studies have included results on economic or investigated family experiences in rural settings and little has been done to include the experiences of children in urban settings. Through the qualitative approach, the proposed study will seek to capture the extent to which alternative caregiving arrangements, communication styles, and emotional coping processes determine the lived experiences of left-behind children (LBCs). The results will be used in informing evidence-based policies in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and practical advice on social service programming in the Kampala Capital City Authority.

1.8 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study explains how parental migration to the Middle East influences the social and emotional wellbeing of children aged 6–17 years in Ntinda Parish. When parents migrate, their physical absence changes family life, affecting how children feel, behave, and relate with others. In this study, parental migration is the main influencing factor, while children's wellbeing is the outcome.

Parental migration is understood through factors such as the length of absence, frequency of communication, remittances, and caregiving arrangements. Long periods away and limited communication may lead to feelings of loneliness or neglect. While financial support can improve living conditions, it does not fully replace parental presence. The type and quality of care children receive at home also play a key role in shaping their experiences.

Children's social and emotional wellbeing is reflected in their feelings, relationships, and behavior. Some may experience anxiety, low self-esteem, or withdrawal, while others may adapt and remain socially engaged. Their ability to interact with peers and perform in school may also be affected.

The framework also recognizes moderating factors such as caregiving quality, socio-economic status, age, gender, and support from schools and the community. These factors can either reduce or worsen the effects of parental absence. Overall, the framework shows that the impact of parental migration depends on both family conditions and the support systems available to the child.

Fig 1.1. Conceptual framework

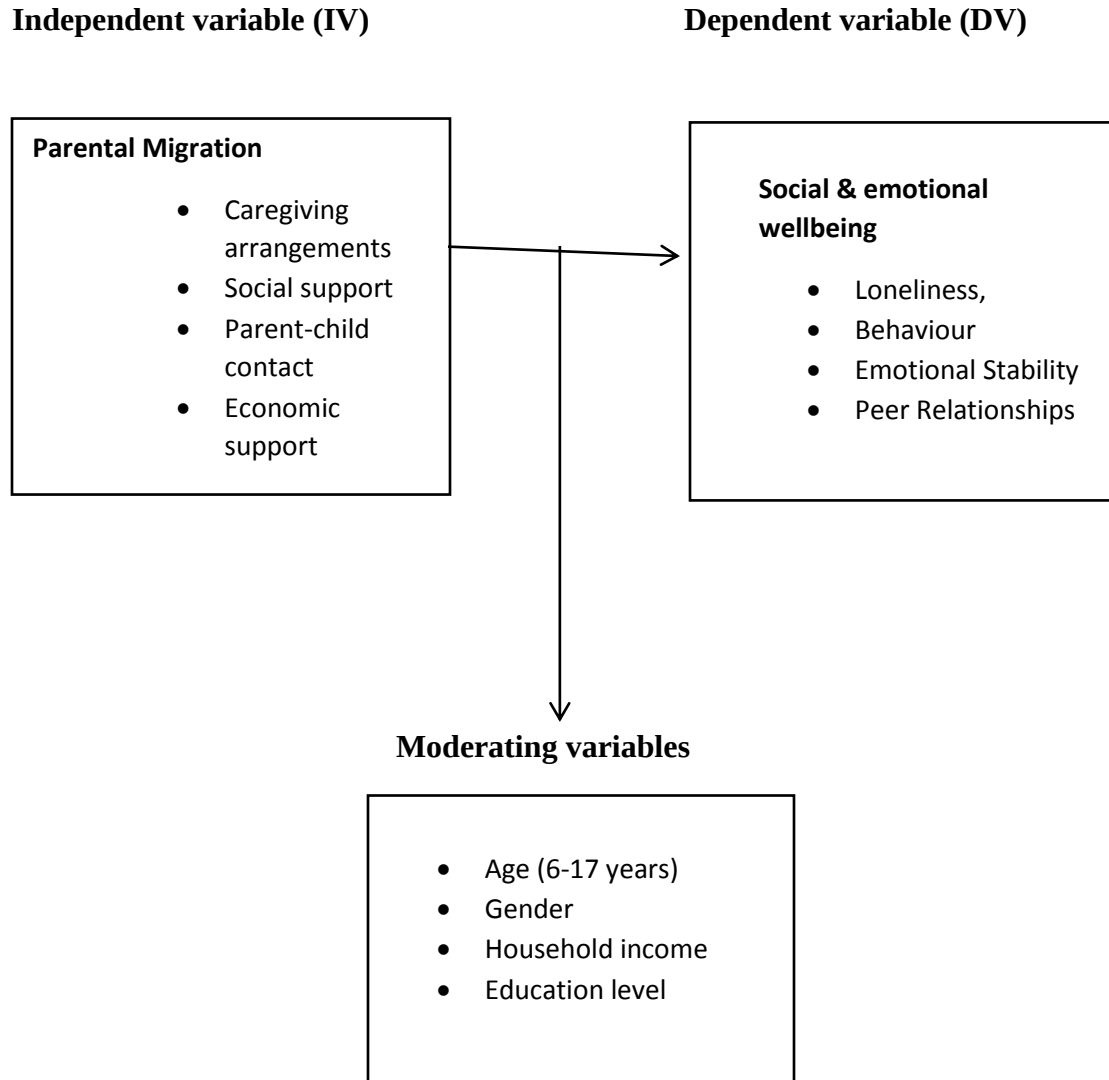


Fig 1.1 Conceptual framework

This conceptual framework was adapted from the general principles of conceptual frameworks as described by **Scribbr (2024)**, which emphasizes the relationship between independent and dependent variables and other influencing factors.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section focuses on reviewing literature, which is related to the subject under research in line with the research objectives. It starts with the theoretical review, which clearly states the tenets, proponents, strengths, weaknesses and research studies that have applied this theory before. This is followed by the empirical review, which draws on studies that have been conducted with in different contexts and what they reveal about migrant labour and how it affects the children left behind. The literature gap is then stated.

2.2 Theoretical review

This section focuses on the theoretical review which reviews the theory which shall be used to underpin this study. The Attachment Theory, developed by John Bowlby and later expanded by Mary Ainsworth, helps explain how the relationships we form early in life influence the way we relate to others as we grow. It suggests that the kind of care and emotional support a child receives from caregivers shapes their sense of trust, security, and expectations in relationships. When individuals experience consistent and nurturing care, they are more likely to develop confidence and form healthy relationships, while inconsistent or neglectful care may lead to difficulties such as fear of closeness or insecurity. In a theoretical review, this theory is important because it provides a clear and relatable way of understanding how past experiences shape present behavior, especially in how people interact, make decisions, and build relationships in different contexts.

Attachment Theory

In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the lives of the children who are left behind as a result of the migration of their parents to the Middle East for purposes of seeking employment, it is necessary to look beyond the economic implications of this migration and get into the lives of the children who are left behind. Although the economic implications of this migration may be useful in meeting the school fees, housing, and other economic needs of the child, the cost of the parent not being there does not have an economic cost, only a cost that comes in the form of not being there to read the child a bedtime story, not being there to answer the child's questions, not

being there to help the child get through life. The concepts of Attachment Theory, Family Systems Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory will guide this research and will be useful in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the lives of the children who are left behind.

The Attachment Theory was formed by John Bowlby (1969, 1982), and later the theory was expanded by Mary Ainsworth and her team (1978). This theory offers us an explanation of the emotional stability of children. According to this theory, children develop strong and lasting relationships with their primary caregivers. This offers them a sense of security and safety. According to this theory, if the caregiver is present, then the child can develop a secure attachment to the caregiver, which can offer the child emotional stability. According to this theory, if parents migrate, then they can create anxiety, and this can have an effect on the emotional stability of the child. This theory has been formed to prove that if parents migrate, then this can have an effect on the emotional stability of the child. This theory has failed to offer us an explanation of how communication can take place through phone calls and video chats. This theory has been formed to prove that if parents migrate, then this can create anxiety and can have an effect on the emotional stability of the child. This theory has been formed to prove that if parents migrate, then this can create anxiety.

Another theory that also considers the entire family, like the Family Systems Theory, was conceptualized by Murray Bowen (1978). Family Systems Theory views the entire family as an emotional system. When one of the members of the family migrates, the entire family feels the changes. For example, having more roles to fulfill, having siblings who have new roles, and having the elderly having the new role of the parents. The money sent by the migrant also has a positive side. At the same time, it also causes some changes in the family, especially when the parents, who are not around, make the decisions for the entire family. The study of Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2005) and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) can be used to gain insight into the changes that the family feels because of the migration. Family Systems Theory can also be used to gain insight into the changes that the family feels because of the migration, but not the child. Therefore, this theory was not as applicable as the Attachment Theory.

According to the Ecological Systems Theory, as propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979, change in the family system is seen to happen in a number of social and economic situations. According to the Ecological Systems Theory, one has to understand that the development of the child happens in a number of systems, including the immediate environment, i.e., the school and the family, and the entire society, i.e., the culture and economic systems. In the case of the migrant parents in the Middle East, the various systems include the global system, the national system, and the cultural system, i.e., the global labor market, the national employment policies, and the cultural values of success. The emotional well-being of the child would include interactions not only with the migrant parents but also at school, with friends, and in society about the issue of migration. Although the Ecological Systems Theory propounds that the development of the child happens in a number of systems, there is no information provided in the theory about the parental-child relationship, unless it is integrated with other theories like the Attachment Theory.

