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The migration of parents and its effects on children left behind:

A Case study on families in Khorog, Tajikistan

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Abstract

While acknowledging that there are many reasons for parents to be absent in the lives of their children, very little attention is paid to parental absence as a consequence of migration. Due to poor economic conditions resulting from the Civil war, the Tajikistani economy and families became highly dependent on external finance. In relation to Khorog migration flow, parents migrate in order to improve their living conditions, as well as economically support their families left behind, which are comprised mostly of children. The literature proposes that some children benefit from the remittances parents send home, which gives them the opportunity to access education, health care and improves their social life, while for others it may result in feelings of abandonment, loneliness, low self-esteem and neglect. This study examines the impact of parents in migration on children left behind, and identifies the effects on various aspects of children's well-being (a general picture), such as health, education, extracurricular activities, and their emotional and social life. In this regard, the results of this study show that, even if migration brings economic benefits to the families, it comes at high price for the children, who are negatively influenced by the prolonged absence of their parents and are being raised in a hostile environment that can have a destructive influence on their socio-psychological well-being, academic performance, health and socialization. The author hopes that this paper will contribute to increased awareness of the subject and stimulate further research within this area.

Keywords: children left behind, parental absence, migration, socialization, child development, violence, psychological effects

1. Introduction

The family is considered to be the fundamental unit of all societies (Kimani and Kombo, 2010). In the small society of Khorog, family is perceived to be the main source of the basic necessities of life and health, clothing and sanitation, tenderness and love. Thus, it is considered to bear the responsibility for the upbringing of all its children. However, as a result of migration, many parents leave their children with their extended families and, in most cases, with their grandparents. Labour migration became a very popular way of reducing poverty and improving the economic situation of the family. More than 600, 000 migrants (7, 5 % of the total population) leave the country each year for seasonal work, mostly in Russia, to provide financial support for their families back home (Khakimov and Mahmadbekov, 2009).

While attention is paid mostly to the economic benefits and effects of migration, inadequate information and data exist on the impact of migration on household dynamics, and studies on the effects of parental absence due to migration on children left behind is practically non-existent. Children left behind when their parents migrate are the key group affected by migration, especially when they are left in vulnerable situations, as not all are fortunate to get effective substitute caregivers (Jokhan, 2007). In this regard, the paper acknowledges the need to devote some attention to the understanding of this particular issue and will focus on addressing this gap by analyzing the impact on various aspects of children's well-being (a general picture), such as health, education, hobbies and extra-curricular activities, socialization, their emotional and social well-being. What is meant by *left behind* is the "potential adverse effects of the loss of caregiver(s)" (Bennet, Clifford and Falkingham, 2011) in the life of children for a certain extended period of time or the absence of parents due to migration in their children's lives. The main goal was to capture an overall picture of a household, where left behind children dwell and to explore how children themselves portray

their lives. Therefore, one is not able to find a steady impact of migration on child well-being overall, but rather to attempt to find out what the children's perception of their current situation is. The objective of this project is to contribute to the understanding of the multiple effects of migration on children, household and society in general. However, it should be pointed out that this is an exploratory study, therefore the information depicted here cannot be generalized, but it can help to grasp an idea of the possibilities related to effects that can develop in children due to the absence of parents. Before going to the field research, it was hypothesized that the effects are both positive and negative and depend largely on the household where the children live. To this end, this study focuses on the following research questions:

- **What are the effects of parents in migration on the well-being of children left behind?**
- **What are the subjective perceptions of the left-behind children on their current situation?**

The literature on parental absence as a consequence of migration conveys various results, some claiming advantages and others disadvantages. Often, migration is examined from an economic standpoint, with its positive impact on the Tajikistani economy through remittances sent by migrant workers to improve their families' lives, as well as its influence on poverty reduction (Livingstone, 2012). Therefore, most of the literature examines parental migration on a macro level, rather than understanding the experiences of those children, who may foster feelings of neglect, abandonment, hostility and loneliness. There are many children who receive little or no physical and emotional nurturance from their caregivers (Jokhan, 2007), and most of them experience violence in their upbringing. According to Leo-Rhynie (1993), destructive behavior can develop among these children, who in the future will consider violence as a way of solving the problems as well (as cited in Jokhan, 2007). Sadly, the

examination of this social dimension of migration is poorly researched, especially in Tajikistan, which has the largest and most dynamic migratory flow (Olimova and Bosc, 2003) among all Central Asian countries.

