

Men's Migration and Women's Social Ties and Wellbeing in Rural Mozambique.

Abstract

Many families in southern Mozambique became dependent on the migratory labour system, which guaranteed migrants' wives and their children a different economic and social status. That dependence has provided advantages for families in rural areas ravaged by the reduction in livelihoods and societal transformations. Meanwhile, with the reduction of recruitment in South Africa and the lack of jobs in the cities of Mozambique, significant consequences for rural families are happening, including transforming support exchanges relationships between middle-age mothers and their children, with implications for their economic and psychosocial and well-being. Using qualitative data collected in southern Mozambique as part of the project "Social Ties and Psychosocial Well-being of Rural Women", we observed a new relationship dynamic that, among various consequences, children and mothers find themselves their backs turned. This situation worsens because mothers do not see a clue of changes, further exacerbated by the fact that they are getting older.

Keywords: Migrants' wives, mother-child ties, Psychosocial well-being, Gaza Province

0. Introduction

Studies on the participation in migratory work of men from the Gaza province, whether to the mines of South Africa or Mozambican cities, particularly the city of Maputo, are well known (Harris 1994; Penvenne 1995; Covane 1994; de Vletter 2000; Matusse 2009; Raimundo 2010; Saide & Pitrosse 2012). However, regarding the relationships of migrants' wives and their children, family, friends, and neighbors whether the husbands of these women are migrants or whether they stop being migrants, nor do those who analyze their psychosocial condition in the context of their relationships with their teenage or married children and with friends, family, and neighbors. It is difficult to find them. For this reason, this study of "Social Ties and Psychosocial Well-being of Rural Women" we dare to say it is typical for Sub-Saharan Africa and it unveils the vulnerability of women in their mid-life towards aging. In all these studies, there are common aspects that characterize the vulnerability of married women, widows, or single women with or without children. They live within a patriarchal context that determines who brings the bread, whom they marry, how many children they should have, and their role as caretakers of the family and the ones who take care of the farm and the elderly.

The dominant patriarchal system in southern Mozambique determines a man's masculinity based on his ability to perform work that can generate income for his family. As Uchendu (2008), Medeiros (1985), and Raimundo et al (2023), point out, the generational masculine ideology among men, begins from childhood and is perpetuated from generation to generation, with the man marrying as many women as he can afford. The female harem is necessary to guarantee the perpetuation of the name or nickname of that lineage.

What I have endeavored to demonstrate in this article is that all women's statements, whether in Focus Group Discussions or individually, reflect the burden of patriarchal relations still dominant in rural Gaza society and the organization of the labor that in the situation of any crisis results in a cascade of events that is: women lacking food and many things for their lives; women forced to break their relationships with their in-laws and grown and undergrown children and her peers or relatives that result in stress and other health issues and break of confidence on future.

The paper aims to respond to these questions:

1. What help do women receive from their children, family, and friends when they have a migrant husband? What kind of help does a migrant wife or ex-migrant wife provide to others?
2. What help do women receive from their children, family, and friends when they have a no-migrant husband?
3. To what extent does this help contribute to their well-being?

4. What help do mothers give their children?

1. Methodology

As mentioned, this paper is the result of Project Social Ties and Psychosocial Well-being of Rural Women, which brings together researchers from the University of California: Los Angeles (USA), the Ohio State University (USA) and the Center for Population and Health Research (Mozambique). Surveys, semi-structured interviews, and Focus Group Discussions were used with women from four districts of Gaza Province (Chibuto, Chokwè, Guijá, and Manjacaze) whose main characteristics are age between 35 and 60 and civil status: married, divorced or separated, and widow.

The paper was based on qualitative information that resulted from the administration of Focus group discussions and individual interviews. The focus groups took place before the interviews to, among other aspects, adapt the interview script prepared by the researchers. The interviews were carried out in two different sessions. The first session consisted of the following questions:

The first session consisted of questions on social relationships and the exchange of help, and the second session consisted of questions about physical and mental health and psychosocial well-being. It should be noted that in the Focus Groups and individual interviews, the selected women had to sign a consent form required by ethical research standards.

The interviews were recorded using codes and transcription to guarantee confidentiality and not allow women to be tracked.

For analysis, I based myself on content analysis, where I tried to find the meaning of what they said, considering the context. In a Focus Group where some felt shy about participating, each knew what another participant was saying. In individual interviews, the answers are known to the interviewer, the transcribers, and the instigators, who can access the recordings and transcriptions.

2. Findings

2.1 Women receive help from their children, family, and friends when they have a migrant husband or the husband is no longer a migrant.

The relationships between sons and daughters and their mothers change over time. According to those interviewed in the Focus Group, the main issues have to do with the following:

“In our times, children listened to their parents more than they do today. Young people skip stages these days and get married prematurely. On the young women’s side, they establish multiple relationships, get pregnant very early, and are not able to identify who the child’s father is.” (FGD, Mucotuene, Chibuto District, on September 5, 2023).