The three perspectives offer a multi-dimensional and understanding approach to the research. Attachment Theory, in particular, focuses on the emotional impact of the experience of separation, as well as the value of parental communication to their children. Family Systems Theory, meanwhile, focuses on the impact of the experience of migration to the family structure, family roles, and family relationships. Ecological Systems Theory, finally, focuses on the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the above-mentioned experiences. In this way, the research, with the above perspectives, confirms that the children who have been left behind do not only have remittances to enjoy, but that they, as well, are emotional beings who have to cope with the experience of parental separation in a world where the globalization of the labor market has become a reality.

2.3.1 The lived experiences of children left behind when their parents migrate

Lived Experiences

From a global perspective, the experiences of children left behind when their parents migrate to the Middle East are often deeply emotional and complex. In many low- and middle-income countries, parental migration has led to the rise of transnational families, where children grow up without the daily presence of one or both parents (Antia et al., 2020; Rachel Murphy, 2012). While these children may benefit from improved living conditions through remittances, many

struggle with feelings of loneliness, abandonment, and anxiety, and are more likely to experience emotional distress than those living with their parents (Xiaoyan Liu et al., 2016; Shuang Chen et al., 2019). Being separated for long periods can weaken the bond between parents and children, especially when communication is limited, making it harder for children to feel supported and understood (Elisabeth Graham & Lucy P. Jordan, 2011). Many of these children are raised by grandparents or other relatives, and although they may receive care, it does not always replace the emotional connection they have with their parents (Erika A. Cardona et al., 2022). As a result, some children may face challenges such as behavioral problems or difficulties in school, showing that financial support alone cannot fully replace parental presence (Yongxin Hu, 2013; Filippo Mazzucato & Valentina Schans, 2011). Overall, global research shows that even though migration can improve a family's economic situation, many children left behind continue to face emotional struggles and the challenge of growing up without close parental care.

In the case of parental labor migration, especially to countries in the Middle East, parental labor migration has become a common phenomenon for many families in developing countries in regions such as East Africa. Though the remittance that is sent by the parents to their home can be used for improving the standards of living, school fees, or any other domestic needs, the absence of the parent at home has resulted in various emotional and social issues for the child who is left behind at home. Various researchers have shown that in most cases, the child has felt the lack of attachment with their parents, especially at times when they feel the pain of the absence of their parents, especially at times of the day, at school, or even when they face some problems that they would normally discuss with their parents. Not only has it been shown that this has resulted in feelings of loss for the child, but the child has also shown that this has resulted in feelings of longing for the guidance, comfort, and reassurance that can only be provided by the presence of the parent (Fauk et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2024).

However, the feelings of the children who have been left behind have not all been negative. For instance, the children have expressed feelings of pride as a result of the efforts made by their parents to provide financially for the family. In addition, communication can also provide emotional support to the children. For the children who have been left behind, communication with their parents who have migrated can provide them with emotional security. For instance, the children who have been left behind have expressed feelings of frustration if they are not able to

communicate, which shows that communication is important for their emotional security (Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2025; Faulk et al., 2024).

This lack of parents also has an effect on the social lives of the children, and some children end up having anxiety or discomfort, which makes their lives difficult. The social problems that the children of immigrants face might be as a result of the anxiety or discomfort that they feel. The attitude of the community, whether it is negative or positive, affects the self-perception of the children. In some communities, migration might be very common, and the children might get support and understanding from their peers, while in some communities, migration might not be common, and the children might feel as if they are different from their peers who have been brought up in a traditional nuclear family structure with two parents present (UNICEF, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

In conclusion, it is obvious that the lived experience of the child who has been left behind by his/her parents who migrated to the Middle Eastern countries is a complex phenomenon consisting of emotions and social interactions. The remittance received by the child from his/her parents will surely improve his/her living conditions, but it is not a replacement for his/her physical presence. The lived experience of the child concerning his/her parents' migration to the Middle Eastern countries depends on the quality of the substitute care received by the child, the quality of the communication received by the child from his/her parents, and the social setting of the environment in which the child is in. In order to fully comprehend the impact of parents' migration to the Middle Eastern countries on their children's well-being, it is necessary to comprehend the complex experience of the child.

2.3.2 How does parental migration to the Middle East influence the social well-being of children left behind?

Social well-being of children

From a global perspective, parental migration to the Middle East affects the social well-being of children left behind in both positive and challenging ways. In many developing countries, children may enjoy better living conditions, improved access to education, and a higher social standing because of the financial support sent home by their parents (Filippo Mazzucato, 2011; Valentina Schans, 2011). However, these benefits often come with social difficulties. Growing up without the daily presence of a parent can make it harder for children to build strong

relationships, as they miss out on guidance, supervision, and emotional support that are important for social development (Elisabeth Graham & Lucy P. Jordan, 2011).

As a result, some children may become withdrawn, struggle to trust others, or develop behavioral problems (Xiaoyan Liu et al., 2016; Shuang Chen et al., 2019). Many are raised by grandparents or relatives, and while this can provide care and stability, it may not fully replace the role of parents in guiding social behavior (Rachel Murphy, 2012). In some cases, children may also feel different from their peers or experience social stigma because of their parents' absence (Antia et al., 2020). Overall, even though migration can improve a family's financial situation, it can also make it more difficult for children to develop strong social connections and feel fully supported in their everyday lives.

The movement of parents to the Middle East is one of the strategies that parents in different countries have employed in order to improve their economic well-being. Although the remittance that they receive from their parents can be used to meet the needs of their children, it has been established in different studies that the absence of parents greatly impacts the transformation of their children, thus their social well-being in different ways. In this study, social well-being was described as the different ways that their children relate and interact with different people in the social environment, feelings of belonging, and the ability to function in the social environment.

Recent qualitative research that was done in Indonesia also gave some insight into what kind of social issues that left-behind children may face. This qualitative research, which was done among left-behind children, highlighted that the negative labeling of left-behind children by their peers and changes in household tasks have impacted their social life among their peers. Left-behind children felt that they were "different" from others or did not want to join in group activities among their peers due to the migration of their parents, which impacted their feelings of belongingness and connectedness (Fauk et al., 2024).

However, other research will still continue to investigate the importance of social connections. In one study that was conducted in China, the researchers had targeted to investigate and compare the effects of children that had been left behind by their parents and those that had not. According to the study, if a child had something to thank for, they had more social anxiety if

they had been left behind compared to those that had not been left behind by their parents (Chen et al., 2025). This is important in understanding the effects of parental absence on the social confidence of the child to be able to socialize and connect with other people, including their friends and social circles at large. Although most of the literature had been based on the experiences of the children outside the Middle Eastern migration, systematic reviews had shown that parental absence had a correlation with low levels of general subjective well-being in the children that had been left behind. In one study that was conducted in six different countries in Europe, it had shown that there was low subjective well-being in the children that had been left behind by their parents compared to those that

Cultural context also matters. In communities where migration is common and socially accepted, children may find peer support and shared understanding among classmates whose parents are also away. Conversely, in communities where migration is less prevalent, children may feel isolated or stigmatized, weakening their sense of belonging and making social spaces feel less welcoming. This demonstrates that social well-being is shaped not just by parental absence but also by how communities interpret and respond to it.

Communication between migrant parents and children is another key factor. Regular, meaningful contact through phone calls, messages, or video chats helps maintain emotional bonds and supports children's confidence in social interactions. When children feel connected to their parents despite the distance, they are more likely to engage positively with peers and adults. In contrast, inconsistent communication can intensify feelings of abandonment and social insecurity, leading to withdrawal and reduced participation in social activities (Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2025; Faulk et al., 2024).

Another factor that could possibly influence the social well-being of the child could be the culture. For example, migrating could possibly be very common within that culture. Therefore, the child could possibly feel supported by their fellow children who could have also migrated. In some cultures, migrating could possibly not be very common. Therefore, the child could possibly feel isolated. This could negatively influence the child's feeling of belonging. This shows that the social well-being of the child could not only be determined by the presence or absence of their parents, but also by the culture of the child.

The communication between the migrant parents and the child could also possibly influence the social well-being of the child. For example, when the migrant parents communicate very well with the child, this could positively influence the social well-being of the child. Therefore, the child could possibly feel attached to their parents. This shows that the child could positively participate in their social interactions. When the migrant parents do not communicate very well with the child, this could negatively influence the social well-being of the child. Therefore, the child could possibly withdraw from their social interactions (Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2025; Fauk et al.,

This is yet again one such factor that will have a great impact on the child. When parents and care givers encourage and promote active participation in school and community activities, and interaction with their peers, it is evident that the child will be able to show resilience and develop robust social skills in spite of the absence of parents. On the contrary, when parents and care givers are busy and have no time to devote to the child, it is evident that the child will not be able to show resilience and develop robust social skills by interacting with their peers.

Therefore, to conclude, it is evident that the social lives of the children who are left behind due to the migration of their parents to the Middle East are influenced by various factors such as family, peer group, community, communication, and care arrangements. Although it is evident that the economic benefits of the migration of parents to the Middle East are great, it is evident that the social lives of the children are influenced in a way that they are challenged.

2.3.3 How parental migration impacts the emotional wellbeing of children left behind

Emotional Impact

Across the world, many families are shaped by migration, especially as parents move to regions like the Middle East in search of better job opportunities and a more stable income for their households. While these decisions often improve living conditions through remittances, they also leave behind children who must grow up without the daily presence of one or both parents. In their everyday lives, these children often describe a deep sense of missing their parents, feeling lonely, emotionally unsettled, and sometimes even abandoned, despite understanding the reasons behind the migration (Parreñas, 2005; Graham & Jordan, 2011). For many, the absence of simple

routines, such as shared meals, school support, or a parent's comforting presence, creates an emotional gap that is difficult to fill.

