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**Parental Migration in Urban Ethiopia:
The Experiences of Children Left-Behind**

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The Experiences of Children Left-Behind

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Abstract

Despite the huge flow of international labor migration, sub-Saharan Africa has not been given due consideration in the transnational family literature. There is a considerable flow of international labor migration from Ethiopia to economically prosperous countries. This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences and life tapestry of children left-behind by one or both parents in Addis Ababa and Adama. The constructivist paradigm was a philosophical underpinning of the study. A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design was used to investigate this issue. The "new social studies of childhood" theory, which views children as active participants in shaping their lives and those around them, informed the study. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 25 participants who experienced parental migration. The findings of the study revealed that parental migration was unconcealed to have many significant effects on shaping and permeating children's lives and identities—their emotions, education, and living arrangements. Despite the children's spatio-temporal separation, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was found to play a prominent role in fostering parent-child relationships. Children were also revealed to have more emotionally charged interactions with their migrant mothers than with their fathers. Parental migration also affects children's aspirations, specifically to be reunited with their migrant parent(s). This study contributes to broadening our understanding of children left-behind in Ethiopia and identifies social work services that require attention. Although there are many policies related to children in Ethiopia, in the existing policies, children left-behind need to be considered as a segment of the population that requires the most attention.

KEY TERMS: *Children left-behind; Ethiopia; information and communication technology; international labor migration; lived experience; parental migration; transnational families.*

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASTU	Adama Science and Technology University
CHAMPSEA	Child Health and Migrant Parents in South East Asia
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ESS	Ethiopian Statistical Service
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
DV	Diversity Visa
GCC	Global Care Chain
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GO	Governmental Organizations
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
ITR	Information Technology Resources
Km	Kilometers
NGO	Nongovernmental Organizations
PEA	Private Employment Agency
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund
US	United States

WB	World Bank
WiFi	Wireless Fidelity

Chapter One

1. Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the study background, which introduces the topic, the context, and the rationale for the study. It then explains the problem statement and the gaps to be addressed. Based on the gaps observed, the basic research questions are specified. Next, the geographical and methodological scope of the study is presented. The significance of the study and policy implications are also described. Finally, the organization of the dissertation is outlined.

1.1. Background of the study

Migration is a movement of persons who leave their country of origin to establish themselves permanently or temporarily in another country. An international frontier is therefore crossed. Migration is an ancient phenomenon that dates to the early periods of human history. In modern times, emigration and immigration continue to provide states, societies, and migrants with many opportunities. In recent years, international migration has emerged as a critical political and policy challenge on issues such as integration, displacement, safe migration, and border management (IOM, 2020).

According to the current global estimate, there were approximately 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which is 3.6% of the world's population. When looking at worldwide migrant populations by UN region, Europe is currently the most popular destination, with 87 million migrants (30.9 percent of the total international migrant population), followed by Asia with 86 million international migrants (30.5 percent). North America receives 59 million international migrants (20.9%), and Africa receives 25 million migrants (9 percent) (IOM, 2021).

In Africa, sizeable numbers of foreign migrants move both within and outside the continent. The number of Africans living in various regions has increased from approximately 17 million in 2015 to over 19.5 million in 2020. In 2020, most African-born migrants living outside the region resided in Europe (11 million), Asia (nearly 5 million), and Northern America (approximately 3 million) (IOM, 2021). Ethiopia is a major source of international labor migration in Africa, with unemployment, poverty, and political persecution the major contributory factors to the outward migration (ILO, 2023). The most prominent migration route is to the Middle East, followed by Africa, Europe, and North America. South Africa is a popular destination for Ethiopian migrants, both as a place to settle and as a transit country for migrating to the North (Kuschminder et al., 2018).

Migration is a regular feature of life in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region (UNICEF, 2021). Migration is partly driven by limited job opportunities in communities and the attraction of much higher salaries in destination countries. The migrants are mainly young women from rural areas going to Arab countries (Kiros et al., 2021). A growing number of parents are joining the global labor force to assume jobs outside their country of origin, which has created transnational families.

It is estimated that several million children in the Global South are currently growing up in the absence of parent(s) due to parental migration. This has resulted in the decline of a traditional “nuclear family” with a breadwinner father and stay-at-home mother and the related rise of two-income earning families, single-parent families, divorced, step-parenting no-child families, and transnational migrant families (Fan & Parreñas, 2018; UN, 2022). According to Yeoh and Lam (2007), children who are left-behind face a wide range of circumstances, with some abandoned by their fathers, others by their mothers, and still others by both parents.

Depending on the migrant's profile, children left-behind may be cared for by various groups of people: mothers, fathers, grandparents, other extended family members, and even non-relatives.

The number of married Ethiopian transnational labor migrants is on the rise, and their main aspiration is to support the education and welfare of their children and families (Fernandez, 2020). To provide for their families, they must leave them behind and take advantage of the greater labor market opportunities in prosperous countries. This raises an urgent need to understand the implications of parental migration on the overall well-being of children left-behind. The impetus for the current study is the alarming increment of transnational labor migration as well as the researcher's own childhood experience.

1.2. Problem statement

Ethiopia is among the leading labor-sending countries in Africa. There has been a recent unprecedented surge in the number of international labor migrants from Ethiopia (Girmachew, 2018). The migration of parents creates transnational families, in which families are dispersed across geographical distances. The migration of parent(s) has established a new form of family structure termed "transnational families," in which children or spouses live apart from their parent(s) or spouse for an extended period (Crawley et al., 2023; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2016). Due to constricting migration laws, which especially pertain to migration from the global south to the global north, it is challenging for children to migrate with their parents (Haagsman and Mazzucato 2020; Crawley et al. 2023).

Research on the impact of migration on the well-being of children left-behind is inconclusive. Numerous studies have reported the poverty reduction effects of migration and remittances (Acosta, 2007; Arif et al., 2018; Girmachew, 2014; Nakamuro, 2010; Wen et al., 2015, WB, 2018). According to the World Bank (2018) report, remittances sent by migrants are

among the most researched issues in migration studies, particularly when investigating the impact of transnational migration on the economic well-being of migrant-sending countries. The other focus of the study was the impact of parental migration on the educational achievement of children left-behind. Parental migration from the Global South to the Global North can increase children's education and educational performance through remittances. Remittances can pay for enrollment in high-quality schools, leading to close supervision and regular school attendance, and high academic performance (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006; Antman, 2012; Cortés, 2013; Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Lam & Yeoh, 2019b). Furthermore, remittances reduce financial constraints and the need for child labor (Kandel & Kao, 2001; Zhang et al., 2014). In addition, academic achievement is enhanced through both the moral support children receive from their migrant parent(s) and through the sending of remittances (Murphy, 2014). For example, it has been found that children left-behind who receive remittances for schooling finish more school years (Kandel & Kao, 2001).

The research findings from Guatemala, Pakistan, and Mexico indicate that migrant families are more likely to send their children to school using remittance cash. Hence, migration and remittances play a pivotal role in increasing child education and reducing child labor (Alcaraz et al., 2012; Adams & Cuecuecha, 2010; Antman, 2012; Binci & Giannelli, 2012; Bredl, 2001; Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2020; Crawley et al., 2023; Edwards & Ureta, 2003; Intemann & Katz, 2014; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Nobles, 2011; Wang & Mesman, 2015; Zhao & Yu, 2016). On the contrary, several studies have found adverse effects of parental migration on children's education (Cortes, 2007; Davis, 2018; Dununsinghe, 2021; Getnet & Abebaw, 2022; Giannelli & Mangiavacchi, 2010; Jampklay, 2006; McKenzie & Rapoport, 2011; Rubio, 2020; Zhang et al., 2014). These studies found that children in migrating households have lower educational

attainment than those in non-migrating families. For instance, in his studies in El Salvador, Rubio (2020) found that children with migrant parents are less likely to attend school, which is attributed to a higher likelihood of working and a greater intention of future migration.

Some studies examined the health-related problems children encountered in the absence of their parents (Chai et al., 2019; De Brauw & Mu, 2011; Gibson et al., 2011; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Ng, 2018; Sharma et al., 2020; Wickramage et al., 2015; Zhang, 2021), whereas other research findings indicate that migration improves the health and nutrition of children through remittance (Anton, 2010; Macours & Vakis, 2010). Parental migration has a tremendous impact on the psychological and social well-being of the children left-behind (Getnet & Abebaw, 2022; Zhao et al., 2018). For instance, Zhao et al. (2018) examined the emotional impacts of prolonged parent-child separation and affirmed that parental absence led to inadequate care and support for children left-behind.

Researchers have studied the impact of parental migration on the reorganization of roles within the family and its impact on the children left-behind. Studies report the complete transformation of roles within the families as parents migrate (Afsar, 2005; Dreby, 2006; Hugo, 2005; Parreñas, 2005, 2014; Save the Children, 2006). For instance, according to Parreñas (2014), when the mother migrates from the household, the nuclear family tends to crumble. In contrast, the nuclear family remains intact when fathers migrate. Research also reveals shifting roles and increased household chores for children. For example, a study in China found that parental migration resulted in increased domestic duties for children aged 7 to 12 years (Meng & Yamauchi, 2015). In a similar vein, when their parents migrate, girls between the ages of 16 and 18 in Mexico take on handling domestic duties (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2011).

Questions such as how parents typically mother, interact with their children left-behind and the numerous means they use to perform maternal duties have been studied (Chib et al., 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Meyers & Rugunanan, 2020; Waruwu, 2022). Findings indicate that migrant mothers across the globe (e.g. Hong Kong, Philippines, South Africa) use ICT extensively to maintain their distance presence. This enables them to provide intensive ongoing care, support, and control with their children as caregivers, despite the distance.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasized the importance of communication as a crucial means by which children exercise their rights. Non-discrimination first requires equality in children's access to the digital environment. As a gateway for many forms of provision and participation, internet access is increasingly taken for granted as a means of ensuring children's rights; consequently, the lack of (sufficient or reliable) internet access is a pressing problem for large groups of children across the world (Lievens et al., 2018).

The result of the previous research demonstrates a wide range of outcomes, indicating that more research is needed to better understand the impact of parental migration on the children left-behind. Most studies that have been conducted has been based on the socio-cultural, economic, and political context of each nation. Thus, the findings of the studies do not represent the Ethiopian context. Moreover, the existing research tends to rely on information obtained from adults, rather than the children's perspectives. The transnational family literature repeatedly focuses on children, often through the lens of their parents (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Osei et al., 2023). This explains the tendency to see children as acted upon rather than as actors in their own lives. Experiences, sentiments, and reactions of children affected by migration are frequently overlooked within the predominantly adult-centric literature on migration.

Most previous research has relied on standardized research instruments developed in the western context, hampering scholars from a contextualized understanding of the phenomenon (Chen et al., 2019; Dununsinghe, 2021; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Kharel et al., 2021; Kraus & Wojtas, 2021; Lu et al., 2020; Ng, 2019; Nobles, 2011; Vanore et al., 2015). Scarce research has tried to capture children's perceptions and constructions of living with their parents' migration (Asis, 2007; Dreby, 2007; Olwig, 1999; Parreñas, 2005; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014). However, the children's accounts are rooted in their cultural contexts. Hence, country-specific studies are essential to discern the assets and challenges of the children involved. Therefore, the aim of current study was to address the research lacuna by concentrating on the perspectives, experiences, and creativity of children left-behind, in managing changes in their daily lives due to parental migration. The study examined the impact of parental migration on the emotional and educational well-being of children left-behind and the reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities within the household. Moreover, the experience of being parented from a distance was explored. In this connection, how children left-behind experience ICT and ICT-based parenting from afar was investigated. Generally, the stories of children's separation and support networks were explored.

1.3. Research questions

Based on the gaps observed, the basic research questions that guided the study were the following:

- How do children perceive the migration of their parent(s)?
- What are the emotional responses of children regarding their parental migration?
- What are the educational impacts of parental migration on children left-behind?
- How do children experience life with arranged caregivers after their parental migration?

- How do children left-behind perceive the intervention of ICT in their transnational family life?
- How does parental migration affect the dreams and aspirations of children left-behind?

1.4. Objectives of the study

The objective of this research was to investigate the lived experiences of children who have been left-behind in Addis Ababa and Adama due to the transnational migration of their parent(s). The aims of the research were to: explore children's perception regarding the causes of their parent(s)' migration; examine the emotional and educational impacts of their parent(s)' migration; explore the experience of using ICT in their communication with their migrant parent(s); explore the life experiences of children with their arranged caregivers; and investigate how parental migration affects the dreams and aspirations of children left-behind.

1.5. Significance of the study

The current study makes a shift from depicting children as passive victims of their parents' migration to investigating their perspectives and lived experiences in their daily lives and activities. It will provide insight into the experiences of children left-behind, highlighting their engagement with the changing situations, thus challenging the notion that children are passive victims. There are few policies tailored for children left-behind in Ethiopia. Hence, understanding children's experiences and perspectives is important in informing policy and practice. The current study will also provide contextualized understanding of children left-behind and generate research questions or hypotheses for further research.

In Ethiopia, the issue of children left-behind has not been recognized or given due attention. There are no comprehensive data on the number of children left-behind in Ethiopia. While there are numerous studies on children left-behind in the Far East, the Caribbean, and

Southeast Asia, there is a lack of research in Ethiopia that explores the issue of children left-behind from the children's perspectives. The current study will be the first or among the first to explore the lived experiences of children left-behind in Ethiopia.

The current study is relevant to social work education, policy, practice, and research. The findings provide important information for curriculum development in social work with children, youth, and families. As most social work theories and practice models echo children's experiences of the Westerner, children of non-western countries receive little attention in the current social work literature. Therefore, this study provides a context-specific understanding of the experiences and perspectives of children with migrant parent(s).

1.6. Scope of the study

In Ethiopia, many children live without one or both parents. However, the geographical scope of this study was limited to Addis Ababa and Adama, as these two areas are the major sources of international labor migrants to economically prosperous nations.

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design. Phenomenology considers children to be active agents who can reflect on their perspectives and experiences. It provides context-specific understanding regarding the lived experiences of children with migrant parent(s) and is instrumental in denuding the similarities and differences in participants' responses about their lived experiences. The study employed a phenomenological approach, comprising a semi-structured interview, which is considered appropriate in providing a voice for children left-behind. The inclusion criteria were children between 12 and 18 years of age in primary and secondary schools whose parent(s) migrated abroad early than a year before data collection.

The findings reveal the perspectives of the children left-behind in urban Ethiopia. Moreover, the study did not include the perspectives of migrant parent(s), caregivers, community members, school teachers, policymakers, and social work practitioners.

1.7. Operational definitions

Children: According to international standards, children are defined as “individuals under the age of 18” (Conventions on the Rights of the Child, Article 1). In this study, children refer to children who are aged between and include 12 and 18 years.

Children left-behind: children left-behind are young people who live in their hometown while one or both of their parents migrate to other places for work for an extended period (Cortes, 2008; Reyes, 2007; UNICEF, 2020). According to existing literature, their living situation necessitates being cared for by a left-behind parent or other extended family members, remaining connected with the absent parent via telephone and the internet, and waiting for family reunification either in the hometown or in the parents adopted place of work (Reyes, 2007). In this study, children left-behind are children whose parent(s) migrated abroad and who were left with extended family members or relatives for at least one year.

ICT: refers to technological devices such as mobile devices, computer hardware/software, and other communication media (Mishna et al., 2021; Rudi et al., 2015). In this study, ICT mainly refers to smartphones used in the transnational communication.

Labor migration: people moving for employment from one country to another or within their own country of residence (IOM, 2011). This study refers to labor migrants who travel cross-nationally in search of better job opportunities.

Lived experience: refers to the subjective perceptions of a group of people involving a unique and complex phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). They are the realities of life for those involved in

different experiences (Pascal, 2010). In line with the above definition, in this study, lived experiences refer to several events in life associated with children with migrant parent(s).

Migration: is the “movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border or within a state. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition, and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification” (IOM, 2011, p. 62). In this study, migration refers to a person who crossed an international border, especially the parent(s). This study did not include internal migration within a State.

Transnational family: is defined as a familial group with members living some or most of the time separated while feeling a sense of collective welfare, unity, and familyhood across national borders (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). In this study, it refers to a family whose parent(s) migrated abroad and whose children are left-behind.

1.8. Organization of the dissertation

I have organized and structured this dissertation as follows: The first chapter consists of an introduction that presents the study background, problem statement, research questions, study objectives, study significance, study scope, operational definitions, and dissertation organization. The second chapter is a literature review that includes the conceptualization of children left-behind, the nexus between globalization, migration, and children left-behind, a review of the empirical literature, and the study theoretical orientation. Chapter three is a presentation of the methodology. It focuses on the research paradigm, research approach, descriptions of the study area, participants' recruitment and sampling strategies, methods of data collection and analysis, data quality issues, and ethical considerations. The fourth chapter is a presentation of the study

findings with themes and sub-themes. The fifth chapter presents the discussion section, which reviews the key study findings in the context of existing literature, thereby highlighting the unique findings, followed by the study limitations. Summary, implications for social work, and conclusion constitute the sixth chapter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2. Introduction

This literature review comprises several sections related to children left-behind within the framework of globalization and migration. The first section conceptualizes children left-behind and reviews the different circumstances under which children may be considered as such. It then explores the linkages between globalization, migration, and children left-behind, as well as the global care chain and care circulation in transnational families. Also included in the review are the children and gender roles in Ethiopian families, and the role of ICT in transnational communications. The review then delves deeper into empirical studies on international migration and children left-behind, followed by a historical trajectory of international migration in Ethiopia. The last section describes the theoretical literature and concepts surrounding children and childhood studies.

2.1. Conceptualization of children left-behind

The term “children left-behind” refers to “children raised in their home countries or in their countries of habitual residence who have been left-behind by adult migrants responsible for them” (UNICEF, 2020, p. 1). Likewise, Huang et al. (2018) and Crawley et al. (2023) depict children left-behind as children whose parent(s) have left their hometown for work and who are placed in the care of grandparents or other close relatives. Parent(s) usually leave their children in the care of family members, friends, relatives, the community, a daycare center, or independently (Zhu et al., 2023).

Children whose parents have migrated internally or internationally are considered children “left-behind” (Crawley et al., 2023). Some parents migrate to urban areas internally for better job opportunities, whereas others migrate transnationally to work in more advanced

nations to earn higher wages and send money back home to support their families (Lu, 2018). For instance, internal labor migration is predominant in China, whereas transnational labor migration is common in the Philippines (Zhu et al., 2023).

Millions of children cannot afford to live with their parents due to economic and social circumstances (The Lancet Regional Health, 2023). While ideally, children should spend a secure childhood with their parents or other caregivers and receive love and education, globally, numerous parents must be separated from their children to make a living. The children of these parents are characterized as left-behind. The separated children are devoid of parental companionship and may lack care and education (The Lancet Regional Health, 2023; Shen et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2018). Research reveals that being left-behind can have a deleterious effect on children's overall well-being, particularly on education, psycho-emotional well-being, and health (Carranza, 2021; Skocheng et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2021). For instance, a study conducted by Carranza (2021) indicated that children left-behind by parents' experience feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety compared to children living with parents.

Previously, numerous works of literature have used the term "children left-behind," which has the connotation that this is their identity rather than something they experienced. However, according to Crawley et al. (2023), the phrase connotes the victim-hood nature of the children and their permanent immobility. Moreover, the phrase overlooks the children's agentic engagement in making choices and shaping their life circumstances following their parental migration. The current understanding is that children should not be considered passive victims of parental migration. Accordingly, recent literature uses the term "stay-back children" rather than "children left-behind" (Marcus et al., 2023; Osei et al., 2023). In this study, terms 'children left-

behind' and 'stay back children' are used interchangeably, both referring to the children as having agency.

2.2. Globalization, migration, and children left-behind

Migration, linked to globalization, illustrates economic disparities among regions as well as rising inequities between societies, with migrants relocating in search of better economic opportunities (UN, 2022). Similarly, scholars assert that migration is a response to global income imbalances between countries. In 2020, about 84 percent of migrants lived in a country that was wealthier than their own (Kaczmarska & Ono, 2022; World Bank Group, 2023). Bryceson (2019) reports that over the past two decades, globalization has led millions of migrants from poor regions to work in better-off regions. Economic migration is usually motivated by hopes of increased income and more access to better services (World Bank Group, 2023). Migrants often leave their home countries in search of higher-paying jobs elsewhere to improve their family's living situation. Castelli (2018), however, notes that along with economic factors in migration, environmental, political, demographic, and social factors are important contributors to people's outward migration.

In 2020, there were approximately 281 million international migrants, which accounts for 3.6% of the world's population (IOM, 2021). This figure includes parent(s) who leave their children behind for better economic opportunities. The migration of parents has created a new type of family structure known as transnational families, which often make material sacrifices and contend with emotional tensions between migrant parents or spouses and the family members left-behind. This phenomenon has also significant consequences for the children's well-being and development (World Bank Group, 2023).

Through remittance, transnational migrant parent(s) play a profound role in improving the health, education, and overall well-being of children left-behind. In 2020, the total volume of remittances reached \$647 billion (World Bank, 2023), with much of the money used to support the well-being of children left-behind. Remittances also play a significant role in improving local water management, health, sanitation, and domestic consumption (UNICEF, 2020). Remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries are projected to grow by 1.4% to \$656 billion in 2023 (World Bank Group, 2024).

The global care work economy and feminized international migration have led many migrant mothers from impoverished nations to work in advanced countries. Thus, children's care is shared among extended family and kin across national borders (Derby, 2006; Nobles, 2011; Parreñas, 2010). Mothers' long-term physical absence in children's lives makes the involvement of other caregivers inevitable. Despite cultural and social differences, grandmothers, especially maternal grandmothers, are usually regarded as the most suitable and helpful caregivers for children left-behind (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenberg, 2012; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Pantea, 2012). For instance, grandmothers in Romanian migrant families play numerous roles, including caring for grandchildren left-behind, being problem-solvers in family conflicts, and providing emotional support for their migrant daughters (Pantea, 2012). Hence, it is imperative to assess and understand the impacts of parental migration on children left-behind to inform policies and evidence-based interventions.

2.3. 'Global Care Chain' and care circulation in transnational families

Two major frameworks appear to be dominant in the literature on care in transnational families: Global Care Chain (GCC) and care circulation. The Global Care Chain refers to a succession of responsibilities passed from women to women. Care circulation, on the other hand,

is a multidimensional and reciprocal exchange of care among transnational family networks, blurring the distinction between caregiver and recipient (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Kilkey & Merla, 2014).

The concept of GCC was first coined by American sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2000). The care chain is characterized as a global chain of personal links, generally comprising women, based on paid and unpaid caring tasks (Hochschild, 2000). It consists of an employed woman in the Global North employing a migrant woman from the Global South to perform domestic and care work. Women from the Global South also pass on domestic care work to other family members (Hochschild, 2000; Yeates, 2005). These chains start in poor countries and end up in rich ones, resulting in a deficit of care for migrants and their families left-behind (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Zickgraf, 2017).

Hochschild (2000) outlined the asymmetrical chain of care exchange that occurs when Third World women migrate to care for children in the Western world, leaving their children behind to be reared by relatives, friends or neighbors. Care flows are unidirectional, with remittances being the only mechanism migrants may use to care for their relatives (Degavre & Merla, 2016; Hochschild, 2000). This brings attention to the negative impacts of migration in terms of 'care drain' and 'care replacement' and underlines the social costs of migration for migrants and their non-migrating family members, notably children and the elderly (Lutz & Palenga-Möllnbeck, 2012).

The GCC concept attempts to describe, from a feminist perspective, the realities of women in the Global South who provide care in the Global North (Lutz, 2018; Herrera, 2020; Lo'pez et al., 2022; Lube Guizardi et al., 2022), situating mobility in unequal and commodified terms. While the care chain approach has advanced our understanding of care trans-

nationalization and drawn attention to uneven development and geographical inequalities in power and wealth (Yeates, 2012), it has been criticized for building on an ethnocentric idealization of the nuclear family (McKay, 2007), with the household as the unit of analysis (Yeates, 2004, 2005). Based on the growing recognition among migration scholars of the multitude of family forms and connections, it has been argued that care chain research should extend beyond the nuclear family to include intergenerational analyses and the broader cultural contexts of diversity in family forms (Yeates, 2004, 2005). This understanding paved the way for the emergence of a care circulation.

The conceptual framework of care circulation incorporates a wide spectrum of care interactions and considers care flowing between family members across time and geographical distance (Baldassar et al., 2007). This approach shifts the focus from migrants as givers of care to acknowledging how all family members participate in a range of caregiving tasks. The distinction between caregivers and care recipients is blurred, and the roles of care providers and receivers are dynamic and fluctuate across life, family, and migration cycles (Kilkey & Merla, 2014).

With its multidimensional concept of care, the care circulation approach promotes a widening definition. Five parts of care are recognized: financial and material (remittances or commodities), physical or hands-on (feeding, bathing), practical (advice, help), emotional and moral support, and accommodation (giving shelter) (Baldassar et al., 2007; Degavre & Merla, 2016; Merla et al., 2020). What the varied forms have in common is that they demand numerous resources to which migrants and their family members have different degrees of access based on characteristics such as age, stage in migration and family cycle, country of origin, and country of residence (Degavre & Merla, 2016). Consequently, the pattern of who gets and who gives care

changes during the life cycle (Merla & Baldassar, 2016), and an examination of care circulation within transnational families must be sensitive to the family and migration cycles. Researchers in transnational family and migration studies have begun to extend their focus beyond the triad of parents, children, and caregivers and to explore how a broader social network contributes to the well-being of members of transnational families.

2.4. Children and gender roles in Ethiopian family

Patriarchy is a gender system that allows for and legalizes men's supremacy over women. (Debabu, 2000). Patriarchal society provides men with specific benefits that are not available to women (Dickerson, 2013). In Ethiopia, due to the patriarchal norms, there appears to be a clear-cut division of labor between young mothers and fathers and clear associated expectations: mothers are responsible for all the household activities, including cooking, washing clothes, fetching water, and collecting firewood, as well as childcare including bathing, feeding, and carrying the children. They are also required to engage in productive agricultural activities in rural areas and income-generating informal sector activities in urban areas, while fathers were responsible for financial support (Agazi et al., 2020). Because of patriarchal norms, this division of labor is accepted by almost all. The role of fathers seems to be limited mainly to income provision, and with no expectation to be actively involved in childrearing, apart from playing with their children in their spare time. There are, however, some exceptionally supportive fathers who have helped their wives even with what is culturally considered to be women's domestic work. Others are not supportive and spend the money they earn on alcohol and do not provide for their family as expected (Young Lives, 2020). Even in developed countries, where women have increasingly become involved in paid work since the 1970s, men's involvement in childcare has not progressed as much as some had hoped (Adler & Lenz, 2015).

In every region of the world, women spend more time on unpaid care work than men, “ranging from 1.7 times more in the Americas, 2.1 times more in Europe and Central Asia, 3.4 more in Africa, 4.1 times more in Asia and the Pacific, and 4.7 times more in the Arab states” (ILO, 2018, p. 54). This problem is more pronounced in developing countries, where mothers are often dependent on their husbands for financial support and constrained by social and gender norms, even when they are engaged in productive agricultural activities. While men have a degree of discretion to use the income they generate as they wish, women tend to use any income they earn for household needs, which seems to be unquestioned by women and society at large. Despite some progress in gender equality in developing countries (notably in urban areas) in terms of women’s involvement in income generation and decision-making, much more needs to be done to support mothers with the challenging task of childrearing, which they often do in addition to managing all the household tasks (Agazi et al., 2020).