Mutual aid in rural communities in Mozambique is something that still prevails. This help can come during weeding or harvesting on the farm or through monetary loans, advice, and in situations of need. This help often occurs between family members, church members, and neighbors. However, it is expected that this help exists between sons and daughters, especially in cases of children who already have some financial income. However, the results of the interviews reveal that help is more significant among women who have some secure income, for example, from remittances sent by their migrant husbands than those who do not have a safe source of income. In these types of situations, the following help situations can be highlighted:

1) The woman who asks her children for help is not necessarily money but help in resolving domestic problems;
2) The woman who asks her neighbors or community residents for help when harvesting. Under these circumstances, she can pay or will pay it back to someone in need on the next occasion.

3) Help that she expects to receive from her family in the event of illness or death.

In general, women in this category can be said to be socially and economically stable. However, few were found in this category during the study. Their husbands had asked for work because they were no longer migrants, were in a state of widowhood, or had been abandoned. Others still because their assets were lost due to the floods, mainly in 2000, 2013, and 2021.

The interviewees expressed their boredom with their children in this scenario. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for their children to give them any help. On the contrary, they are the ones who help their children even though they have nothing to offer, as they said.

2.2 The contribution of the help to women's well-being

In any circumstance of needing help, whether a woman with a migrant husband or without a migrant husband, help is essential and contributes to social and psychological well-being. They say,

"It's good to feel like someone is with you. Having help means you're not poor." (FGD, Maqueze, 6th September 2023).

2.3 Help that women receive from their children, family, and friends when they have a no-migrant husband

One of the significant transformations recorded in rural areas is that daughters who in the past were the outside help of their mothers no longer do so. This scenario upsets the mothers, who no longer know what to do. There are several reasons for this new way of life for daughters and their relationship with their mothers. The reasons are as follows:

"Life is more difficult for them from my point of view. Nowadays some young women have to have implants, which later causes health problems and prevents them from getting married later. Nowadays young women do not consult their mothers, they make life decisions on their own. As mothers, it is difficult for us to see the life they lead. Young women today, respond to the government's call to prevent early pregnancy and forget to prevent sexually transmitted diseases". (FGD, Mucotuene, 5th September 2023).

Meanwhile, their sons behave as follows:

"Young people leave because they are tired of their mother and don't want to support her; young people are often pressured by their wives to leave their mother's house. Sometimes, they leave because the family is enormous and the space is too tiny. When they become adults, Children raised only by their mothers are induced by their parents to accuse their mothers of being witches and abandon them. On the other way, our sons drink a lot, don't have a job, and most are on antiretroviral treatment. And all of these are violent towards their families ". (FGD, Mucotuene, 6th September 2023).

A good relationship between children and their mothers can only exist when the mother's part is mature, as per the following statement:

" What makes the difference is the mother's maturity and maintaining a productive dialogue with her children. It is essential that mothers do not interfere in the lives of married adult children and that mothers establish an understanding between the mother, the sons, and the daughter-in-law." (FGD Mucotuene, 5th September 2023).

2.4 Help that comes from the mothers towards their children.

The study also sought to discover the type of help mothers offer their children. The answers were as follows:

"They welcome their children's difficulties, visit them, and offer products from the farm. They care for their children's and grandchildren's homes if necessary. However, widowed women are the ones who help the least because they do not have a provider, while separated and married women help their children more, as it is help that comes from both parents".

2.5 How do mothers help their children solve social problems?

Psychologists and even the community say that a mother always bears her child's pain. Regardless of the help she may or may not receive from her child, she will always do her best to help him. The interviewee's statement below best illustrates this situation.

"They advise you to go to church and say prayers. My children are mine. It doesn't matter the age. When they are sick or lack the money to go to the hospital, I must help them. I give him money to go to the hospital because there is a hospital nearby, but there is another one where you have to take a bus and go to Chibuto. So, when I have money, I have to give it." (Interview, Mucotuene, 11/16/2023).

3. Final remarks

This work is based on data collected within the Social Ties and Psychosocial Well-Being of Rural Women in Gaza Province project. In all four rural districts, women struggle in their daily lives because of the break of the relationship with their relatives and children. The situation worsens due to lack of rain, some due to inundations and floods, shortage of jobs for their children who hardly feed their families, as well as severe environmental problems due to the growth of slums. Poverty is widespread, and inequalities are increasing among women dwellers, including their children, married or not or living with them or not.

As wives of migrants, these women were doing well, as they could provide material help not only to their children, even grown-ups, but also to other family members and neighbours. They had the means to offer psychological or associated support. However, with their husbands losing their jobs in South Africa and other cities, they were limited in providing help to others. On the side of children and others, help has also been reduced because of the transformations that have occurred in rural areas where children look at their mothers as burdens and also because they are in great need.

4. References

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