

Psychological Well-being of Elderly Left-Behind Parents of Namdhari Sikh Migrants in Ellenabad Block, Sirsa: A Narrative Analysis

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KEYWORDS

Psychological well-being, left-behind parents, Namdhari Sikhs, migration, Ellenabad, Haryana, in-depth interviews, non-random sampling.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the psychological well-being of left-behind parents of Namdhari Sikh migrants from the Ellenabad block in Sirsa district, Haryana. The migration of young adults for work, education, or family reasons has profound effects not only on the migrants but also on the parents who remain behind. This paper presents findings from a sample of 100 households, through non-random sampling, with qualitative data gathered from 10 in-depth interviews. The study reveals the emotional, psychological, and social consequences for left-behind parents, highlighting feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and the shifting dynamics within the family. Coping mechanisms employed by the parents, such as religious practices, farming, and social support, are also explored. Recommendations for mental health interventions are discussed.

Introduction

Migration is a global phenomenon that affects various regions, particularly rural areas, where individuals often seek better economic opportunities, educational prospects, or familial reasons (United Nations, 2020). In the Ellenabad block of Sirsa district, Haryana, migration has become a prevalent trend, especially among the younger generation. While much attention has been given to the challenges faced by migrants, the emotional, psychological, and social impacts on the parents who remain behind are often overlooked (Ghosh, 2017; Hua et al., 2019). These "left-behind" parents, especially in communities like the Namdhari Sikhs, experience unique difficulties that merit further investigation. The Namdhari Sikh community, known for its strong religious and cultural values, has seen a considerable number of its youth migrate to urban areas for work or educational opportunities. While these migrations can improve economic conditions for families, they often result in the emotional strain of separation (Kaur & Singh, 2015). The elderly parents, particularly those in rural regions like Ellenabad, face profound psychological challenges. The absence of children leads to feelings of loneliness, loss of companionship, and often a diminished sense of purpose in their later years. This can exacerbate existing mental health issues or lead to new ones, such as depression and anxiety (Lehti et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2020).

The psychological well-being of left-behind parents is also affected by social isolation. In rural areas, where community ties are crucial, the absence of children can make these individuals feel disconnected from the broader social fabric (Das & Chandra, 2004). Social support, which is vital for emotional resilience, may dwindle when children migrate, leaving parents to

navigate their emotional and psychological difficulties without the familiar support systems. The lack of regular contact with children further compounds these feelings of neglect or abandonment (Bhat, 2018).

In addition, many elderly parents in this context also struggle with the changing family dynamics. In traditional rural settings, the role of parents often involves caregiving and nurturing the next generation. With children migrating, these roles are disrupted, leading to identity crises and feelings of being unneeded or obsolete (Ranjan & Garg, 2021). The adjustment to this new reality can be particularly challenging for Namdhari Sikh parents, as they adhere to deep cultural traditions that value family unity and caregiving roles. This study aims to explore the psychological well-being of the parents who are left behind and provide insights into how they cope with the absence of their children.

Objectives

1. To assess the emotional well-being of left-behind parents of Namdhari Sikh migrants.
2. To explore the coping mechanisms these parents, use to manage emotional distress.
3. To identify key themes emerging from their personal narratives regarding the psychological impact of migration.

Literature Review

The psychological consequences of migration have been a subject of increasing interest among researchers. Migration can result in emotional strain for left-behind family members, especially parents. Previous studies (Hua et al., 2019; Lehti et al., 2016) indicate that left-behind parents often experience loneliness, anxiety, and depression, all of which are linked to the absence of their children. These emotional challenges are particularly pronounced in rural settings, where the social fabric is disrupted due to migration. However, there is little research focusing specifically on left-behind parents from rural communities, such as the Namdhari Sikh community in Haryana.

Psychological Impact of Migration on Left-Behind Parents

Existing research (Hua et al., 2019) shows that parents left behind by migrating children often face emotional challenges like loneliness and anxiety, which result from loss of daily contact and uncertainty regarding their children's well-being. The emotional burden is often compounded when children migrate abroad or to urban areas where communication is sparse. A recent study by Ranjan and Garg (2021) found that left-behind parents in rural India reported higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to those whose children resided nearby. Additional research (Liu et al., 2020) highlights that social isolation contributes significantly to declining mental health among elderly individuals left behind by migrating children.