At the same time, these children's experiences are not entirely negative. Some express pride in their parents' hard work and the sacrifices made to secure a better future for the family. However, this pride is often mixed with sadness and longing, as regular communication cannot fully replace physical closeness (Asis, 2006; Jordan & Graham, 2012). In many cases, children are cared for by relatives such as grandparents, which provides stability and support, but may not fully meet their emotional needs. As they adjust, some children become more independent or take on additional responsibilities at home, while others quietly struggle with stress, changes in behavior, or declining performance in school (Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011).

Ultimately, children left behind often live with a delicate balance of emotions—grateful for the opportunities created by their parents' sacrifices, yet still longing for closeness, guidance, and the emotional security that comes from having a parent physically present in their daily lives.

The issue of parental migration to the Middle East has been cited as one of the most preferred migration destinations for parents in Africa to seek better economic opportunities. Even though the migration of parents to the Middle East and the remittances sent to their children in Africa can improve their living standards, pay their fees, and improve their future, it can have a cost in terms of emotional upsets for their children in Africa. It can be cited that the migration of parents to the Middle East can have a negative impact on their attachment bonds, which can result in emotional upsets for their children in Africa, as cited in the research findings of different studies. It can be cited that the migration of parents to the Middle East can have a negative impact on their attachment bonds, which can result in emotional upsets for their children in Africa of different age groups, as cited in the research findings of different researchers (Fauk et al., 2024; Al Azzeh & Diab, 2025).

The effect of age and gender has also been seen to have an effect on the determination of the effects of parental absence. Teenagers have been seen to exhibit anxiety and depression signs due to the period of absence of their parents, while pre-school children have been seen to exhibit

signs of attachment due to the absence of their parents, which has a major effect on their emotional control in the future (Tamang, 2025). Girls have been seen to exhibit that they are more affected by the absence of their parents, as they exhibit feelings of loneliness and sorrow, while boys exhibit that they are affected by the absence of their parents in the form of aggression.

Regular communication with the parents of the migrants has been identified to be one of the factors that help in reducing emotional strain. It has been identified that regular phone and video calls help in maintaining emotional relations with their children and provide them with a sense of assurance and connection, even though they are physically away from their parents (Al Azzeh & Diab, 2025). The frustration and uncertainty felt by those children who have had less communication with their parents have emphasized the importance of communication in relation to emotional well-being in children.

Another factor is that the environment in which the children are staying is also impacting their emotional conditions. It is found in urban and semi-urban areas that due to the absence of their parents, some children have to face taunting by their peers, and this may add to their problem in terms of emotional issues (Scott, 2025). In those areas where migration is high, it is found that the presence of their peers is helping the children in overcoming their emotional issues due to access to their peer group for emotional support. It is found that attending school and religious events is helping the left-behind children.

However, it is also important to note that the long migration of parents could also have some emotional effects on their children in the future. The children could learn to live with their emotional experiences by detaching themselves from their parents and by idealizing their parents. This could have negative effects on their relationship with their parents and their emotional experiences in the future (Fauk et al., 2024).

It is of utmost importance to understand complex emotional experiences in order to come up with ways to address the needs of children who have been left behind in countries where there is high migration to the Middle East, in such a manner that does not compromise their social and emotional well-being due to parental migration.

2.4 Summary of literature gaps

Although it has been very instrumental in bringing to our attention the issues that have been facing children who have been left behind by their parents who have migrated to the Middle East, most of the literature that has been done was based on the economic benefits and psychosocial effects, although some of it was based on the research that had been done in other parts of the world (Fauk et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025). In-depth research had not been conducted in the African region to bring to our attention how the child had perceived the emotional and social effects of being left behind by their parents. They had been viewed as a single group, with no differentiation by age, gender, or caregiving environment.

Even though the communication between the parents and the children of the migrants has been identified to be of importance, not much is known about the effects of the amount of communication with the parents of the migrants on the emotional resilience and social confidence of the children of the migrants in Africa. In addition, not much is known about the effects of the repeated and prolonged migration of parents on the child, including how the child adapts, copes, and develops as a response to this phenomenon.

The study aims to make a contribution to the knowledge gap on the effects of parental migration on the lives of the children of the migrants in Africa by focusing on the children aged between 6 and 17 years in Ntinda Parish, hearing their stories, and exploring how they are affected by the caregivers and peer groups. Through the engagement with the culture and society of Africa, the study aims to make a contribution to the knowledge gap that already exists concerning the effects of parental migration on the lives of the children of the migrants in Africa, beyond the statistical and economic indicators, and explore the voice of the child.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research design, research area, sources of information, study population, sampling, data collection methods, data collection tools, data analysis, reliability, and study limitations.

3.2 Research design

The research employed a phenomenological research design, which is a qualitative research approach. The phenomenological research design was used to describe the lives of the caretakers who have left-behind children due to their parents' departure to look for jobs in the Middle Eastern countries. The experiences described by the phenomenological research design were very instrumental for the research. Phenomenological research design enabled the researcher to "dive into the world of experiences of research participants" and therefore enabled the researcher to use a rigorous engagement methodologically, and this was the reason for using this research design.

3.3 Area of study

The study area was Ntinda parish because a significant number of the parents of Ntinda parish have abandoned Uganda to pursue jobs in the Middle East countries because such jobs are perceived as better paying than those in Uganda (International Organization for Migration, 2020; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2019).

3.4 Sources of data/information

The study used both primary and secondary sources of information. This was done to ensure that the study not only had an accurate understanding of the issue, but it also had reliable information, as it was obtained from multiple sources, as recommended by Bryman (2015). This, in turn, meant that the study had reliable information, as it obtained from both the primary and secondary sources of information.

The use of the primary source of information was essential in ensuring that the study got first-hand information, as it was obtained directly from the source, either from the caregivers, relatives, or guardians of the children of parents who had migrated to the Middle East in search of job opportunities.

3.5 Population

The population of this study included the children (15 in number), and caretakers or guardians (15 in number). This is because it is a qualitative study which focused on the quality of participants and not how big the number is (Patton, 2018). Such a population was suitable for a location like Ntinda parish which made the study not to be over ambitious.

The information that these two populations provided about the emotional and social lives of the children who were left behind by their parents in the Middle East was very valuable. The information that the children provided included their experiences, their feelings about their situation, and their ways of dealing with their situation, and their problems in their daily lives, which may not have been known by anyone else (Fauk et al., 2024; Al Azzeh & Diab, 2025). The information that the caretakers provided included the changes in the behavior and responsibilities of the children in the absence of their parents (Scott, 2025; Tamang, 2025). This way, the study was able to get a complete picture, and the information gathered was very valuable in addressing the needs of the children who were left behind by their parents in the Middle East.

3.6 Sampling

Purposive sampling

The study used purposive sampling in identifying the most qualified participants to participate in the research (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018). For example, the researcher will ensure that the children are purposively sampled and the caretakers of the children who are left behind by their parents to go and work in the Middle East countries are included in the research as key informants. The researcher will make use of the concerned stakeholders to get to the children, as they know about the issue.

3.1 Sample size and sample selection

The Table below shows the study population, the target population and the sampling techniques that were used during the study.

Table 3.1. Sampling Techniques

Category	Study population	Target population	Sampling technique
Selected children who have been left behind by parents to go work in the Middle East	20	15	Purposive sampling
Caretakers of children left behind by parents who have immigrated to the Middle East	20	15	Purposive sampling

The research sought to reach a number of 20 caretakers of the left-behind children and 20 left-behind children, due to the fact that 20 is the recommended number in qualitative research to enable one to arrive at saturation and satiety (Bryman, 2018; Cresswell, 2018). The study utilised 15 caregivers, and 15 children as participants, respectively.

Another major concept in qualitative research is the concept of data saturation, where there is no new theme that comes out as a result of the gathered data. The understanding of the existence of data saturation ensured that the research conducted by the researcher was all-inclusive. Literature showed that the population of 20 people per group is enough to ensure the understanding of the existence of data saturation, as it not only ensures an in-depth exploration of the experiences of the children but it was also easy to explore (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This ensured not only the exploration of the experiences of the children but also the exploration of the experiences of those around the children, hence providing a holistic understanding of how parental migration affected the lives of the left-behind children.

3.7 Data collection methods

In-depth interviews were used as a method of collection of information from the children, caregivers, and area local leaders. The reason why in-depth interviews shall be used is that it gave the participants an opportunity to share information with the researcher. This was important in collection of data.

Therefore, it was beneficial to the participants because it created an environment in which they shared their feelings concerning their loneliness, anxiety, and coping with their parents' migration. Furthermore, it was beneficial to the caregivers because they had interesting and

insightful data concerning their perception of change in their household, their roles, and change in their children (Fauk et al., 2024; Scott, 2025).

3.7 Data collection tools

In terms of the collection of the data, it was done using an interview guide. This gave it structure in terms of the major issues that were explored in this study, it also allowed for the exploration of the rich experience of the children and the caregiver in terms of situations where parents had migrated. This not only gave it structure in terms of the major constructs that had to be explored in this study, it also allowed the participant to have their own story to tell. This was very important in qualitative study where the aim of the study was to explore the richness of experience of the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

These were open-ended, and this offered a chance for the participants to share their emotions, routines, difficulties, and many more. The nature and kinds of questions, which were extremely personal in nature, could only be understood if one got a chance to listen to the stories of the people who were living in these situations (Li & Wang, 2018; Shrestha, 2025). The guide had the potential to help the researcher in addressing any problem that arose due to the participants, as well as clearing the confusion, with due care and empathy (Bryman, 2015). It had the potential to help in engaging the children and their caretaker in a way that offered a conducive environment for the participants to open up to the researcher about their experiences, which was extremely important, especially for children, as has been seen in the study done by Mazzucato & Schans (2011).