The research is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces conceptualization and operationalization of the work, by examining the causal link between migration and children left behind and the existing literature on this issue. It introduces the issue of migration in Tajikistan by addressing its effects on children and lays out the theoretical framework for the research. Section 3 explains the research methods and instruments preferred for this study. Section 4 outlines the findings of the study, derived from a qualitative research method with in-depth observations. It also analyses 6 case studies, with 3 explaining the overall picture of the household where the child (en) live and the other 3 explaining the subjective view of the children of their life with their caregivers. Section 5 emphasizes the main analyses and discussion of the work by addressing the main outcomes of parental absence due to migration. Section 6 concludes the main points of the study, possible outcomes that can result from the use of violence and coping strategies that society can develop. Finally section 7 gives suggestions and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

This study focuses on the effects of migration on the well-being of children left behind and the subjective perception of children on their current situation. To that end, the literature reviewed explains conceptualization and operationalization (2.1) of the work, and traces back to the history of migration in Tajikistan, economic issues related to migration in Tajik society (2.2), research conducted in other countries and in Tajikistan analyzing the effects of parent's absence on children left behind (2.3), theoretical framework (2.4) and methodological analyses (2.5) of various works. The literature used in this research elucidated not only the positive sides of the remittances sent back home by the migrants, but examined the

consequences that follow the migration of parents and the vulnerability of the children left behind. While conducting the review of relevant literature, a taxonomy of related sources was created.

There are few valuable works that emphasize the well-being of children left behind, yet child well-being is also complex, therefore one would not expect to find homogeneous effects overall, but rather attempt to look into correlation between migration factors on children well-being. Parents are believed to be the main agents of socializing their children, thus their role is very crucial in this process (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). Hence, this research tries to look into the consequences that can follow their prolonged absence in the lives of their children. Some literature claims the importance of migration in terms of GDP (gross domestic product), increase in the budget of the family, which supports the development of the lives within the household by improving access to health care, education, better nutrition and hygiene. On the other hand, scholars who examined more deeply the lives of the households, especially children, discovered that there were negative consequences of parental absence, and in addition the money sent by parents is most of the time not spent on them.

2.1 Conceptualization and Operationalization

Left behind can be understood in different contexts such as: orphan children, abandoned children, children who do not get appropriate and sufficient attention from their parents and children whose parents are in migration. This study focuses on children *left behind*, when household members migrate. In particular, on the “potential adverse effects of the loss of caregiver(s)” (Bennet, Clifford and Falkingham, 2011) in the life of children for a certain extended period of time. Furthermore, this research will follow the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’s (UNCRC) definition of *children* as “individuals below the age of 18” (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, many other studies that are used, define children as being those below the age of 15. The definition of “*migration*” on the other hand is complex

and debatable as it depends on the length, location and nature of the migrant. By addressing the impact of migration on children's life, the duration of migration should be taken into consideration of at least 6 months and as well as the absence of both parents (not their location or what they are engaged in). Based on the aims of this study, migrant is defined as "any person who has been away from their household for a certain extended period of time" (UNICEF, 2011).

On the other hand child *well-being* is also "complex", with various aspects that differ and have more impact on one household than others (*ibid.*). The UNCRC, affirmed by Tajikistan proposes a comprehensive approach to child well-being (UNICEF, 2011). It sets out the "right of the child to the highest attainable standards of health and education, and the right to be free from discrimination, exploitation, and abuse" (*ibid.*). This research will try to measure the well-being in relation to education, health, extra-curricular activities, emotional and social aspects of a child's life. Therefore, one is not able to find a steady impact of migration on child well-being overall, but rather attempt to find out what the children think about their parents being absent in their lives. To this end, this study emphasizes the understanding of labour migration consequences, through the prism of the children's own understanding of their well-being.

2.2 The context of Tajikistan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan faced a Civil war (1992-1997), which dramatically changed the living conditions of the population. Tajikistan in common with other ex-soviet states embarked upon an ongoing transition to a free market economy that made the lives of people even harsher, as there was a sharp decline in production across all sectors (UNICEF, 2011). Due to the fact that many people lost their jobs and the infrastructure of the country disintegrated, for most of the Tajik population finding a job abroad was the only alternative choice to fight poverty and hunger (Olimova and Bosc, 2003).