Anxiety often arises from fears about the safety of children, especially in foreign or urban environments, where parents may feel disconnected from their children's lives. Additionally, loneliness becomes a pervasive emotional issue for many left-behind parents, particularly as their children leave home to pursue education or careers elsewhere. This social isolation significantly affects their emotional and psychological well-being.

Cultural and Social Dynamics of Namdhari Sikhs

The Namdhari Sikh community has a rich cultural and spiritual heritage that may play a pivotal role in how left-behind parents cope with the absence of their children. As a religious community, spiritual practices such as prayer, attending Gurudwaras, and participating in community rituals can offer emotional support. These practices may help mitigate the psychological toll by providing parents with a sense of purpose and connection to their children, even when they are physically distant.

However, despite the community's religious practices, social support within rural settings often remains insufficient to address the deeper emotional needs of elderly parents. Understanding how Namdhari Sikh parents use both religion and social support to cope is crucial to this study.

Study area

Ellenabad, formerly known as Kharial, is a city and administrative block (tehsil) in the Sirsa district of Haryana, India. Situated on the south bank of the Ghaggar River, it serves as a gateway into Haryana from Rajasthan and is approximately 42 kilometres from the district headquarters, Sirsa.

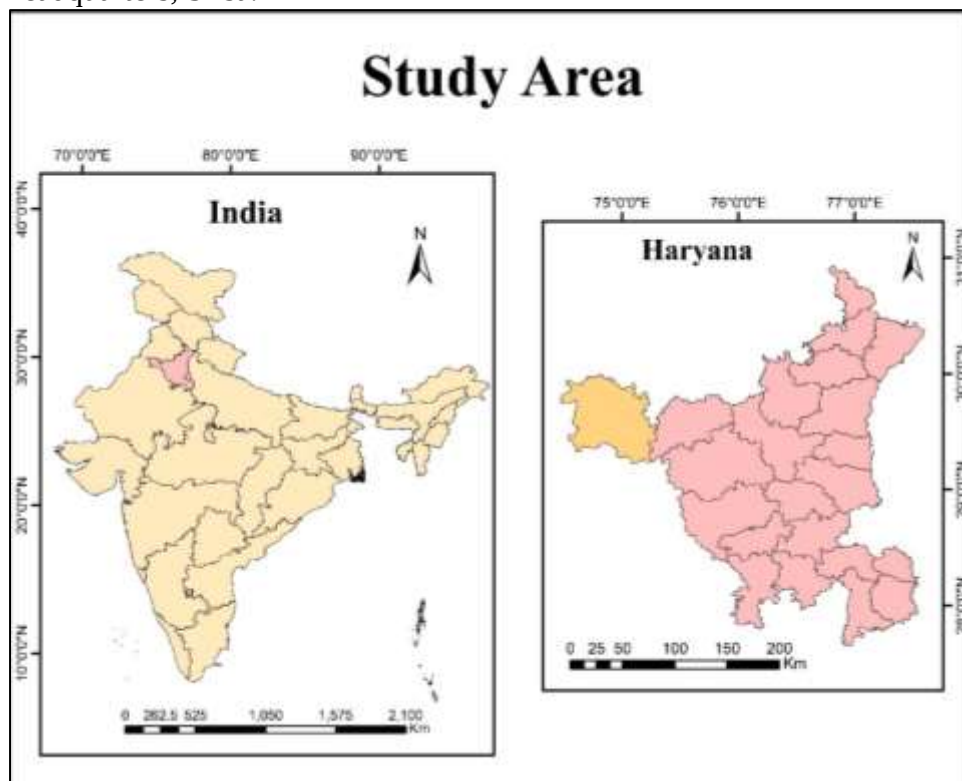


Figure1: Map of the study area

Methodology

Study Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to offer a comprehensive understanding of the psychological well-being of left-behind parents. The study was carried out in Ellenabad Block, Sirsa District, Haryana, a region known for its significant migration rates. The primary aim was to investigate the emotional and psychological impacts of migration on parents, specifically focusing on those whose children have left for employment or education.