3.8 Data analysis

The gathered data was entered into Nvivo 14, coded, and cleaned. Emerging themes were established to make sure that clear patterns were identified. The analysis was then performed through thematic analysis and the results were reported in verbatim.

3.9 Reliability

The criterion used in observing the trustworthiness of the research was based on the criteria established by Miles and Huberman (1992). The researcher ensured that there was transferability of the research findings. The researcher observed confirmability throughout the research process.

The researcher ensured record keeping and maintaining a trail of events of the research process to ensure that there was clarity on the way the research process was executed.

3.11 Ethical considerations

The researcher ensured informed consent for adults aged 18 above by allowing the participants to feel free to be part of the study as and when they felt like. Then for children who were 6-17 years of age the researcher sought ascent for their participation in the study.

The participants had the freedom to leave the interview in case they feel the necessity. The researcher observed the international frameworks and protocols such as Helsinki declaration of 1964, the Belmont report of 1979 and the Nuremberg code of 1947. These guide the conduct of research involving human beings.

3.12 Study limitations

There was a high possibility that the research was being restricted due to the fear of the caregivers being very open to the researcher in order to provide all the necessary information to the researcher. However, the researcher was be able to address this by presenting herself as a student who is undertaking the research in order to enable her to graduate with Bachelors in Social Work.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter analyzes, presents and discusses the findings of the study in line with the research objectives. The presentation is organized thematically to reflect the key issues emerging from the data collected from children left behind by parents who have migrated to the Middle East. Verbatim quotations from participants are used to provide a clear representation of their lived experiences, while interpretation and discussion are supported by relevant literature to situate the findings within existing knowledge. The analysis focuses on how parental migration influences children's emotional well-being, parent-child relationships, caregiving arrangements, peer interactions, school engagement, and coping mechanisms. By integrating participants' narratives with scholarly evidence, the chapter offers a comprehensive understanding of the social and psychological implications of parental migration on children's everyday lives.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of children who participated in the study

This study looked at age, education level and gender of the children studied. The results on children demographic characteristics are summarized in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Total percentage
Gender		
Male	5	33.3
Female	10	66.6
Total	15	100
Education		
Lower Primary	8	53.3
Middle Primary	3	20
Upper Primary	2	13.3
Secondary school	2	13.3
Total	15	100
Age (years)		
0-9	5	33.3
10-18	10	66.6
Total	15	100

Source: primary data 2026

The demographic characteristics of the 15 children who were included in the study are summarised in 4.1, both by sex and education and age.

The spread of gender in the sample shows that it is largely female. Out of the 15 participants, 10 (66.6%) are female, while 5 (33.3%) are male. This means that there are more girls than boys in this study.

In terms of education level, most of the participants are from lower primary school (8 children, 53.3%). This is followed by middle primary (3 participants, 20%). There is an equal number of participants in upper primary and secondary school (2 each, 13.3%). This indicates that the majority of children included in the study are at an early stage in formal education.

As far as age is concerned, most participants are in the 10-18 years age group. In particular, 66.6% (10 children) are aged 10-18 years, and 33.3% (5 children) are aged 0-9 years. This demonstrates that the study reflects to a great extent the views of older children and adolescents.

The general picture from the table is that it is a sample that is predominantly female, male-dominated in lower primary and predominantly in the age range 10-18 years.

4.2 Demographic characteristics of caretakers

The study looked at the demographic characteristics of the care takers looking at their Gender and the education level

Table 4.2: Demographic characteristics of caretakers

Characteristics	Frequency	Total percentage
Gender		
Male	5	33.3
Female	10	66.6
Total	15	100
Education		
Primary	2	13.3
Secondary	7	46.6
Tertiary	5	33.3
No formal education	1	6.6
Total	15	100
Age (Years)		
10-19	1	6.6
20-29	2	13.3
30-39	2	13.3
40-49	5	33.3
50-59	5	33.3
Total	15	100

Source: Primary Data 2026

A total of 15 caretakers participated in the study and their demography characteristics are presented in 4.2. The results indicate that most of caretakers were females (10, 66.6%), and males (5, 33.3%). This means that the women are mainly responsible for care-taking in the study setting. In terms of education, the findings show a diverse profile of the respondents. 7 caretakers (46.6%) had completed secondary education, which was the highest level of education for such a large number. Those who have tertiary education follow at 5 respondents (33.3%), while a smaller number have only primary education at 2 respondents (13.3%) and the least number of respondents are those who have no formal or minimal education at 1 respondent (6.6%). The results indicated that the great majority of the caretakers could not but have some secondary level of education, which implied that the participants had a relatively low level of literacy. In terms of age distribution, the data show that caretakers were mostly in the older age groups. Fifty (33.3%) were between 50-59 years of age and 40-49 years of age, respectively. 2 respondents (13.3%) were in the 30-39 age group and 2 (13.3%) in the 20-29 age group, with only 1 (6.6%) respondent in the youngest age group. The results indicate that older people are more likely to be provided care, which may be because they have more life experience and family responsibilities. The overall profile of the caretakers in this study is a relatively older, moderately educated,

predominantly female group that may have implications for their caregiving capacity, decision making, and support needs, as well as those of children.

4.3 Lived experiences of children left behind due to parental migration

Among the objectives of this research project was the exploration of the influence of parental migration to the Middle East on the lived experiences of those children who are left behind in care of the caretakers. This goal was thoroughly discussed, and the results were grouped into major themes, which are outlined below.

Emotional and Psychological Well-being

Children's narratives strongly highlight loneliness as a central emotional experience shaping their psychological well-being in the context of parental migration. Although many of the children continued to live in households with relatives or caregivers, their accounts reveal that emotional presence, rather than physical proximity, is what sustains a child's sense of security and belonging. The absence of parents created a persistent emotional void, leaving children feeling isolated, unheard, and disconnected from the affection and reassurance they once relied on.

One child's account illustrates how this loneliness is embedded in everyday routines, particularly in moments that previously involved parental interaction and emotional support:

“Most evenings are the hardest for me. When I come back from school, the house feels empty even though there are people around. My mother used to ask me how my day was and sit with me, but now no one really does that. Sometimes I try to call her, but when she doesn't pick, I start overthinking and feel like maybe she is too busy for me or has forgotten about me. I miss the small things, her voice, her presence, and it makes me feel like something important in my life is missing.” **(Ten-year-old girl, 3rd March 2026)**

This narrative underscores that loneliness is not merely about being alone, but about the absence of meaningful emotional connection. The child's fear of being forgotten reflects a deeper psychological impact, a weakening sense of attachment and belonging, which are critical components of healthy emotional development.

Similarly, another participant's account reveals how loneliness is often intertwined with anxiety, fear, and emotional suppression, further affecting psychological well-being:

“I am always worried about my father because I hear stories about how people are treated when they go to work in the Middle East. When he doesn't call, I cannot concentrate at school because my mind is full of fear. At the same time, I feel hurt because I need him here. Sometimes I ask myself why he had to go so far away and leave me behind. I try to be strong, but deep inside I feel sad and alone, like I have no one to really share my feelings with.” **(Eleven-year-old boy, 5th March 2026).**

This account demonstrates that emotional loneliness extends beyond sadness to include psychological distress, such as persistent worry, reduced concentration, and internal conflict. The child's inability to express these feelings openly suggests emotional internalization, a condition associated with longer-term mental health challenges.

Observations from caregivers further reinforce this pattern, showing that loneliness often remains hidden beneath outward behavior:

“Sometimes the child sits alone for long hours without talking to anyone. Even when other children are playing, you can see that the happiness is not really there. She may smile in front of people, but when she is by herself, you can tell that she misses the parent deeply and feels that empty space inside.” **(Caretaker, 5th March 2026)**

This highlights how children may adopt coping mechanisms that mask emotional distress, making it difficult for caregivers to fully address their psychological needs. The discrepancy between outward appearance and internal emotional states suggests that loneliness is not only pervasive but also deeply internalized, affecting children's social engagement and emotional expression.

These findings align with existing literature, which shows that children left behind by migrant parents often experience emotional loneliness, social withdrawal, and reduced psychological well-being, largely because remote communication cannot fully substitute for direct parental care and affection (Sun et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020; Yeoh et al., 2023; Qin et al., 2020).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that while parental migration may provide economic benefits, it simultaneously undermines children's emotional and psychological well-being by disrupting attachment relationships that are essential for healthy development. Loneliness emerges not as an isolated feeling, but as a multidimensional emotional experience, encompassing sadness, anxiety, disconnection, and unmet emotional needs, ultimately shaping how children perceive themselves, their relationships, and their sense of security in the world.

Parent–Child Relationship and Attachment Dynamics

Children's narratives revealed that parental migration to the Middle East significantly disrupted parent–child relationships, reshaping attachment patterns in ways that were often emotionally distressing. While parents migrated with the intention of improving family welfare, many children experienced the prolonged physical separation as a breakdown in emotional connection. The absence of consistent, face-to-face interaction weakened the sense of closeness that once defined these relationships, leading some children to feel abandoned, emotionally displaced, or no longer central in their parents' lives.