In Ethiopia, the role of the extended family is of paramount importance, especially for first-time mothers. This is especially true of grandmothers and sisters-in-law, and to some extent, grandfathers. Neighbors also play a key role, but their involvement has been diminishing in some cases. Parenting is understood primarily in terms of the roles of young mothers and fathers. However, the role of others who engage in childcare, notably among the extended family, should also be considered (Agazi et al., 2020).

Children are at the center of social connections and economic activities in Ethiopia. Child labor is a way of life, and most families have long included it as a means of enhancing family well-being. Strong work ethics have been ingrained in Ethiopian society since a young age. Children contribute significantly to the social and economic (re)production of society, despite all the challenges they encounter (Alebachew, 2009). Ethiopian children are encouraged to focus on

acquiring skills that will help them in their future adult roles. Particularly among impoverished households, children are viewed as assets, and many of them work on the streets to support their own welfare (Ennew, 2005) or improve their families' lives (Verhoef, 2005).

Children are expected to contribute labor, especially in agricultural activities in Ethiopia. The boys are engaged in herding cattle and supporting their father in the farm activities. The girls are heavily involved in household chores, fetching water, and taking care of their younger siblings. Although decreasing over the years, a preference to send boys to school at both primary and secondary levels has been a widespread practice in rural communities. This is widely seen now in secondary education, which demands that children move away from their families to nearby towns where such schools are available. Parents in many cases prefer to send boys rather than girls for fear of sexual abuse to their daughters and fear of losing their major contributions in managing household chores (Yehualashet & Negussie, n.d).

2.5. ICT in transnational relationships

Technological advances, such as mobile phones and social media networks, facilitate transnational communication and parenting in real-time. Visual video chat technology has heightened the level of intimacy not previously accessible through letters and photos (Carranza, 2021). ICT allows children of migrant parents to communicate with their parents and enables migrant parents to actively participate in their children's lives. The capacity to swiftly communicate shows that divided families can make timely decisions and have improved knowledge and engagement daily (Crawley et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2012). Francisco (2015) noticed instant and visual features of video chat technology brought a degree of closeness that was not present with letters and pictures, boosting connections among transnational families.

There is an acute need for transnational communication between migrants and their families left-behind. The recent dramatic growth of ICT has radically transformed transnational communication (Carranza, 2021; Demirsu, 2022; Madianou & Miller, 2012) from face-to-face contact, postal delivery, and dial-up telephone to a form that is a ‘click-away,’ instant, and mobile (Girmachew, 2018, p. 1).

Researchers have mainly discussed the role of Skype and Facebook in facilitating transnational relationships (Ahlin, 2018; Baldassar, 2016; Baldassar et al., 2016; Madianou, 2018; Madianou & Miller, 2012). The recent proliferation of other social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, has begun to be widely utilized by transnational family members, grabbing scholars’ attention (Markwei & Appiah, 2016; Osei et al., 2023; Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Osei et al. (2023) further noted that as ICTs continually change, researchers need to examine new technologies that enable long-distance communication by providing young people with more room for maneuver.

According to Madianou (2016), smartphones can be considered polymedia, with the ability to provide different affordances concurrently (i.e. text-based chats, video-based Skype, Facebook video calls). Users can use the strengths of different applications, platforms, and devices to compensate for the weaknesses of others (Madianou, 2016). It has been articulated that connected presence creates a sense of closeness among physically distant family members, blurring the distinction between absence and presence (Wilding 2006). Baldassar et al. (2016) introduced the concept of “ICT-based co-presence” (p. 134) to encompass the various expressions of ICT-mediated communication in transnational families.

Migrant parent(s) typically use cell phones as the primary means to manage relationships from abroad, with their children (Dreby, 2006). Nedelcu (2017) used the transnational families of Romanian migrants living in Canada and Switzerland as an example of how new forms of co-

presence mediated by ICTs have emerged as a means of “grand parenting” and “doing family” in the digital era. It demonstrates that migrant parents can pick up a variety of technology skills to help them deal with distance and separation, as well as to enhance their relationships and interactions with their children and grandchildren who live overseas. Drawing on ethnographic research with various groups of women left-behind (mothers, aunts, and grandparents), Chen (2022) explores the collaboration between overseas family members and childrearing through digital media use. He states that the development of different digital media allows divided family members to preserve and manage family ties.

Numerous studies have explored the role of ICT in children’s emotional attachment in the context of parental migration in Latin America (e.g. Venta et al., 2021), South-east Asia (e.g. Graham et al., 2012), and China (e.g. Wang et al., 2023). One study investigated the reconfiguration of care arrangements due to parental migration and the subjective well-being of the children left-behind in two South-east Asian countries (Indonesia and the Philippines). The study revealed differences in the subjective well-being of children associated with the gender of the migrant parents and caregiving arrangements. Children left-behind expressed more distress and feelings of abandonment when their mothers migrated than when their fathers left. Such feelings decreased when the migrant mothers showed care through frequently communicating and closely supervising their children left-behind, though mobile phones and e-mail or Skype (Graham et al, 2012).

Research has been conducted on the use of smartphones in the emotional socialization of children left-behind in China in the context of internal migration (rural to urban) (Wang et al., 2023). Findings indicated that while smartphones create a sense of mobile familial co-presence, they do not resolve the reality of parental physical absence; thus, children’s loneliness remains

unchanged. In this sense, digital compensation does not guarantee an adequate and stable parent-child connection but rather can intensify children's sense of relative deprivation (Wang et al., 2023). Likewise, Peng and Wong (2013) reported that the ubiquitous communication and virtual presence of transnational mothers introduced by ICT perpetually remind all involved of their physical separation, impose enormous pressure on transnational mothers, and can exacerbate any tension and conflicts among family members.

2.6. Effects of parental migration on the hopes of children left-behind

Many parents from developing countries emigrate to prosperous nations to ensure a better future for their children (Dreby, 2010; Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2014; Parreñas, 2005). Children who are left-behind have international migration aspirations influenced by information from their parents and larger social networks (Böhme, 2015; Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). Greater migration experience within the family increases the likelihood that children growing up in such households will migrate (Kandel & Kao, 2001). This suggests that the migrant parents of the children left-behind inform them that it is economically lucrative to live and work in cities abroad because of the employment opportunities they offer. Some youth aspire to migrate, and while their migrant parents agree with their children's plans, they lack the means to help them migrate. These parents offer young people hope that family reunification is realistic, but they often face financial and legal constraints, especially undocumented migrant parents (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). Some youth in this category latch onto the hope offered by their parents and postpone finding alternative opportunities (Osei et al., 2022).

2.7. International migration and children left-behind: Empirical Review

Several studies on international migration and children left-behind have been conducted in various parts of the world. Many of these studies, however, treat children as passive recipients of treatment. The research has been conducted fundamentally “on” children rather than with or for children (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Mayall, 2000; O’Kane, 2000). Children have tended to be seen as objects to be studied and regarded as incompetent, unreliable, and incomplete (Barker & Weller, 2003). Children's voices and experiences have been silenced and children have been considered 'incomplete' adults who lack knowledge and wisdom. As a result, the view has been that children must be protected and controlled, and their needs must meet rather than their rights enforced. Based on these assumptions, children are included in family and school research, focusing on their development and socialization toward adulthood rather than their experience and perspectives as a child (Devine, 2002; James et al., 1998; Qvortrup et al., 1994).

The following section presents the multidimensional impacts of parental migration on children's development and well-being, ranging from educational, and emotional to overall social well-being. The role reconfiguration brought about by parental absence at the household level is also discussed. As parental absence can have a deleterious impact on children’s socialization, behavioral outcomes, and economic well-being, it is critical to, understand the impact of parental migration on children remaining behind, to develop relevant policies tailored to these children.

2.7.1. Education

The educational impact of parental absence is revealed to be heterogeneous and inconclusive. The effect can be positive or negative depending on factors such as the child's age, gender, the gender of migrant parent, communication frequency, and remittance consistency. The remittance might allow children left-behind to attend better schools; yet, parental migration

might affect school enrollment and attendance and lead to dropout. Studies have found that remittances can assist the financial situation of families left-behind by easing household budget constraints and making more resources available (Acosta, 2011; Alcaraz et al., 2012; Antman, 2012; Arif et al., 2018; Cuadros-Menaca et al., 2020; ECMI/AOS, SMC, & OWWA, 2004; Mahapatro et al., 2017; Nakamuro, 2010; Wen et al., 2015).

Studies conducted in Central America and the Caribbean indicate that children with parents living abroad and receiving remittances have lower school dropout rates than other families. This is due, in part, to the fact that remittances alleviate the financial constraints that prevent children from continuing their education (Adams & Cuecuecha, 2010; Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2020; Bredl, 2001; Edwards & Ureta, 2003; Intemann & Katz, 2014; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Nobles, 2011). While some studies suggest that remittances can increase consumption and finance schooling, a study by Cuadros-Menaca et al. (2020) found no evidence to support these claims. Findings were that despite lessening market work engagement of children in remittance-receiving households, international remittance had no role in influencing children's school attendance.

The instrumental variable analysis and propensity score matching conducted in the Philippines reveal an overall beneficial influence of international parental migration on children's left-behind education, work, and temper (Pajaron, 2018). Similarly, Crawley et al. (2023) state that children who stayed behind and received remittances showed higher rates of school attendance: 59% of children in remittance-receiving households were enrolled in school, compared to 40% of children who stayed behind in non-remittance-receiving households (p. 16). Likewise, Arguillas and Williams (2010) found that children who remained behind in the

Philippines, Albania, and Moldova performed better academically and took part more in co-curricular activities and other academic organizations.

The detrimental consequences of parental migration on children's schooling have also been reported (Carranza, 2021; Davis, 2018; Getnet & Abebaw, 2022; Halpern-Manners, 2011; Rubio, 2020; Skocheng et al., 2019; Ye & Murray, 2005). For instance, Davis (2018) indicates that the migration of Nicaraguan parents to Costa Rica is linked to lower school enrollment among children who stay in Nicaragua. Halpern-Manners (2011) observed that family members' migration had a negative influence on educational transitions from lower secondary (middle or junior high school) to secondary school (high school) among non-migrant children in Mexico. Similarly, Bucheli et al. (2018) reveals that with parental migration, the chance of children continuing to secondary school falls as they take on home duties or are urged to work.

Skocheng et al. (2019) examined the effects of parental migration on the educational outcomes of children left-behind in Cambodia. The study found that parental migration reduced the completed years of schooling by about half a year. A study conducted by Getnet and Abebaw (2022) found that children left-behind demonstrated a lack of motivation in their education due to the various psychological and social problems they experienced. Similarly, Carranza's (2021) study with children of migrant parents in El Salvador and Nicaragua found a decrease in educational attendance and performance due to a lack of guidance from parents, feelings of abandonment, anger, and sadness, or children experiencing sexual abuse and maltreatment in their households.

The effect of parental migration on children's school performance varies depending on their gender. This is evident in Mexico (Antman, 2013), Cameroon (Kuepie, 2018), and El Salvador (Acosta, 2011; Rubio, 2020). A lack of parental care and supervision was found to

affect children's school performance. In Mexico, parental migration significantly increases educational attainment for girls and lowers the probability of boys completing junior high school and children completing high school (Antman, 2013). In Cameroon, a detrimental effect of migration on boys' school attendance was reported, whereas girls were not affected (Kuepie, 2018). Acosta (2011) and Rubio (2020) explain that remittances reduce child wage labor in El Salvador, with girls benefiting from an increase in schooling while boys do not.

In India, Vikram (2021) examined the link between paternal migration and children's arithmetic and reading achievement. Using propensity score matching, he found that fathers' current and long-term migration positively affected children's education. The benefits of paternal migration, however, are experienced more frequently by sons than daughters. Sons of migrant fathers demonstrate higher reading and arithmetic achievement, benefit from higher education expenditure, and spend more time on educational activities than sons of non-migrant fathers. Daughters of migrant fathers have better reading skills and receive higher education investments, but they are no different from daughters of non-migrant fathers in terms of time spent on educational activities and arithmetic achievement.

Researchers have observed the effect of parental migration based on the migrant parent's gender in the Philippines (Cortes, 2013), Thailand (Jampaklay, 2006), and Sri Lanka (Dununsinghe, 2021). According to Cortes (2013), children of migrant mothers are more likely to lag in school than children of migrant fathers, as a mother's absence has a more detrimental effect than that of a father. Jampaklay (2006) found that long-term maternal absence hurts children's education in Thailand, whereas paternal absence has no effect. Likewise, Dununsinghe (2021) found strong statistical evidence to suggest that educational performance is lower among children whose mothers migrated. The probability is high that children in mothers' migrant

households perform poorly in school as mothers participate in children's educational achievement (Dununsinghe, 2021).

Assessing migration and education of children who stay behind in Moldova and Georgia, Cebotari et al. (2016) reported that when fathers migrate and mothers are caregivers, children's education deteriorates in Georgia. In contrast, children with migrant fathers who are cared for by mothers report better school performance in Moldova. Furthermore, in Moldova, there is a strong association between improved school performance and parents being abroad, either together or divorced, while decreased performance relates to the absence of remittances. Intemann and Katz (2014) studied the children's educational achievement in El Salvador based on migrant parents' remitting behavior and the gender of the migrant parents, the study found that children with at least one migrant parent will complete more years of school, with the gender of the migrant parent having no significant influence on the children's schooling.

The impact of parental migration on the long-term well-being and socio-economic opportunities of children left-behind has also been examined. Longitudinal studies have shown that the effects of parental migration on children left-behind can extend into adulthood. Research by Wang et al. (2016) found that children left-behind were more likely to have reduced educational attainment and insufficient job prospects compared to children who grew up with both parents. Lu (2014) examined how children's education differs across migration streams (internal vs. international) in two societies (Mexico and Indonesia). Drawing down from data from the Mexican and Indonesia Family Life Survey, Lu found that children left-behind by transnational migrant parents did less well in educational attainment than those living with both parents.

According to Antman (2012), the difference in siblings' ages at parental relocation is crucial. Because they have already completed their schooling, parental migration does not influence the educational outcomes of children who are at least 20 years. Younger siblings may still be in school and, hence, will be affected by any parental move. McKenzie and Rapoport (2011) argue, however, that migration harms older children's schooling in Mexico, due to increased housework for girls.

A parent's migration also results in redistribution of decision-making and responsibilities within the household, which can have an impact on a child's schooling, either because the new decision-maker (for example, the other parent or an older child) cares about education investment than the migrating parent or because the redistribution of roles places more pressure on children to help in the household (Démurger & Li, 2013).

In summary, studies have found that migration has both positive and negative effects on schooling and educational outcomes for children left-behind. Those who find positive effects emphasize the importance of migrant remittances, which relieve household resource constraints. In contrast, those who find overall adverse effects argue that the negative impact of parental absence outweighs an increase in income. Moreover, the researchers identified several intermediate factors, such as the child's gender, the remittance, the gender of migrant parents, and the age of the child, in assessing the impacts of parental outmigration on children's lives.

2.7.2. Health

Like the effect on education, parental migration can differentially impact the health of children left-behind. The impact differs based on factors such as the age and gender of children, as well as migrant parents' gender, remittance, caregivers' education, migration duration, and communication frequency.

A positive association exists between health status and remittances. Migrant parents can use remittances to fund healthcare, and medicine and provide nutritious food for their children. Children of migrant parents are more likely to visit private healthcare facilities and eat three times a day. Children born into remittance-receiving households in Mexico had a lower risk of health problems at birth (Frank & Hummer, 2002). A study conducted by IOM and Save the Children (2017) however, reported that when controlled for income, children left-behind have less optimal height and weight measurements than children whose parents have not migrated.

Studies have identified the potential negative impact of parental migration on the health and well-being of children left-behind (Carranza, 2021; Cebotari & Dito, 2020; Dreby, 2010; Fellmeth et al., 2018; Getnet & Abebaw, 2022; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Ivlevs et al., 2019; Meng & Yamuchi, 2015; Nguyen, 2016; Ron, 2010; Turnip & Umami, 2019). Some studies report no association between parental migration and children's mental health. Adhikari et al. (2013) found no association between parental migration and their children's mental health outcomes in Thailand. Similarly, a longitudinal investigation of Ghanaian children left-behind undertaken by Cebotari et al. (2018) indicated no worse mental health and well-being results compared with children, not children left-behind. The authors, however, identified a non-stable home environment, frequent caregiver changes, and migrant parents' divorce as important risk factors for the well-being of children left-behind. Likewise, the internal parental migration in China demonstrated no differences in mental health problems between children left-behind and those that are not, if more attention is paid to improving the stability of caregivers and the effectiveness of parent-child communication (Zhang et al., 2019).

Studies on Filipino school children found little to no evidence that children of migrants have more psychological problems than children of non-migrants (Battistella & Conaco, 1998).

The authors reasoned that parental migration has become normalized in some communities and that modern communication systems facilitate parent-child relationships. Another reason could be that extended family support offsets the negative impact of parental absence (Bryant, 2005). Fellmeth et al. (2018) show that parental migration is deleterious to the health of children and adolescents left-behind, with no indication of any advantage. In contrast, in his comparative analysis of the psychological well-being of children left-behind and those that are not in Nepal, Kharel (2021) observed that adolescents living with their parents have poorer psychological well-being than those with one of their parents living abroad.

Drawing data from the CHAMPSEA project, Graham and Jordan (2011) assessed the psychological well-being of children left-behind in four Southeast Asian nations: Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. They observed no common trend across the four countries. Multivariate models found that children of migrant fathers in Indonesia and Thailand are more likely to have low psychological well-being compared to children in non-migrant homes. Their findings were not, however, reproduced in the Philippines or Vietnam (Graham & Jordan, 2011).

Researchers have identified sentiments of fear, wrath, resentment, sorrow, melancholy, rejection, abandonment, and loss among children left-behind (Carranza, 2021; Getnet & Abebaw, 2022; Graham et al., 2012; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Ron, 2010). Ron (2010) reports a link between poorer self-esteem and feelings of abandonment, melancholy, and loneliness in children left-behind in Cuenca. Exploring the obstacles faced by children in El Salvador and Nicaragua whose parents had migrated to the United States, Carranza (2021) notes the loneliness the children left-behind experience despite the improved financial condition.

Researchers in Romania studied how parents' migration affects the education, physical health, and mental health of children left-behind. Using data from a unique representative survey

conducted in 2007, instrumental variables, and bivariate probity estimates, the study found evidence for a significant positive effect of parental migration on children's school performance (reflected in higher grades) along with a higher probability of suffering from depression and more frequent health problems. Furthermore, the study reports that living in transnational families is more detrimental for girls and for those from rural areas (Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2020).

A comparative cross-sectional study in Sri Lanka revealed that more than 30% of children left-behind experienced mental health difficulties as well as lower mental health outcomes in comparison to children living with their parents (Hu et al., 2018; Wickramage et al., 2015). Similarly, in Ecuador, Jerves et al. (2020) indicate the development of less secure attachment patterns among children with an absent parent. A study by Lu et al. (2020) found that rural children suffer mentally and cognitively if abandoned by both parents. Rural children with both parents fare better mentally and cognitively. Lu et al. noted, however, that the drawbacks of children left-behind are mediated by caregivers' emotional well-being, parenting practices, and education.

Based on the children's gender and migrant parents' gender, the psycho-emotional impact on children left-behind differs. In their mixed-methods research in Ethiopia, Getnet and Abebaw (2022) found that girls left-behind are more likely to experience emotional, social, and behavioral difficulties than boys. Similarly, in Ghana, the living conditions of girls worsen when parents migrate, owing to increased domestic work and frequent changes in care arrangements. This is likely to be the case if mothers, as opposed to fathers, migrate (Cebotari & Dito, 2020). A detrimental impact of fathers' absence on mental health and emotional well-being was found in Indonesia and Vietnam (Graham & Jordan, 2011; Ivlevs et al., 2019; Turnip & Umami, 2019).

Using longitudinal data from the Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS), Ng (2018) reported that whether parental migration is advantageous or harmful to child health seems to depend on which parent migrated. Migration of the mother impairs the child's height-for-age, decreasing the height-for-age Z score by 0.5 standard deviations, an impact that is not apparent for the father's migration (Ng, 2018). Meng and Yamuchi (2015) also observed that mothers' migration negatively affects children's height and weight.

Nobles (2011) and Antman (2012) have described divorce as a substantively separate experience. Despite significant geographic separation, Mexican children have considerably more interaction with migrant fathers than they do with fathers who have left their families following divorce. Further, links with migrant fathers are positively associated with school performance, possibly mitigating the reported education costs of family separation. Zhao et al. (2018) reported that the negative effects of parental migration may be exacerbated by other vulnerabilities such as parental divorce and poverty and the frailty of grandparent caregivers. In another study, Mazzucato and Cebotari (2016) observed comparable results in Nigeria, finding poorer health outcomes among children left-behind whose parents were divorced, who were older, and whose mothers migrated.

In a cross-country study, children left-behind in Angola demonstrated poorer mental health and well-being results when compared with Ghanaian and Nigerian children left-behind. Furthermore, excellent care giving practices did not moderate the unfavorable connections, whereas they did in Nigeria and Ghana (Mazzucato et al., 2015). Such sentiments have been reported to decrease when mothers continue to express their care through regular personal conversations with their children left-behind in Southeast Asia (Graham et al., 2012). The effect of parental migration on the health and cognitive skills of children in Ethiopia, India, Peru, and

Vietnam was also explored using a quantitative research approach. The author noted that the harmful effect on children is more significant for long-term parental migration than short-term migration (Nguyen, 2016).

In Sri Lanka, where local options for low-skilled jobs with decent compensation are few, emigration provides an important doorway for families to escape poverty. The worry for the children who experience parental migration (especially maternal migration) has led to harsh emigration restrictions in Sri Lanka. Children from homes with migrant parents, however, are no more likely to endure poor childhood experiences than those with non-migrant parents (Knipe et al., 2021).

Parental migration, especially the mothers, upsets the children's sense of safety, security, and belonging (Carranza, 2021). A reason that female migration is regarded as 'problematic' rests in the transfer of care tasks to other caregivers. Substitute caregivers may be unable to adequately replace biological mothers. This would result in insufficient assistance being provided for children in terms of affection, nourishment, medical care, schooling, punishment, and control (Bryant, 2005; Cortés, 2007; ECMI/AOS, SMC, & OWWA, 2004).

Research on the health implications of migration is mixed. Whether migration is harmful or suitable for the health of children left-behind is context-dependent (Démurger, 2015). Children are more likely to develop psychological and mental issues due to separation if the migrant is the primary caregiver. Several aspects must also be addressed in understanding children's health and psychological wellness, including family context, living situation, educational environment, and age (Antia et al., 2020). The caregiver's safety and stability, the length of separation, and communication frequency are also some of the determinant factors. Furthermore, it is important to examine the gender of migrant parents. In addition, the number of

migrant parents should be considered to understand if it is one or both parents. It is vital to consider these contributory factors to understand the impact of parental migration in assessing children's well-being. It affects their health and psychological welfare.

2.7.3. Labor supply response

In addition to affecting education and health, migration influences the labor division decisions of family members left-behind. The situation can be viewed from two angles. First, remittances can have both positive and negative effects on labor supply decisions. Migrant resources can enable family members left-behind to engage in riskier and higher-return economic activities that were previously limited by household financial constraints. This can result in increased income from local activities. Having said that, non-migrant family members may become less motivated to work because of their improved remittance income, which would lower their participation in the labor force. The relative importance of the effects of lost labor and remittance-related effects should be considered when assessing how migration affects the labor supply (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006).

Second, migration results in the loss of the migrant's local labor, which may restrain the labor supply response of non-migrating members in the short run. When labor markets are imperfect, as is often the case in developing nations, family members left-behind may be unable to acquire labor to compensate for the migrant's lost contributions. In rural areas, the loss of labor might cause other family members to dedicate more time to subsistence farming (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006).

As is the case with education and health, the net effect of migration on labor supply relies on the relative scale of the remittance-related effects and the lost-labor effects. Furthermore, the net effects may vary between subgroups of people, depending on the age and gender of the

household members, their employment sector, the seasonal or permanent nature of migration, the household's assets, and how binding liquidity constraints are for the household (Démurger & Li, 2013).

Consistent with an overwhelming income effect deriving from remittances, most research offers evidence of a negative effect of migration on the labor supply of non-migrants. This link is strong in several circumstances. Grigorian and Melkonyan (2011) found that households receiving remittances in Armenia experienced a decline in labor hours. This suggests that remittances may have a negative impact on labor supply among non-migrants in the country. Kim (2007) observed that remittance income lowers labor force participation among non-migrants in Jamaica. Rodriguez and Tiongson (2001) found that migrants reduce the labor participation and hours of work of non-migrants in the Philippines. Funkhouser (1992) observed that remittances limit labor force participation in Nicaragua.

In addition, other research focuses more directly on the reactions to the labor supply of women who are left-behind. Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2006) found that remittances are associated with a drop in women's labor supply in informal and unpaid jobs in rural parts of Mexico. Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) show that male migration negatively impacts the labor market involvement of women left-behind in Nepal.

Antman (2011) revealed that Mexican children's reduced school hours and increased job hours were due to the immediate financial difficulties associated with their fathers' relocation before they started receiving remittances. Although not statistically significant, fathers' relocation lowered boys' and girls' chances of attending school. There was also a substantial and statistically significant surge in work hours for 12 to 15-year-old males of roughly 32 hours per week and an increase in job participation (Antman, 2011).

Other research has investigated the effect of migration on child labor and school attendance. Rubio (2020) found that young boys in El Salvador with at least one absent migrant parent are more likely to work than peers without absent migrant parents. On the other hand, Cuadros-Menac et al. (2020) found that children in remittance-recipient households in Santiago de Cali, Colombia, were less likely to engage in any form of labor than their counterparts.

In conclusion, the migration of family members has a direct or indirect impact on labor supply, children's education, and labor. Migration enables family members left-behind to engage in riskier and higher-return economic activities. Yet, family members who remain behind may become less motivated to work due to remittance. Thus, the effect of migration on labor supply rests on the relative scale of the remittance-related effects and the lost-labor effects. Moreover, the net effects may differ between subgroups of people, depending on cultural norms, economic issues, and household characteristics.

2.7.4. Role reconfigurations in the households

The migration of one or both parents brings up shifts in household roles. Parental migration necessitates the need for extended family members to care for children left-behind, particularly when mothers migrate. When parents relocate for work, it often results in a shift in family dynamics. In some cases, female family members take over as the primary caregivers from the parents. The well-being of the children left-behind may be impacted by this shift in care giving duties.

The restructuring of care arrangements in the family, from one with parents to another with primarily female family members functioning as caregivers, shows that, as women depart, males remaining behind take on increased care giving tasks. This is visible in Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka (Afsar, 2005; Chantavich, 2001; Hugo, 2005; Parreñas,

2018; Save the Children, 2006). This effect is not usually sustained once the women return. In Bangladesh, husbands who take on domestic responsibilities without their foreign spouses generally do so with the support of older children (Afsar, 2005).

Researchers in Sri Lanka have noted a greater degree of flexibility in fathering due to the assumption of care giving chores by fathers left-behind. Changes in fathering duties can mitigate the harmful impact of a mother's absence on children left-behind. Most children are satisfied with their father, who is assigned a new responsibility. On the contrary, fathers who are left-behind tend to be under more stress, with more of them participating in drinking and drug usage. This may eventually raise risks among children, and negatively affect their emotions and academic progress (Gamburd, 2005; Save the Children, 2006).

Fathers, whether as migrants or males left-behind, rarely take on the role of nurturing their children. Rather, they often delegate this responsibility to other female family members, such as daughters, domestic workers, aunts, or grandparents. In the transnational households of migrant males in the Philippines, fathers confined their parenting obligations to their monthly remittances and talked little with their children. Likewise, in the transnational households of migratory women, fathers were rarely responsible for caring for their children. Most fathers delegated this labor to other women. They also avoided housekeeping by moving to a distant part of the Philippines (Fan & Parreñas, 2018; Lam & Yeoh, 2019; Parreñas, 2005).