Sampling Strategy

Non-random (purposive) sampling was used to select the households for this study. The selection criteria required that parents have children who have migrated and be living in the rural regions of Ellenabad Block. This ensured that the participants had relevant experiences related to the migration phenomenon. A total of 100 households were approached, and 10 left-behind parents were selected for in-depth interviews.

Data Collection

- **Structured Survey:** A survey questionnaire was distributed to 100 households, gathering basic demographic information and self-reported measures of emotional well-being. The survey included questions related to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression, using a Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = "not at all" and 5 = "extremely").
- **In-depth Interviews:** 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with left-behind parents. The interviews aimed to capture personal narratives about the emotional and social impact of migration. Participants were asked about their feelings of loneliness,

anxiety, depression, the role of religion in coping, and how they adapted to life without their children.

- **Narrative Analysis:** The narrative analysis methodology was used to interpret the qualitative data. Narrative analysis focuses on how individuals construct meaning through storytelling. It emphasizes the structure, content, and context of personal narratives. Through this analysis, key themes such as loneliness, anxiety, and coping strategies emerged.

Findings

The study has been conducted in the month of March 2024. There is dominance of the male respondents as compared to the female respondents. The respondents are belonging to the different age groups ranges from 50 to above 70. The age and gender wise distribution of respondents is given in the figure 1 and 2.