One child explained:

“Before my mother left, we used to talk about everything. She knew when I was happy or upset even without me saying much. But now, when she calls, it feels different. The conversations are short, and sometimes I don't even know what to tell her anymore. It's like we are slowly becoming strangers. I still love her, but I don't feel as close as I used to, and that hurts me because I don't know how to fix it.” **(8-year-old girl, 4th April 2026).**

This account highlights how sustained separation can erode emotional intimacy, creating relational distance that children interpret as abandonment despite the continued presence of love. The gradual loss of shared daily experiences and emotional responsiveness undermines secure attachment, leaving children feeling disconnected from parents who were once their primary source of comfort. Evidence from existing studies similarly indicates that migration can weaken attachment bonds by limiting opportunities for emotional attunement and co-presence (Yeoh et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2021).

Another child emphasized that financial provision did not compensate for the absence of relational closeness:

“My father sends money and provides for us, but I feel like what I really need is him being here. When I have problems at school or when something good happens, I want to share it with him in person, not just on the phone. Sometimes when he calls, I feel shy or uncomfortable because we are no longer used to each other. It makes me feel like the bond we had is fading, and I am afraid it may never be the same again.” **(9-year-old girl, 5 April 2026).**

A caregiver echoed this perspective, noting how children’s attachment needs often remain unmet despite material support:

“The child sometimes feels abandoned because she was very close to the mother and when the mother left she felt abandoned. While I try to understand the child and provide for her, she still thinks about her mother and expresses herself to show that she feels abandoned. For example, sometimes she craves what I cannot provide due to resource constraints. She may want ice cream, and I do not have the money to provide.” **(32-year-old caregiver, 3rd April 2026).**

These narratives collectively illustrate that children differentiate between economic care and emotional presence, with attachment security being more closely tied to consistent, responsive, and physically present caregiving. Although some literature suggests that regular communication can help maintain relational bonds (Graham & Jordan, 2019), the findings here indicate that mediated contact alone is insufficient to sustain the depth of attachment previously experienced.

Caregiving Arrangements

Parental migration to the Middle East often leaves children in the care of grandparents, aunts, older siblings, or other relatives. Although these caregivers provide basic needs, children reported that substitute care often lacked the emotional warmth and guidance they previously received from their parents. One child shared:

“I stay with my aunt now, and she tries to take care of me, but it is not the same as when my mother was here. With my mother, I felt free to talk and be myself, but here I have to

be careful about what I say and do. Sometimes I feel like a visitor in this home, not really part of the family. Even when I am sick or troubled, I miss the kind of care my mother used to give me.” **(11-year-old boy on 6th April 2026)**

This shows how changing caregivers can create feelings of distance and reduced belonging. Similar studies found that while substitute caregivers meet daily needs, they may struggle to replace the emotional connection of a parent (Graham & Jordan, 2019; Su et al., 2021).

Another child described how caregiving gaps led to early independence:

“Since my father left, I live with my grandmother. She is kind, but she is old and cannot manage everything. Most of the time, I take care of myself and even help with many responsibilities at home. There are moments when I feel like I have grown up too fast because there is no one to guide me closely. I do what I think is right, but sometimes I wish there was someone to correct me and show me the way like my parent used to.” **11-year-old girl on 8th April 2026 in an interview**

The aspect of caregiving arrangements was shared and the caretaker submitted as follows;

“As I caretaker, I cannot meet all the needs of the child but I can try to provide what I can because I also have children of my own who need my attention. I am just trying because however much I try, the child will always need the attention of the parent” **45-year-old caretaker to a girl in an interview on 28th March 2026.**

This suggests that some children assume adult responsibilities too early because caregivers may lack the strength or capacity to supervise them fully. Although attentive caregivers can reduce emotional disruption (Qin et al., 2020), the findings show that substitute parenting often leaves children feeling less supported, less secure, and more emotionally isolated.

Social Relationships

Parental migration to the Middle East also affects children’s relationships with peers. Many children reported becoming withdrawn, feeling misunderstood, or struggling with stigma linked to having a parent abroad. One child explained:

“At school, I don’t mix easily with other children like I used to. Sometimes I just prefer to be alone because I feel like they don’t understand what I am going through. When they talk about their parents, it makes me uncomfortable, and I end up keeping quiet. Even when they try to include me, I don’t always feel like I belong.” **8-year-old boy on 4th April 2026 in an interview.**

This suggests that emotional distress can reduce children’s confidence and sense of belonging in social settings. Similar studies show that left-behind children often struggle with friendships because parental absence affects emotional adjustment (Sun et al., 2021; Yeoh et al., 2023).

Another child described how social comparisons from peers deepened isolation:

“Some of my friends say I am lucky because my parent is abroad and sends money, but they don’t see the other side of it. Sometimes they make jokes, and it hurts because they don’t know how much I miss my parent. I try to act strong, but inside I feel different from them, like my life is not normal. It makes it hard to be close to people because I feel like they won’t really understand me.” **9-year-old boy on 5th April 2026 in an interview**

The caretaker also shared her views as she said that;

over time she has observed that when the child comes back from school, she complains about how her peers make her feel isolated which affects her esteem in one way or the other. As a caretaker, I try to encourage her to feel free and not allow her friends to socially ostracise her. She has made some friends as result and she is coping well.” **50-year-old caretaker to an 8-year-old girl in an interview on 4th April 2026**

This shows that while others may associate migration with financial advantage, children often experience hidden emotional loss. Consistent with Graham and Jordan (2019), the findings indicate that parental absence can weaken children’s social confidence, although supportive peers may help some children remain resilient.

4.4 How parental migration to the Middle East affects the social well-being of children left behind

This objective explored how parental migration to Middle East on the social wellbeing of the left behind children. The emphasis was on the impact of parental long-term absence on children,

their social interactions, relationships, and behavior, as well as their overall adaptation into their families, schools, and communities.

Social Well-being

Parental migration to the Middle East strongly affects the emotional and psychological well-being of children left behind. Children described loneliness, sadness, and anxiety that often extended into their school and social lives, reducing their confidence and sense of security. One child shared:

“Most days I feel a heavy sadness that I cannot explain. When I come home from school, the house feels empty and quiet. I try to call my mother, but sometimes she doesn’t pick up, and I start thinking she has forgotten me or is too busy for me. I miss the small things, the way she used to laugh with me, listen to my problems, and comfort me when I was scared. Without her, I feel like a part of me is missing, and no one here truly understands how lonely I am.” **(10-year-old girl on 6th April 2026)**

The caretaker who argued that supported this;

“Sometimes this child feels sad and I have established that the sadness is due to the absence of the mother who happens to have travelled to the Middle East .As a caretaker, I can’t do much to take away the sadness although I try to disrupt the child by telling her to play with her friends, put some movies for her to watch so that she is entertained” **(40 year old Caretaker of a boy in an interview on 3rd April 2026)**

This shows that parental absence creates emotional distress that goes beyond missing a parent, affecting how children interact with others and cope with daily life. Children who felt persistent sadness or worry often withdrew from peers and social activities. These findings are consistent with studies showing that left-behind children frequently experience emotional strain that weakens social engagement and self-esteem (Sun et al., 2021; Yeoh et al., 2023; Graham & Jordan, 2019). Overall, the findings suggest that parental migration affects not only family life but also children’s broader emotional and social well-being.

Attachment Dynamics

Parental migration to the Middle East often weakens parent–child attachment by reducing communication, intimacy, and emotional support. Children described growing emotional distance despite continued contact. One child explained:

“Before my mother left, we shared everything, our stories, our laughter, even small worries. Now, when she calls, the conversation feels short and rushed. Sometimes I don’t even know what to say because we are not as close as before. I still love her, but I feel like a distance has grown between us, and I don’t know how to bridge it.” **(14-year-old boy in an interview on 4th April, 2026).**

Another child said:

“My father sends money and tries to talk to me on the phone, but it is not the same. I want him here, to see what I do at school or just sit with me when I feel sad. When he calls, I feel shy and unsure because we are no longer used to each other. It makes me afraid that our bond may never be the same again.” **(12-year-old girl on 5th April, 2026)**

These accounts show that financial support and phone calls cannot fully replace physical presence. Similar studies found that weakened attachment in transnational families can reduce children’s sense of security and make social relationships more difficult (Yeoh et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2021). Overall, disrupted parent–child bonds affected both emotional well-being and children’s ability to relate confidently to others.

Caregiving Arrangements

When parents migrate to the Middle East, children are often left with grandparents, aunts, uncles, or older siblings. Although these caregivers usually meet basic needs, children reported that emotional support and guidance were often limited. One child shared:

“I stay with my aunt now, and she tries to take care of me, but it is not the same as when my mother was here. With my mother, I felt free to talk about anything, and she understood me. Here, I have to be careful about what I say, and sometimes I feel like a guest rather than part of the family. I miss the warmth and attention my mother used to give me.” **(13-year-old girl on 3rd April, 2026)**

This shows that substitute care can provide stability but may not replace parental closeness. Similar studies found that substitute caregiving can create insecurity and early independence when emotional guidance is missing (Su et al., 2021; Graham & Jordan, 2019). As a result, caregiving arrangements influenced not only children's home life but also their confidence and ability to build relationships with others.