Because of long-term male absences and migration, women have more autonomy and decision-making authority over land concerns, children's education, and household finances (Jolly et al., 2003; Hugo, 2002; Rigg, 2007). Even after their spouses return, women are likely to maintain their greater authority. On the other hand, taking on more significant tasks, along with other factors such as an unfriendly family, a lack of support, and a husband's extramarital

activities, has resulted in increased stress and vulnerability among mothers/women left-behind. Roy and Nangia (2005) observed that women who were left-behind in India were more likely to endure physical and mental stress.

Distinguishing the varied parental expectations of transnational mothers and fathers, Dreby (2006) found that increased emotional engagement was required of women in Mexican transnational households. She writes, "Mothers' ties with their children in Mexico primarily depend on exhibiting emotional intimacy from a distance, whereas fathers' relationships rely on their economic success as migrant workers" (p. 34). Likewise, Abrego and LaRossa (2009) discovered that Salvadoran transnational mothers firmly maintained their parenting obligations from afar through their selfless devotion to their children's wellness. Men, she noticed, did not.

Migrant women adopt dual duties as both breadwinners and nurturers from a distance (Hondagneu-Soletto & Avila, 1997) while enduring a feeling of loss over their separation from spouses and children. The loss experienced by other family members may also be more significant when a mother moves overseas to work. In the Philippines, as Parreñas (2008, p. 1062) points out, "the traditional gender ideology of separate spheres constructs fathers as 'pillars' and mothers as 'lights' of the home. 'Pillars' and 'lights' provide distinct contributions, one sustaining the family and the other nurturing the family, but women are considered to hold the family together. When men relocate away from 'home' for work, their children see this as an extension of their breadwinner role while viewing their moms as obliged to work overseas due to poverty (Parreñas, 2005).

Gendered differences in how children perceive parental migration are examined by Cebotari et al. (2017), who found that female children have positive attitudes toward parental migration, which was not found among male children. Studies demonstrate that the migration of

parents is beneficial for girls because migrant parents often entrust them with increased decision-making regarding the younger siblings' care, remittances management, and household expenditures (Parreñas, 2005).

2.7.5. Social behavior, relationships, and socialization

Children's social conduct could be altered by the movements of one or both parents. Battistella and Conaco (1998) discovered that Filipino children with absent mothers had poorer social adjustment and delayed psychosocial development. In contrast, the 2003 Philippines research found that children left-behind were socially well-adjusted, had strong social support, and had a good relationship with other family members (ECMI/AOS, SMC, & OWWA, 2004). A Save the Children (2006) study in Sri Lanka revealed that children left-behind had better connections with their caregivers and that minority ethnic groups have strong extended family ties when mothers migrate. Nevertheless, the Sri Lanka study also replicated Jampaklay's (2006) results in Thailand that a mother's love is frequently irreplaceable, even by the finest caregivers, as more negative impacts on the children left-behind by mothers might be detected.

Chen et al. (2019) reported the implications of father and mother migration for children's adjustment and the essential role of maternal support. They noted that mother migration was negatively associated with children's social skills and academic success and positively linked with the psychological problems of children. Through the mediation of maternal support, father migration was positively associated with the positive adjustment of children.

Inconsistent outcomes have been observed in the areas of abuse and neglect. According to numerous studies, parental migration markedly increases the prospect of children being mistreated or neglected (Cortes, 2008). Mothers' migration, rather than fathers' migration, was presented to be more pertinent in terms of children being physically and sexually abused

(Crawford-Brown, 1993). In contrast, 2003 school-based research in the Philippines showed no significant differences in verbal, physical, or sexual abuse among children of migrants compared with those of non-migrants (ECMI/AOS, SMC, & OWWA, 2004).

According to a study in Mexico, children with migrant fathers had increased issues with drug and alcohol misuse (Cortes, 2008). Problem behavior among children left-behind has also been documented in Moldova (Vanore et al., 2014). Research data from Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, however, suggest that having a migrant parent(s) does not increase the risk that children will participate in harmful behaviors (Asis, 2007). In Sri Lanka, however, where it is believed that 90 percent of the nearly 600,000 migrant women workers are mothers, society worries that "children's misbehaviors increase when their mothers migrate abroad" because "society thinks that mothers teach good habits and lead the children in the exact way that society expects a child to be in the society with good characters and moral behaviors" (Fan & Parreñas, 2018, p. 84).

The 2003 Philippines study indicated that parents' migration did not affect children's socialization. Even when their parents are not there, children left-behind continue to be assigned typical duties by caregivers as part of their obligations. Children of non-migrant households, on average, must undertake more duties than those of migrant families. The same values and spiritual knowledge are also communicated to children, whether by parents or caregivers. Regarding future career choices, children of all genders, regardless of their parents' migration status, have similar aspirations (ECMI/AOS, SMC, & OWWA, 2004).

Parental absence brings on changes in caregivers and changes in household structures. Parents are the primary socializing agents of children and can discipline and nurture them. Parents also socialize children with the appropriate norms and values of society. Moreover,

parents play a profound role in educating children about the social roles, values, and norms of society and their expectations. It is through the supervision and socializing agents of the family that children's self-concept develops. Thus, the absence of parents from the household has a mixed effect on children's behavior.

2.7.6. Economic and material well-being

Studies indicate the general economic well-being of children who stay behind after their parents' relocation. DeWaard et al. (2018) observed that parental migration was related to children living in homes with more assets than children of non-migrant parents, such as residential property, housing materials, housing size, electricity, running water, and radios and televisions.

Parental migration is not related to poorer living conditions for Ghanaian children. Instead, specific circumstances, such as parental divorce, internal migration, and the child's gender, impact whether children experience a reduction in their living situations when parents migrate (Cebotari & Dito, 2020). In El Salvador, Abrego and LaRossa (2009) observed that children's economic well-being is typically greater when mothers migrate compared to when fathers do because mothers feel a greater sense of obligation towards their children, sending remittances more often and with a greater monetary value compared to fathers.

2.8. Children's agency in the context of migration

Robson et al. (2007) describe agency as an individual's capacities, abilities, and actions that permit them to circumnavigate the contexts and positions of their life worlds, fulfilling many economic, social, and cultural expectations while charting individual and collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives. Understanding young people as agents, i.e., competent social beings, entails seeing them as "doers" and "thinkers" rather than "human

beings" (p. 137). Thinking and doing are essential components of any definition of agency, with ample evidence that young people are both thinkers and doers.

Children's agency is powerfully connected to the values emphasized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United Nations created this convention in 1989. While the word 'children's agency' is not mentioned openly in this convention, it is rooted in the notion of children's agentic rights. For instance, social research has connected children's agency to Article 12 of the convention, which foregrounds the importance of children's opportunities to influence decision-making and of voices being heard in matters that affect them (Hart & Brando, 2018; Mayne et al., 2018; Sirkko et al., 2019).

Mainstream sociologists legitimize that children are viewed as the objects of socialization at home and school and should be nurtured and developed to become social beings (Turner, 1992). Children are frequently framed as vulnerable, helpless, immature, and in need of care, causing researchers to neglect their agency and capacity to create their life course and affect their experience. Most extant material takes the perspectives of migrant parents or their partners left-behind. The experiences, views, and adjustments of the children left-behind must be better understood (Christ, 2017).

According to Deng et al. (2022), children's agency is manifested in several ways: First, in the migration context, children left-behind were both caregivers and care receivers. Children's agency is reflected in young people's experiences of caregiving in transnational families (Pantea, 2012). The absence of mothers may generate vulnerabilities related to emotional support and a lack of attention for children left-behind in both Indonesian and Filipino cultures, along with the obligation of children to support their mothers' double pressure by undertaking household duties (Graham et al., 2012).

Colombian children whose parents have migrated exhibited autonomy in accepting and managing gifts and remittances, as well as caring for siblings. Nonetheless, experts have differing perspectives on sibling care taking. According to one perspective, it is regarded as child labor and inappropriate for children's age and development; in contrast, it is considered as children gaining autonomy and new obligations (Duque-Páramo, 2012). In addition to providing care for children, children left-behind in Southeast Asia exercised agency in responding to care arrangements, which included three types of responses: resilience, reworking, and resistance (such as refusing to engage with the adults' agendas) (Hoang et al., 2015). While many abandoned children in Southeast Asia had little say in their care arrangements, some were able to exercise their agency by influencing their parents' decisions and, ultimately, migratory behaviors (Lam & Yeoh, 2019).

Second, children cope with their left-behind lives. They handle changes in their lives and manage their well-being. Children left-behind in Southeast Asia had agency in influencing migration outcomes, playing an active part in managing their well-being, dealing with parental absence, and keeping the family together. Their agency was located within the confines of a migrant home in several unique ways (Lam & Yeoh, 2019). Children left-behind in Tajikistan exhibited resilience and employed coping methods in their everyday lives to deal with the psychosocial costs of separation from migrant parents. Gender disparities were evident in their coping mechanisms. For instance, boys spent their free time on social media networks and hung out or played sports with other boys, whereas girls felt overwhelmed by the caregivers' domestic tasks (Nazridod et al., 2019).

Third, children exercise agency in starting communication with migratory parents. In the Philippines, children left-behind have access to communication technology for connection and

interaction and the ability to explore individual agency in varied ways. However, adults often functioned as gatekeepers (Graham et al., 2012). Fourth, children are active players in receiving or giving information. Children left-behind in Romania acquire power since they may choose to provide or conceal information; migrating parents may lose power while losing information. Those under their grandparents' care may undermine their power by leveraging their restricted mobility or digital illiteracy (Pantea, 2011).

Children's agencies also display cultural differences. In cultures stressing interdependence, individuals may be more collectively agentic, whereas in cultures stressing independence, individuals may be more personally agentic (Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001). The implications of children exercising agency are not always beneficial. Sometimes their activities may go against socially acceptable aims and societal norms (Bordonaro, 2012; Sutterlüty & Tisdall, 2019), such as children's agencies in domestic work in Haiti. Such agency may be unwelcome owing to the victim image of child labor (Hofman, 2010). Children's agencies may also be against their interests. For example, people could be satisfied merely by playing computer games regularly, yet this may negatively affect their health and well-being. Thus, children's agency varies according to individual desires, unique circumstances, and cultural variations, and the agency may affect the children positively or negatively.

From the above review points, duality is highlighted in the popular perspective of children left-behind in the context of parental relocation. They are either considered passive beneficiaries of the consequences of parental migration or social actors who may improve their surroundings. While discussing children's agency in parental migration, Thompson et al. (2019) imply a possible danger in recognizing children's agency by no longer treating them as vulnerable subjects. Instead, they are regarded as social actors with the same rights and

obligations as adults and, hence, are excluded from the particular protection afforded to children. While it is understood that children are social actors in the context of parental migration, it is vital to realize that children have limited awareness and experience of action compared to adults (Ansell, 2009). Children do not typically have the experience and access to knowledge that adults do, which constrains them from behaving with similar degrees of consciousness and purpose. As Cebotari (2018) notes, the good outcomes of studies on children's coping method and resilience should maintain their susceptibility.

Thus, this study focused on more than just children's agency after their parental migration. It also examined their vulnerability in the face of parental relocation. The numerous obstacles children confront and their coping techniques were also studied. The research investigated the positive and negative elements of agency based on the cultures and existing social norms of the study area.

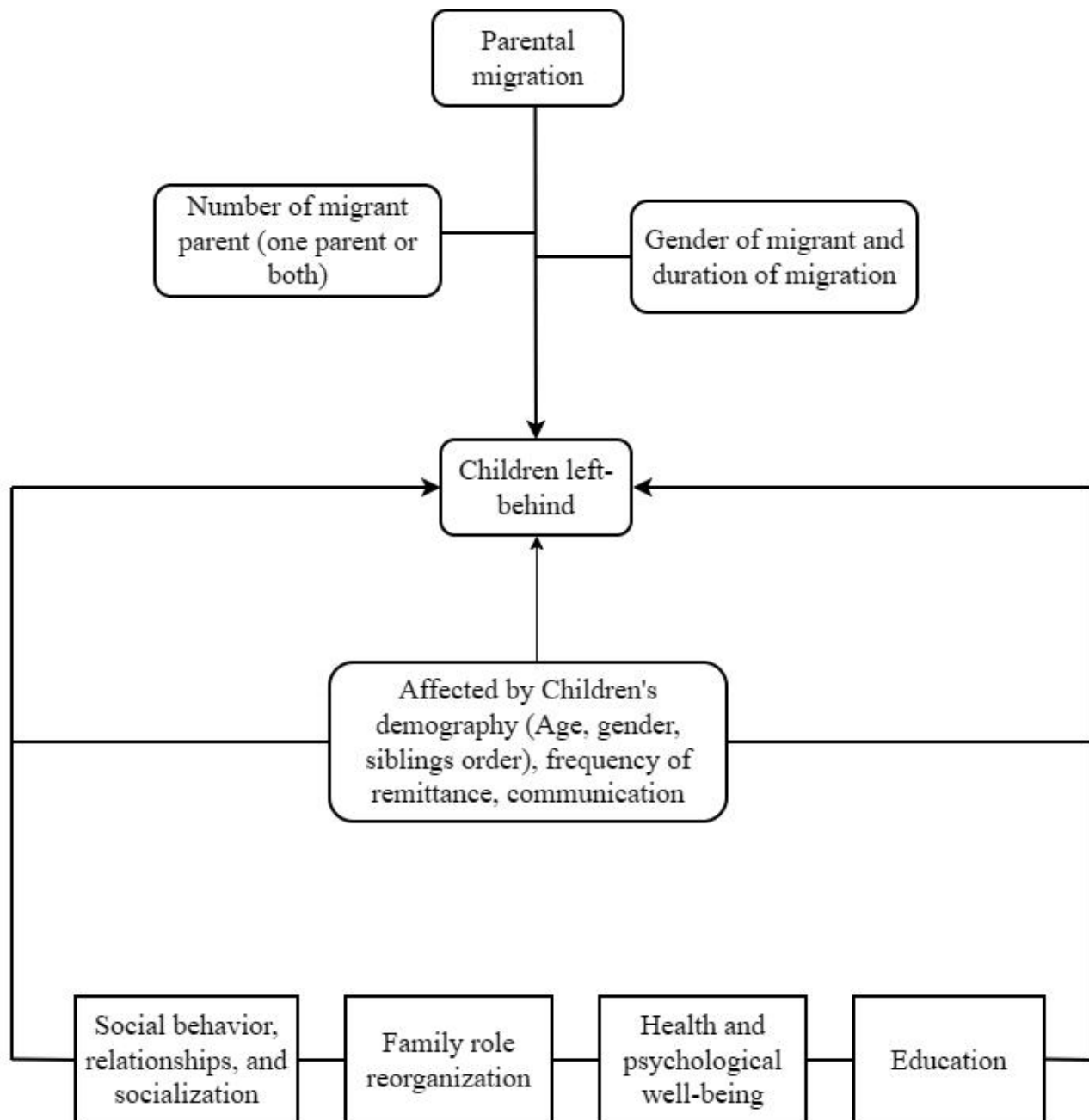


Figure 1. Developed by the author based on key findings from the literature

2.9. Summary of literature review

The literature was reviewed within the wider context of transnational families and care. Most research acknowledges that children left-behind can receive material and financial resources from their migrating parents, which have a positive impact on their educational achievement (Adams & Cuecuecha, 2010; Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2020; Bredl, 2001; Edwards & Ureta, 2003; Intemann & Katz, 2014; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Nobles, 2011). The detrimental consequences of parental migration on children's schooling were also reported (Carranza, 2021; Davis, 2018; Getnet & Abebaw, 2022; Halpern-Manners, 2011; Rubio, 2020; Skocheng et al., 2019; Ye & Murray, 2005). Most of what is known about the relationship between parental migration and educational outcomes is either from large data sets or from interrogating adults such as migrant parents or the caregivers in the country of origin. In this study, however, I approach the investigation of the hurdles that children left-behind experience in their educational trajectories through their own perspectives.

Studies have also identified the potential negative impact of parental migration on the health and well-being of children left-behind (Carranza, 2021; Cebotari & Dito, 2020; Dreby, 2010; Fellmeth et al., 2018; Getnet & Abebaw, 2022; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Ivlevs et al., 2019; Meng & Yamuchi, 2015; Nguyen, 2016; Ron, 2010; Turnip & Umami, 2019). Children of migrant parents are more likely to eat three times a day and visit private healthcare facilities than children of non-migrant parents (UNICEF, 2011). Children born into households in Mexico that receive remittances were less likely to face health risks at birth (Frank & Hummer, 2002). A study conducted by IOM and Save the Children (2017) reported that when controlled for income, children left-behind have less optimal height and weight measurements than children whose parents have not migrated.

Research on the impact of migration on children left-behind has yielded conflicting results. Studies are dependent on several factors of the children left-behind, such as gender, age, sibling birth order, gender of the parent migrant and number of absent parents, geographic location, access to social support networks, household resources, and the frequency and length of parental migration, which have consequences for the experiences of children who remain behind. Whether migration has a net positive or negative impact on the education, health, psychological, and economic consequences of children left-behind is context-specific (Antman, 2013; Crawley et al., 2023).

Based on the preceding empirical literature review, the following gaps are identified:

1) Existing research paints a mixed and ambiguous picture of the costs and benefits that parental migration has for children left-behind. This implies that further study is needed to better understand the impact of parental migration on children left-behind. Hence, the current study addresses a gap in the literature and contributed to a greater understanding of the impact of migrant parent(s) on the children left-behind from the children's perspective.

2) Numerous studies worldwide have been conducted on transnational migration and its impact on families left-behind. Studies on the well-being of children left-behind have focused on the stream of migration from Central America and the Caribbean to the United States (Antman, 2011; Abrego & Rossa, 2009; Carranza, 2021; Cortes, 2008; Dreby, 2006; Hu et al., 2018; Jerves et al., 2020; Nobles, 2011; Rubio, 2020) and similarly, from Southeast Asia to Europe, the Gulf States, and the United States (Gamburd, 2000; McKay, 2010; Pajaron, 2018; Parreñas, 2001, 2008, 2010; Pingol, 2001). This emphasis overlooks significant trends in transnational migration in other migrant-sending countries, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Ethiopia. The African continent has remained unexamined in the considerable literature on transnational

families. An aim of the current research is to bridge the geographical gap by investigating the perspectives and experiences of children left-behind in Ethiopian transnational families.

3) The existing research rarely obtains children's perspectives; rather, it is based on information gathered from adults. Researchers have explored migrant parents' agency in caring for their children at a distance. Yet how children left-behind perceive their lives as the children of migrants has remained under-researched. Most studies have not considered children as valid data providers. Data were frequently gained from teachers, caregivers, and other pertinent individuals in the children's local contexts. As Mazzucato and Schans (2011) and Ose et al. (2023) remark, transnational family literature consistently focuses on children through the prism of their parents. Shifting the focus to children's views is vital because it identifies how children's agency is intertwined with transnational family life (Graham et al., 2012). In Ethiopia, parents are the decision-makers for their children, which resonates with the notion that children lack awareness and are weak in knowledge, so they require adults' care and protection.

4) Most studies use quantitative methods and tools that were developed in the Western context (Antman, 2011; Chen et al., 2019; Dununsinghe, 2021; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Kharel et al., 2021; Kraus & Wojtas, 2021; Lu et al., 2020; Ng, 2019; Nguyen, 2016; Nobles, 2011; Shi et al., 2018; Vanore et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2019). These methods, however, might not accurately represent other cultural contexts. Although few studies attempt to capture children's perspectives (Olwig, 1999; Parreñas, 2001, 2005; Dreby, 2006, 2010), children's narratives must be perceived in their cultural settings, which makes culturally sensitive research fundamental. Since it is not possible to generate homogeneous remedies to the problems facing children left-behind, performing country-specific studies to determine the benefits and challenges of the children involved is essential and indispensable.

Generally, the aim of the current study was to investigate how children experience and understand parenting from a distance due to parental migration, including their interactions with physically nearby caregivers, and how children exercise their agency in their daily activities. The study also examined how children use ICT to communicate with their parents and explored how gender roles are redefined within the household. This study was different from previous research in that it used a qualitative research approach for an in-depth exploration of children's experiences and meaning making. A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design was employed to understand the lived experiences of children left-behind. There is a dearth of studies on children left-behind in Ethiopia, despite the alarming augmentation of international labor migration, with most of migrant parents leaving their children. Focusing on the unnoticed thematic and geographical areas of parental migration, this study seeks to address the existing knowledge gap in the literature.

2.10. International migration in Ethiopia

International labor migration is Ethiopia's most recent phenomenon. During emperor Haile Selassie I's reign, from 1930 to 1974 (Marcus, 1994), skilled urban technocrats were among the few Ethiopian emigrants who left the country for education and returned after completing their studies. With the subsequent political chaos and socioeconomic disasters that overwhelmed the country, the volume of migration has increased significantly since the mid-1970s. Apart from diversity visa (DV) migrants, who make up most Ethiopian migrants to the US, most were refugees who fled their country primarily in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to escape political persecution, famine, economic deprivation, and war. They left Ethiopia via neighboring countries and emigrated to North America, Western Europe, and Australia (Kefale & Zerihun, 2015; Teferi, 2016). The recent migration streams from Ethiopia are primarily for

labor migration as opposed to the previous flows that were primarily characterized by refugee migration (Kuschminder & Siegel, 2014).

Migration destinations: Currently, there are three central migration destination regions from Ethiopia. The first and most prominent is the Middle East. There is an increasing body of research on female emigration from Ethiopia primarily to the Middle East (de Regt, 2010; Fernandez, 2010, 2013; ILO, 2011; Kuschminder, 2016, 2017). The second key destination is migration within Africa, wherein the primary destination of Ethiopian migrants is South Africa. Ethiopians migrate to South Africa primarily for economic purposes (Horwood, 2009). Although south Africa is the destination country for some migrants, it is also used as a transit country for migration further afield, such as to the US, Europe, or Canada.

The third key destinations of migrants from Ethiopia is both North America and Europe. There are several important differences with this destination as compared to Africa and the Middle East. Migrants going to the North are more likely to be educated, migrate legally with documents, and have mixed reasons for migration such as study purposes or family reunification (Kuschminder et al., 2012). While irregular migration from Ethiopia to the North also occurs, precise figures are unknown.

Feminization of migration: The African women's migration to the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East is the latest development dating to the end of the 20th century (de Regt, 2007). Most migrating women are young girls or women with little or no knowledge of the inhumane working and living conditions of domestic workers in Gulf countries (Teferi, 2016). Nowadays, migration to the Gulf State is ill-famed among the urban population due to the well-publicized abuses and barbarous treatment of migrants.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has been importing migrant workers from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia for many years. While official numbers are limited, academics suggest that a larger proportion of Ethiopian migrants in the Gulf States are young women, who come from rural regions of Ethiopia and seek jobs as domestic workers (Fassil, 2017; Girmachew, 2017). Although female migration from Ethiopia to Lebanon began in the mid-19th century, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have recently become popular destinations for Ethiopian domestic workers. These workers have limited access to modern education and employment in their home country (Schewenken & Heimeshoff, 2011).

Most migrants are managed by Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) based in Ethiopia and destination countries. The migration of Ethiopian women to the Middle East as domestic workers is a critical issue for governments and international organizations. The prevalent narrative of this migratory route in international media, papers, and scholarly publications is predominantly negative because of exploitation and abuse, illegality, and risk. It is often said that young women and girls, uneducated and facing desperate economic circumstances, are deceived by the false promises of brokers into appalling work conditions, only to return to Ethiopia with broken spirits, perhaps broken bodies, and nothing in their hands (Abebaw, 2012; Fassil, 2017; Kubai, 2016; Jamie & Tsega, 2015; Reda, 2018).

2.11. Theoretical perspectives

Understanding the scholarly interest in children in migration studies requires considering the historical trajectory of children and childhood studies, as well as the dominant perspectives in this research field over time. For a long time, the globalized themes of cognitive and behavioral development and of socialization have held sway with regards to children's maturation. Children became an object of inquiry in the late nineteenth century, specifically in the fields of

developmental psychology and sociology. The work of James Mark Baldwin on the mental development of the child (1895) as well as Jean Piaget's research on children's cognitive development and thinking (e.g. 1936) brought major contributions to the early conceptualizations of childhood. In old sociology, children were not considered human, and rather, were viewed as human becoming. In the new social studies of childhood, children are people who change their lives and those around them.

Cognitive development theory (Jean Piaget): Biological imperatives of age underline a theory of child's development, as evidenced in the very influential Piagetian model of cognitive development within the discipline of developmental psychology. This linear development positions childhood as a universal concept because children are expected to traverse through similar channels of cognitive and behavioral development (Prout & James, 1997).

According to Piaget, intellectual development takes place through stages that occur in a fixed order, and which are universal as all children pass through these stages regardless of social or cultural background. He labeled these stages (1) sensorimotor intelligence, (2) preoperational thinking, (3) concrete operational thinking, and (4) formal operational thinking. Each stage is correlated approximately with an age period in childhood. Development can only occur when the brain has matured to a point of "readiness". According to Piaget, schemas, which are mental structures, contain all the information we have relating to one aspect of the world around us. We are born with a few primitive schemas such as sucking which gives us a means to interact with the world. These are physical but become mental schemas as the child develops. These schemas become more complex with experience (Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022).

Piaget suggested that all children pass through the sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete, and formal operational stages of development (Moreno, 2010). During the process of moving from one stage to the next, children's cognitive abilities qualitatively change (Sigelman & Rider, 2012). Piaget also believed that cognitive development is a continuous process, and that all children, notwithstanding different environmental contexts and cultural diversity throughout the globe, go through the same sequence of cognitive development (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2011).

Despite its Western orientation, middle-class contexts, and sense of universality, cognitive development theory is widely applied in practice and policy settings in education in the developing world (James & Prout, 1997; Rabindran & Madanagopal, 2020). The concept of development in child psychology was criticized for its lack of attention to the social and historical contexts of childhood, as well as viewing adulthood as the standard of rationality. Consequently, the assumption that childhood can be treated as a universal, biologically given phenomenon was questioned (Alanen, 1988). Piaget concentrated on the universal stages of cognitive development and biological maturation; he failed, however, to consider the effects of social settings and culture on cognitive development (Alahmad, 2020). Therefore, Piaget neglected cultural, educational, and social effects on children's cognitive development. Piaget did not evaluate children from diverse backgrounds to identify the stages of cognitive development. He examined only children who had formal education, compared to those outside the West (Lilienfeld et al., 2011).

Attachment theory (John Bowlby): Attachment theory is based on the belief that infants have an innate need to form an attachment with a caregiver for both security and survival and on the associated significant impact of separation from or loss of that caregiver on the child's

development (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton, 1992). Caregivers support children's social and emotional development and help them navigate stressful situations by fostering a sense of closeness, safety, and confidence. This helps children in their relationships with others as they enter adolescence, adulthood, and later in life (Juang et al., 2018). Various factors contribute to attachment styles including parental characteristics, child characteristics, relationship stresses, external stresses, and the availability or lack of social support (Bosmans et al., 2020). Children's interactions with their primary caregivers in general, as well as during stressful and upsetting situations, can impact how their relationships develop and function in the future (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2021).

Variability in the quality of caregiving is partly responsible for the development of four distinct attachment styles (Juang et al., 2018): secure, anxious/preoccupied, dismissive/avoidant, and disorganized attachment. The last three represent insecure attachment styles (Davis & Carnelley, 2023). Children with a secure attachment develop an internal working positive model of themselves and others (Manning et al., 2017), whereas children with an insecure attachment are characterized by a more problematic mental model of self and others (Kivlighan et al., 2017). Research indicates a correlation between insecure attachment and later mental health problems (Howard et al., 2023; Widom et al., 2018). For instance, Widom et al. (2018) reported that childhood neglect and abuse can have lasting effects on adult attachment style. The authors further noted that anxious and avoidant adult attachment styles contributed to understanding the negative mental health consequences of childhood neglect and abuse later in adulthood.