It became a crucial tool as a means of solving the problem of unemployment, famine and survival.

Today, labour migration plays a huge role in the mountainous and isolated areas of countries such as Tajikistan. The economic, social and cultural impacts on the life of the communities have changed, along with the increase in the number of migrants (Olimova and Olimov, 2007). The mains reasons for the Tajik migrant flow to the Russian Federation is believed to be the consequence of poor economic situation that leads to unemployment and poverty (Olimova and Bosc, 2003). It is estimated that approximately 800,000 Tajiks were working in Russia in 2009 (Ganguli, 2009). According to the data from the National Bank of Tajikistan, about 2,67 billion USD or 49 % of the GDP (gross domestic product) is accounted for by the money migrants sent home in 2008 (UNICEF, 2011). Whereas, 34% of the migrant households received remittances every three to six months, 19 % only received once every six to twelve months, irregularly, rarely or not at all (Livingstone, 2012). 72 % of long-term migrants did not visit their households back home during the last 12 months (*ibid.*). Due to the fact that the number of migrants leaving Tajikistan is steadily growing every year, the number of left behind children is expanding as well. The regions with the highest levels of absolute and extreme poverty rates are the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAO) and Khatlon (UNICEF, 2011). Thus, Tajik citizens see migration as one of the main sources of income to meet the basic needs of their families.

In the literature on migration in Tajikistan, it appears that labour migration is seen as a response to the civil war and economic crisis, rather than a normal part of all families in the Tajik society. Most of the literature emphasized the positive side of migration and remittances that the families of Tajik society receive, but in order to understand the real aftermath of this issue, one needs to investigate the lives of the migrant families, especially the children. Parents migrate in the hope of earning enough money to send home for a better life for their

children, who are growing up with their extended families. Nevertheless, caregivers in some situations might not be able to replace parents, which can raise important issues, as the socialization and well-being of children is highly dependent on adults.

2.3 Challenges for children of migrating parents

Many households consider migration as a way of survival, to meet the basic needs of mere existence. There are many families, who have one member in migration (almost in all cases the man), however during the last several years, migration of both parents has increased dramatically in Tajikistan (Olimova and Olimov, 2007). Researches have been done on such topics with diverse results, some claiming that the remittances sent by migrant parents increase the attendance of children in school, decrease the gender gap in education, improve child health-particularly of girls, and reduce child labour (Glind, 2010), while others say that the migration of parents has strong negative impacts on the well-being of children left behind (Nasritdinov and Schenkkann, 2012; Sanghera, Ablezova, and Botoeva, 2011; Glind, 2010; Jones, Sharpe and Segren, 2004). However, the majority of the findings assert the disadvantages of parental migration.

According to Jones, Sharpe and Segren (2004), who conducted research in Trinidad, the left behind children were twice as likely to have emotional problems (as cited in Glind, 2010). The same results were found by Nasritdinov and Schenkkann (2012), who claimed that migration, has strong negative impacts on children's health, academic performance, and behavior. Furthermore, in some cases where both parents are in migration, children must take over the domestic chores to the detriment of their education and most of the time they are left with their grandparents who find it difficult to care for them (Jones, Sharpe and Segren, 2004). During the research in Tajikistan by Saodat Olimova and Igor Bosc (2003), when asking about the negative effect of their migration, migrants most often cited the weakening of control over their children's education. Furthermore, research in Albania suggests that the

absence of parents in the household due to migration leads to reduce investment in their children's education and may be a psychological cost (Giannelli and Mangiavacchi, 2010). Similarly Jokhan (2007) suggests that, negative behavior can develop among children, who experience parental absence as a consequence of migration and according to Nasridtidov and Schenkkan (2012) children develop behavioral problems such as hooliganism, stealing, or drinking, when there is lack of parental attention. Such problems are of course seen in single and traditional families as well, however this particular research focuses on the consequences of the absence of parents due to migration on their children, who are more likely to be influenced (Grusec and Davidov, 2007) and these are just a few of such effects. Research done in Tajikistan by UNICEF (2011) suggests that some households cited advantages of migration by having more money in the family budget for health, education and better nutrition and others claimed increased aggressiveness and depression among children, as well as the lack of parental guidance. Household income is a very important factor for child welfare. Migration is one way and probably in some cases the only way of increasing the income of households in Tajikistan. Therefore, remittances are the main source of positive effects from migration on left behind children (*ibid.*). However the question here is, whether households do receive money from migrants when it is urgently needed and is the money sent spent on the welfare of children? This is questionable, hence, most of the literature on this particular issue claims negative effects of parental absence.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The research is based on socialization in family (Grusec and Davidov, 2007), social domain theory (Bugental, 2000) and the structural functionalism theory of Durkheim. The Socialization in the family and social domain theories, explain the role of parents (if parents are absent, than caregivers) in the socialization process of the children and argue that parents (caregivers) are the most important agents in their impact on children's well-being. The