Academic Engagement

Parental migration to the Middle East often affects children's school participation by reducing motivation, concentration, and interest in learning. Emotional stress and the absence of parental encouragement can also weaken relationships with teachers and peers. One child explained:

“Since my mother left, I find it hard to concentrate in class. I want to do well, but I often think about her and worry if she is okay. Sometimes I don't feel like doing my homework because it feels like no one will notice or care. I used to share my achievements with her, and now there is no one to celebrate small successes with me.” **(12-year-old boy on 4th April, 2026)**

The caretaker of the child also argued that;

When the parent to the child was in Uganda with her daughter, the academic performance for the child was better as opposed to when the parent went to work in the Middle East and left the child behind. The child passes but doesn't perform as when the mum was with her” **(8-year caretaker of a boy in an interview on 1st April, 2026)**

This shows how parental absence can affect both academic performance and social participation at school. Similar studies found that emotional distress and reduced parental support can limit school engagement and peer interaction among left-behind children (Li et al., 2020; Yeoh et al., 2023). Overall, parental migration shaped children's social well-being by influencing how they participated in the school environment.

4.5 Parental migration and its effect on the emotional well-being of children who are left behind by parents who migrate to the Middle East.

This aim was aimed at studying the connection between the migration of parents to the Middle East and emotional state of the remaining children. It particularly examined the effects of extended absence of migrating parent on the emotional experiences of the children such as

feelings of loneliness, anxiety, insecurity and disrupted attachment. The results are discussed using emergent themes based on the experiences of the participants, which offer a more in-depth insight into the impact of parental migration on the psychological and emotional health of the children in the case presented in the study.

Loneliness

Children left behind when parents migrate to the Middle East described profound feelings of loneliness, even when they remained in the care of relatives. Although guardians were physically present, many children felt emotionally alone because the unique comfort, affection, and understanding provided by a parent could not be replaced. For several children, loneliness was most intense during quiet moments at home, when the absence of a parent became more noticeable. The researcher met a young girl who looked lonely and from the interview conducted; she had this to say to confirm what the researcher observed as follows;

“Most evenings are the hardest. When I return from school, the house is quiet, and even though my aunt is here, it does not feel like someone really understands me. I miss my mother’s voice, her hugs, and just sitting together. Sometimes I sit in my room for hours, wishing she was here, and it feels like no one can replace her. Even talking to friends doesn’t help because they don’t know what it feels like to be left behind.” **(11-year-old girl on 3rd April, 2026).**

This account illustrates how parental migration can create a deep emotional void that extends beyond physical separation. The child’s experience shows that loneliness was not simply being alone, but feeling emotionally disconnected from those around them despite living with other family members. In some cases, children withdrew socially because they believed others could not understand their pain or the experience of being left behind. Similar studies have found that children of migrant parents often experience sadness, social withdrawal, and difficulty forming trusting relationships due to reduced parental affection and emotional support (Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2025; Fauk et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Overall, loneliness emerged as a significant consequence of parental migration, affecting children’s emotional well-being, sense of belonging, and ability to connect meaningfully with others.

Anxiety

Children left behind by parents who migrate to the Middle East described persistent anxiety, particularly related to concerns about their parents' safety and well-being while abroad. Because many children had limited knowledge of their parents' living and working conditions, periods of delayed or irregular communication often triggered fear and uncertainty. For some, the absence of contact created constant worry that something harmful had happened. This was evident from the revelation of one child who the researcher interviewed as follows;

“I am always thinking about my father. Sometimes I hear stories about people getting hurt or facing problems where he is working, and it scares me. When he does not call for a few days, I start imagining all sorts of bad things, and I cannot focus on school or even play. I just sit quietly, hoping he is safe, but the fear doesn't go away.” **(12-year-old girl on 4th April, 2026).**

The caretaker who said that also substantiated this;

“Sometimes the child asks her whether the war taking place in the Middle East has not affected her parents. The child expresses herself to show concern and express fear regarding the safety of her parents. I usually calm the girl and I tell her that her parents are parent/mother is safe. Sometimes the mother calls to talk to the child to give her assurance that she is safe.” **(34-year-old caretaker to a girl in an interview on 28 April, 2026)**

This account illustrates how parental migration can generate ongoing emotional distress as children struggle with uncertainty about a parent's safety. The inability to know whether a parent is well often left children feeling helpless, with worry becoming part of their daily lives. In many cases, this anxiety extended beyond emotional discomfort to interfere with concentration, play, and normal childhood activities. Similar studies have shown that delayed communication with migrant parents can increase fear, disturb sleep, reduce school performance, and weaken social engagement among left-behind children (Fauk et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Overall, anxiety emerged as a significant emotional consequence of parental migration, undermining children's sense of security and affecting their psychological well-being.

Sadness

Children left behind by parents who migrate to the Middle East frequently expressed profound sadness, describing parental absence as the loss of an important emotional presence in their lives. The separation deprived them of daily affection, guidance, and shared routines that had once provided comfort and stability. For many children, this absence created a lingering emotional pain that resembled grief. This was evident from the confession by a young girl who was interviewed by the researcher. The girl looked sad and this can be seen from the interview as captured below.

“I feel a deep sadness every time I think about my mother. I miss the little things—her laughing with me, helping me with schoolwork, or just sitting with me when I am upset. It feels like a part of me is missing. Sometimes I cry alone because I cannot see her, and it hurts knowing that I might not be able to share the good and bad moments with her.”

(10-year-old girl, 6th April 2026).

This account demonstrates how children mourned not only the physical absence of a parent but also the loss of emotional closeness that had shaped their everyday lives. The sadness described by participants often stemmed from missing ordinary moments that once made them feel loved and supported. In some cases, children internalized this pain, crying in private and struggling to express their emotions to others. Similar studies have shown that parental migration can create grief-like feelings, emotional emptiness, and reduced resilience among left-behind children (Fauk et al., 2024; Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2025; Lin et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings indicate that many children experienced parental migration as an emotional loss, producing sadness that affected their sense of security, attachment, and belonging within the family.

Feelings of Abandonment

Children left behind by parents who migrate to the Middle East frequently described painful feelings of abandonment, even when parents continued to provide financial support from abroad. For many, the prolonged absence was interpreted as a sign that work had become more important than the parent–child relationship. As a result, some children felt emotionally neglected and began to question their value within the family. One child shared:

“Sometimes I feel like my father chose work over me. He sends money, but that does not replace having him here. When I need advice or comfort, I feel like there is no one to really care. It makes me feel small and unimportant, like I don’t matter to him the way I used to.” **(11-year-old girl on 10th April, 2026)**

This account illustrates how children often viewed parental migration not simply as physical separation, but as emotional rejection. Although financial remittances helped meet household needs, they could not replace the reassurance that comes from a parent’s presence, affection, and involvement in daily life. In the absence of that connection, some children developed feelings of insecurity and diminished self-worth. Studies similarly show that when communication is limited, children may interpret migration as rejection, leading to weakened attachment, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal (Fauk et al., 2024; Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2025; Lin et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings suggest that it was not physical distance alone that created abandonment, but the perceived loss of emotional care and parental availability that left children feeling forgotten within their own families.

4.6 Coping Mechanisms

Despite the emotional challenges associated with parental migration to the Middle East, many children described developing coping mechanisms that helped them manage feelings of loneliness, sadness, and anxiety. Rather than remaining overwhelmed by parental absence, some children found ways to adjust by keeping themselves occupied, seeking emotional support from other family members, and finding routines that provided comfort. These strategies enabled them to continue functioning in their daily lives despite ongoing emotional strain. One child explained:

“When I feel sad or miss my mother, I try to keep myself busy with schoolwork or playing with my friends. I also talk to my grandmother when I need advice or comfort. It doesn’t completely take away the sadness, but it helps me feel stronger and not completely alone.” **(9-year-old girl on 2nd April 2026).**

This account demonstrates how children combined personal resilience with social support to cope with parental absence. Engaging in school activities and spending time with peers helped distract them from distressing thoughts, while trusted relatives provided emotional reassurance

when parental comfort was unavailable. Although these strategies did not remove the pain of separation, they helped children regulate their emotions and maintain a sense of stability. Similar studies have shown that resilience among left-behind children is strengthened through supportive family relationships, emotional regulation, and the ability to reinterpret migration as a sacrifice made for family well-being (Lin et al., 2025; Fauk et al., 2024; Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2025).

In sum, the findings show how parental migration to the Middle East has a profound impact on the life experiences of children left behind, with overlapping impacts on emotional, relational and social functioning. Loneliness, anxiety, sadness and abandonment feelings were found and were common link that occurred throughout the findings. Such experiences are deeply related to the disruption of parent–child attachment relationships that involve less physical contact and fewer meaningful interactions between the two, which can significantly affect children's sense of security and belonging. While parents are still financially contributing to the family, the results in every study are revealing that economic support alone does not replace emotional support and that this financial support can lead to feelings of distress, which, in turn, can affect the child's self-perception, behavior, and psychological development.

Moreover, the study shows that care arrangements and social contexts buffer, but not entirely, the effect of parents' absence. While some substitute carers are able to meet children's basic needs, they do not always try to offer them parental warmth, guidance, and emotional support, resulting in children feeling detached and becoming independent at an early age, and feeling less connected to the substitute carer. Such difficulties also pervade the social and academic world of children, leading to social withdrawal, less interaction with peers and a decline in focus at school. However, some children are resilient, coping in their own way by turning to family for support, participation in school activities and the formation of selective peer relationships. Overall, the results suggest that parental migration is not just an economic choice but also a deeply social phenomenon with significant implications, and interventions that reinforce connection through emotional support, increase caregiving capacity and support regular parent–child contact over distance are needed.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations of the study. It synthesizes the key findings with regard to the overall purpose of the study, which was to explore the lived experiences of children left behind when their parents migrate to the Middle East, examine the impact of parental migration on the social well-being of such children and understand the emotional experiences of extended absences. The chapter synthesizes the themes identified in the analysis to provide an integrated picture of the impact of migration on children's life, relationships, and development.