A critique of attachment theory is that it represents a Western middle-class conception of development with the primary goal of individual psychological autonomy and overlooks the ideals and practices of caregiving in much of the world (Keller, 2013, 2018). Whereas

attachment theory has focused on the monotropic relationships between the child and a caregiver, collectivistic cultures focus on the polytropic relationships that characterize relational sociocultural contexts (Keller & Otto, 2009; Keller, 2018). Unlike Western nuclear families that often correspond with attachment theory's assumption of the mother as the child's primary caregiver (Neckoway et al., 2007), families in many African contexts typically live as extended families and/or depend on a network of relatives to care for a child (Bornstein & Bradley 2003; Lewis 2005; Lewis & Takahashi, 2005; Meehan & Hawks, 2014). In many parts of Africa, maternal relatives and siblings often spend more time with a child than the mother (Rothbaum et al., 2002). These caregiving systems involving multiple caregivers are more common and represent collective environments in most African countries, which affects the nature of attachment (Keller, 2018).

Sociological theory (Talcott Parson): The sociological perspective positions the child as being in the process of becoming a desirable member of society. According to this perspective, children are viewed as natural, universal, and irrational; the child is perceived as becoming rather than being. According to Brannen and O'Brien (1995), the sociological view of the child regarded children as "incompetent" and "incomplete," as "adults in the making rather than children in the state of being." Social imperatives are critical as the child goes through the "process of becoming human" (Jenks, 1996, p. 13) through the lens of adults who are considered rational and competent, in contrast to the irrationality and incompetence assigned to children.

In sociology, socialization theory has been criticized as conventional (Alanen, 1988) because it considers children as passive and presupposes that the child is only in the process of becoming social—undergoing socialization (Dreitzel, 1973). Although socialization theory explains how children, born without knowledge of society's language or organization, become

inducted into the surrounding social worlds, it does so from ‘the adult ideological viewpoint’ (Speier, 1976; Thorne, 1987). This viewpoint has been labeled ‘an elitist perspective’ (Alanen, 1988, p. 58), i.e. from a position of power to those undergoing socialization—in this case, children. The concept of socialization was critiqued for regarding children as ‘not-yet-social beings’ and for to being inattentive to children’s active social participation and agency.

New social studies of childhood: In the 1980s and 1990s, a revolutionary view of childhood emerged, based on critiques of the inherent reductionism of childhood to incompetency, as well as the particularization of the Western model as the global ideal of childhood. This social constructivist approach is billed as a paradigm shift in childhood studies, which has led to the so-called "new social studies of childhood", which is a break from the orthodoxy of biological and social imperatives. This approach is antithetical to the dominant bio-social thinking in which the child’s progress and abilities are subsumed under those of adults. It foregrounds the child as a fully participating being who should not be objectified in the process of socialization (Honig, 2009). The new social study of childhood considers children not as passive objects of socialization but as social actors.

According to Knapp (1999), the new social studies of childhood emerged to give children a voice or agency, in contrast to the old sociology, which considered children as empty vessels waiting to be filled with adult qualities through socialization. Children are regarded as active participants with the ability to understand and affect their societies. Evidence is increasingly emerging on how children are conscious, thinking individuals who can shape their world in a variety of ways by reflecting on their situation and the options available to them at any given time. In this way, children actively construct their own worlds and realities (Matthews, 2007).

The new paradigm has established methodological approaches to studying children (James & Prout, 1990). The fundamental principles of the paradigm include: childhood is constructed socially; childhood should be a variable in social analysis; children's culture and social relationships should be studied regardless of adults' perspectives; children are understood to be active in constructing their own lives and the lives of others around them and society; and ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. The paradigm of childhood sociology meant engaging and responding to the reconstruction of childhood in society (James & Prout, 1990).

In summary, the previous perspective of bio-social thinking objectifies children as incomplete, incompetent, and passive who are not yet humans and considers them as 'human becoming'. As a result, children's perspectives have not been accounted for in research. Rather, adults were supposed to speak on their behalf. The new social studies of childhood, however, argues that children are social actors and thus acknowledges children's voices, experiences, and perspectives. It is considered essential for researchers and practitioners to value children's agency in making choices and shaping their lives. By recognizing children's voices and experiences, the social study of childhood challenges an age-old notion that considers children and childhood as incompetent and incomplete. The current study was also guided by this perspective to explore the lived experiences of children left-behind. Children were given room to narrate their experiences in the face of parental migration.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

3. Introduction

This chapter is organized into several sections. The first section focuses on the research paradigm that guided the study with particular emphasis on the constructivist paradigm. It then explains the research approach and the research design utilized. The third section explains the description and rationale of the study location. My positionality is described in the fourth section. Recruitment and sampling are discussed in the fifth section. Methods of data analysis, methods of ensuring trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are also described.

3.1. Research paradigm

No research is value-free. All studies include assumptions about the world and knowledge that informs the inquiries (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Qualitative research identifies or implicitly embraces, a philosophical stance to frame research. Thus, this research was guided by a constructivist paradigm, whereby reality is considered socially constructed and multiple. People are thought to make sense of their personal and social worlds differently. A particular phenomenon can therefore be understood only within the context in which it is investigated, and findings from one context cannot be generalized to another (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The epistemology of constructivism considers knowledge to be formed through social interaction. Constructivism recognizes the mutual influences between individuals and society in generating and sharing knowledge and giving subjective meanings to experiences. It acknowledges the existence of multiple realities, subjective meanings, and the dynamic nature of knowledge depending on the context (Golafshani, 2003).

By taking their research participants into account, constructivism gives direction to understanding human experiences. Research participants are invited to express their feelings and develop meanings of the phenomenon they experience. Researchers are expected to emphasize the perspectives of individuals and to describe and interpret their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dan & Dietz, 2008). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), in constructivism, people seek to understand the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences, and the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on participants' views about the situation. As the research questions for this study focus on the lived experience of children left-behind, an emphasis was placed on their subjective interpretation.

3.2. Research approach

To explore the central phenomenon, I employed a qualitative research approach. I chose a qualitative study over quantitative and mixed methods because quantitative studies emphasize measurement and analysis of relationships between variables rather than processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2015), which would not offer insight into the lived experiences stated in the research questions.

Qualitative research is informed by a constructivist ontology, seeing reality as complex, dynamic, and socially constructed. It allows researchers to present a complex portrait of a project and many different perspectives of individuals. It also allows researchers to listen to the actual words of the participants to better understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2016). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is a form of inquiry in which researchers interpret what they see, hear, and understand. The researchers' interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history, context, and prior understandings.

Qualitative research allows researchers to tap into the richness of children's thoughts and feelings about themselves, their surroundings and their world (Mishna et al., 2004). The constructivist paradigm dictates the use of a qualitative research approach to explore the multiple meanings of reality from the perspective of the research participants (Creswell, 2007). Thus, this study employed a qualitative research approach to examine children lived experiences in the face of their parent(s)' migration. A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design was used as it provides rich descriptive content from the participants' perspectives. The design was helpful in allowing me to elaborate on the experiences of the children who were left-behind. Accordingly, an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of children with migrant parents was conducted.

3.3. Research tradition: Phenomenology

I chose phenomenology from among the different research traditions because it is essentially the study of lived experience or the "life world" (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology emphasizes the world as lived by a person, rather than the world or reality as something separate from the person (Valle et al., 1989). Creswell (2016) explained that the phenomenological approach is one of the most effective ways of interpreting a person's or group's lived experiences for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and of expressing participants' accounts. As the current study is intended to understand the lived experience of children left-behind, a phenomenological approach is appropriate. The aim of the study was to provide a voice for children to narrate their lived experiences. Children were regarded as acting subjects who were experts in their own lives, capable of expressing themselves with insight and meaning in their own words.

Approaches to phenomenology: There are two approaches to phenomenology: empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology investigates the world in a pre-reflective approach and encourages the use of phenomenological *epoche*, which means 'bracketing', to understand the lived experience's true essence, and all preconceived ideas must be ignored. The basic interest is to discover and describe the 'lived world' (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology rejected the phenomenological *epoche* and considered the researcher as a vital component of research as 'Being-in-the-world' of the participant (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Heidegger argued that it is difficult for researchers to separate themselves from the world and to shade accumulated information and experiences as they are connected to society and share many things that bind them together. To use the words of Heidegger, the inseparability of individuals from the world (both social and physical world) is termed 'Being-in-the-World.' This inseparability from the world is in keeping with the social work concept of the person in context, and systems theories more broadly. Heidegger stated that the world and individuals are indivisible; no world, no being, and no being no world (Heidegger, 2000 as cited in Pascal, 2010).

According to hermeneutic phenomenology, realities vary across time, cultures, and individuals and are the product of textual interpretations constructed by researchers and research participants (McManus, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with understanding, interpreting, and verifying the veracity of human experiences, as well as taking its meanings, habits, practices, and skills that account for social, cultural, and political contexts (Benner, 2008; Freeman, 2008).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is preferred for the current study as it describes research as oriented toward lived experience (phenomenology) and to interpreting the “texts” of life (hermeneutics) (Creswell, 2007). The use of hermeneutic phenomenology enables exploration of participants’ experiences with further abstraction and interpretation by the researchers based on the researchers' theoretical and personal knowledge. Hermeneutics adds the interpretive component to elucidate meanings and assumptions in the participants' texts that participants themselves may have difficulty enunciating, such as tacit practice knowledge (Crotty, 1998).

Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology aligns with the objectives, research questions, and research philosophy and design of this study. The interpretive and descriptive aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology, its context-based and holistic approach, and its epistemological and ontological foundations are all critical to understanding the lived experiences of children with migrant parent(s).

3.4. Description of the study location

In every corner of Ethiopia, there is an unprecedented surge in the number of international labor migrants (Girmachew, 2018). According to the joint report of IOM and the Ethiopian Statistical Service (ESS) (2021), over the past five years, more than 839,000 Ethiopians have migrated to other countries in search of jobs and economic opportunities. Of these, 78 percent who migrated during this period were between 15 and 29 years, and nearly 31 percent traveled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, and Yemen were also other popular destinations. According to the report, migrants are both from rural and urban areas of Ethiopia and women took the lead in migrating to the Gulf States (IOM, 2021). Although there is no clear or official published document on the number of

migrants who leave their children behind, it is not uncommon to see children being cared for by their extended family members.

Addis Ababa and Adama have a considerable number of children living with one or both migrant parent(s) hence, the respondents were recruited from these two cities. Addis Ababa was founded in 1886 by Emperor *Menilik II* and his wife, Empress *Taitu Bitul*, and became the capital of Ethiopia in 1889. According to the Ethiopian Statistical Service 2024 population projection, 109.4 million people live in Ethiopia. The annual population growth rate has been estimated at 2.62%, with an average household size of 4.7 persons. The population of Addis Ababa was projected to be 5.7 million. The city is divided into 11 administrative sub-cities with over 100 *weredas* (lit. the lowest administrative units) (ESS, 2024).

Adama is a city in Ethiopia's central Oromia region. Located in the East Shewa Zone, 99 km southeast of Addis Ababa, the city sits between the base of an escarpment to the west and the Great Rift Valley to the east. It is among the densely populated, fast-growing metropolitan areas in Ethiopia. It had a total population of 356,344 (176,487 males and 179,857 females) with a growth rate of 6.8% from 2007-2016 (ASTU, 2017). Currently, its population has reached 509,738 (252,457 men and 257,281 women) (Adama City, Finance & Planning Office, 2022). According to the budget 2022 plan document data, children under the age of 15 make up 28% of the total population, which is 142,726. The document also states that the population grew at a rate of 5.3% from 2017 to 2021. Being the hub of manufacturing industries, hotel tourism, and other business transactions, its moderate weather conditions, and being the gate to the Ethio-Djibouti Railway, among others, make it one of the preferred metropolitan areas for living. People from different parts of the country migrate to the city for business transactions and job opportunities.

The aforementioned research site was found to be an ideal location for this study. While staying for my PhD in Addis Ababa, I found several children who were cared for by their extended family members and whose mothers typically traveled to the Gulf States. Adama is an urban area in which one can see many parent(s) migrate abroad to ensure the well-being of their children and families. I chose Adama because it is very close to Addis Ababa, and this helped me to travel regularly for data collection. In Adama, I also had a friend who facilitated and connected me with school principals. Since my friend was born and raised in Adama, he has been well-acquainted with teachers and school principals. He also had children learning in these schools and was a member of one of the school's parents' committees.

3.5. Positionality statement

According to Holmes (2023), locating the researcher with respect to the subject under investigation is one of the areas in which positionality is identified. My childhood experiences inspired me to select the topic of children left-behind. Between the ages of 12 to 17 years, I was without the care of my mother as she traveled to Saudi Arabia for work, with intermittent visits over the years. Before the rise of ICT, a landline telephone was used to communicate with migrant parents in Ethiopia. When I was a child, landlines were only available in a few homes in the vicinity, which meant I had limited ability to contact my mother.

To communicate with my migrant mother, there was a home we used, which has a landline telephone 30 minutes walking distance from our home. My mother would call and inform the house owner of the schedule when she would contact us, which the house owner would convey. On the scheduled day, all of us including, my father, grandmother, and siblings would gather and communicate with my mother, each taking turns speaking with her. As there was no way of contacting my mother, we would worry about when she would contact us again.

As she was not able to read or write, letter exchange was not possible. She did, however, send updated photographs of herself with individuals traveling from Saudi Arabia. Thus, transnational communication occurred infrequently over the months and years, which was typical.

In this study, my childhood experience enabled me to be passionate, understand the feeling of participants, ask the right questions and being patient with the study participants. In contrast to my experiences of being left-behind, conducting the study revealed to me how the proliferation of ICT, such as smartphones, significantly facilitates long-distance communication between parent(s) and children left-behind. Reflecting on the radical advances in communications in the past decades, I felt unlucky about the absence of mobile and smartphone communication during my childhood as such would have enabled me to connect regularly to my migrant mother.

3.6. Recruitment and sampling

Recruitment: Using a supportive letter from the School of Social Work, Addis Ababa University, I contacted two school principals to identify children living without one or both parents. In so doing, I identified two schools from which 16 participants were recruited. My friend in Adama informed me that in these two schools there were many children who were left-behind. Thus, I identified participants in primary and secondary schools through the cooperation of school principals. Addis Ababa was my temporary residence, and I easily accessed these children through friends and relatives.

The research inclusion criteria entailed children whose parent(s) were transnational labor migrants and who had been separated for at least one year at the time of data collection. This latter criterion was based on my belief that a minimum of one year is required to see changes or transformations in the reorganization of the family's roles in the household. Children from 12 to

18 years were selected because children of this age are more aware of and able to express themselves than younger children. They have an emerging ability to coordinate information from diverse perspectives, go beyond immediate appearances, and make logical references (Schave & Barbara, 1989). Only children whose verbal assent and caregivers' consent were obtained were included in the study.

One of the two school principals was willing to identify at least ten children and scheduled me to come after two days. The principals also informed me of arranging a platform to contact their caregivers to obtain their consent. After two days, the principal identified 14 children by asking for verbal consent from their caregivers. Based on my request, the school principal phoned the caregivers of the 14 children and requested them to come to school the next day. Of the 14, seven came to school, I met the children's caregivers in-person to introduce myself, explain the purpose of the study, and obtain written consent. I also explained to the children ethical issues related to conducting research, including maintaining data confidentiality, preserving informants' anonymity, and using the research for the intended purposes. I obtained the children's verbal assent to ensure their willingness to participate in the interviews. Interviews were conducted with seven children in June 2023.

Since the time was a final exam for the students, the principal of the second school informed me of the interview when the school opened after the summer vacation, because he believed that at the time of the exam, the children might not be free to focus on providing sufficient details to the interview questions. He asked me to remind him in October 2023, which I did. By December, he identified nine children, and we were able to obtain caregivers' consent and children's verbal assent, explaining the research purpose and other ethical issues. The

interviews were conducted in December 2023. Interviews with nine children were also conducted in August 2023 at Addis Ababa.

Sampling strategy: A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit a small number of participants. In purposive sampling, a researcher intentionally selects participants with specific characteristics or unique experiences related to the research questions. Purposive sampling is used when researchers seek to identify individuals or groups with knowledge, skills, or experience relevant to the research questions. The goal is to identify and recruit participants who can provide rich and diverse data to enhance research findings. Snowball sampling involves identifying a few initial participants who meet the eligibility criteria and asking them to refer others they know who also fit the requirements. The sample size increases as referrals are added, creating a chain-like structure. Purposive and snowball sampling involves the selection of information-rich cases to investigate a certain phenomenon (Hackathon, 1997; Yin, 2011).

Sampling at maximum variation was used. Maximum variation is a sampling method in which researchers attempt to collect data from the widest range of perspectives possible on a certain topic. The goal of this type of sampling is to gain an understanding of a certain topic from a wide variety of perspectives (Creswell, 2016). Through this sampling technique, children who were extremely different from one another in age, grade, gender, migrant parents' gender, and caregivers were included, to gain an in-depth and holistic view of the topic (Hackathon, 1997).

Participants in Adama were selected through purposive sampling with the support of school principals. Based on the inclusion criteria, the school principals identified the participants by moving from class to class. Participants in Addis Ababa were identified through snowball sampling. Participants of various ages, sexes, and grades were recruited for this study. A friend of

mine identified a child left-behind who lived in her neighborhood. The child then brought other children, including her sister. Using snowball sampling, nine children were identified. First, I explained the purpose of the interviews and requested the participants' willingness to participate. Subsequently, I contacted their caregivers and obtained their consent, and the interviews were conducted in August 2023. The full sample consisted of 25 participants (17 girls and 8 boys). The average age of the participants was 15.16 and the median age was 16. The average age at which their migrant parent(s) left was 7.17. The average duration the participants separated from their parent(s) was approximately 3.42 years.

Deciding the number of participants: In qualitative studies, there is no unanimous agreement regarding the number of participants to be included. However, researchers believe that the sample size should be small. For example, some scholars (e.g. Creswell, 1998) have suggested that the number of participants should be small sample sizes as it allows researchers to obtain an in-depth account of participants lived experiences. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), there are many approaches to determine the sample size in qualitative research. One approach to the sample size depends on the qualitative design used. For instance, narrative includes one or two individuals; phenomenology involves a range of 3–10; grounded theory, 20–30; ethnography examines one single culture-sharing group with numerous artifacts, interviews, and observations; and case studies include about four to five cases. Another approach is the idea of saturation, when one stops collecting data when the categories (or themes) are saturated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I used the principle of data saturation as a standard to determine the number of participants to be included in the study rather than deciding the number of participants ahead of data collection. In doing so, 25 participants (17 girls, 8 boys) who met the criteria participated in individual interviews between June and December 2023 in Adama and

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I stopped recruiting additional participants at 25 when the participants repeated what had been said by other participants, indicating saturation. I felt that I might not obtain new information by including additional participants.

3.7. Data collection

This study was conducted in Addis Ababa and Adama, where a significant number of children live without one or both parents. I developed an interview guide that asked about the participants' demographic profiles, their responses to the causes of their parent(s) migration, their emotional responses to their parent(s) migration, the impact of parental migration on their educational performance, role configuration at the household level, the role of ICT in parent-child relationships, and hopes regarding living with their migrant parent(s). I conducted all the interviews myself, which enabled me to build rapport with the participants and capture children's feelings.

Interviews were conducted in mutually agreed-upon physical settings and times.

Amharic and *Afaan Oromo* were the two languages used for interviews in Addis Ababa and Adama, respectively. I conducted interviews with nine individuals in Amharic in Addis Ababa and sixteen in Afaan Oromo in Adama. My proficiency in these languages gave me a deep understanding of the perspectives and experiences of individuals of different ethnic origins.

I stopped collecting data when I believed that the research questions were adequately answered, and when new codes and themes no longer emerged in the analysis process. Privacy and the absence of noise were essential criteria for determining a suitable place to conduct the interviews. During the interviews, COVID-19 protocols set out by the Ethiopian Ministry of Health were strictly followed, which included wearing face masks, washing hands, and social distancing.

The first set of questions inquired information about children's demographic data, including age, grade, main caregiver, siblings, migrant parent(s) gender, age when their parent(s) migrated, and the country their parent(s) left. The second set of questions explored the experiences of children after their parent(s) migrated (see Appendix A).

Based on the verbal assent of the participants, a digital audio recorder was used during the interview. Data were stored on a password-protected personal computer that was accessible only to me. I also developed backup copies of computer files, and high-quality recording devices were used for audio recordings of the interviews. The average duration of the interviews with the children was between 15 and 45 minutes. In addition, I wrote field notes describing the participants' physical appearance, facial expressions, and emotions, as well as my feelings, reflections, and observations. Three rounds of interviews were conducted in Adama and Addis Ababa between June and December 2023. I also conducted telephone interviews with the participants using their caregivers' phones to clarify any inconsistencies in their responses.

During the interviews, I attentively listened to the children's narration and avoided leading questions. I bracketed my prior childhood experience and courteously listened to, observed, and took notes on the entire situation of the interviews. I wrote thorough explanations of my personal biases and childhood experiences in a notebook. According to Giorgi (2009), bracketing is about preventing prior knowledge from influencing present experiences rather than attempting to forget what has already occurred. Therefore, in a different journal, bracketing was completed by reflecting on the entire data-gathering and analysis process. I avoided formulating and posing leading questions that would reveal my preconceptions. The findings of the study were also interpreted in line with existing literature and theories.

I preserved courtesy to make the participants feel relaxed and to help them feel comfortable sharing their experiences. I offered chocolate to the participants to build rapport. The participants took the lead by narrating their perspectives and experiences of being left-behind. My role was to pose questions, use probes to evoke more information and take notes alongside the tape recording. Non-verbal communication, such as body gestures, facial expressions, and emotions of the participants were captured by field notes. In qualitative research, participants and researchers collaborate to create knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, I believe that knowledge should be the outcome of co-creation between the researcher and participants rather than the interpretation of events by one party alone. In this instance, study participants were considered co-authors in addition to being data suppliers.

During data collection, I encountered several challenges. A glaring challenge was the lack of sincere cooperation among school principals in recruiting study participants. However, my good friend in Adama, whose child was learning in the schools, and who was on the ‘parents’ committee’ of the schools took me to the school principals and explained the purpose of the study, after which they cooperated. My friend asked me to give a 500 ETB incentive for each principal. Thus, they were able to collaborate and easily identify the participants by moving from class to class.

Another challenge was that the children were not ready to spend much time in the interviews, and they became bored immediately. However, I offered them chocolate at the beginning and during interviews to offset their tedium. I initially conducted two interviews in an empty classroom in the school; other children came, opened the door, and disturbed the interviews, putting the interviewees in uncomfortable conditions. I then told the principal about the situation, and in the next interviews, the school principal arranged for the interviews to take

place in his office. I also found the office uncomfortable as many teachers were coming and going in search of the school principal. At another time, the school principal allowed me to use the office at the students' library, where I found it safe to conduct interviews.

In the first round of interviews, the school principal arranged for participants who had exams in the afternoon to attend interview in the morning. In another school, based on the experience in the first school, I requested that the school principal arrange the office of the library assistant for me, and I received a positive response. He asked selected children who had classes in the morning to attend school in the afternoon for interviews.

In the second phase of the interviews, in December 2023, I lost my audio recorder on my way from Addis Ababa to Adama. I then started interviewing the children and writing their responses in my notebook. My good friend brought me his audio recorder, and I continued using it in the interviews. Although I tried to interview my mobile phone, I did not find the sounds clear or audible.

3.8. Research instruments

The forms of data collected in a phenomenological study are diverse and can range from one-on-one interviews to an eclectic array of data sources, including observations; documents, such as poems and written letters; and music and sounds. The critical question to answer is, "How are people experiencing the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2016, p. 549). To do so, I used semi-structured interviews to explore and understand participants' perspectives and experiences in depth. Moreover, field notes were used as a supplement to capture participants' emotional and non-verbal signs.

Semi-structured interviews: Qualitative research explores the complexities of human experiences, perceptions, and meanings. Semi-structured interviews are one of the data collection

instruments used in qualitative research, which helps gather in-depth insights from the participants. Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews provide a flexible framework that combines predetermined questions with the freedom to explore emergent topics and probe deeper into participants' thoughts and experiences (Mack et al., 2005). Semi-structured interviews uncover rich narratives, personal insights, and contextual details that may not emerge in more standardized interview formats. The open-ended, non-directional, and descriptive nature of semi-structured interviews allows for a holistic understanding of the research topic and captures the complexity of human experience (Creswell, 2007; Mack et al., 2005; Ritchie & Lewi, 2003). Thus, the interview tool was designed in a semi-structured format, making every question open-ended to encourage the participants to share details of their experiences. I began by asking major questions and continued probing. The interviews focused on the current lives of the children and their feelings regarding their parents' migration. The interview tools helped me to understand the lived experiences of the children left-behind.

During each interview, I took notes that included my general reflections on the participants' reactions, such as questions about which they felt uncomfortable responding, and my assumptions about the factors underlying the discomfort, body gestures, voice tones, and facial expressions. I produced 15 field notes, which were later incorporated into the interview transcripts. I began collecting data in June 2023 and continued until December 2023.

3.9. Data analysis

Data analysis is an ongoing process that involves analyzing information provided by participants, through general analysis steps found within a specific design. More general steps include organizing and preparing the data, an initial reading of the information, coding the data, developing a description and thematic analysis from the codes, using data analytic programs,

representing the findings in tables, graphs, and figures, and interpreting the results (Creswell, 2016).

In this study, data analysis was started after all data were collected and were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a qualitative approach that aims to thoroughly examine personal experiences. It generates an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions. It is explicitly idiographic in its commitment to examining the detailed experience of each case before moving to more general claims (Peat et al., 2019). IPA is a meticulously idiographic and hermeneutic phenomenological approach that aims to illuminate how people make sense of their lives. This type of qualitative inquiry can help researchers create insightful interpretative accounts of experiences and better understand and highlight important issues (Peat et al., 2019).

IPA uses both descriptive and interpretive processes to better understand the lived experiences of participants (Creswell et al., 2016). IPA considers the perspectives of the study participants and researchers in data analysis and interpretation (Fade, 2004; Kalof et al., 2008). Although Moustaks's (1994) steps are rooted in descriptive phenomenology, I adopted some elements for data analysis as it is procedural, systematic, and easy for data management. The first step involved interview transcription. Soon after data collection was complete, I listened to the interviews several times and transcribed them verbatim into Afaan Oromo and Amharic. As I am proficient in Amharic and Afaan Oromo, I was able to transcribe it, which helped me remember the emotional experiences, facial expressions, and feelings of the participants. One hundred and fifty pages of transcription were produced from the interviews. In addition, I have produced 15 pages of field notes. I then translated the transcripts into English.

After I prepared the data for analysis, I read it to gain a general sense. I then went through the text line by line, and wrote down the words and phrases that best represented the participants' narratives in connection to the research questions on the left margins of the transcripts. The participants' voices were then coded using descriptive words. In so doing, 45 codes were initially identified. I went back and forth through the transcripts to ensure that I correctly classified the raw data. During the process, I made improvements, added some codes, and removed others. Although it was advisable to use data management software such as NVIVO to manage the data, manual coding and theming were used. This manual coding allowed me to better acquaint myself with and control the interview data.