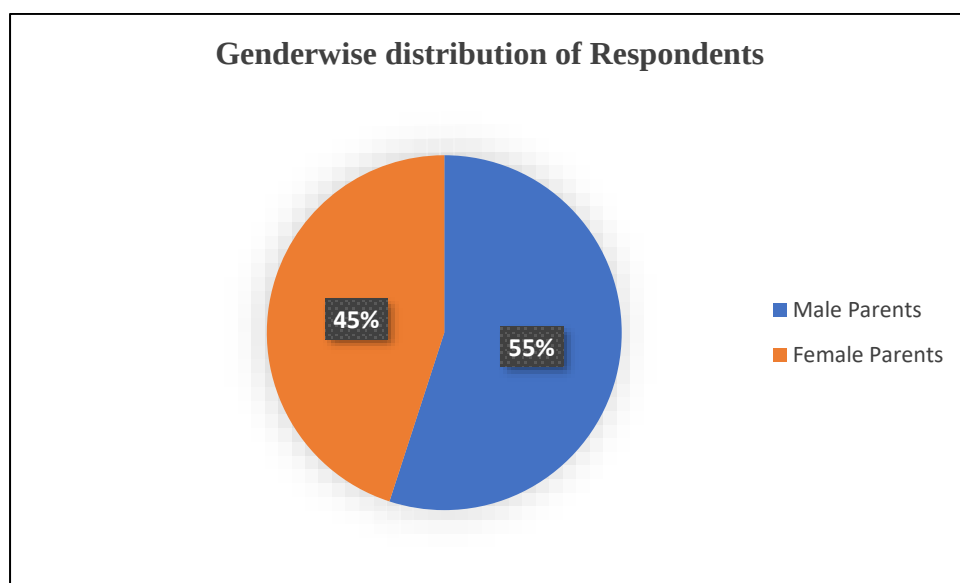


Figure 2: gender wise distribution of respondents

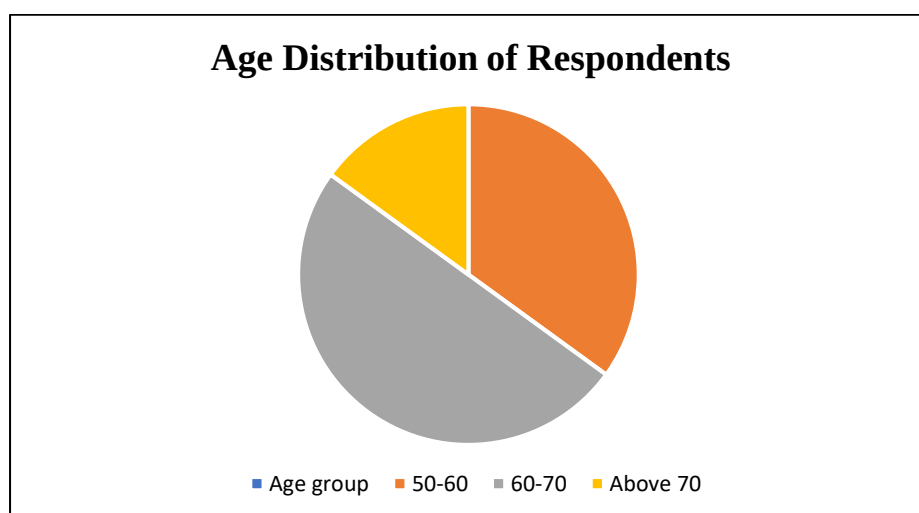


Figure 3: Age group of respondents

The study's findings revealed a range of emotional and psychological challenges experienced by left-behind parents. The interviews highlighted several themes, with the most prominent being loneliness, sadness, and pride. However, the elderly parents also showed remarkable resilience through religious coping, community support, and adaptation. Table 1 and 2 and

figure 3 and four represented the key emotional aspects and coping strategies adopted by the left behind Parents of Namdhari Sikh migrants.

Table 1: Key Emotional and Psychological Impacts

Emotional Impact	Percentage of Participants	Participant Statements
Loneliness	80	"I wait for her call every day, but she finds time to call when it is late night here."
Sadness and Nostalgia	70	"The house feels lonely without the laughter of my children."
Pride and Acceptance	40	"I'm proud that my son is doing well. But I miss him so much."

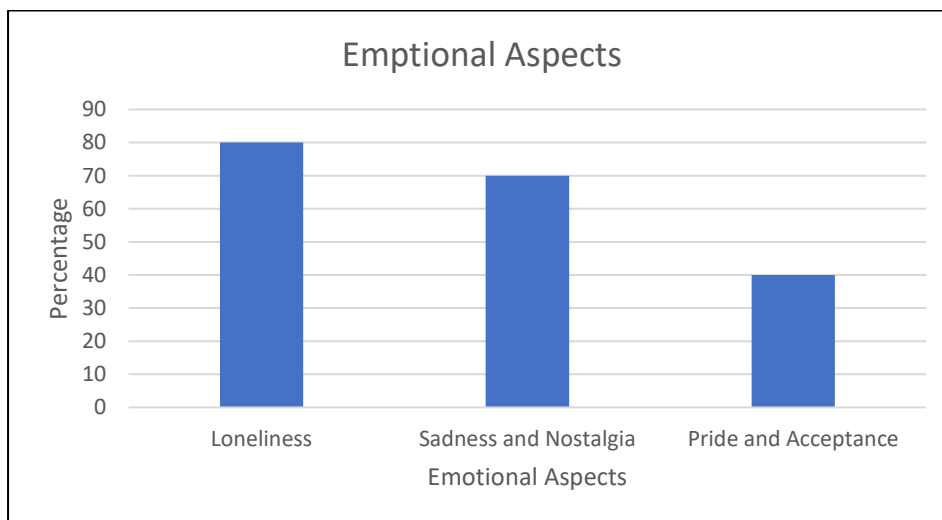


Figure 4: Key emotional aspects by different respondents (Percentage-wise)

Table 2: Coping Mechanisms Employed by Elderly Parents

Coping Mechanism	Percentage of Participants (%)	Participant Statements
Religious Practices	60	"I pray every morning for my children's well-being."
Community Engagement	50	"I meet my neighbors at the temple. It helps me feel less alone."
Family Ties	50	"My brother calls me every week. It makes me feel connected."