The chapter is based on the voices, lived experiences of the participants, and highlights the critical issues of family separation, disrupted attachment, caregiving relationships, social adjustment and emotional wellbeing. It then infers meaningful conclusions that capture the interconnections between these experiences, highlighting the scope of the impact of parent migration beyond economic effects. Lastly, practical recommendations are made that attempt to address both the challenges encountered by left behind children and also fortify the family/community level of support, as well as help inform policy and practice. It also recommends some areas for further study to build understanding about the impact of parental migration and the long-term consequences for children.

5.2 Summary of findings

Parental migration to the Middle East has been confirmed to have multiple and significant impacts on children left behind with such impacts extending beyond the emotional, social, relational and academic aspects. Overall, the results indicate that the effects of the long absences of the parents have a significant impact on the lives of children and that problems are interrelated in their daily lives, relationships and development. These effects are not just about physical distancing, but involve a more general disturbance of emotional safety, attachment and social functioning.

One of the most significant findings was the widespread feeling of loneliness among children, even when they were living with caregivers, with feelings of emptiness and isolation being common. Lack of consistent parental interaction led to feelings of emotional emptiness, often manifested in anxiety and concentration problems after school and in other customary situations. Very close to this was the feeling of being left out, because for many children a long absence of their parents was perceived as emotional neglect even if they received financial support. It reflects a real difference between "what" is being provided and "how" it is being provided, and less good relationship bonds mean less valued and less connected children.

Caregiving arrangements also influenced the children's adjustment – substitute caregivers were generally able to provide basic needs, but not the emotional warmth, stability, and guidance provided by a parent. This sometimes caused children to take on adult duties at an earlier age. These also manifested in children's social lives, with emotional distress leading to withdrawal, poor peer relations and stigma experiences. The presence of supportive peers and caregivers occasionally served to buffer these difficulties, but for many children, their self-confidence was lowered, they felt less included and connected in social settings, and they felt less included and connected in school.

Furthermore, the research revealed that emotional distress had a significant impact on attachment and academic involvement. Relationships with migrant parents became strained over time, and relationships expressed emotional distance, despite the fact that children engaged in regular communication with their parents. This diminished feeling of security impacted their ability to feel secure in socializing with others. Academic involvement was also impacted, with less motivation, focus and parental support among children being a factor in their reduced participation in academic activities. Children's resilience was evident in their ways of coping, including participating in schoolwork, interacting with their peers and accessing support from available caregivers. These strategies, however, did provide some stability; though not complete eradication of the longstanding sense of loss, isolation and emotional strain.

5.3 Conclusions

5.3.1 Lived experiences of children left behind when their parents migrate to the Middle East

The study concludes that the lived experiences of children left behind when their parents migrate to the Middle East are characterized by profound emotional disruption, weakened family attachment, altered caregiving environments, and strained social relationships. The findings show that many children experience persistent loneliness, anxiety, sadness, and feelings of abandonment because the physical absence of parents often translates into emotional distance and reduced psychological security. Parent–child relationships become increasingly fragile as communication becomes irregular and less intimate, causing children to feel disconnected from parents who were once central to their daily lives.

The study further demonstrates that although substitute caregivers may provide basic needs, they often cannot fully replace parental warmth, guidance, and emotional reassurance, leaving some children feeling neglected or forced into premature independence. In addition, parental migration influences children’s interactions with peers, with some becoming socially withdrawn, misunderstood, or stigmatized because of their family circumstances. Overall, the findings suggest that parental migration extends beyond economic survival and significantly reshapes children’s emotional well-being, social development, and sense of belonging within the family and community.

5.3.2 Parental migration to the Middle East and how it affects the social well-being of children left behind

The study concludes that parental migration to the Middle East significantly influences the social well-being of children left behind by weakening their emotional stability, reducing the quality of family relationships, altering caregiving patterns, and limiting their participation in school and peer life. The findings show that children often experience loneliness, anxiety, and emotional insecurity, which affect their ability to interact confidently with others and build healthy social connections. The weakening of parent–child attachment through distant and irregular communication creates emotional disconnection that can reduce children’s trust and sense of belonging within the family. The study also shows that substitute caregivers provide basic care

but may not fully meet children's emotional and social needs, leading some children to feel unsupported or socially withdrawn.

Furthermore, parental absence affects academic engagement, as emotional distress reduces concentration and participation in school activities, thereby limiting opportunities for peer interaction and social development. Overall, the findings demonstrate that parental migration influences social well-being not only through physical separation but also through its broader impact on children's emotional health, relationships, and ability to participate meaningfully in their social environment.

5.3.4 Parental migration and its effect on the emotional well-being of children who are left behind by parents who migrate to the Middle East.

The study concludes that children left behind experience the emotional impacts of parental migration to the Middle East through persistent loneliness, anxiety, sadness, and feelings of abandonment, which collectively shape their emotional well-being and daily lives. The findings show that the absence of parental presence creates a deep emotional void that many children experience as isolation, making them feel misunderstood and disconnected from others. Children also live with constant worry about the safety of their migrant parents, especially when communication is irregular, which increases fear and emotional instability.

The study further reveals that parental absence is often experienced as grief and emotional loss, as children mourn the disappearance of everyday care, affection, and guidance that once gave them comfort and security. Some children interpret this absence as emotional neglect, believing that financial support cannot replace parental love and attention, which affects their self-worth and sense of belonging. At the same time, the findings show that some children develop emotional resilience by relying on peers, caregivers, school activities, and personal coping strategies to manage these challenges. Overall, the findings demonstrate that children experience parental migration not only as physical separation but as a deeply emotional process that can both strain and strengthen their emotional development over time.

5.4 Recommendations

The study recommends that parents who immigrate to the Middle East to have regular and meaningful communication with their children by engaging in frequent and planned phone or video calls. This is supposed to be done purposefully so that the child is predictably reassured of his or her emotions. The communication must be not only on financial issues, but also on emotional support, active listening, encouragement, participation in the everyday experiences and choices of children. This is significant as it would help to build stronger parent-child relationships and alleviate the sense of loneliness, abandonment, and insecurity in children who stay behind.

Additionally, the study also recommends that families, care givers and schools to enhance substitute caregiving and psychosocial support systems to children left behind. Parental migration needs to be preceded by preparation and support of caregivers to help them be emotionally responsive, stable and able to offer care and guidance that go beyond the basic needs. Schools should consider improving the counselling and guidance services to detect and assist children with emotional distress like anxiety, sadness and withdrawal, as well as reinforce positive peer relationships and involvement. This is due to the fact that home and school coordinated support enhances the emotional adjustment, confidence and social well-being of the children.

Lastly, the study recommends that government and child welfare stakeholders to formulate and enhance policies that aim at mitigating the social and emotional effects of parental migration. This must involve the obligatory child emotional care, communication, and family relationship maintenance training of migrant parents before their departure. Moreover, the community-based systems of child protection and psychosocial support need to be widened to ensure continuous monitoring and assistance of the abandoned children. It is significant as institutional support assists in minimizing the social isolation, resilience, and the emotional and social developmental needs of children are sufficiently safeguarded.

6.6 Areas for Further Research

A similar study can be carried out, but it should cover a wider geographical scope and also adopt a pragmatic approach to research so that this can be used for comparative analysis

Also, further research should be conducted on the long-term psychological effects of parental migration on children left behind, particularly focusing on how early emotional experiences influence mental health outcomes in adolescence and adulthood.

Additionally, I recommend that future studies explore the role of digital communication (e.g., video calls and social media) in shaping parent–child attachment and emotional well-being among children of migrant parents in different cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

Based on this study, further research should be undertaken on the effectiveness of substitute caregiving arrangements, with particular attention to how different caregiver types (grandparents, siblings, relatives, and non-relatives) influence children’s emotional and social development.

Additional studies examine the coping strategies and resilience-building mechanisms used by children left behind, with a focus on identifying protective factors that reduce emotional distress and improve social functioning.

Future researchers should investigate the impact of parental migration on children’s academic outcomes and school engagement, especially how emotional distress interacts with learning performance and peer relationships over time.

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Appendix i. Interview guide for the children

Name of Researcher: Chatelelekela Sandra

Registration Number: S23/MUC/BSW/057

Degree Level: Bachelor of Social Work and Social Administration, Uganda Christian University

Study Topic: Exploring How Parents Working in the Middle East Affect the Social and

Emotional Well-being of Children Aged 6–17 in Ntinda Parish

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to understand the daily life, support, coping, and feelings of the child when his/her parent works in the Middle East.

Introduction for Participants

Section A: About You

What is your age?

How long have your parent(s) been away working in the Middle East?

How often do you talk or see your parent(s)?

Section B: Daily Life

Tell me about your normal day.

How has your life been different since your parents are not at home?

What are some of the things that you enjoy doing?

Are there things in your life that you wish were different since your parent(s) have been away in the Middle East?

Prompts if needed:

Your daily routines or responsibilities

Your household chores or help with siblings

Your school work, hobbies, or activities within the community

Section C: Social Life

How do you get along with people at home (siblings, guardians) and at school?

Do you feel supported by adults around you? How?

Are there activities or events you cannot join because your parent(s) are away?

Have you made new friends or relationships since your parent(s) left?

Prompts:

Friendships and peer relationships

Feeling included or feeling left out

Participation in social or recreational activities

Support from family, neighbors, or community

Section D: Feelings and Emotions

How do you feel when your parent is not at home?