I reviewed three interviews with a colleague to ensure the quality and consistency of my coding, and no significant difference was found. I also shared the codes with my principal supervisor and we amended the codes and established themes. This resulted in condensing the 45 overlapping codes to 30 by merging repetitive and overlapping codes. The codes were then collapsed into themes, with eight interacting and overlapping themes identified: children's perceptions and understanding of parent(s)' migration, the gendered nature of parental migration, emotional responses to their parent(s)' migration, mixed effects of parental migration on children's educational performance, shifts in living arrangements after parental migration, children's relationships with their caregivers, ICT-mediated parent-child relationships, and hopes regarding living with parent(s). These themes were subsumed within an overarching theme titled; *parental migration shapes and permeates children's lives and identities*.

I then wrote a composite description from the textural or structural descriptions that present the essence of the phenomenon, labelled the essential, invariant structure (or essence). In this step, I analyzed the themes in a general description. The composite description did not rely

on the experiences of a single participant but on those of the participants in the sample group. The findings were presented, explained, and interpreted thoroughly in a separate chapter during the final step of the data presentation. To better explain the meaning of the data, tables were also used.

3.10. Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, researchers endeavor to ensure trustworthiness. Credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability criteria are vital for assessing trustworthiness and methodological rigor (Lincoln, 1995). I ensured that each of these criteria was met.

Credibility: Credibility is defined as the degree to which the research represents the actual meanings of the research participants, or the "truth value" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement, member checking, and reflexivity are powerful strategies in enhancing credibility (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004). I took enough time (seven months) in my research environment to collect data, which enabled me to understand the settings and central phenomena. Prolonged engagement allowed me to develop relationships with the children, thus developing trust and understanding. Triangulation techniques can be used to clarify meaning by identifying multiple and in-depth perspectives of the phenomena (Umanailo, 2019). Multiple interview sessions are considered credibility checks in a qualitative study. A second round of interview sessions was conducted with some participants for clarification due to inconsistencies in the data collected in the first session.

Member checking, which involves engaging participants entirely in the knowledge construction process, was also used in the data collection process to ensure accuracy. While interviewing, I took short notes on what the interviewees said, in addition to audio recordings. Member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the

final report or specific descriptions back to the participants and determining whether they felt that they were accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, I conducted member checking with the participants at the end of each interview using summarized data from their own interviews to enhance credibility. In doing so, I confirmed that what the participants said was their “voice”.

A reflexive technique was used to ensure the credibility of the research. Reflexivity acknowledges the researcher’s professional background, biases, opinions, and personal relationships that may affect the objectivity of the study (Walker et al., 2013). In a separate reflexive journal, I documented my personal biases, prior knowledge, and experience related to the topic under investigation and the entire process of data collection and analysis.

Transferability: Transferability refers to how sufficient contextual information is provided regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Anney, 2014; Tracy, 2010). Transferability was ensured by providing a “thick description” of my results. I have included detailed narrations of each child's experiences with parental migration, my interpretations, and the findings' consistency and inconsistency with existing empirical studies. The summarized findings of the study can be transferred to a group of children who share similar characteristics with study participants in urban areas. Peat et al. (2019) label this structure resonance; others with similar experiences are invited to comment on the findings, focusing on whether the findings resonate with them. In so doing, I shared the summarized findings with five children in Bahir Dar whose parents migrated abroad. Of the five children, two had migrant parents who migrated to the USA and three to Saudi Arabia. Hence, the children expressed similar life experiences to those in Adama and Addis Ababa.

Confirmability: Confirmability refers to the extent to which the results can be considered objective and satisfy the standards of trustworthy research (Lincoln, 1995). I have enhanced the

confirmability of the study through reflexivity and debriefing. Reflexivity and peer debriefing are the two primary strategies used to ensure conformability. Peer debriefing allows professionals outside the context who have some general understanding of the study to comment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To this end, two of my colleagues from Ethiopian Civil Service University and Arsi University were debriefed to examine my study's methodology, transcripts, data analysis, and report. The debriefs provided substantive content on the coding, theme formation, and ethics of the study.

Dependability: Dependability refers to the reliability of data interpretation. It is preserved using a research approach and specific methods that include an appropriate strategy for collecting and analyzing data to answer the study's research questions (Anney, 2014; Collingridge & Gantt, 2008). I believe that a qualitative approach involving phenomenology is suitable for answering the study's research questions. The active roles of participants and researchers in knowledge construction were demonstrated, and dependability was ensured through triangulation and a code-recode strategy in the data analysis process.

3.11. Ethical considerations

Researchers must anticipate ethical issues (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Writing about these anticipated ethical issues is required to argue for a study. According to Israel and Hay (2006), researchers must protect research participants, develop trust with them, promote the integrity of research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions, and cope with new, challenging problems. Ethical questions are apparent today in issues such as personal disclosure, authenticity, and credibility of the research report, the role of researchers in cross-cultural contexts, and personal privacy issues through forms of Internet data collection (Israel & Hay, 2006).

According to Mishna et al. (2004), a qualitative study of children can present unique ethical issues. For example, while issues of capacity to consent and perceived freedom to refuse participation should be considered in all research on human subjects, children's cognitive abilities and power differentials between adults and children require special attention. I focused on the issues arising during the research and took reasonable precautions to ensure that children would not be harmed by participating in the research by keeping their identities confidential.

Before conducting fieldwork, I sought a supportive letter from the School of Social Work at Addis Ababa University. A critical ethical consideration in research involving children is the level of risk to which children are exposed. The term risk refers to the potential harm (physical, psychological, or social) that may arise from research. Researchers should pose more identifiable risks of harm (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Accordingly, the children were informed that their involvement in the study would be confidential and voluntary. Confidentiality is critical because disclosing information can endanger children and their rights. Accordingly, I ensured that all information solicited from the participants was kept with strict confidence and treated anonymously using pseudonyms. In Ethiopia, anyone under the age of 18 years is legally considered a child. According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Science and Technology's National Research Ethics Review Guideline (2015), assent should be sought from a study participant under the age of 18. Assent was a child's affirmative agreement to participate in this study. The guidelines further state that informed consent from a parent or caregiver must be sought. I prepared an informed consent letter (see Appendix C) to the caregivers that detailed the researcher's identity, research purpose, privacy protection, contact address, and right to decline participation.

Overall, the study was performed in a child-friendly manner, respecting children's choices, encouraging their participation, and protecting them from harm. The site and time of the interviews were mutually decided by me and the children; assent was sought on whether to have the interview recorded; and children were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time. The school guidance and counseling staff was notified and prepared to assist if any emotional or psychological disturbances arose during the interviews. Fortunately, no such incidents occurred. While conducting the study, I made the children feel respected. I also emphasized the shared status of being students to reduce the distance between me and the children and make an equal dialogue possible. Participants were told they could skip any questions. Moreover, I ensured that the study findings reflected participants' actual experiences. The secondary sources that were used in the study are duly acknowledged and recognized.

Chapter Four: Findings

4. Introduction

The main purpose of the current study was to examine the lived experiences of children with migrant parent(s) in urban Ethiopia. A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design was employed. To this end, 25 participants were interviewed in Adama and Addis Ababa. The current study provided a voice for the children left-behind to narrate their lived experiences. The basic research questions that guided this study were as follows:

- 1) How do children perceive the migration of their parent(s)?
- 2) What are the emotional responses of children to parental migration?
- 3) What are the educational effects of parental migration on children left-behind?
- 4) How do children experience life with arranged caregivers after parental migration?
- 5) How do children left-behind perceive ICT intervention in their transnational family life?
- 6) How does parental migration affect the dreams and aspirations of the children left-behind?

This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first section provides participants' demographic characteristics, including sex, age, grade, caregivers, siblings, age when their parent(s) left, places where their parent(s) migrated, and reasons for parent(s)' migration. The second section presents a glimpse of the major themes and subthemes within an overarching theme entitled; *parental migration shapes and permeates children's lives and identities*. Within this overall theme, the first subtheme addresses how children perceive and understand the causes of their parent(s) migration. The second subtheme focuses on the gendered nature of parent(s) migration. The third concentrates on the impact of parental migration on children's emotional well-being. The mixed impact of parental migration on children's educational performance was identified as the fourth subtheme. The fifth subtheme discusses changes in living arrangements following

parental migration. The sixth subtheme describes the children's relationships with their arranged caregivers after parental migration. The role of ICT in transnational relationships was described in the seventh subtheme. Finally, the children's hopes regarding living with migrant parent(s) were described.

4.1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Twenty-five participants (17 females, 8 males) who experienced parental migration during their childhood, participated in individual interviews between June and December 2023. All participants were between 12 and 18 years at the time of the interview. The majority (14) reported that their mother had migrated, whereas six stated both parents had migrated and five stated it was their father. Of these, 21 migrated to the Gulf States, three to the United States, and one to Belgium. Participants expressed various perceptions of the reason for their parent(s)' migration. The largest number of participants (10) indicated that their parents migrated abroad due to extreme poverty in their country of origin. A few participants (6) reported that mothers migrated to the Gulf States after their husbands' deaths, whereas others (6) explained that mothers migrated after divorce. A few participants (3) said that their parent(s) were invited by relatives abroad.

Nine participants were born in Saudi Arabia. They explained that due to the high costs and tuition fees in Saudi Arabia and their parent(s)' wish to have their child(ren) educated in English rather than Arabic, these participants returned to Ethiopia. Both parents of three participants remained in Saudi Arabia and sent their children to Ethiopia. Four participants explained that they returned to Ethiopia with their mother while their father remained in Saudi Arabia; a fifth returned with their father while their mother remained abroad. One participant who had been living apart from her mother in Saudi Arabia returned to Ethiopia with both

parents. The participants whose parent(s) migrated were typically left in the care of other family members (mother 5, father 5, grandmother 5, aunt 5, uncle 2, older siblings 2, cousin 1). Just over half of the participants (13) explained that their migrant parent(s) visited intermittently, whereas just under half (12) stated that their parents had not visited since they left. Of this latter group, one participant whose mother migrated when she was a baby, had never met her mother.

The participants' age when their parent(s) migrated ranged from six months to 16 years. The vast majority had not seen their migrant parent(s) for over five years, with fewer having seen their migrant parent(s) within the past five years. Over three-quarters (21) of the participants wanted to reunite with their parents in Ethiopia and lead a "better life", and a small minority (4) wanted to reunite with their parent(s) abroad.

4.2. Overall Theme: Parental migration shapes and permeates children's lives and identities

The participants described experiencing various forms of parental migration: maternal, paternal, or both parents. Across the interviews, parental migration was revealed to have many significant effects in shaping and permeating the participants' lives and identities—their emotions, education, and living arrangements. After they experienced parental migration, participants underwent complex life experiences and trajectories, with participants expressing mixed responses and feelings. The majority believed that parental migration had detrimental effects on the emotional and psychological well-being of themselves and their siblings. Concurrently, participants expressed feeling grateful for the remittance their parents sent them, which provided essentials for the children, such as school uniforms and educational items. Reflecting their complex responses, participants described the significant loss associated with parental migration. As expressed by Afework, "my mother used to respect and love me so much.

I lost the love and respect of my mother.” Another consequence of their parent(s) migrating, which exacerbated the emotional challenges participants faced entailed having to move to other households.

The migration of parent(s) emerged as having a mixed effect on participants’ educational performance. Many participants explained that in providing remittances, gifts, and paid tutors for the children left-behind, parental migration facilitated their education and that of their siblings. The effects of a mother’s migration emerged as considerably more difficult for the participants and as negatively affecting education performance. It was revealed that with maternal migration came significant shifts in the household and the roles assumed by the children, typically with extended family members caring for the children left-behind and, in some instances, elder siblings taking on the care giving role. In other circumstances, due to increased finances because of remittances, household domestic workers were hired. A finding consistent with the participants’ depiction, there was a greater impact when it was their mother that migrated, is that all the participants preferred that their father rather than their mother be the parent to migrate.

The proliferation of ICT, such as smartphones and social media applications for example WhatsApp, IMO, Telegram, and Viber, radically shifted transnational relations and the ability to communicate. Currently, technology-mediated communication significantly increases child-parent communication, thus shifting the nature of physical distance. The participants described using various communication media. Participants reported that with respect to parents who migrated, they communicated more often with their mothers than with their fathers. The findings revealed that all participants hoped to reunite with their parents; some wanted to join their parents(s) abroad, whereas others wanted their parents to return to Ethiopia, which they thought would lead to a “better” life.

4.2.1. Theme 1: Perceptions and understanding of parent(s)' migration

Participants reported a wide variety of reasons for parental migration. Participants' consent was not obtained when their parents migrated. However, some migrant parents informed their children regarding the reasons for their migration. Across the interviews, economic hardships stood out as major contributing factors.

“To improve our lives”: While discussing the reasons they believed their parent(s) migrated, participants attributed as the main reason for migration as their parent(s)' desire "to improve our lives" (Zakir). The participants poignantly discussed the dire circumstances that led to their parent(s)' migration. For example, Hayat, whose father died when she was an infant, said her mother migrated to Saudi Arabia to support herself and her grandmother. Hayat stated that when she asked her mother to return to live and work in Ethiopia, her mother responded, “How can I teach you and support my mother? You have nobody else to support you except me.” Similarly, Firtuna recollected a challenging life before her mother migrated. Tracing her memory back seven years, she eloquently identifies the factors behind her mother's migration to Bahrain:

We lived in rental in Addis Ababa. The cost of living was dramatically increased.

Sometimes my mother did not afford to pay for the rental house. Thus, my mother borrowed money from her close friend and traveled to Bahrain in search of a better job. She informed me that she would travel abroad to earn money and lead better lives in the future. I was a child at the time, and I did not know what life looked like abroad. I could not stop her from migrating.

Another participant, Zakir, stated that before migrating, his mother “could not fulfill all our basic needs. However, after she left, my mother was able to send the money we needed.” This participant added that before his mother's migration, he and his sibling each “had one

school uniform,” whereas, after she left, “we used to have three school uniforms, which was not affordable for most of our friends at school.”

Some participants did not know exactly when their parent(s) migrated and why they had not visited them. For example, Firtuna stated:

I do not remember exactly when my mother left for Bahrain. However, I recall that my mother left when I was around a third-grade student or nine years old. I have not met my mother physically since then. I am unclear why my mother did not visit us intermittently. I have not thought that she will stay all these years. [Firtuna was disappointed and unable to explain the reason, and she said, ‘It is better to ask her’].

Another participant whose mother migrated reported that before his mother left “there was a low life and a low income” (Dagim). According to Marina, her parents, who had migrated, did not plan to return to Ethiopia. She stated, “They told us to continue our education in Ethiopia and then send us to Europe or the United States for further education in the future.” Similarly, Afework indicates life before and after his mother left for Dubai. He narrated:

The main factor in her [mother's] departure was poverty, and my mother needed to make life better for me and my grandmother. Before my mother moved to Dubai, she worked in various private supermarkets in Addis Ababa. After going to Dubai, she was able to purchase a house in a rural area. She went as a domestic worker in Dubai. However, she told me that she started her own small business, opening a shop in Dubai, which was exciting.

According to the participants, economic reasons or the willingness to change their lives and their families who remained behind were the major reasons for the migration of parent(s).

However, specific circumstances, such as divorce, forced mothers to leave for the Gulf States to raise their children and support other family members who remained behind.

4.2.2. Theme 2: The gendered nature of parent(s)' migration

I asked participants about their preferences regarding the gender of their parents that migrated. All participants supported their fathers' migration rather than that of their mothers. Although all participants were eager to live with both parents, they said that if one parent had to migrate, they preferred that their mother stay and live with them. The participants whose fathers migrated while their mothers remained with them, described their remaining family as a nuclear family, despite father's absence.

In Ethiopia, because of the existing patriarchal mindset, fathers are considered the breadwinners of the household, and mothers are children's nurturers. In explaining the preference that their mothers stay, the female participants reasoned that their mothers educated them about kitchen work and how to socialize regarding gender roles and expectations. For example, Dagmawit supported her father's departure: "My mother stays at home and teaches me everything that a woman or girl would do. It is the mother who educates children, especially daughters, on household duties and shapes girls into kitchen work." Mariamawit also indicated that "mothers would manage households and discipline children because the father does not stay home." She asserted, "after my mother left, the younger siblings did not listen to or respect their older siblings. My father does not manage this because he is busy with many duties outside the home."

Some participants required their fathers' presence for safety and security. It is believed that the presence of a father or male figure is a deterrent to pillage and felony in the community. For example, Dagmawit, who lived with her mother and female siblings, underscored, "most of

the time, we feel lonely because our father, who is a house figure, is absent. We fear robbers and thieves.” Halima said, “I prefer my father to go abroad rather than my mother because the mother will not let her children down, even if she gets remarried. But our father believes that his second wife [stepmother] treats us like our biological mother, so he is not heedful to us.” Halima was not happy with the treatment she received from her stepmother, explaining that her stepmother usually insulted her.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Emotional responses to parent(s)’ migration

Parent(s)' migration was revealed to have a striking impact on children's emotional well-being. Most participants had been living with their migrant mothers. Many lost their fathers due to death or divorce. Divorced fathers remarried another woman and lived in other places. Children experienced feelings of loneliness, sadness, and “emptiness”. Others experience mixed feelings: they feel sad because of their parent(s) absence; yet, they relish the financial support (remittances).

Feeling lonely: The feeling of loneliness and sadness is one of the major emotional consequences that participants experienced in the absence of their parent(s). Participants expressed feeling "empty" because they missed parental love in their lives. In particular, the absence of mothers had adverse effects on participants that they found could not be compensated by remittances. For instance, Hafiza's mother traveled to Saudi Arabia, and her father was not alive. To overcome life challenges, her mother had left her at her aunt's house for over five years. She felt lonely and thought that her mother's affection and love for her had diminished. She expressed, “I was feeling outrageous for not spending time with my mother. I feel lonely and deeply sorrowful. I feel as if something is missing from my life.” Similarly, Zakir said he needs his mother's presence, especially on holidays. His mother traveled to Dubai soon after divorcing

his father. He expressed that on holiday; he felt lonely and sad because of his mother's absence. He said, "I would be delighted if my mother lived with me." Nuredin, whose father was in Saudi Arabia and who was under the care of his mother, feels bad about his father. He felt lonely and complained to his father for not occasionally visiting him. He expressed:

I do not know exactly what my father is doing in Saudi Arabia. I do not understand why my father traveled, but I ask my mind why he does not visit us intermittently. My father did not contact me when he was traveling to Saudi Arabia because I was a child at the time.

Feeling acute pain in comparison to friends' parental relationships: Study participants experienced pain and envy during parental migration. They felt angry while observing their friends, walking and enjoying themselves with their parents. For instance, Jemila had never seen her biological mother, and her father passed away when she was a baby. Soon after her father's death, her mother remarried and traveled to Saudi Arabia, leaving her with her sister. Hence, the participant grew up under the care of her aunt. She grew up seeing care given to her friends by their biological parents, and noted, "I am covetous of them [her friends]. I usually see mothers hugging their children and doing domestic chores on their own." While narrating her experiences, life seemed dismaying to the participant, and she expressed feeling disappointed. She was unwilling to talk much and was in deep grief and anguish. She frequently paused with teary eyes while speaking. She was introverted and did not have the courage or confidence to speak.

Dagim, whose father died, had not seen his mother for over nine years, expressed his dissatisfaction with his grandmother's and uncle's care, and felt the earnest need for his mother's love and care. He relayed:

I feel depressed when my friends go to church and school with their parents. I need my mother's presence. I am dissatisfied with my grandmother's and uncle's care. My grandmother has not replaced my biological mother. There are also frequent disagreements when I come late at night to watch soccer with my friends. They tell me to come early.

Some migrant mothers leave their children in the care of their fathers. According to participants, however, fathers do not substitute for mothers' roles because fathers leave home early in the morning and come late at night. For example, Sekina expressed, "My father is living with me, but he woke up early in the morning to work and came late at night. Accordingly, I spend solitary time at home." The participant also noted the acute pain she experienced while observing her friends' lives. She stated:

While noticing my friends' happy moments with their mothers, I feel unlucky. When I was lonely, I did not have anyone to talk to. I felt as if I missed something in my life. However, when I was with my mother, I was happy and excited. I talked to my mother, and she talked to me. When I quarreled with my friends, my mother treated me well.

Even when I was crying, she used to console and soothe me. I always need the presence of my biological mother beside me because I feel that I am protected from danger.

The participant explained, "it is joyful to live together with one's parents. Life is better with one's parents, despite poverty. Parents' love is much better than living a luxurious life with the money they send back home."

Paternal absence also emerged as having being difficult, despite the mother's presence, and was more pronounced when they observed their friends with their fathers. For instance,

recollecting the memory of her life in Saudi Arabia, where all family lived together, Afomia expressed:

I am ill-fated to live without my father. While my friends hugged and walked with their fathers in school, I interrogated myself about my father's absence. I feel livid when my friend's father guides their children about their education and tutors them on homework and assignments. Some fathers buy candy for their children from shops. I wish that my father lived with us, and I remember my family's happiness. While we were in Saudi Arabia, my father came at night buying bananas, apples, and orange juice. While leaving for work early in the morning, he used to give us a kiss on our forehead.

Afomia felt deep sorrow when the school ordered students to bring their fathers during Parents' Day. She feels uncomfortable when she sees her friend's father. The participant's family was, however, like a nuclear family, except for the father's absence. She lived with her mother and siblings in the absence of extended family members in the household.

'Why is your father not coming? Has he married another woman?': Participants described finding it emotionally challenging to live without the presence of parent(s) due to comments they regularly encountered from the community and friends. They explained that the reactions from their friends and neighbors often reminded them of their parental absence. For instance, friends of Eldana often asked her, "Why is your father not coming? Has he married another woman?" Hayat experienced a similar situation. Her friends often asked about her mother, for instance, "Why did she [her mother] leave you?" and "why did she [her mother] not come? to which she had no answer. Zalika also stated that friends and neighbors bothered her by asking about her mother's whereabouts. Similar questions disturbed Firtuna. She expressed:

Our neighbor sometimes asks me, 'Do your mother call you?' 'Is she fine?' 'Does she ask you?' These questions sometimes worried me. However, most of my friends understood that my grandparents are my parents. My uncle and aunts are my siblings. But my close friends who know the issue ask me, 'Does your mother send you money and clothes?' I then showed them the iPad and clothes that she sent me.

Mustefa's friends, unlike other participants, did not ask him about his mother's whereabouts. He explained, "My friends and neighbors do not ask me about my mother's absence because every neighbor has at least one family member who migrated abroad. I also did not talk to my friends about my mother's absence."

Providing emotional support to their migrant parent(s): Another striking finding is that some participants described focusing on the emotions of their migrant parent(s), rather than their own. For example, Firtuna stated, "I was thinking of my mother because she had lost her children's love. My mother feels lonely when I do not call her. Sometimes, she cries. I advise her not to cry and to remain strong." Another participant Semira, commented:

When we came back to Ethiopia, our mother was disenchanted, for she had been detached from her children. However, I stayed a little bit with my mother to console and treat her as the eldest daughter of the family. Even, she got sick and was admitted to the hospital for a while.

Another participant, Hafiza, who lived with her aunt expressed worry about her migrant mother. She stated, "After my father passed away, the burden of raising me fell on my mother. I feel pity for my mother. She has been caring for me as a father and a mother." Firtuna also did not want to pressure her mother by asking to send her clothes and money because she had heard that life in Arab countries is unpleasant and "evil-looking". What she had seen and heard in the

local media about Ethiopian migrant domestic workers in the Gulf States was tormenting. Employees' abuse and death were frequently reported, which made her worry about her mother's well-being.

Hayat also expressed concern for her mother. For instance, she wanted her mother to marry again. She stated:

My mother is 31 years of age. I consider my mother as a friend, and we talk about everything openly and honestly. I frequently advise her to remarry because I need siblings. However, she [her mother] replied, 'If God wills,' I told her to come [...] I need my mother to take a rest. She spent all these years abroad raising me. But now I must pay her off.

Mixed feelings of parental absence: love vs money: Some participants experienced mixed feelings about their parental absence. They wanted the presence of their parents; however, they were pleased with the financial support they received. They even consider their mothers' travels to be a positive gesture. Participants believed that their mothers' subsequent financial support enabled them to complete their secondary and tertiary education; yet, they were not pleased with losing their mothers. Participants believed they received remittances from migrant mothers at the expense of their mother's love and affection. For instance, Afework, whose mother left for Dubai in 2012 soon after divorce, experienced mixed feeling about his mother's absence. The participant stated:

My mother is a source of income for me and my grandmother. I am glad that my mother sent me money, and I am not suffering from money shortage. She sends us money monthly and sometimes weekly. Regarding my feelings about my mother's migration, I have mixed feelings. Sometimes I feel sorrow, and sometimes I feel happy. I feel sad

because I have not found my mother around me, and nobody is giving me the love of a mother. My mother used to respect and love me so much. I lost the love and respect of my mother. Life was incomparable when I was with and without her. Something is missing from my life. I lost my mother's love, and I am eager to regain it.

Another participant, Mustefa expressed:

I perceived my mother's travel as a positive gesture because I completed my educational journey with the remittance I received from her. I attended my primary and secondary education with the financial support of my mother. My mother's financial and emotional support has always been with me. Had it not been for my mother's financial and moral support, I would not have completed my primary and secondary education.

Sometimes, having a family abroad is considered a sign of "wealth" and "prestige". For example, after the departure of his mother to Dubai, Afework's social status within his friend's circle increased. He narrated:

My friends and neighbors expressed to me that I would be wealthy buying houses and cars in the future because of my mother. Thus, my friends respect me and that makes me happy. They believe that I will reach the highest standard of living. Yet I feel depressed when I see my friends walking with their parents. I feel that I would be like them if my mother was around. Sometimes, money does not matter, and the love of a mother is greater. Better to have the love of my mother than getting money.

Other participants (Marina and Dagmawit) similarly observed that their friends at school considered them "wealthy" and "rich". They added that their friends expected the participants to invite them for food and coffee in school and after school.

4.2.4. Theme 4: Mixed effects on children's educational performance

Most participants reported that because of their parental migration their educational performance decreased, one-third commented that there was no effect, and a minority believed their educational performance increased.

Decreased educational performance

Some of the study participants relayed the negative effects of parental absence on their educational achievements. Participants gave various reasons for their poorer educational performance. Reasons frequently mentioned included, role reversals in the household, emotional preoccupation, lack of supervision and support, and involvement in income-generating activities.

Role reversal: After parental migration, role reversal in the household level became imminent. Children, especially older siblings, often serve as caretakers for younger siblings. For example, Semira, whose parents were in Saudi Arabia, was in the role of a parent figure for her siblings. Their cousin, who lived with them, was quite busy and unavailable. She relayed, “My main duty is to manage my siblings so they can attend school, do their assignments, and study hard.” The task of managing the household had significantly affected her own educational performance. This participant described herself as a “medium” student and believed that if her parents were with her and took on household responsibilities, her educational performance would improve. Similarly, Mekdes expressed:

I am responsible for managing all responsibilities at home. I manage the money sent by my parents and regularly purchase household items. I ranked 10 out of 40 students. This was attributed to the responsibility that I assumed, which made me very busy.

Jemila, who had not seen her mother throughout her life, lived in her aunt's home, who had an 8-year-old son and a 6-year-old daughter. Jemila was responsible for bathing the children

twice a week, and was busy with various domestic duties, such as cleaning the home, looking after her aunt's children, and washing their clothes. She had no time to study or play with peers or friends. She narrated:

I leave for school early in the morning, usually without breakfast. When I returned from school, I began to prepare a meal for lunch, but my aunt did not help me prepare a meal. Every domestic chore is on me. If I do not perform domestic duties, my aunt will beat me severely. She [her aunt] usually eats breakfast after going to school. When I returned from school, I prepared meals and lunch together. She then leaves for a mini-market. Nobody assists or tutors me in my education. I do not have the time to do homework or assignments.