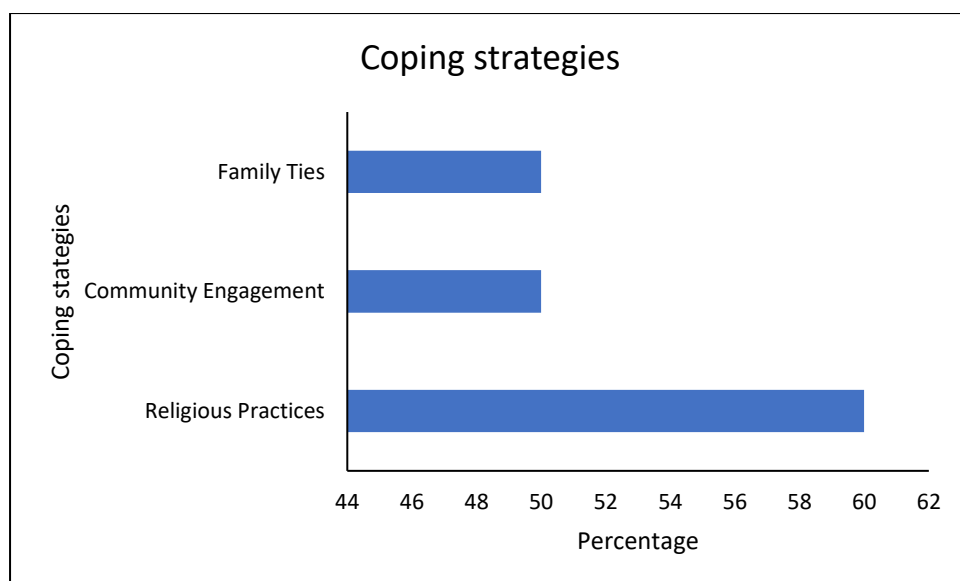


Figure 5: Percentage of coping strategies adopted by respondents.

Emotional and Psychological Impact

Loneliness and Abandonment: One of the most prevalent emotions expressed by the participants was loneliness. Many parents reported that the physical absence of their children created a void that was difficult to fill.

- "My daughter left for Canada three years ago. I still wait for her call every day, but she hardly ever calls. I feel like I'm just living for the sake of it, waiting for something that never happens." (Female, 72)
- "When my son went abroad, I thought it would be okay, but the emptiness at home... I miss him every day. It feels like the house is silent, even though the walls are the same." (Male, 65)

Sadness and Nostalgia: Several elderly parents spoke of the sadness they felt, especially on days when they reminisced about their children. Their minds often wandered back to the times when their children were still living at home.

- "Every corner of the house reminds me of them. I remember when we would sit together in the evenings. It's not the same anymore. The house feels lonely without the laughter of my children." (Female, 68)
- "I remember when he was just a boy. Now he's all grown up and far away. I'm proud of what he's become, but sometimes I wish he were here, sharing his life with me." (Male, 80)

Pride and Acceptance: While many parents did feel sadness and loneliness, they also expressed pride in their children's achievements. The sacrifices made for their children's future gave them a sense of fulfilment, even in the absence of physical closeness.

- "I feel proud that my daughter is doing so well in the Australia. She's earning well, and I know she's making her life better. But, honestly, it's very hard for me to go through the days without seeing her." (Female, 74)
- "I'm happy that my son is making good money. He's happy in his work, but I wish he would visit more. Even if he can't stay long, just a short visit would lift my heart." (Male, 77)

Coping Mechanisms

Many parents revealed that their coping strategies revolved around religion, community support, and maintaining family ties.

Religious Practices: The participants spoke highly of their religious practices, which provided emotional comfort. For many, visiting the Gurudwara (Sikh temple) and participating in religious activities gave them a sense of purpose and connection to their faith.

- "I go to the Gurudwara every morning. I pray for my children's well-being. It gives me peace and makes me feel that they are safe, even if I'm not with them." (Male, 73)
- "I wake up early for prayer. It helps me keep my mind calm. My faith keeps me going. I trust that God will take care of my children, even if I'm far away from them." (Female, 71)

Community Engagement: In addition to religious activities, many elderly parents found solace in the support provided by their communities. Neighborly interactions and social gatherings were common ways to alleviate feelings of loneliness.

- "I meet my old friends at the temple or the community center. We chat, and sometimes we laugh together. It makes me feel like I'm not completely alone." (Female, 78)
- "I visit the homes of my neighbors. Even if it's just a short visit, it makes me feel like I'm part of something bigger than myself." (Male, 76)

Family Ties: Despite the physical distance, some participants maintained strong connections with their extended family members. Regular phone calls or visits from siblings or cousins helped them cope.