Can you think of a time when you felt extremely happy, sad, worried, or lonely because your parent is not at home? Share that with me.

What do you do when you feel sad, worried, or lonely?

How do you stay in touch with your parent? How do you feel about that?

Prompts

Emotions: sad, happy, worried, proud

Coping: talk to someone, play, hobbies, pray

Support: support from caregivers, friends, teachers

Section E: Support and Coping

Who do you turn to when you need support or someone to talk to?

Are there people or programs that make you feel safe and supported at home or at school?

What kind of support do you wish to have from your parent or your community?

How do you think your life will be different when your parent is at home?

Appendix ii: Caregiver Interview Guide

Researcher: Chatelekel Sandra

Registration Number: S23/MUC/BSW/057

Level of Education: Bachelor of Social Work and Social Administration, Uganda Christian University

Introduction for Participants

Hello. My name is Chatelekel Sandra. I am a student of social work at Uganda Christian University. I want to assure you that I am very much interested in conducting this research. I am also very much interested in knowing the life experience of the child or children of parents working in the Middle East.

I have some questions to ask you about the child or children that you are taking care of. I am very much interested in knowing about the life experience of the child or children of parents working in the Middle East. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. I am only interested in knowing the honest answer to the questions based on your real life. Thank you very much for participating in this research!

Section A: About The Child(ren)

1. How many of the child(ren) that you are taking care of have parents working in the Middle East?
2. How long have the child(ren)'s parents been working in the Middle East?
3. How often do they talk to, or see, their parents (phone calls, video calls, letters, etc.)?
4. Can you tell me a little bit about the personality, likes, or interests of the child(ren)?

Section B: Daily Life and Experiences

1. What changes have you noticed in their daily routines since parent(s) left?
2. How do they manage school, chores, and playtime?
3. Are there challenges you notice they face because their parent(s) are away?

Prompts:

- ✓ Household responsibilities or caring for siblings
- ✓ Homework and school participation
- ✓ Hobbies, play, or involvement in community activities

Section C: Social Life and Relationships

1. How do the child(ren) get along with their family, friends, and other adults?
2. Have you seen any changes in their interactions with others since their parent(s) left?
3. Are there social activities or events that the child(ren) miss because their parent(s) is/are not around?
4. Are there other people who provide support to the child(ren), such as grandparents, neighbors, or teachers?

Prompts to Consider

Friends and school

Sense of belonging

Community and support from friends

Section D: Feelings and Emotional Well-being

1. How do the child(ren) show their feelings when they miss their parent(s)?
2. Can you give an example of when the child(ren) seemed to be extremely happy, sad, worried, or lonely?
3. How do the child(ren) deal when they feel sad, nervous, or stressed?
4. How do they respond when they talk to their parent(s) who is/are abroad?

Prompts:

Signs of Sadness, Worry, Anxiety, or Joy

Coping Mechanisms: Talking to Someone, Hobbies, Playing, Spirituality

Resilience or Stress Indicators

Section E: Support and Protection

1. What type of support do you offer to assist in providing a feeling of safety and security for the child(ren)?
2. Is there someone in the community that assists in providing support for the child(ren)?
3. What could make their life easier or more joyful while their parent is/are away?
4. How do you think their life has been impacted by their parent's migration?

Appendix iii: Ascent form

Study Title: Exploring How Parents Working in the Middle East Affect the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Children Aged 6–17 in Ntinda Parish

Why We Are Doing This Study

We are conducting this study to learn more about your feelings and your life as your parents are not at home. This study will help us, the teachers, social workers, and leaders in this community, to know how to help you as your parents are far away working.

What You Will Do

You will have a great conversation with me in this interview.

You will have an opportunity to share with me your feelings, your being taken care of, and your daily activities as your parents are not at home.

The interview with me will take about 30-45 minutes.

Things You Should Know

You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

You can stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

Everything you tell me will be private, and your name will not be on any report.

There are no rewards for participating, and your answers will help other children like you in the future.

Voluntary Participation

- i. Being part of this study is your choice, and you can be part of it or not. If you say yes, it means you are choosing to be part of this study, and if you say no, nothing will be affected.
- ii. You can ask me anything you want to know about this study, now or in the future. You can also ask your parent, guardian, or teacher.

Agreement

I have heard what this study is all about. I know I can say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and stop at any time I want to. I am happy to be part of this study.

Age:

Child’s Signature / Thumbprint:

Date:

Researcher’s Name: Chatelekela Sandra

Reg. Number: S23/MUC/BSW/057

Telephone Number: 0772349708

Researcher’s Signature:

I have read and understood what this study is all about. I agree to let my child be part of this study.

Parent/Guardian Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix iv: Consent Form for Caregivers/Guardians

Researcher: Chatelelela Sandra

Registration Number: S23/MUC/BSW/057

Contact Number: 0772349708

Introduction

This letter is meant to inform you why you have been chosen to participate in this research study. It is in this regard that you are a caretaker to a child whose parents went to look for employment in the Middle East. In this document, I have attempted to describe what this study is all about, what is involved in your participation in this study, and your rights as a participant in this study. I therefore encourage you to read this document very well and ask me any question if you do not understand any information in this document.

Purpose of the Study

The major reason why this study will be conducted is to explore and understand the experiences of children who are aged between 6 and 17 years and whose parents went to look for employment in the Middle East. Apart from this, this study will also aim to explore and understand your experiences as a caretaker who is supporting a child whose parents went to look for employment in the **Middle East**.

Your Choice

Your voluntary participation

This means that you have the right to say no or say yes to our request. This applies whether you are in the middle of responding to our request or not. This means that you have the right to say no or say yes to our request without negative effects on your child and yourself.

Risks and Benefits

There are very few risks involved when you take part in our request. There are certain feelings that you might develop just by talking about your child. We are here to assist you, though. There are no benefits to you, but when you take part in our request, you are giving us certain benefits as well as to society as a whole because you will be aware of the problems that your child is undergoing in life.

Confidentiality

Your information will be kept completely confidential. This means that no one knows that you are participating in our request, and no one knows your name and child's name in our report.

Questions

In case one has any questions about this research, one is free to contact the researcher on 0772349708.

Consent Statement

I have read and understood the information above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions, and all questions have been addressed. I voluntarily want to participate in the research.

Name of Caregiver/Guardian:

Signature/Thumbprint:

Date:

Researcher's Name and Signature: Chatelekel Sandra

Appendix v. Budget

Item / Activity	What It's For	Unit Cost (UGX)	Quantity	Total (UGX)
Transportation	Traveling to Ntinda Parish for interviews and follow-ups	10,000	15 trips	150,000
Data Collection Materials	Notebooks, pens, consent forms, and printing questionnaires	5,000	10 sets	50,000
Phone Airtime & Internet	To schedule interviews and make follow-up calls	10,000	10	100,000
Refreshments for Participants	Light snacks and drinks during interviews with children and guardians	5,000	20	100,000
Research Assistant Stipend	Paying support for coordinating interviews and taking notes	50,000	3 days	150,000
Transcription & Data Processing	Transcribing the recorded interviews	20,000	5 interviews	100,000
Printing & Stationery for Reports	Printing dissertation, final report, and supporting documents	150,000	1 batch	150,000
Contingency	Extra funds for unexpected costs	–	–	100,000
Total	–	–	–	900,000

Appendix vi. Work plan

Week	Activities	Expected Outputs / Deliverables	Who's Responsible
Week 1	- Finalize research tools such as interview guides, focus group discussion questions, and observation checklists. - Obtain ethical clearance and local permissions from KCCA and relevant NGOs. - Reach out to selected NGOs (NECDA, Free Child Uganda, IPHR Uganda, CWAS) for collaboration.	- Completed and finalized research instruments. - Approval letters and ethical clearance documents. - List of participating NGOs with contact details.	Researcher
Week 2	- Pilot test the instruments with 2–3 children and 1–2 NGO staff to check clarity and relevance. - Revise tools based on feedback from the pilot. - Schedule interviews and focus group discussions with children aged 6–17 years and their caregivers.	- Revised and improved research tools. - A clear schedule for interviews and focus groups.	Researcher & NGO liaisons
Week 3	- Conduct in-depth interviews with children, caregivers, and NGO staff. - Hold 2–3 focus group discussions with children. - Take observational notes on caregiving and home environments.	- Complete interview transcripts. - Notes from focus group discussions. - Observation logs from caregiving environments.	Researcher
Week 4	- Transcribe and code interviews and focus group discussions. - Begin preliminary analysis to identify key themes. - Summarize initial findings on children's social and emotional well-being. - Debrief with participating NGOs to validate findings and gather feedback.	- Transcribed and coded data ready for analysis. - Preliminary report highlighting initial findings. - Feedback from NGOs incorporated into analysis.	Researcher



UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

March 31, 2026

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: INTRODUCTORY LETTER FOR RESEARCH

This is to introduce to you Chatelele Sandra Registration number S23/MUC/BSW/057, a student of Uganda Christian University, pursuing Bachelor's degree in Social Work and Administration. She is expected to carry out research in the final year under the guidance of a university supervisor in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the above-mentioned award.

Topic: "Exploring How Middle East Parental Migration Affect Social and Emotional Well-Being of Children Aged 6-17yrs"

The purpose of this communication is to request your office to allow her collect data from your organization. Any assistance rendered to him will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,


Doreen Kukugiza
Coordinator, Research & Fieldwork Programmes
Tel: 0773395349
Email: dkukugiza@ucu.ac.ug

A Complete Education for A Complete Person