theory of socialization is very crucial in this work as it emphasizes the development of the child in order to become a well-functioning member of the society. The main reason of choosing structural functionalism theory of Durkheim is its explanatory power in relation to this research. An argument of Durkheim is that a system consists of diversified components or sub systems and in order for the whole system to work, all sub systems must function together (Kimani and Kombo, 2010). Structural functionalism theory sees family as an organism, comprised of several structures, each of which is expected to perform its role in order to sustain the family unit (*ibid.*). Each structure within the family is interrelated and interlinked and if there is a malfunctioning of one structure, then it has effects on the whole unit. However, within the family there should be a central authority, in order to enhance harmony and stability (*ibid.*). Hence, parents (or caregivers) play the central and crucial role in the family and their position helps them to adopt various activities. Such activities include upbringing of the children, coordination of the family activities, setting family duties and socialization of the young (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). Through inspiring children with basics of social culture, the family creates a solid fundament for their further integration in the society.

In order for the children to be well-functioning members of society, they should experience a positive process of socialization. Socialization according to Grusec and Davidov (2007), involves “the acceptance of values, standards and customs of society as well as the ability to function in an adaptive way in the larger social context”. However, such values, customs and standards are constructed from generation to generation; thus, parents (caregivers) are the helpers in creating the environment for the children, so they can behave and accept the values, standards and customs willingly, rather than out of fear or external consequences (*ibid.*). There are many children who live and grow up with their extended families, who pressure them, and as a result the children develop anxiety and stress

symptoms. This is a very significant issue nowadays, because parents, due to financial need leave their children in the care of their relatives, who, in some cases are overwhelmed with the responsibility and thus caregiving seems to be burdensome, with resulting violence. The age at which parents leave their children is significant, subsequently it influences their upbringing, socialization, emotional, social and academic advancement (Kimani and Kombo, 2010). As for growth and development of the child's personality, the presence of both parents is crucial (*ibid.*). Researchers have long acknowledged that there is a tremendous influence of parents (caregivers) on children that leads to changing actions, behavior, and personality (Grusec and Davidov, 2007).

Social domain theory of Bugental (2000) on the other hand emphasizes that, there are many domains of social life, where there are various issues to be addressed and there are different rules that operate in social life (Bugental, 2000). Bugental's (2000) identifies four domains of social life: the child's need for protection and security, the development of a sense of autonomy that can be jeopardized when parents or caregivers control and direct the actions of the child, the child's need to identify her/his social group or be part of the group and exchange of relationships. In essence, there are various paths to socialization and with fairly different outcomes at the end of each path, and each demanding different parenting practices. Children are keen to act in accordance to rules, actions and standards of the surroundings with which they identify, therefore parents or caregivers, in turn, serve as a model of socially acceptable behavior for the children as well as managing the environment for their children so that they feel safe and protected (Bugental, 2000). In addition, they need to be responsive to the wishes of their children, collaborate with their desires and aspiration, and exchange in a positive and harmonious way (*ibid.*). Hence, if the caregivers are unable to organize effectively, the children are very likely to suffer in their development (Kimani and Kombo 2010).

The theories used in the research emphasize the importance of positive upbringing and the role of parents (caregivers) as the main agents in the socialization process of the child, in order for him/her to be a well-functioning member of the society. Therefore, the development of the society in general depends on its well-functioning members.