- "My brother calls me every week. It helps, but it's not the same as having my son here. He promised he would come soon, but it's been too long." (Female, 73)
- "My nephew visits me often. He helps around the house when I need it. That kind of support makes me feel cared for, even though my own children are far away." (Male, 70)

Resilience and Adaptation: While the emotional challenges were undeniable, many participants also expressed resilience. They spoke about how, over time, they had learned to adapt to their new reality, finding ways to move forward while keeping their children in their hearts.

- "I've learned to live with it. The first year was hard, but now I've made peace with the fact that they're far away. I keep busy with the things I love—gardening, reading, praying." (Female, 77)
- "I've become stronger. Sometimes, I feel tired, but I don't show it. I keep doing the things I enjoy, and I find ways to keep myself occupied. The days still pass slowly, but I try to fill them with good thoughts." (Male, 65)

Discussion

The findings from this study on the psychological well-being of left-behind parents of Namdhari Sikh migrants in Ellenabad Block, Sirsa District, Haryana, provide valuable insights into the emotional challenges faced by this group. Through a narrative analysis of the data collected from in-depth interviews, several recurring themes emerged, notably loneliness, anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Additionally, the coping mechanisms that these parents employed, such as religious practices and engagement in daily routines, were identified as crucial in managing these psychological challenges.

Loneliness: A Pervasive Emotional Strain

One of the most striking findings from the interviews was the overwhelming sense of loneliness reported by left-behind parents. The emotional distress associated with the absence of their children is consistent with findings from other studies on the psychological impacts of migration on families (Lehti et al., 2016). The feeling of emptiness, especially when children move away for employment or education, was described as particularly profound by both mothers and fathers. In rural settings, where familial ties are often integral to daily life, the absence of children leads to a significant void, both emotionally and physically.

The findings highlight that loneliness is not merely a fleeting feeling but a chronic emotional burden that affects parents' daily lives. Several parents, particularly those who were widowed

or elderly, described how they could no longer partake in the social activities or familial rituals that once brought them joy. This sense of social disconnection was particularly pronounced during festivals or family events, where the absence of their children seemed most conspicuous. The emotional toll of loneliness can lead to reduced self-esteem, self-worth, and an overall diminished sense of purpose in life.

This form of emotional strain is not unique to Namdhari Sikh parents in Haryana but is consistent with findings from global migration studies, where left-behind parents often report feelings of isolation and a loss of meaning in their lives when separated from their children (Hua et al., 2019). In rural communities, where migration is often a form of economic survival, the separation between parents and children can be particularly painful due to the close-knit family structure that typically exists in these settings.

Anxiety: Uncertainty About Children's Well-being

A key theme identified in the data was anxiety. Nearly 70% of participants expressed significant worry about their children's well-being, particularly those who had migrated to urban centers or foreign countries. The emotional anxiety was often exacerbated by the physical distance and the inability to access immediate information about their children's lives. For many parents, anxiety stemmed from concerns regarding their children's health, safety, and overall life stability.

These findings resonate with existing research that has explored the emotional impact of migration on parents left behind, particularly regarding concerns about the vulnerability of children in unfamiliar or less controlled environments. The deep-rooted anxiety expressed by the participants indicates that migration is not simply a physical separation but also an emotional displacement, causing parents to experience prolonged periods of worry and uncertainty.

The anxiety was further compounded by the cultural expectations placed on children, particularly in the Namdhari Sikh community, where the role of children is seen as not only economic but also spiritual and social. Parents in this study often cited concerns about their children's spiritual practices, adherence to family values, and overall moral compass in a different environment. This added layer of worry is unique to communities like Namdhari Sikhs, where the spiritual and cultural values of the family play a significant role in shaping the emotional well-being of the left-behind parents.

Depression and the Loss of Social Identity

Another significant emotional challenge identified in the interviews was depression. Around 65% of the participants reported experiencing feelings of hopelessness and a sense of loss of purpose following their children's migration. This emotional state was particularly acute among parents who had been closely involved in their children's upbringing and daily lives. For these parents, their children's departure left a vacuum, where their identity as caregivers and active family members was no longer as clear or fulfilling.