Emotional preoccupation: Few participants were emotionally preoccupied with their migrant parent(s), which negatively affected their educational interest. For instance, Hayat, who was living in the care of her ailing grandmother described:

I have lost my focus on education. While I am attending class, I engross myself in the deep thinking of my mother. I do not pay attention to the classroom lesson often [...]
Local media and social media platforms frequently talk about domestic workers' deaths and horrible situations in the Gulf States.

Currently, Hayat is not interested in education due to her mother's ongoing absenteeism. Her mother was unwilling to return without significant or better money in her hands. Her mother told her to focus on education. However, she was not interested in life because her mother had been suffering in other countries, which made her feel guilty. Hayat expressed: "I told my mother to drop my schooling if she would not come; that is, my decision. Because of this, I

stopped communicating with her. She asked about me calling my grandmother and uncle's children.”

Participants whose parents had migrated to either Europe or the United States said they had no interest in pursuing education in Ethiopia, as they hoped to join their parents in Europe or the United States to continue their education. As Hanur said, “I lost focus on my education because my dream is only to go to the USA.” Halima, who lived with her father and stepmother, explained that when her mother was with her, she used to concentrate on her education. She was an active student in her class and was among the two best students. After her mother's migration, she was among the top ten students in her class. She noted that "this reduction could be attributed to my mother's deep thinking. I am seriously thinking of her."

Lack of supervision and support: Several participants reported doing less well in school due to a lack of support and supervision by caregivers. For example, Dagim, whose mother traveled to Saudi Arabia nine years ago, reported doing poorly in his education. He was under the care of his grandmother and uncle, whom he described as uncaring. He narrated, “There was no supervision of my education. I do not meet my uncle because he leaves home early in the morning and arrives late at night. He does not speak to me about my education.”

Although Zakir was able to graduate with a diploma after his mother left for Dubai, his educational achievement decreased because his mother used to advise him to concentrate on his education and supervise him to study, do homework, and assignments. However, following her departure nobody is taking about his education. Similarly, Jemila had no one to guide her through her education. She did not have adequate time to study and do assignments. Munira also experienced a significant reduction in educational performance after parental migration. She said:

My mother used to tutor me every day. After my mother's departure, I studied by myself.

My eldest siblings are busy with their studies because they are grade 12 students preparing for the national school-leaving certificate exam. Thus, I believe that my mother's travel has lowered my educational achievement.

Involvement in income-generating activities: Some participants were engaged in income-generating activities, which negatively affected their study time. They involved in income-generating activities to support themselves financially and fulfill their needs.

During their summer vacation, participants engaged in woodworking activities while being employed in their neighboring areas. For instance, Dagim, a grade 11 student who was supposed to prepare himself for the national school-leaving certificate examination, engaged in carpentry to support himself financially. He expressed, "During summer, I began carpentry around my house to get some money rather than sitting idle, which enabled me to buy personal care products such as perfumes and other cosmetics. I will also use the money to entertain myself and my friends." Similarly, Zakir used to generate income to assist him and his family. Both participants expressed that the remittances sent by their mothers did not cover all their desires and this had a serious impact on their educational achievements. Zakir asserted:

Now, I have grown up and am working in woodwork, being employed in one of my friends' homes. We work together to create various tables, shelves, and wooden beds. As a result, I earn 5000 Ethiopian birr (\$91 per month). I have developed working wood skills, and I plan to start on my own.

Positive effects on children's educational performance

Parental migration has a positive effect on children's educational performance.

Remittances and gifts, paid tutors, and hired domestic workers were commonly noted as helping

children to perform better in their education. The migrant parent(s) financial strength also helped families hire tutors for children left-behind. Moreover, various gifts, such as iPads, clothing, shoes, and laptops, have assisted children in performing better in their education.

Remittances and gifts: Remittances allowed most participants to purchase educational items, such as books and other materials, and ensured that the children did not go hungry. For instance, Zakir stated that before his mother migrated, he and his sibling each “had one school uniform,” whereas, after she left, “we used to have three school uniforms.” Similarly, Zakir attended and completed his diploma program with financial support from his mother. However, he now needs the presence of his mother. Previously, she had to go abroad and support him and his siblings. But now “she should come back, and I am ready to support her.”

Migrant parents also sent gifts that helped them pursue their education. For instance, Firtuna stated, “The special gift my mother sends me is that she provides me with an opportunity to pursue my tertiary education. My father also pays tuition fees for my education.” Participants also received various gifts such as clothes, shoes, cellphones, laptops, etc., which could help them in their educational endeavors, particularly for those who were learning at the college level. For instance, Firtuna stated, “My mother sent me some money to buy a laptop computer. My brother paid the remaining money, and I bought a laptop computer to help with my education.” Remedan likewise noted that the gifts that his father sent encouraged him towards his educational performance. He stated, “Our father frequently sends us extraordinary gifts when we score high marks and become ranked students in a class. My father sends me cash, and my mother buys me a smartphone when I rank first in the classroom.”

Paid tutors: Migrant parent(s) hired a tutor to help the children left-behind to help with their education. For instance, Dagmawit expressed:

My father employed a tutor for me and for my siblings. I perform well in my education. I am among the best students in my class. There was no difference in my educational achievements before and after my father's departure. My father also sent us money via my mother to buy various books, cell phones, and clothing for me and my siblings.

Hired domestic workers: Sometimes, migrant parents (s) hire domestic workers for families left-behind. The domestic worker performed domestic chores, including cooking, washing clothes, compounds, and dish wares. Children are expected to concentrate on education. In some families, the oldest daughter or female caregiver performs these domestic duties, which has a detrimental effect on educational performance. Eight of the interviewed children had domestic workers at home. For example, Zeyineba relayed, "All the responsibilities reside with the domestic worker. Sometimes, it is our responsibility to assist her [the domestic worker]." Similarly, Remedan described, "The domestic duty rested on hired domestic workers who perform all the housework duties like cooking, washing clothes, cleaning compounds, etc." However, now, his mother was planning to quit and let the domestic worker go, as there was no money that they could pay her because recently his father had lost his previous job in Saudi Arabia and he was searching for another. Munira also reported the existence of a hired domestic worker at home who supported them in cooking food and preparing meals. She said:

Our parents hired domestic workers to help us. As a result, we have few responsibilities at home other than studying. However, I prefer that my parents be with us, as they allow us to be free and play with our friends. We also fear that our parents may hear our behavior, so we should keep our good name from tarnishing. Our mother strongly

advised us not to go outside. When they were with us, we could go wherever we wanted with consent.

After their mothers migrated, some participants' families experienced robbery by a domestic worker. For instance, Mariamawit indicated that "soon after my mother left for Saudi Arabia, the house worker became a robber, taking all the materials from home while we were at school. If my mother had been present, such a robbery would not have happened."

Semira also narrated:

Domestic duties are performed by hired domestic workers who cook meals, wash clothes, and do laundry. Our parents are responsible for paying domestic workers and covering household expenses. My main duty is to manage my siblings so they can attend school, do their assignments, study hard, and pay school fees, electricity, and water bills.

Other children left-behind did not have a hired domestic worker, which forced the children, especially older ones, to perform household tasks, which, in turn, had a serious effect on their educational performance. For instance, Marina stated, "As there are various domestic duties at home, my sister and I do not have much time to concentrate on education."

Table 1. Participants' responses to the impact of parental absence on their education

Impact of Parent(s)' Migration on Education	Number of participants	Participants
Education negatively affected	14	Hayat, Jemila, Mekdes, Dagim, Halima, Semira, Marina, Sekina, Afomia, Mariamawit, Hanur, Munira, Hafiza, Zeyneba
Education promoted and	4	Firtuna, Zakir, Mustefa, Eldana

positively affected		
No effect on education	7	Zalika, Teklu, Afework, Habiba, Dagmawit, Remedan, Nuredin

No effect on educational performance

A few participants reported that parental migration did not affect their educational performance or achievement. For example, Afework stated, “I was among the top three students in my class before and after my mother's migration.” He was a Grade 11 natural science student who planned to attend university in 2024. He was confident about attending one of the Ethiopian public universities and pursuing an undergraduate degree in sports sciences.

Despite her parents migrating, Habiba was among the top students in her class. She said, “My parents’ migration does not affect my educational performance. I am the best student and always stand first in my class.” She received tutoring by her older siblings and extended family members who occasionally visited them during her studies.

Remedan, who lived with his mother and siblings, also stated that his father's absence did not contribute to his educational performance. Ramadan, a sixth-grade student, always stood first in his class, and he also tutored his siblings. Similarly, Dagmawit, who had a migrant father and caring mother, did not see any difference in her educational achievement because of her absent father. The participant's family had domestic workers who could cook meals, clean houses, and wash clothes.

4.2.5. Theme 5: Experiences of shifts in living arrangements

Divorced or widowed mothers usually travel abroad to earn money to support their children and family remained behind. These mothers leave their children in the care of extended family members or close relatives. In some instances, the migration of mothers forced children to

move from one household to another. This happens in cases of inconveniences with the arranged caregivers. Thus, migrant parent(s) arrange for another caregiver, which might have adverse effects on children's social and emotional well-being. After their parental migration, children may undergo shifts in caregivers, households, and schools.

Shifts in caregivers and associated challenges: After parental migration, a few participants described moving across several households. For example, soon after her mother migrated to Bahrain, Firtuna lived with her mother's friend, where she encountered profound challenges. Specifically, she was put in charge of caring for the friend's child and described being "abused" and "mistreated". She explained, "After my mother traveled, my mother's friend's behavior completely changed. She forced me to take care of her child. By the time I was nine years old, I did not even know how to take care of a kid [...] I always felt starved. I ate bread that lasted for a week or more."

Firtuna also talked about having lost the freedom to communicate with her mother: "[...] when I spoke to my mother, my mother's friend listened to me. She did not want to hear the complaint I would present to my mother." It was therefore difficult to inform her mother about her life situation. Even when she wanted to visit her aunt who lived nearby, her mother's friend beat her severely. Firtuna was able to meet her aunt in person at a school ceremony and at that time, told her about her situation. Her aunt then traveled to Addis Alem, a few kilometers from their city Addis Ababa, and brought her father. The next day, Firtuna moved to Addis Alem with her father. Firtuna completed her primary and secondary education while living with her father, which went well. As her grades were not sufficient to enter pre-university or preparatory school, her mother paid for her to pursue her education at a private college in Addis Ababa. The

participant was attending college during the interview, and described herself as, “lonely, living in a house that my mother bought.”

Firtuna's father had been married to other women and had children before marrying her mother. However, after her mother, her father did not marry again. The experience of living with her father was stimulating and enabled her to learn about her father's love. She considered him a source of inspiration and he regularly advised her to be a better student and to have a dream in life. Her father raised her just like a mother and father would. In the meantime, when she was in grade eight, she lived with her aunt for six months and then returned to her father's home because her aunt's husband was not interested in her staying with them. She realized that this created frequent disagreements between her aunt and her husband and returned to her father.

Hayat similarly described her experience of moving from household to household. For some time after her mother migrated, she lived with her father's sister, a home in which there were several children. Following her grandmother's return from Saudi Arabia, this participant's mother, who remained in Saudi Arabia, insisted Hayat live with her grandmother. Happy at her aunt's home, the participant stated, “I was wretched and felt unhappy when my mother requested me to live with my grandmother. Also, my aunt and cousins were not happy with my leaving. We all cried.” Hayat's mother implored her however, explaining that her grandmother was lonely. According to Hayat, her mother told her, “My mother and your grandmother should not live alone. She has nobody else except you and me.” Hayat had no option other than to obey her mother. Unfortunately, living in a home in which there were no other children was unbearable for Hayat. She explained, “it was hard for me to adjust to living with my grandmother and I was feeling distressed for some time. I missed playing with my aunt's children at night and we also

used to study together.” She continued to visit her aunt and cousins regularly, which offered her comfort and relief.

Likewise, Hanur, whose parents were both in the USA, joined another large family of his aunt, who had many children. He was in deep torment for being left-behind. His parents recurrently promised to invite him to the USA soon, but this had not yet occurred. Either he needs his parents to come to Ethiopia or he needs to go to the United States. In his words, Hanur expressed:

I think of how long I will live without my parents. This has always come to my mind. I feel like I am not equal to my friends or peers. My neighbors always ask when I go to the USA and join my parents. I do not focus on my education. I feel depressed, remembering my parents. My friends try to console me not to be saddened and feel lonely. They advised me to be patient and at times invited me to their home to play with them.

Felt home with grandparents; did not know mothers: Some participants left by their parent(s) when they were infants or young children described having no or little sense of their parent(s) because they had not experienced life with them. For example, Zalika expressed:

I have no sense of my mother. I do not remember life with my biological mother. I am happy with the life I have been going through. I feel that my biological mother might not give me care and protection like my grandparents. I feel that my siblings do not give me care, love, and support like my aunts and uncles do.

Zalika recognized that she had many siblings from her father, born from another mother. She had not seen them thus far, and there was no communication. However, her half-sister Firtuna visited her occasionally. Zalika and Firtuna are sisters, and due to their parents’ divorce and their mother’s subsequent travel to Bahrain, they are growing up in separate households.

They became followers of different religions, with the former adhering to the Christian religion and the latter to Islam. In expressing communication with her mother, Zalika relayed:

My mother brought me an iPad, clothes, and a laptop computer. She sent me money through my grandmother and aunt. The laptop was bought in Ethiopia by sending me money. I did not request her to do something. I could obtain whatever I wanted by asking my grandfather. Although my grandfather did not want me to pressurize my migrant mother, she [her mother] pesters me to do a favor. I then told her to buy me a laptop. She did this because she felt guilty. She said to me that 'for a long time, I did not search for you' and to avoid the possible hatred from me, she is comforting me by doing this.

When children are left in their early years, they consider their caregivers "mom" and "dad." Some informants considered their grandparents to be mothers or their uncles to be fathers because they only knew their caregivers, especially when their biological mother stayed away for a prolonged period without intermittent visits. Most did not remember the time they spent with their mothers and only knew their caregivers. Mustefa, whose mother had left for Saudi Arabia when he was 11 years, was unable to compare life with and without his mother, as he did not remember life with her. He was raised by his aunt and uncle, whom he regarded as mother and father, respectively. Similarly, Teklu considered his caregivers to be fathers and mothers. He reported, "I consider my grandmother a mother and my uncle a father." Hayat also said, "Although I do not have siblings, I consider my aunt's children as my siblings because we have grown up together."

4.2.6. Theme 6: Relations with extended family members

Most of the fathers remarried after divorce. There was no communication between their fathers and children, including phone calls. Hence, the task of caring for children falls on

extended family members and distant mothers. Absent mothers from home crumble the nuclear family and push children to join other families, thereby creating extended families. Extended family members play a vital role in supporting family members who remain behind. Some play a vital role in regularly visiting children in their households. Others join families left-behind and serve as caregivers. Hence, it is common to see children left in the care of their grandmothers, aunts, cousins, eldest brothers, uncles, and fathers.

Grandmothers: Most of children were left in the care of their grandmothers. In particular, grandmothers carry the burden of raising their grandchildren, despite their ailing age and other illnesses. Although it was time for grandmothers to rest and be cared for by their children, they were tasked with raising and looking after their grandchildren. According to the participants, most grandmothers were in their 70s and 80s, making it difficult for them to move and care for their grandchildren. Most participants considered their grandmothers to be their mothers. Hayat expressed that her grandmother was a source of inspiration for her. She has been doing everything herself. "I consider my grandmother to be my mother." Hayat did not want her grandmother to perform the domestic duties because of her grandmother's age. Thus, she cares for her grandmother. She said, "I carry all responsibilities at home. As soon as I returned from school, I would cook and wash clothes; everything would reside with me. I do not want my grandmother to do domestic duties because she is old and tired."

Dagim, who was being cared for by his aging grandmother and unaffectionate uncle, expressed dissatisfaction with the care and treatment he received from his grandmother due to her age. His grandmother had been fulfilling his needs by selling items at a mini-market in their surroundings, but stopped doing so because of her age. He expressed:

After my mother leaves, there has not been adequate care I have received from my grandmother because she is old and tired. I wash my clothes myself. My grandmother tries her best to cook a meal that remains difficult for her. My uncle works as a daily laborer, and he is a mason.

Contrasting Dagim, Teklu's grandmother was a bit strong and could cook food for him. He also had a caring and attentive uncle who bought him school materials such as exercise books, school uniforms, pens, and pencils. Although his elderly grandmother was around 80 years, she still struggled to fulfill his needs. Teklu also had a married sister who had frequently visited them. He described:

My grandmother cooks for me, and I wash my clothes. My grandmother suggested to me to practice washing clothes as I might lead a lonely life in the future. I also assisted my grandmother in cooking. I supported her in buying household cooking items from shops and mini-markets.

The case of Afework was like that of Dagim. Although Afework enjoyed walking with his mother, he did not enjoy that kind of experience with his grandmother. His grandmother was old and occasionally ill. As a result, she is unable to fulfill his interests; rather, she relies on him for various services. Afework stated:

My grandmother and I do not cook food at home. My grandmother was too old to move around and cook food. I also do not have cooking experience. Thus, I always buy food from hotels. My mother, on the other hand, plans to hire a domestic worker at home who can assist us in cooking and washing clothes. We have a washing machine at home, and the responsibility of washing clothes rests on me because my grandmother is too old to do so.

According to Afework, he lived with his grandmother by sharing love to each other. He stated:

I have been living a lovely life with my grandmother. I come home early, which does not create a disagreement with my grandmother. Since she is alone, I have to come home early. I am also obedient to and respectful of my grandmother's instructions.

Aunts: In most cases, participants are in the care of their aunts, typically their maternal aunt. While some aunts treat children with greater love and care, others do not. The participants had strong objections to their aunts' care. For example, Jemila was not satisfied with the care provided by her aunt. She also protested that her aunt had not arranged a way for her to communicate with her mother. She expressed:

Despite my interest in meeting and communicating with my mother, my aunt was not ready to do so. She said to me, 'Do not ask me about her [Jemila's mother]; there has not been any communication between me and your mother.' My aunt is unwilling to connect with my mother. I have not even come across them when they talk to each other. I am afraid to ask my aunt why they have not been engaging in phone communication because I feared that she might be offended.

Unlike Jemila, Mustefa had a caring and loving aunt. He lived with his uncle and aunt, as well as his cousins. He had always been supported by his aunt's children in washing clothes and cooking meals. As a result, Mustefa considered his aunt to be his mother and her children to be siblings. He stated:

My aunt has also been giving me care like a mother, and I also consider her a mother. It is difficult to call her aunt, because she has taken care of me for the last 16 years. I also consider the children of my aunt as siblings since we have grown up together. I am satisfied with the treatment that my aunt has provided me [...] There was also some

disagreement with my aunt. Disagreements arose when I arrived late in the evening. They sometimes forbid me when I was going to watch movies with my friends. My mother has a strong faith in my aunt and uncle. She had no doubt about my safety and security.

Hanur was not satisfied with the care given to him by his aunt, because of the intense supervision he received. He reported:

She [my aunt] did not replace my biological parent. I receive intense supervision from my aunt, and she does not allow me to go outside and play with my friends. There is strong disagreement with my aunt when I want to play with my friends.

Fathers: A few of the participants (5) were left in the care of their fathers. However, fathers were not available most of the time, leaving home early in the morning, and returning in the late hours of the night. For example, Halima's parents were divorced, and her mother traveled to Belgium. Her mother left her with her father, who was married and had children. She expressed:

When my parents divorced, I lived with my mother for some time. She then traveled to Belgium for work. Life was comfortable when living with my mother and father.

However, my stepmother was not as attentive to me as my mother. For example, my mother regularly counseled me to focus on my schooling and to study hard. However, my stepmother is not advising me like my mother. So, I am extremely disappointed with not having my mother beside me. When my mother was present, she took me to recreational places, but I felt uncomfortable going to with my father. I feel more comfortable walking and moving with my mother than with my father.

Mariamawit and her siblings were left with her father. She, however, feels frustrated living without a mother, because she feels that nobody can take the place of a biological mother. Her father was a government employee who regularly left for fieldwork for days, weeks and months. However, when he was present at home, he took her to the market and bought all necessary materials. Her father also encouraged Mariamawit and her siblings to focus on education. He advises and instills confidence in them. Similarly, Zeyineba, who was left in the care of her father, expressed, “my mother used to tutor me. My father is busy and going to work as far as Dire Dawa, so he does not tutor me at all.”

Older siblings: Older children serve as surrogate or pseudo parents. Although parents arrange some sort of caregiving from extended family members, there are instances when arranged caregivers are not able to carry out their responsibilities. In such circumstances, older children undertake the responsibility of managing households and caring for younger siblings. For example, Semira, whose parents were in Saudi Arabia, was tasked with serving as a parent figure for her sibling. Sometimes, their cousin lived with them; however, cousin was quite busy. She narrated:

I became the parent of my younger sibling. I provided them with what our parents used to supply them. I bathe them regularly, wash their clothes, and occasionally prepare food. My cousin, who lives with us, sometimes takes care of and treats us well. However, he was infrequently present. Domestic duties are performed by hired domestic workers who cook meals, clean compounds, and do laundry. Our parents paid for domestic workers and covered household expenses. My main duty is to manage my siblings so that they can attend school, do their assignments, study hard, and pay school fees.

At school, Semira registered herself as an immediate caregiver for her siblings. Whenever her siblings are asked to call a parent in school, she talks to teachers and school principals.

Whenever her siblings quarrel with other children in the neighborhood and are asked to call their parents, she is the one to discuss issues with the parents of her sibling's peers. Semira found this to be a serious responsibility. Semira also connected her siblings to their parents, who were living abroad. She noted, "When my younger siblings yelled and screamed to contact our parents, especially our mother, I made a callback request call on the phone of our mother. She then comforts them by promising to send them various gifts from Saudi Arabia."

As Mekdes and her siblings also lived with an inconsiderate and unaffectionate uncle, she took over the task of managing the households and siblings. However, Mekdes is not the oldest; she is the second-eldest daughter in the family. She expressed her life experiences as follows:

Although we live with our uncle, he does not help us. He had a room and sleeps there. He had no interest in living with or talking to us. He is a super-busy man who builds a house and has other personal projects. As daughters, it is frightening to live without men.

Sometimes, our uncle provides us with money when we run out of it until our parents send it to us. I will then reimburse him. He doesn't dine with us; he eats at hotels. He does not care whether we study, do homework, or complete assignments.

According to Mekdes, they are frustrated when their uncle did not sleep in the house with them.

Their uncle's primary responsibility was to report any misbehavior or ill-discipline to their parents. He also arranged a vehicle that transported them from the school to home. Mekdes and their siblings were not allowed to go outside without valid reasons or permission from their uncle.

According to Mekdes, there were no conflicts with their caregivers, and he provided them with

support, especially regarding financial issues. The uncle rarely came around, so they asked him only for money when they were done.

4.2.7. Theme 7: ICT-mediated parent-child relationships

ICT emerged as prominent in connecting participants with their migrant parent(s). Parent(s) who migrated to find better labor market opportunities were able to maintain close contact with their families that remained behind in general and particularly with their children. The overwhelming majority of participants had access to smartphones with various social media applications. In addition to sending clothes as gifts, the migrant parent(s) often sent their children smartphones, iPads, and laptop computers. Through these information and communication technologies, the participants connected with and received emotional support from afar—their migrant parent(s).

Mixed responses to ICT communication: The overwhelming majority of participants had access to ICT, which was made available by their migrant parent(s). Most participants had the latest and most expensive smartphones. Participants used diverse forms of social media applications and platforms through which to communicate with their migrant parent(s), with IMO being the most widely used. The most common reasons were the clarity of the sound and the excellent quality of the videos. Telegram, WhatsApp, and Viber were also used widely.

Table 2. Participants' use of social media applications

Media Platforms in Communication	Number of Responses	Participants
IMO	15	Mekdes, Zakir, Dagim, Semira, Marina, Dagmawit, Sekina, Afomia, Mariamawit, Eldana, Hanur. Munira, Remedan, Hafiza,

		Nuredin.
Telegram	1	Teklu
Whats App	2	Halima, Zeyneba
A mixture of Telegram, IMO, and Whats APP, Viber	4	Firtuna, Zalika, Mustefa, Habiba
Cell Phone	1	Afework
Erratic or No communication	2	Hayat, Jemila

While participants described using smartphones and cell phones to communicate with their migrant parent(s), they reported not feeling satisfied with ICT communication because of their desire to be cuddled and hugged by their migrant parent(s). They described the strong need for physical touch rather than remote communication. In addition, participants did not find communication via their smartphones' social media applications reliable due to unstable internet connections and frequent power blackouts, which increased their sadness and anger. For instance, Dagim, who was cared for by his grandmother, explained:

When I had online communication with my mother, the communication was not smooth due to poor internet connectivity. Sometimes, I do not hear what she says, and there is frequent communication disruption. For instance, in 30 minutes of video communication, the conversation would usually be off at least twice. In these situations, I always think of why my mother left me. I always felt angry and sad when communication was disturbed due to a bad connection. Sometimes, I prefer audio calls to video communication.

Likewise, Munira, whose parents were both in Saudi Arabia indicated:

Since we do not have a Wi-Fi connection at home, we usually use mobile data, which consumes much of our money. When my phone runs out of money, I and my siblings go

to areas where there is a free Wi-Fi connection to call our migrant mother, usually to top-star hotels and nearby colleges. We also do not smoothly communicate because of the bad internet connections. Sometimes, despite having enough credit on my phone, the mobile data was not working for days, and that was distressing.

Participants relayed that due to continual power blackouts, the mobile phone run out of battery, which in addition to connectivity problems, was a barrier to communicating with their migrant parent(s). Remedan, who was living with his mother and siblings, said:

I used my Samsung smartphone for years. As a result, the battery has become weak and cannot allow talk for more than 15 minutes. Sometimes, we communicate with my father, with my phone plugged in. While doing so, my communication was discontinued because of a regular power outage. Although my father promised to send me another smartphone, that has not happened yet.

While most of the participants were not satisfied with the communication due to the noted problems, a few participants felt happy using smart mobile phones despite the poor internet quality. For instance, Dagim, emphasized:

Despite the hapless internet connection and frequent power interruptions, I am happy to see my mother via IMO video calls. We talk to my mother at night, when the connection is much better. My mother sent me her photographs via IMO and Telegram. I also sent her my grandmother's and my photographs. How can I communicate if I do not have a smartphone? I feel that my mom is inside my phone because my phone gallery is occupied by my mom's pictures.

Transformation of children's roles: The presence of smartphones at home appeared to empower the participants concerning their caregivers. Children were able to easily adapt to and technically manipulate smart mobile phones, which they learned with their peers. They described being “gatekeepers” between their migrant parent(s) and their caregivers. For instance, Afework and Remedan, each served as the connector for their grandmother and mother, respectively, because their caregivers were aged, illiterate, and unable to technically manipulate smart mobile phones. The participants explained that with their grandmothers, they typically stated who was calling and gave them the phone. At the end of the conversations, the grandmothers returned the phone to the children to end the call.

As surrogate parent(s), older children served as bridges between younger siblings and their migrant parent(s). In some cases, the older children owned the phone and talked with their migrant parent(s); they also made sure to allow their younger siblings to speak. For instance, Semira communicated daily with her parents, who were in Saudi Arabia. Every morning, her mother called the children to check whether they had breakfast and were ready for school. At night, she checked whether they had dinner and were ready for bed. The participant’s mother closely followed her children’s daily activities. Semira stated:

Sometimes we show her a video of what we are doing in the kitchen and when we dine together. When she sees this, she says, ‘I can’t eat a meal properly when you are not with me,’ and that makes us disappointed. However, she is happy when she sees us dining together.