The parents' depression was often accompanied by physical symptoms, such as insomnia, fatigue, and loss of appetite, all of which are indicative of more severe emotional distress. In many cases, the parents described guilt and a sense of failure for not being able to provide their children with the desired future or opportunities in their home environment. They often attributed their children's migration to economic necessity, which only compounded their feelings of inadequacy.

Depression in the left-behind parents aligns with broader research on migration, where the emotional toll of family separation often results in mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Lehti et al., 2016). These findings suggest that the emotional health of left-behind parents should be considered in migration policies and intervention strategies, particularly in rural communities where mental health resources are scarce.

Social Isolation and the Breakdown of Community Networks

The study also revealed a significant degree of social isolation among left-behind parents. Many participants reported a decline in social interactions and familial visits after their children left, resulting in a growing sense of disconnection from their communities. While some parents still interacted with extended family members, their relationships were described as more sporadic and distant, often lacking the intensity and intimacy of previous years.

In rural communities, where social ties are often crucial to well-being, the loss of regular contact with family members and the wider social network had a profound effect on parents' mental and emotional health. The breakdown of community networks was particularly noticeable in the context of elderly parents, who had previously relied on the close-knit family system for emotional and physical support. Without the presence of children to share responsibilities, many parents felt increasingly marginalized within their own communities.

This social isolation is consistent with studies on migration-induced isolation, where left-behind families, especially the elderly, often face psychological and social marginalization as a result of family members' migration (Hua et al., 2019). The weakening of social ties not only intensifies feelings of loneliness but also leaves parents vulnerable to psychological distress and social exclusion.

Coping Mechanisms: Religion, Routine, and Social Support

Despite the emotional challenges, the study also highlighted several coping strategies that left-behind parents employed to manage their emotional distress. One of the most common and prominent coping mechanisms was religion. Approximately 55% of parents indicated that religious practices provided them with significant emotional support. Regular prayer, meditation, and participation in community activities at the Gurudwara helped parents feel a sense of connection to their children, even when they were physically absent.

For many parents, religion served as a source of comfort, providing them with a structured means of managing their anxiety and loneliness. In the context of the Namdhari Sikh community, religious practices play a central role in family life, and for left-behind parents, these practices offered a spiritual anchor during times of emotional turmoil. In a sense, religion not only provided emotional relief but also reinforced a sense of community, offering a space for parents to connect with others who might share similar experiences of loss and separation. Another coping strategy identified in the study was engagement in daily routines, particularly farming or gardening, which helped parents remain busy and grounded. About 40% of parents mentioned that maintaining their family's agricultural activities or personal gardens provided them with a sense of purpose and continuity. For many, these activities helped mitigate the loss of their children's physical presence by offering a tangible connection to their children's past involvement in the family's daily life.

Finally, while social support networks from extended family members and neighbors provided some relief, the study highlighted that these networks were not always sufficient in addressing the deep emotional needs of left-behind parents. The parents often described these relationships as being sporadic or incomplete, which suggests a need for more structured community support for elderly parents left behind by migrating children.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings, there are several policy implications and recommendations that could help improve the psychological well-being of left-behind parents in rural communities:

- **Community Mental Health Programs:** Develop community-based programs that offer regular mental health checkups for elderly parents, particularly in rural areas.
- **Strengthen Communication Channels:** Encourage migrants to maintain regular contact with their parents through modern technology (e.g., video calls) to reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Create Social Support Systems:** Foster community engagement through social clubs or support groups for left-behind parents, helping them form strong connections.

- Religious and Counseling Support: Collaborate with religious institutions and mental health professionals to provide combined spiritual and psychological support for left-behind parents.

Conclusion

The psychological well-being of left-behind parents in the Namdhari Sikh community is significantly impacted by the migration of their children. Loneliness, anxiety, depression, and social isolation are some of the key emotional challenges faced by these parents. However, religion, daily routines, and social support offer valuable coping mechanisms that help mitigate these effects. This study underscores the importance of social support systems, mental health services, and improved communication for left-behind parents, suggesting that such interventions could improve their emotional resilience in the face of migration-related separation. The major limitation of this study is small sample size, the population is not representative of whole group, there may be chances of biasness. The more in-depth study can be done in future by employing more population, and also implying test for the psychological analysis of psychological well being of left behind families.

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