A way of taking control entailed some participants choosing to not answer phone calls from their migrant parent(s). One reason offered was if the child was having conflict with their caregiver and feared their migrant parent(s) might be angry at them because of their behavior. For example,

Teklu lived with his grandmother as his mother was a migrant and his parents were divorced. He stated:

One day, when I came late in the evening to watch soccer, my grandmother waited for me with a stern face. She was enraged because she did not want me to come late at night. At that moment, my mother called, and I immediately closed it because if I answered the phone at that moment, she would talk to my grandmother, and she would tell her I was late coming home.

Feeling upset with their migrant parent(s) was another reason participants gave for not responding to their phone calls. For example, Hayat whose father passed away when she was an infant and who lived with her grandmother, explained, "I told my mother to drop my schooling if she would not come back for good. Because of this, I stopped communicating with her. I do not respond to her calls."

Distance parenting: ICT allows migrant parents to be actively involved in their children's daily lives and thus provide emotional support to children left-behind. For example, Remedan said that his father advised him to stay away from misbehaving students, to attend daily prayer, and to obey his mother and perform better at school. He articulated:

I feel like my father is physically present with me. My father told me that he was going to Saudi Arabia to do a job and sent us money [...] IMO is a social media application through which I daily communicate with my father. My father asks my mother whether I am studying or my day-to-day behavior, and then he talks to me and my siblings. Thanks to technology, I have not felt any void in my life because of my father's departure.

As Mekdes' parents were both in Saudi Arabia, she was cared for by her uncle. Her mother often asked whether there were problems at home, school, or with their neighbors. Her father, who

phoned every few weeks or months, directed Mekdes and her siblings to concentrate on religious and secular education, not to skip daily prayer, not to go to neighbors' homes, and to use the money sent carefully.

Dagmawit communicated regularly with her migrant father. Sometimes her father told her to recite the *Qur'an* through IMO video call. He listened and corrected her breathing. Dagmawit believed that the use of smart mobile phones and the online presence of her father allowed her to receive a religious education. Mustefa had contact with his mother on Fridays and Saturdays, through smartphones. Accordingly, he stated:

Whenever I wanted to contact her, I sent her a recorded voice message via IMO, and then she called me back. During my communication, my mother encourages me to advance my education. In doing so, she was ready to support me financially. My mother also assisted me financially in obtaining a driving license. We also exchanged ideas and views on the country's peace and stability.

Participants described typically communicating with their parents either in the morning or evening as they attend school during the day and are not allowed to use mobile phones in school. In addition, the migrant parent(s) took advantage of the much better internet connection that was available in the morning and evening. Participants reported that their migrant parent(s) usually called them, although they noted that children call their parents or message them when they need something.

Most participants depicted their migrant mothers as emotional and loving when they spoke with them through smart mobile phones and videos. For instance, Dagim said that his mother usually cried when they spoke. He expressed:

We usually communicate on a video call, and she frequently tells me as if she is dying thinking of me. She advised me to concentrate on my education. I communicate with my mother three times a week. She sent smartphones to me and my uncle [...] She promised to come to Ethiopia, but she is not keeping her word. I hope that she will come in the upcoming Easter, as she promised

Afework and his mother spoke weekly, which mainly comprised greetings, and his mother's encouragement to perform better in school and at soccer.

When I talk to my mother, I feel she is beside me, and we talk for an hour or more. My mother advised me to continue playing football because she knew I was good at soccer [...] My mother has not sent me a smartphone because she believes that it may distract me from my education and soccer. I also believe that because I have seen children spend much of their time on Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, which made them lag in their education.

Gendered communication: The duration and frequency of communication vary according to the gender of the migrant parents and children. The children, particularly girls, said that when communicating with their mothers, they typically spoke for longer periods, such as one hour or longer. According to the participants, their migrant mothers were very involved in the conversation, asking about their education, health, and relationships with their siblings and neighbors. In contrast, the participants described communication with their migrant fathers as short. Participants explained that they felt relaxed and comforted when talking to their mothers. According to Sekina:

I communicate with my mother through various social media platforms and feel excited and enthusiastic. I remember the good old days. She used to kiss my forehead whenever I

returned from school. She also showed me appreciation by slapping my back when I promptly returned from a shop to buy items. Although my mother sent me all the materials I needed, I desperately needed her physical presence.

Similarly, Mekdes communicated with her mother daily through an IMO video call, whereas she had less frequent contact with her father. She relayed, “My communication with my mother lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. The conversation with my father was erratic and lasted approximately ten minutes. However, when he wanted me to recite a Qur’an, he took more time.”

Shifts in contact: According to the participants, the recent proliferation of ICT has radically shifted communication and contact with migrant parent(s). Participants experienced how the shift in ICT allowed them to meet their migrant parent(s) frequently. For instance, Firtuna, who had not physically seen her mother for 12 years, reported a gradual change in contact:

Earlier, my mother did not call me frequently. She called me for months or years to my friend who had a mobile phone. Currently, using the smartphone she sent me, I frequently contact her via various social media platforms, such as IMO and Telegram video calls. I have memories of my mother’s childhood. Thanks to the smartphone, I have seen her on video, and she has now physically changed and has become gigantic [...] We talk about education, our country’s peace, and my relationship with my siblings. I feel comfortable and relaxed when I speak to my mother.

Likewise, Zalika, Firtuna’s sister, stated:

I did not receive calls from my mother when I was a child. As I get older, my mother’s eagerness to contact me increases. She left me in my grandparents’ home when I was two

years old. She began to call me when I reached 14 years old. That may be because of her inaccessibility to phones, and I also did not have phone access [...] Currently, when I do not pick up her phone, she cries, saying, 'I fell in love with you, and why do you not pick up the phone?' I do not know her, but I respect her as a mother because she is a mother. I have no complaints for leaving me behind.

Zalika, however, was unhappy with her mother's frequent phone calls and prolonged conversations. She explained:

While talking to my mother, I do not feel something special as I have not lived with her. I do not recall any memory. My mother talked a lot about my educational status. She requested my needs and desires. When I talk to her, I do not feel bored or happy. I am in between [...] I am happy with the life I have been going through.

Neither Firtuna nor Zalika had seen their mothers for more than a decade. Their mother appeared to be an undocumented worker in Bahrain, so she was legally unable to visit her children. The participants, particularly Firtuna, hoped that her mother would return one day, so they could live together.

4.2.8. Theme 8: Hopes regarding living with parent(s)

The migration of parent(s) affects the dreams and aspirations of children left-behind in different ways. It emerged that dreams and aspirations could affect the educational performance and emotional well-being of children left-behind.

Reunion with parent(s) abroad: Participants' narratives indicated that their parents' migration affected their dreams and aspirations, specifically their desire to be reunited with them. Most participants did not wish to move to the Gulf States, due to the dreadful experiences reported by local and international media outlets. Rather, participants expressed a wish that their

parent(s) would return home to Ethiopia. An exception was participants whose parents were in the USA or Europe, as they wished to join their parent(s) abroad. For example, Halima reported the following:

If God wills, my sister and I plan to go to Belgium, rather than my mother coming. We have a plan to travel to Belgium this year. Our father is ready to allow us. I plan to go to Belgium and earn my undergraduate degree in Medicine. I want to become a medical doctor and treat those who are sick.

Some participants stated that they did not recommend mothers to travel abroad and leave their children behind. According to Halima, “despite challenges, mothers must raise their children. Otherwise, they should have children with them.” Similarly, Firtuna explained, “I am not ready to go to Arab countries. I wanted to pursue education and become successful in Ethiopia. I advise mothers not to migrate leaving their children behind, as it affects children’s social, educational, and emotional well-being.” Likewise, Zalika explained, “Although I am not familiar with the life of a biological mother, I do not advise them to leave their children behind. If it is obligatory to go abroad, they must leave their children with trustworthy relatives, like me. Otherwise, they should not leave their children behind, as this has a tremendous impact on their psychosocial well-being”. Zalika added, “I do not have the dream of going abroad and doing like my mother does. I dream of pursuing education and enrolling in the School of Medicine. Currently, I am taking short-term training in fashion design on weekends if I fail to join a medical school”.

Another participant, Zakir who also did not want to migrate to Arab countries, narrated:

I do not intend to move or work abroad, and I do not recommend that mothers leave their children behind. Going to an Arab country must be the last choice. First, every

opportunity must be exhaustively attempted in the home country. Going abroad and sending money directly to children may lead to addiction. This harms children's health and psychological well-being. It is also beneficial for children if the money sent is effectively used. In this case, the advantage outweighs the disadvantage.

Zeyneba was eager to travel and join her parents in the USA. She noted, "I am not focusing on my education because I am only dreaming of going to the USA and attending my education."

Likewise, Mustefa planned to travel to Europe or the USA to pursue education. He does not want to go to the Gulf States to work like his mother.

Exceptions were participants (Hayat and Mekdes), who planned to migrate to the Gulf States to help their mothers. Hayat explained, "I plan to go abroad and support my mother and grandmother. Like my mother, I intend to travel to Arab countries and support her." Similarly, Mekdes described: "I intend to join my parents in Saudi Arabia and continue my education."

Reunion with parent(s)' in Ethiopia: Many participants whose parent(s) were in the Gulf States wanted their parents to come and lead better lives in Ethiopia. They were stressed whenever they heard of the ill treatment, death, and abuse of Ethiopian domestic workers in the Gulf States. However, Afework wanted to travel to Europe and the USA using Dubai as transit. The remaining participants wanted to pursue and advance their education in Ethiopia and to become doctors, lawyers, and artists.

Habiba, who had both parents in the USA, did not intend to join her family; rather, she wanted to continue her education in Ethiopia. She explained:

I plan to continue my education in Ethiopia and enroll in a school of medicine at an Ethiopian public university. The motivation behind medicine is that everyone talks about health. I want to treat sick people. If I learned medicine, I could support and treat those

who were ill. In addition, my brother is learning medicine and he is talking about how the field is remarkably interesting.

Similarly, Semira had no interest in traveling to Saudi Arabia or joining her family. She wanted her parents to come to Ethiopia for good. She also intended to pursue education in Ethiopia and become a successful medical doctor. She asserted:

In the future, our parents plan is to come to Ethiopia for good. I do not have the aspiration to go to Saudi Arabia and work like my parents do. I have a fervent desire to continue my education in Ethiopia and enroll in the School of Medicine at one of the Ethiopian universities. The motivation behind medicine is that when I was in Saudi Arabia, my mother was sick at night. My father was not around, and it was impossible to bring her to a health center. By that time, I was anxious and could not do anything to help her. From that point on, I decided that I had to learn medicine to help my family members and others in need.

Munira also did not want to go abroad or join her family; rather, she wanted her parents to return. She wanted to advance education in Ethiopia and become a famous lawyer. Aware of Ethiopia's justice system, Munira stated:

I plan to continue my education and want to become a renowned lawyer. My motivation to become a lawyer is to advocate for the rights of girls and women. Women are abused by their husbands and the justice system is not working to protect the rights of girls and women. The formal legal system is returning the issue to the traditional system of conflict resolution, where local elders play a pivotal role. This has a serious limitation in making the perpetrators accountable and mostly ends in forgiveness.

Some participants whose parents had migrated to Europe or the United States had no interest in pursuing education in Ethiopia. They planned to go to the United States and Europe to continue their education. They eagerly waited to go abroad, join their parent(s), and continue their education. As a result, they lacked a focus on schooling. As Hanur said, “I have a keen interest in traveling to the USA and meeting my parents. Moreover, I am enthusiastic about pursuing education in the United States.” Similarly, Zeyneba did not pay attention to her education. She said, “I am very zealous to travel to and join my mother in the USA.”

Table 3. Participants’ aspiration to live with their migrant parent(s)

Hopes to live with migrant parents	Number of Responses	Participants
Traveling abroad and reuniting with parents	4	Hayat, Halima, Hanur, Zeyneba
Reuniting here in Ethiopia with a better life	21	Jemila, Mekdes, Firtuna, Zalika, Zakir, Dagim, Teklu, Afework, Mustefa, Habiba, Semira, Marina, Dagmawit, Sekina, Afomia, Mariamawit, Eldana, Munira, Remedan, Hafiza, Nuredin

Chapter Five: Discussion

5. Introduction

The purpose of the current study was to explore the lived experiences of children left-behind due to parental migration. In this chapter, I discuss the current study's findings and those reported in previous studies, highlighting unique findings as well as similarities.

The participants shared with me their perspectives and experiences of being left-behind. After parental migration, the participants described going through complex life experiences, expressing mixed responses and feelings. The children left-behind unanimously acknowledged that the migration of their parent(s) was mainly to improve their lives, and they did not demonstrate any complaint against their migrant parent(s). Parental migration had some detrimental effects on the emotional well-being of the children left-behind—the participants and their siblings. Concurrently, participants expressed gratitude for the remittances their parent(s) sent to them, which provided essentials.

Although the participants believed that parental migration improved their lives in some significant ways, they described experiencing serious emotional consequences. Participants found it especially challenging when they saw friends spending time with their parents. Children left-behind are not only recipients of love and care from their migrant parent(s), but also worry about and provide emotional support for their migrant parent(s). The community emerged as being both helpful and hurtful. On the one hand, repetitive questions and comments about their migrant parent(s) absence were described as exacerbating the emotional challenges of children left-behind. On the other hand, having migrant parent(s) abroad was characterized as improving the status and peer respect of children left-behind.

The migration of parent(s) appeared to have a mixed effect on children's educational performance. On the one hand, factors such as familial role reversals, emotional preoccupation, a lack of supervision and support, and involvement in generating income emerged as negatively affecting the participants' educational performance. On the other hand, parental remittances, gifts, paid tutors, and hired domestic workers facilitated the education of participants and their siblings. Some participants reported that parental migration did not affect their educational performance. Significant shifts in caregivers that accompanied parental migration appeared to often hurt the participants' emotional well-being and education. Having to leave familiar caregivers for new situations and caregivers affected the emotional well-being and education of the children left-behind.

Findings revealed that participants felt mixed about the use of ICT, which had significantly increased the frequency and changed the way they communicated with their migrant parent(s). Despite the opportunities for communication afforded by the internet, many conveyed their dissatisfaction with distance communication and relationships and expressed longing for their migrant parent(s) to physically cuddle and hug them. The participants noted that poor internet infrastructure and frequent power interruptions made the use of ICT unreliable. The poor connectivity of ICT at times fueled feelings of anger and disappointment among children left-behind as they were reminded of their parent(s)' absence. Concurrently, all the participants appreciated the use of ICT as it enabled them to at least see their migrant parents on video. With the advancement of technology, the challenges posed by the restrictions of communication techniques have been overcome, in contrast to previous decades when children who were left-behind used costly and infrequent phone calls and letters to interact with their migrant parent(s).

The following themes are arranged to respond to the basic research questions outlined in the first chapter, which includes: How do children perceive the migration of their parent(s)? What are the emotional responses of children to parental migration? What are the educational effects of parental migration on children left-behind? How do children experience life with arranged caregivers after parental migration? How do children left-behind perceive ICT intervention in their transnational family life? How does parental migration affect the dreams and aspirations of the children left-behind?

5.1. Perspectives on parental migration

The participants depicted the main aim of parental migration as improving their lives and those of their families. Parent(s) migrate because of extreme poverty, and according to the participants, their parents were unable to fulfill family needs. Participants also noted that their lives worsened after their parents divorced or after their father's death. Before their parent(s) migration, life was challenging, and parents did not earn adequate funds to sustain their well-being. Previous research likewise described the financial constraints parent(s) encountered in their home countries; and that as soon as they left, they started to send money to help children obtain life necessities (Nazridod et al., 2019). Nazridod et al. further stated that children understood that they had been left-behind with their relatives because their parents wanted to support them financially and provide a better future. Similarly, Jemal (2018) noted that remittances improved the consumption of goods and services for children left-behind. However, Jemal stressed that the living conditions of children left-behind worsen when migrant parent(s) do not send remittances. In another study, Fernandez (2020) emphasized that parents, especially mothers, travel to the Gulf States to improve their families and children's living conditions. Migration decisions are largely motivated by the desire to improve the well-being of family

members, especially children (Dreby, 2010; Kaczmarska & Ono, 2022; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Nobles, 2011).

Generally, migration is partly driven by limited job opportunities in communities and the attraction of much higher salaries in destination countries. Besides the economic hardships of migration, Parreñas (2001) identified that the breakdown of relationships, domestic abuse, and extramarital affairs constitute a significant motivation for women's migration. Likewise, findings in the current study indicated that parental divorce, the death of husbands, and invitations from relatives were the contributory factors for parental migration in addition to the well-established economic reasons.

5.2. Emotional responses to parental absence

Following their parent(s) migration, children reported having mixed feelings and responses. On the one hand, the participants referred to benefiting from the remittance and financial support. On the other hand, the participants described feeling sad and lonely, especially when seeing friends with their parents at school and in their neighborhoods and community. This fits with Carranza (2021) and Kufakurinani et al. (2014), who indicated that children experienced feelings of abandonment, anger, and sadness when their parents were absent. Asis (2007) noted that while migration creates emotional displacement for migrants and their children, it opens possibilities for children's agency and independence. The experiences of children in Mexican transnational families indicate that children can experience power vis-à-vis their parents, while simultaneously being disadvantaged as dependents within their families (Dreby, 2007).

Children whose parents migrate and are divorced have greater emotional difficulties and psychological risks compared to children living with both parents (Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2016; Zhao et al., 2018). Wang (2023) underscored that parental migration results in full childcare

responsibilities for the extended family members, typically grandparents; thus, it is challenging for them to support children's development due to lack of adaptation and outdated child-rearing concepts. The current study also found that some participants were not satisfied with the care given by their grandmother as they were "old" and "tired."

A unique finding of the current study is that some participants depicted themselves as focusing on providing emotional support to their migrant parent(s) rather than focusing on their own well-being. They talked about wanting to encourage their migrant parent(s) to persevere and remain strong despite the adversity they faced abroad. Another distinctive finding in the current study is that, according to the participants, the community sometimes exacerbated the emotional challenges of children left-behind by reminding them that their parents had left and had not visited them. On the other hand, after parental migration, the participants found that due to their parent(s)' migration, their respect and social status increased in their friendship circle, as they were considered "wealthy" and "rich."

Although all participants were eager to live with both parents, the participants whose fathers migrated while their mothers remained with the children found that the remaining family resembled a nuclear family, which felt positive. This finding is concordant with Parreñas (2005, 2014), who concluded that a nuclear family remains intact despite the father's absence. In the current study, the participants, especially girls, stated they preferred that it be their father should one parent have to migrate, explaining that their mothers educated them about the household and other work. A similar finding was reported in prior research; for instance, Jemal (2018) reported that while parental absence detrimentally affects the psychosocial well-being of children left-behind, the impact is greater when the mother is the migrant.

5.3. Impact on educational performance

Consistent with Intemann and Katz (2014), who revealed the beneficial effects of parental migration on children's education, the findings of the current study suggest that parental migration sometimes facilitates children's education. Specifically, remittances, gifts, and paid tutors played a pivotal role in aiding participants' education. At the same time, parental migration was revealed to decrease children's educational performance due to household role reversals, emotional preoccupation, lack of guidance and support, and involvement in generating income. Such results are in accordance with the conclusions of Getnet and Abebaw (2022) and Jaure and Gregory (2022), who found that children of migrant parent(s) performed less well academically due to the absence of parental guidance and the associated negative psychological and behavioral effects.

Parental migration can decrease educational performance by changing school behavior, lack of parental advice, and the psychological costs of separation (Dreby & Stutz, 2012). Children left-behind can become less motivated educationally as they see their parents earn much more abroad through jobs requiring little or no education (Dreby, 2006; Jemal, 2018). Instead of focusing on their education, these children pursue international migration aspirations (Robles & Oropesa, 2011). In addition, care for younger siblings affects older children's study opportunities (Chen, 2013). Bucheli (2018) also revealed that under migration, the chance of children continuing to secondary school decreases as they take on home duties or are urged to work. Parent-child separation directly leads to inadequate supervision of children's after-school study, which negatively affects their study engagement (Amato & Cheadle, 2005; Gao et al., 2018; Meng & Yamauchi, 2017). However, some participants in the current study expressed that their educational performance did not change after their parents' migration.

Previous research has also suggested that parental migration increases educational attainment more for girls than boys (Cebotari & Dito, 2020; Kuepie, 2018). In contrast, in the current study, the educational performance of older girls was found to be lower than that of boys, partly because of their role as surrogate parents. In another study, although children became separated from their migrant parents, only maternal migration has been demonstrated to hurt their study engagement (Wang, 2021). Children of migrant mothers performed less academically than children of migrant fathers (Dununsinghe, 2021); however, Dreby and Stutz (2012) showed that fathers migrating alone has no significant impact on children's educational aspirations. Likewise, various studies have shown that children of migrant mothers demonstrate lower well-being due to missing their mothers' love and care, which can interfere with their educational performance (Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Jampaklay, 2006; Khatia et al., 2020).

5.4. Shifts in living arrangements

Parental migration, especially maternal migration, was associated with significant shifts in household roles. Typically, extended female family members care for the children left-behind, whereas in some instances, older siblings assume the caregiving roles. This finding supports research by Fan and Parreñas (2018) and Seepamore (2016), who indicated that fathers left-behind seldom assume the role of nurturing their children and rather, delegate the responsibility to elder daughters and extended female family members. Similarly, Osei et al. (2022) found that frequent changes in residence cause interruptions in educational trajectories.

Consistent with previous findings (Cebotari et al., 2018; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2016), children who frequently changed caregivers showed poorer psychological well-being than children who remained with the same caregiver. The current study found that children who were left-behind faced emotional challenges due to having to move to other caregivers and schools.

5.5. Role of ICT in parent-child relations

Most of the participants reported having access to ICT, which dramatically increased and generally improved their communication with their migrant parent(s). This finding is consistent with research indicating that long-distance communication through ICT has resulted in a new way of relating (Karimullah, 2023), enabling family members to remain connected regardless of physical location (Girmachew, 2018; Rogers, 2020). Through ICT, parents and children can talk regularly/frequently, share moments, and maintain close relationships. Moreover, it emerged that migrant parents, particularly mothers, used smartphones to parent their children from afar. This finding is supported by other studies which revealed that migrant mothers use ICT to care for and support their children from abroad (Chib et al., 2014; Meyers & Rugunanan, 2020; Parreñas, 2005, 2014).

According to participants, their migrant parent(s) sent them technological devices such as smartphones, iPads, and laptop computers, and initiated communication, which also benefited the participants' siblings. Similarly, a study by Poeze et al. (2017) found that when migrant parent(s) consider their children left-behind old enough to use ICT to communicate with them without the involvement of caregivers, they send their children mobile phones. The current study found that sometimes migrant parent(s) do not send smart mobile phones to their children because of reported concern that this would disrupt their concentration and negatively affect their education. This concern is supported by research findings, which, although not specifically related to children left-behind, indicate the deleterious effects of digital media on youth generally. Such effects include digital addiction, insufficient sleep, inactivity, poor communication, social life, obesity, behavioral problems, risky behaviors, and cybersquatting (Duggan et al., 2015; Kim & Faith, 2019).

According to Madianou (2016), smart mobile phones have become polymedia with the ability to provide various affordances. Polymedia allows users to utilize the quality of each platform to compensate for the limitations of other platforms. This is similar to the current study's finding that the children left-behind use smart mobile phones with diverse social media applications, including IMO, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Viber. While in the current study, IMO is depicted as the most widely used social media platform, a previous study revealed that Facebook was the most popular online platform used by children left-behind in the Philippines (Replam et al., 2021).

The more frequent communication afforded by ICT allowed participants to receive love and care from their migrant parent(s) and to feel as though their parent(s) were physically present. Participants' narratives suggest that the migrant parents, especially mothers, typically initiated communication. This finding fits with other research that revealed the parents' desire to be more closely involved with their children left-behind (Repalam et al., 2021) and which indicated that migrant mothers talk with their children about their daily lives, check on their health, and provide rules about domestic life, hygiene, and school (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Monini, 2018). The participants described migrant mothers as monitoring their children's activities through regular, often daily, communication. In contrast, they depicted migrant fathers as more likely to give advice on financial issues, discipline them, and have less frequent and shorter communication. This finding is consistent with previous research, which found that migrant fathers did not regularly communicate with their children and that they were more likely to discipline them when they did communicate (Parreñas, 2014).

A striking finding is that while the use of ICT dramatically increased the participants' communication with migrant parent(s), most conveyed mixed responses due to both emotional and technical reasons. Like previous research findings, participants reported feeling dissatisfied with the communication quality due to the inadequate infrastructure and continual poor network connections (Parreñas, 2014). In addition, most of the participants expressed feeling frustrated and sad because the ICT communication did not provide the physical contact with their migrant parent(s) for which they longed. Previous research likewise documented access problems and a lack of ICT infrastructure in rural areas, which negatively affected parent-child communication (Wang et al., 2023). Despite rapid advancements in technology, transnational intimacy does not provide 'full' intimacy for the family. The joys of physical contact, the emotional security of physical presence, and the familiarity allowed by physical proximity continue to be denied to transnational family members (Parreñas, 2005).

While not negating the effects of physical separation, the current study indicates the importance of digital contact with migrant parent(s), in their sense of connection or attachment with their migrant parent(s). Many participants however, commented on the lack of reliable internet, which was a barrier to communication. Communication with their parent(s) is considered a way through which children's rights are exercised. Research is therefore needed to examine the effects of internet availability on this essential right of children.

With the absence of their primary caregiver, usually the mother, some participants who were separated in their early years and who did not have regular communication with the migrant parent(s) described developing attachments with their caregivers. These participants explained that they considered their caregivers as parents and thus did not dwell on their migrant parent(s). Consistent with this finding, Peng and Wong (2016) found that children with strong attachments

to their female caregivers called them ‘Mama’. Another study found that when a caregiver provides motherly care in the absence of a biological mother, children may no longer feel that they lack parental care because of parental migration and the physical distance between the parent and child (Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014). Poeze and Mazzucato further stated that the care provided by migrant parent(s) does not necessarily need to be provided in geographical proximity. By sending remittances, regular phone calls, and return visits, children can feel that their migrant parents care for and about them. The acceptable nature of non-proximate care is grounded in parenting ideologies that allow parenting tasks to be transferred to caregivers other than biological parents (Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014). Similarly, Venta et al. (2021) noted that young adolescents with frequent phone contact with their migrant fathers reported more attachment security than respondents who did not.

Generally, the ability of transnational parents to communicate with their children and other family members is greatly aided by ICT. Although it does not replace in-person connections, smartphone communication significantly bridges the distance between parents and children. Online communication makes distant parenting feasible, as parents can support and guide their children from afar. Regardless of the lack of in-person contact and the unreliable and poor internet connections, parenting from a distance largely positively effects children's attachment to their parents.

5.6. Hopes regarding living with migrant parent(s)

The children revealed mixed responses regarding their hopes of living with their parents. Participants whose parents migrated to Europe and the USA wanted to join their parents abroad. Similarly, previous research has indicated that the Global North promises a “better” life, while staying means limited local employment opportunities and poor social infrastructure (Dako-

Gyekye, 2016; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Kandel & Massey, 2002; Setrana, 2021; Somaiah & Yeoh, 2021).

Parental migration increases the migration desire of children left-behind, indicating that emigration is a route to escape poverty for themselves and their families (Jemal, 2018). Furthermore, Jemal reported that children do not see education as a possibility to gain a better future, which is associated with the belief that education has a very low financial return compared to what the migrants earn abroad. Similarly, Crawley et al. (2023) reported that children left-behind in Ethiopia's Hadiya region, whose family members migrated to South Africa, aspired to migrate rather than pursue their studies in Ethiopia. The current study found that others whose parent(s) were in the Gulf States wanted their parents to return to Ethiopia, which they believed would lead to a "better life." In contrast, children whose parent(s) migrated to the USA and Europe wanted to reunite with them abroad. According to Osei et al. (2023), some youth aspired to migrate immediately after completing their secondary education. Others preferred to wait until they achieved a particular milestone in Ghana, be it a tertiary degree or the acquisition of other skills that would better equip them to find a job abroad.

Generally, according to the CRC and other sources of international law, the children of migrant workers have the same right to live with their families as all other children, a right that should be indiscriminately applied (UNICEF, 2020). Ethiopia has an obligation to consider the best interests of children and ensure that children have the protection and care necessary for their well-being. Pursuant to Article 18(2) of the CRC, which Ethiopia signed, states are obligated to "render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities, and services for the care of children" (UN, 1989). States that have ratified the CRC have an international legal

obligation to understand the needs and interests of children in migrant households and respond appropriately (Cappelloni, 2011).

5.7. Study limitations

Although this study provided a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of children left-behind in Ethiopia, it was not without limitations. First, the study cannot safely be generalized to children living in other parts of Ethiopia, although it is likely that the findings are transferable to children left-behind with similar demographic characteristics.

Second, the current study was designed to provide voices to the children. Hence, this study did not consider the perspectives of migrant parent(s), caregivers, teachers, social workers, government officials, and community leaders. Thus, future research should incorporate these perspectives to obtain a holistic understanding. Third, I relied primarily on semi-structured interviews to conclude. Although I initially planned to use additional data collection methods, such as drawings and diaries, I used interviews because most participants were able to remember their experiences and narrate their ideas fully.

Although this study is informative in identifying social work services that require attention, it does not represent all children left-behind in Ethiopia. Children below 12 years of age were not included in this study because they might not adequately express their views. Moreover, the current study was conducted in urban areas of Ethiopia, which might not represent the rural areas of the country where communication between migrant parent(s) and children was intermittent and nonexistent due to the inaccessibility of ICT and electric services.

Chapter Six: Summary, Social Work implications, and Conclusion

6. Introduction

This section comprises a summary, social work implications, and conclusions. The first section summarizes the key findings of the study. The second section illustrates the social work implications of the study for practice, policy, education, and research. The final section presents the study conclusions.

6.1. Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of children left-behind in Addis Ababa and Adama from the participants' perspectives. The participants' narratives illuminated how parental migration shaped and permeated their lives and identities including their emotions, education, and living arrangements. The narration of the children was explained in an overarching theme: *parental migration shapes and permeates children's lives and identities*. Within this grand theme, eight interacting and overlapping subthemes emerged: perception and understanding of parent(s) migration, the gendered nature of parent(s) migration, emotional responses to parent(s) migration, mixed effects on children's educational performance, experience of shifts in living arrangements, relations with extended family members, ICT-mediated parent-child relationships, and hopes regarding living with migrant parent(s).

The current study explores the perspectives of the children left-behind when their parent(s) migrate to improve their economic situation. Participants reported a wide variety of reasons for parental migration. Economic hardships emerged as major contributing factors across the interviews. Moreover, participants reiterated that they were not consulted or asked for their agreement prior to their parent(s) migrating. Some migrant parent(s), however, informed their children about the reasons for their migration.

Regarding the gender of their parent(s) that migrated, all participants supported their fathers' migration rather than that of their mothers. Although all participants were eager to live with both parents, they said that if one parent had to migrate, they preferred that their mother stay and live with them. The participants whose fathers migrated while their mothers remained with them, described the remaining family as a nuclear family, despite father's absence. According to the current study, children left-behind are not only recipients of love and care from their migrant parent(s) but also worry and provide emotional support for their migrant parent(s).

The current study also found that the community emerged as both beneficial and hurtful. Repetitive questions and comments about their migrant parent(s) were described as exacerbating the emotional challenges of children left-behind. On the other hand, having migrant parent(s) abroad was characterized as improving the status and peer respect of children left-behind. Children experienced significant and repeated shifts in their living arrangements, with most being cared for by extended female family members. Having to leave familiar caregivers for new situations and caregivers affected the emotional well-being and education of children left-behind.

The findings of the present study indicated variable and inconsistent effects on children's academic performance due to their parent(s) migration. In some cases, their parent(s)' migration was beneficial to the children left-behind, whereas in others, the children experienced greater difficulties and challenges. Moreover, some participants explained that their parent(s)' migration did not affect their academic functioning. With parental migration, especially among mothers, there were significant shifts in household roles and frequent changes in caregivers. Older children were responsible for caring for their younger siblings, which they believed would affect their educational performance.

According to the participants, most of the fathers remarried after divorce and there was no communication between their fathers and children, including phone calls. Hence, the task of caring for children falls on extended family members and distant mothers. Absent mothers from home crumble the nuclear family and push children to join other families, thereby creating extended families. Extended family members play a vital role in supporting family members who remain behind. Some play a vital role in regularly visiting children in their households. Others join families left-behind and serve as caregivers. Thus, it is common to see children left in the care of their grandmothers, aunts, cousins, eldest brothers, uncles, and fathers.

The study also found communication technology especially smartphones, as highly instrumental in helping children left-behind communicate with their migrant parent(s) notably more regularly than previously. Most participants described this regular contact as positive—loving and comforting. Smartphones owned by children play a pivotal role in enhancing parent-child relationships. Parental migration also affected participants' dreams and aspirations, specifically their desire to be reunited with their parents. A few participants who were closely bonded with their caregivers and others in the reconstituted home situation found it difficult when their migrant parent(s)' efforts sought regular contact with them. Parental migration affects children's dreams and aspirations, with many focusing their hope on living with their migrant parent(s).

6.2. Social work implications

The current study's findings can provide information for stakeholders, such as educators, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, to gain a better understanding of their roles in addressing the quandary of children left-behind. The findings add knowledge to existing social work theories, methods, and practices by integrating a child-centered and culture-specific

understanding of the lives of children with parental migration. It fills gaps in studies that focus solely on assessing children's experiences based on preset measurement criteria for their emotional, educational, and psychological characteristics. Previous studies have considered children from an adult-centric perspective, ignoring their voices. Therefore, this study focused mainly on obtaining the experiences and perspectives of children.

The current study improves our understanding of the needs of children left-behind in Ethiopia. Although children have agency to overcome challenges that are not beyond their capacity, their rights protected in the international conventions must be ensured. The findings of this study will serve as a reference point for analyzing the situation, using evidence to build a case for action, develop policies, build program capacity in child welfare and childhood development, and create a family-based child welfare system. The findings of this study thus have far-reaching implications for children left-behind from the perspectives of practice, policy, education, and research.

6.2.1. Implication for practice

The current study can inform social work practice at the school, household, and community levels in a various way and can inform program needs. Programs are needed to support caregivers in addressing the emotional, educational, and other needs of children left in their care. Specific interventions should target caregivers to ensure that children's interests and needs are met. In so doing, education is needed about the importance of children's rights enshrined in CRC and the Ethiopian constitution.

Social work practitioners need to provide information to migrant parent(s) to maintain regular contact with their children left-behind to minimize the negative effects of separation. Such support can be seen as the implementation of the conventions on the rights of a child.

Pursuant to Article 9(3) of the CRC, “States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests” (UN, 1989).

Social work services must capitalize on children's inbuilt potentials and strengths. The possible interventions of various practitioners, such as psychologists, counselors, and social workers, should enhance the strengths of the children left-behind. Due to the lack of attention to children left-behind in Ethiopia, none of the participants in this study accessed professional counseling to address their psychological, emotional, and educational challenges. As a child, I also did not receive any support while my mother was away due to having migrated to Saudi Arabia. According to Wang et al. (2024), training programs in China are organized to enhance parenting awareness; strengthen cooperation with community organizations to conduct parent-child activities, health education, and psychological counseling; and improve the overall quality of life for children left-behind and their parents. Counseling encourages children to develop self-esteem, coping skills, positive relationships with their immediate environments, and optimism. It is also important to provide pre-departure information for migrant parent(s), highlighting the potential emotional, educational, and psychological risks their children might face. The intent would be to help the parents minimize the challenges and maximize their contact.

Centers need to be established in schools to provide counseling services to children left-behind. Older children can be encouraged to mentor or tutor younger children in migrant households, or children can design and lead emotional support networks for other children whose parents have migrated. In doing so, children must be capacitated to devise and lead support programs.

A range of stakeholders, including parents, guardians, teachers, community members, social workers, policymakers, and the private sector play a role in protecting the rights of the children involved. Educational, healthcare, child protection, and social protection providers must be sensitive to the needs of the children left-behind and have protocols in place to address emotional issues and other challenges that these children might face. It is also essential to advise migrant parent(s), typically mothers, to travel to the Gulf States legally, which in turn enables them to visit their children intermittently.

Labor migration is deemed lawful when labor migrants meet the legal requirements of both their home and destination countries. In contrast, people who migrate illegally are those who leave their home country without following the required legal procedures in their home and destination countries (Gizachew, 2018). As movement from Ethiopia to the Gulf countries is largely irregular, Ethiopian migrants often experience great perils and are exposed to a wide range of risks on these journeys (IOM, 2021).

While working on reconnecting children left-behind with their migrant parent(s), ICT's significance should be emphasized. Although ICT is significant in facilitating parent-child relationships, connectivity issues, and ICT infrastructure should be addressed.

6.2.2. Implications for policy

This study provides empirical evidence for designing social policies that aim to minimize the problems of children left-behind in urban Ethiopia. Policies should be oriented toward mitigating the psychosocial impact of migration on children in Ethiopia, as per the CRC. Researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and community representatives are often considered experts in developing policies to address children's needs. In Ethiopia, it is not uncommon for children to be disregarded on matters that affect their lives. Children are considered "pure" and

“incompetent” and adults often speak on their behalf (Norozi & Moen, 2016). The absence of children’s participation in policy formulation that affects them is a serious concern and doomed to fail. Thus, policymakers should incorporate children’s perspectives into policy and program designs that affect their well-being. The active participation of children can provide policymakers with a better sense of the problems facing children while also instilling a sense of autonomy and self-worth in children.

To formulate a specific policy or service issue for children, I propose further studies that incorporate the perspectives of a range of stakeholders, including parents, caregivers, teachers, community residents and leaders, local government officials, and social service providers. Policymakers must identify and prioritize inbuilt personal resources that play a pivotal role in enhancing the physical and psychosocial well-being of children left-behind.

Wickramage et al. (2015) indicated that governments in developing countries may not have the necessary capacity and resources to develop appropriate policies to address the needs of children left-behind. Bilateral and multilateral organizations, civil society, and the private sector play important roles in bridging this resource and capacity gap (Wickramage et al., 2015).

Child protection systems associated with children left-behind should be established through the cooperation of government and non-government organizations, families, schools, and communities. Caregivers should be empowered in their new roles through counseling sessions and support groups. According to Wang (2023), the government must take effective measures to coordinate and collaborate with families and schools to strengthen the responsibility of migrant parents in children's psychological development through the adoption of regulations and guidance and to increase investment in psychological education in schools, with an emphasis on psychological counselling for children.

It is incumbent upon governments to find ways to help parents remain at home and support their children so they won't need to migrate. Since the main motive behind migration is economic, financial support or credit loans must be provided to help parent(s) start businesses that support their children and families. Likewise, Belayneh and Belete (2023) argue that the government and civil society should prioritize creating job opportunities as the primary means of enabling women to support themselves and their families domestically rather than viewing migration as their only choice. A further suggestion is for policymakers to establish a separate department at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to specifically address the challenges associated with children left-behind.

The importance of ICT should be emphasized while working on reconnecting children with their migrant parent(s) and should be indicated in the Ethiopian national child policy. The government and other stakeholders need to expand ICT infrastructure to facilitate children's well-being. Training must be provided to address the negative outcomes of ICT use on children left-behind. It is important that social work practitioners work with migrant parent(s) to ensure they make optimal use of ICT to regularly communicate with their children, as this can offset some negative effects of separation on children left-behind.

6.2.3. Implications for education

This study has theoretical and methodological implications that could serve as a source of information for social work education. Children left-behind must be carefully considered in the social work field education as a segment of society that requires solemn attention. The findings of this study can serve as a source of information for curriculum development in social work with children, youths, and families. As social work theories and practice models express Western children's experiences and perspectives, the extant social work literature offers little attention to

the situations of children left-behind in non-Western countries, including Ethiopia. Therefore, the current study provides a contextual understanding of the children left-behind for social work educators and students.

Graduate and undergraduate social work fieldwork education programs must consider the issue of children left-behind. School social workers must play a fair role in helping children manage the psychosocial challenges associated with parental migration. Although schools are places where children spend time, they do not have a portfolio of children with parental migration. Thus, I suggest that schools maintain children's portfolios, including when and where their parents migrated, contact details, school performance, social relationships, and teachers' comments. This could help them create a better coping plan to address the challenges faced by the children involved. Parents and caregivers can also act according to feedback from schools to support their children and help them improve their well-being.

School teachers need to be trained to provide counseling services and should regularly communicate with children left-behind to understand their daily experiences, difficulties, and needs. This would enable them to show care, respect, and support to the children. For example, effective development programs that reduce loneliness and promote positive development are essential. The programs might improve peer relationships, social support-seeking skills, and other intrapersonal strengths, such as resilience and self-esteem.

Scholars such as Wang (2023) have indicated the importance of schools as a protective environment for children's resilience development when faced with parental migration in general and maternal migration in particular. Wang noted that children who are left-behind use their social networks to protect their well-being associated with parental absence, thus providing additional evidence of their agency.

Children left-behind should be included as a vulnerability factor when assessing their need for social services, and regulations should be established or revised to ensure that these children are not excluded from cash assistance or food programs on the assumption that remittances can provide adequate care and education. Where necessary, support programs should directly target children of migrant parents and their guardians (Crawley et al., 2023).

6.2.4. Implications for research

Considerable research on children is based on adults' perspectives and expectations in a given society. There is research that obtains children's views but it is limited to other related topics and geographic areas (Asis, 2007; Dreby, 2007; Olwig, 1999; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014). I believe that country-specific studies are essential to examining how parental migration shapes and pervades children's lives and identities in Ethiopia. Therefore, considering children as social actors who can construct their own life experiences and shape their life trajectories presents an important perspective to the study of children left-behind.

Phenomenology was central to this study. Hence, I relied solely on semi-structured interviews to collect data and explore children's experiences and perspectives. Future researchers may study the issues of children left-behind using case studies and grounded study methodologies to enhance and strengthen our understanding. Conducting a comparative analysis of the children of non-migrant parents might also provide a greater understanding of the lived experiences of children left-behind in Ethiopia. Further studies should include children aged below 12 years. Child-friendly data collection tools should be employed to explore their experiences and perspectives.

I suggest conducting longitudinal research to ascertain the long-term effects of parental migration on the children left-behind in Ethiopia. Longitudinal studies can provide unique insights that may not be available in other approaches, enabling researchers to observe and investigate how parental migration affects children at different stages of their lives and explore the mechanisms of these effects more comprehensively. Since this study was conducted in a few urban areas of Ethiopia, studies in rural areas are essential for a better understanding of the issue.

6.3. Conclusion

The migration of parent(s) exposes children to multidimensional challenges. Parental migration significantly shapes and permeates all aspects of the lives and identities of the children left-behind, including emotions, education, and living arrangements. The participants expressed mixed feelings and responses following their parent(s)' migration and reported both benefits and challenges. Study participants also noted that ICT interventions minimize and offset the negative effects of separation.

This study acknowledges that children are experts in their lives and have the innate strength to overcome challenges after parental migration. Guided by the theoretical framework, new social studies of childhood, children were invited to narrate their experiences and perspectives. The children narrated their emotional and educational experiences and shifts in their living arrangements. Children employed their strengths to overcome the challenges associated with their parental migration, which leads to the conclusion that children should not be considered passive victims in the face of their parental migration. Rather, they should be considered individuals who can change their lives and those around them. Unlike previous frameworks in which children were considered 'human becoming' whereas adults were seen as

‘human beings,’ participants fit the view of children as having the inherent capacity to change and shape their lives and those around them.

Interventions with children left-behind must begin by assessing their strengths and challenges to help them address their predicaments. The current findings can inform policymakers and practitioners in understanding and addressing the situations of children left-behind in Ethiopia. This study contributes to the literature by expanding our understanding of children left-behind in Ethiopia and identifying the need for social work services. Children left-behind in Ethiopia are a segment of the population that requires earnest attention.

This study overcomes the major theoretical and methodological limitations of existing literature on children left-behind. Theoretically, based on the new social studies of childhood, this study provides the opportunity for children to express their experiences. Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative research approach, which is suitable for exploring the experiences and perspectives of the children left-behind. In this study, children were treated as social actors who could make sense of and actively construct their life experiences. Although children have inherent and inbuilt strengths to change their lives and those around them, policies must be designed and strengthened to secure the rights of children, as stipulated in international conventions such as the CRC (1989). Moreover, policies and legislation should be bolstered to better monitor and punish various forms of child abuse at home, and should be oriented toward minimizing the psychosocial impacts of parental migration on children left-behind.

The ability of transnational parents to communicate with their children and other family members is greatly supported by ICT. Although it does not replace in-person connections, smartphone communication significantly bridges the distance between parents and children. Online communication makes distant parenting feasible, as parents can support and guide their

children from afar. Regardless of the lack of in-person contact and the unreliable and poor internet connections, parenting from a distance positively affects children left-behind. In working to reconnect children with their migrant parent(s), it is vital to recognize the importance of ICT. This importance can be illustrated by including the need for equitable ITR (Information Technology Resources) access in the Ethiopian national child policy.

Overall, this study draws the attention of practitioners, policymakers, and government officials in Ethiopia to pay particular attention to children whose parent(s) become transnational labor migrants. Furthermore, the traditional notion of considering children to be incomplete human beings was challenged in this study, and children were found to be active in shaping their lives and those around them. Therefore, the inherent potential of children should not be undervalued.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

Addis Ababa University

School of Social Work

The interview guide was informed by a review of the literature to identify the major themes. The interview questions are designed to focus on the background of research participants; experiencing life in the face of their parents' migration, coping mechanisms, the experience of being parented from abroad, and the changing roles and responsibilities because of parental migration.

1. Demographic Characteristics

- Age: _____
- Sex: _____
- Grade: _____
- Main Caregiver: _____
- Year your parent(s) left abroad _____
- Date of interview _____
- Place of interview _____

2. General Research Questions

The following questions are a starting point, but related questions were asked during our discussion.

- 1) Can you talk about what it was like for you when your parent(s) migrated abroad?

Probes:

- Why do you think your parent(s) migrated?
- What is your opinion about your parent(s) migration? Why do you have such opinions?
- How do you feel about being left-behind?
- How often do your parents come back home? Do you miss your parents? How is your relationship with them? Are there any changes taking place during your separation?

- 2) Can you talk about what your life is like now with your parent(s) away compared to when she was here?

Probes:

- How do you lead your daily life? (e.g., making meals, clothing, housing, transportation, living expenses, school life, homework, domestic chores, and holidays).
- Have you had any challenges after your parent(s) migration at home, school, and in the community? And how did you overcome those challenges?
- How is it different? How is it the same?
- How does the amount of housework you do now differ from when your parent(s) was at home?
- How do you evaluate your school performance before and after your parent(s) left?
- Have you faced any psychological/ emotional or physical problems since your parent(s) departure?

3) Can you talk about who is caring for you with your parent(s) away?

Probes:

- Are you satisfied with your current caregiver in comparison to your parent(s)?
- Have you experienced any disagreement between you and the person with whom you are living, who is caring for you? If yes, please explain.
- Who takes care of you during your childhood (emotional care, discipline, financial support) after your parents' migration? How is your relationship with the guardian? (e.g., father, mother, grandparents, or other extended family kin)?

4) Can you talk about your contact with your parent(s)?

Probes:

- Do you have contact with your migrant parent(s) (father, mother, or both)? What is the topic of communication?
- What kind of communication tool (landline, mobile, smartphone, laptop, or any social media) have you used since you separated with your family? Please reason of your technology usage.
- How do you contact your parent(s)? (Questions about the method of distance communication, the frequency of communication, and the feelings about these experiences).

5) Does your parent(s) provide money for you?

Probes:

- How do you get the money?
 - Does this money affect you? (e.g., your daily consumption, education, or the power relationship between the family members with whom you are living?)
- 6) Do you have the aspiration of being a migrant worker in a foreign country? Why?

Appendix B: Demographic Profile

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Grade	Caregiver/siblings	Migrant parents	Age when parents migrated	Place of Migration	Place of interview	Last seen of migrant parent/s
Hayat	F	17	10	Grandmother only	Mother	2 with intermittent visits in between	S. Arabia	Adama	2 years
Jemila	F	12	3	Aunt, aunt's children	Mother	1	S. Arabia	Adama	1 year
Mekdes	F	16	9	Uncle, sisters, and brother	Both parents	10	S. Arabia	Adama	mother (5 years) and father (7 years)
Firtuna	F	18	10+1	Father, and brothers	Mother	9	Bahrain	Addis Ababa	7 years
Zalika	F	14	9	Grandfather and grandfather's children	Mother	1	Bahrain	Addis Ababa	Do not remember
Zakir	M	18	10+2	Grandmother, unmarried aunt, and sister	Mother	6 with intermittent visits in between	Dubai	Addis Ababa	5 years
Dagim	M	17	11	Grandmother and unmarried uncle	Mother	9	Beirut	Addis Ababa	8 years
Teklu	M	15	9	Grandmother, unmarried uncle	Mother	Six months	Bahrain	Addis Ababa	2 years

Afework	M	18	11	Grandmother only	Mother	11	Dubai	Addis Ababa	6 years
Mustefa	M	18	12	Aunt, unmarried uncle, aunt's children, and sister	Mother	11	S. Arabia	Addis Ababa	5 years
Halima	F	16	9	Father, sister, half-brother, and stepmother	Mother	9	Belgium	Adama	5 years
Habiba	F	14	9	Unmarried aunt, uncle's children	Both parents	5	USA	Adama	Mother (8 years) and father (1 year)
Semira	F	17	9	Eldest daughter, brothers, and uncle's son/cousin	Both parents	15	S. Arabia	Adama	2 years
Marina	F	18	9	Married uncle without family, brothers, and sister	Both parents	16	S. Arabia	Adama	Mother (2 years) and father (6 years)
Dagmawit	F	16	9	Mother, sisters, and a brother	Father	10	S. Arabia	Adama	6 years
Sekina	F	14	6	Father, sister	Mother	9	S. Arabia	Adama	5 years
Afomia	F	12	5	Mother, sisters, and brother	Father	7	S. Arabia	Adama	5 years
Mariamawit	F	17	10	Father, brother, and sister	Mother	16	S. Arabia	Adama	1 year

Eldana	F	12	6	Mother, sisters, and a brother	Father	11	S. Arabia	Adama	1 year
Hanur	M	14	7	Aunt, aunt's children, and sisters	Both parents	8	USA	Adama	6 years
Munira	F	13	5	Elder brother, sisters, and brother	Both parents	8	S. Arabia	Adama	Father (5 years) and mother (2 years)
Remedan	M	18	6	Mother, brother, and sister	Father	16	S. Arabia	Adama	3 years
Hafiza	F	14	6	Lives only with aunt	Mother	9	S. Arabia	Adama	5 years
Nuredin	M	13	5	Mother, young sister	Father	8	S. Arabia	Adama	5 years
Zeyneba	F	16	10	Father, brothers, and sisters	Mother	11	USA	Adama	5 years

Appendix C: Parent(s) or Caregivers Consent Form

Research Title: Parental Migration in Urban Ethiopia: The Experiences of Children Left-Behind

Researcher: Eliyas Taha

Your permission is being sought to have your child participate in this study. Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether to give your permission.

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is to help us understand the lived experiences of children left-behind because of parental migration.

Procedure to be followed: During data collection, your child will be notified and scheduled to provide details of their lived experiences following his/her parent(s) migration. In the process, their voices will be recorded.

Discomforts/risks: There are no foreseeable discomforts or dangers to either you or your child in this study.

Incentives/benefits for participation: There are no direct benefits to your child, but your child will receive a small gift for participating. The results of this study, however, will increase our knowledge of the experiences of children left-behind following their parent(s) migration.

Statement of confidentiality: All records are kept confidential. If the results of this study are published, the data will be presented in group form and individual children will not be identified.

Voluntary Participation: Your child's participation is voluntary. If you feel your child has in any way been coerced into participation, please inform the faculty advisor. We also ask that you read this letter to your child (if age-appropriate) and inform your child that participation is voluntary. At the time of the study, your child will once again be reminded of this by the researcher.

Termination of participation: If at any point during the study, you or your child wishes to terminate the session, we will do so.

Questions regarding the research should be directed to:

I, the parent, or caregiver of _____, a minor _____ years of age, permit his/her participation in a program of research named above and being conducted by Elias Taha

Signature _____

Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Articles

Article 1.

Eliyas T., Faye M. & Ashenafi H. (2024). Transnational families in urban areas of Ethiopia:

understanding the lived experiences of children left-behind. *African Journal of Social Work*, 14(3), 303-310. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajsw.v14i6.1>

ABSTRACT

Despite a huge flow of international labor migration, sub-Saharan Africa has not been given due consideration in the transnational families' literature. There is a considerable flow of international labor migration from Ethiopia to economically prosperous countries. This study aims to explore and understand the lived experiences and life tapestry of children left-behind by one or both parents in Addis Ababa and Adama City, Ethiopia. The study was informed by the "new social studies of childhood" theory, which considers children as active in constructing their lives and those around them. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 25 children who experienced parental migration. The findings revealed that parental migration has many significant effects in shaping and permeating children's lives and identities—their emotions, education, and living arrangements. Despite children's spatio-temporal separation, smartphones were found to play a prominent role in fostering parent-child relationships. Parental migration affected children's aspirations, specifically to be reunited with their migrant parent(s). This study contributes by expanding our understanding of children left-behind in Ethiopia and identifies social work services that need attention. In the existing policies related to children in Ethiopia, children left-behind must be considered as a segment of the population that requires earnest attention.

KEY TERMS: Children left-behind; Ethiopia; international labor migration; lived experiences; parental migration; transnational families.

Article 2.

Eliyas T., Faye M. and Ashenafi H. (2025). Information and Communication Technology in

Transnational Families: understanding the experiences of children left-behind in urban Ethiopia. *The British Journal of Social Work*, bcaf215, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaf215>.

Abstract

Despite the tremendous flow of international migration, Ethiopia has not been given due consideration in the literature on transnational families. The current study explored the perspectives of children using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) with their migrant parent(s). A descriptive qualitative approach, which provides rich descriptive content from participants' perspectives, was employed. We conducted interviews with twenty-five participants from Adama and Addis Ababa. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data. Based on the analysis of the interviews, five overlapping themes were revealed: mixed emotional responses to ICT communication, transformation of children's roles, distance parenting, shifts in contact, and emotional detachment. This study contributes by expanding our understanding of children left-behind in Ethiopia and identifying the need for tailored social work services. Equitable digital access in the Ethiopian national child policy is found to be essential, which can be demonstrated by investing in school-based Wi-Fi hubs to facilitate parent-child communication and attachment. By highlighting children's right to equitable digital access to communication with their migrant parents, this study contributes to child welfare policy across the globe in the context of migration.

Keywords: *Children left-behind, Ethiopia, information and communication technology, international migration, lived experiences, transnational families*

Declaration and Letter of Approval

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my original work. It has not been presented in any other University and that all sources of materials used for this work have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Elias Taha

Signature:

Date: November 2025

Letter of Approval

To whom it concerns:

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled ‘Parental Migration in Urban Ethiopia: The Experiences of Children Left-Behind’ is the original work of Elias Taha, performed under our close guidance and supervision. This study was submitted to Graduate Studies, a school of social work for examination, with our approval as supervisors.

Principal Supervisor Name: Faye Mishna

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