2.5 Literature on Methodology

While reviewing the literature, almost all the researches are quantitatively done and most data is derived from standard household surveys, which are usually designed to analyze information about the household but are not specifically focused on migration, remittances and children's well-being. Therefore, for understanding the impact of migration on children left behind, more thorough investigation needs to be conducted, as finding the effects is not an easy task, hence observation and individual interviewing plays a significant role. The researches carried out by UNICEF (2011) in Tajikistan and Nasritdinov and Schenkkkan (2012) in Kyrgyzstan are unusual in the sense that they used a "mixed method", both quantitative and qualitative, which helped the researchers to quantify the impact of parents' migration on a set of key outcome indicators, while at the same time, untangling the causal dynamics through which those effects came to be. Some parts of the methodology used by UNICEF (2011) were used in this research, and are further discussed in the methodology section. Deliberately, the choice of methodology preferred for this particular study was qualitative with in-depth observations.

3. Methodology of the study

Due to the methodological challenges (including issues of conceptualization, definition and framing) there is limited empirical evidence on the impact of migration on children left behind (UNICEF, 2011). As Rossi mentions, most of the quantitative empirical research about children left behind is based on data derived from standard household surveys (as cited in UNICEF, 2011). Moreover, according to the literature most of the research is

quantitatively based rather than qualitative.

The research method preferred for this study was adopting qualitative method with 6 case studies. According to Flyvbjerg (2006), case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, while other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building. In addition, case studies are helpful in thorough investigation of one or more units by gathering in-depth understanding of the issue studied. The advantages of this approach in this study are that, it gave a clearer image of the life of the children left behind, and allowed to look at the world through their eyes. Qualitative research methods help to learn about people's understandings, values, beliefs, interpretations, preferences, priorities and the social context of a particular population (Patton and Chochran, 2002). The strength of such a research method is its ability to provide textual description of how people experience a given research issue.

The section is divided into several parts: 3.1 focus of the study, 3.2 research area and fieldwork overview, 3.3 research methods and tools, 3.4 interviews, 3.5 observation, 3.6 ethical consideration and 3.7 the limitations of the this study's methodology.

3.1 Focus of the study

The study considered one type of household, which was highly influenced by migration. It focused on migrant households in four case studies. A migrant household consists of at least one child (under 18 years old), whose parents have both been in migration for at least six months. Parents should be away for different reasons, either study or work, and should have been in contact with the household at least once during the past 4 months. The study focuses mostly on the well-being of children, who are living with their extended families.

3.2 Research area and fieldwork overview

The research for this study was carried out in Khorog city, which is the capital of

Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (the eastern part of Tajikistan). The area is shown in the following map:



Source: Nasser (2012): <http://nadimnasser.blogspot.com/>

Its population is approximately 30, 000 people (“Khorog City,” nd.). The fieldwork was conducted during December 2013 and January 2014 (2 ½ weeks). All the households were found by snowball sampling, as the time for the research was limited and the respondents of the study were willing to share information about their problems and experiences; however, of course not all the information was accurate, so an observation was conducted as well. A snowball sampling yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981).

Children on the other hand were less communicative, and boys were less active than girls. In one case, during a week stay in one of the households, the girl who lived with her extended family cried often and was distressed. Moreover, children were less confident in

themselves, were hesitant in providing examples from their own experiences and were confused when asked to do something, like drawing a picture of their closest person.

3.3 Research methods and tools

As mentioned in the introduction of this section, qualitative research was used to gather the information needed, with 4 case studies of migrant households. The techniques used to gather the data include a focus group with children (aged 6-11), individual interviews with children (aged 10-18) and caregivers, as well as interviews with local informants using semi-structured questionnaires. The key research participants were:

- **Children** (male and female, 6-11 years old, 12-18 years old)
- **Caregivers** (with whom the children currently live)
- **Teachers** (for overall information about students with migrant parents)
- **NGO members** (who have worked with migrant families)
- **Family doctors**

Measuring the well-being of children left behind is complicated, therefore, most of the results are based on how the children see changes in their life during the period of their parent's absence. As the project is based on finding the effects of migration on children, interviews with caregivers helped to enrich the analysis. For the children aged 6-11 a focus group was conducted in order to explore the difference in opinions and to retain their interest. Participatory work with children requires particular care, and the researcher needs to be careful to build and maintain trust. Therefore, some of the methods used in UNICEF (2011) research undertaken in Tajikistan were used for the focus group for children aged 6-11. There were many other icebreaker games, before approaching the migration issue. Such a research method is designed to allow participants to enjoy the research, as well as to express issues in their own terms:

- **Migration mapping:** the idea of this exercise is to help children to display by drawing where

their parents traveled to work, which will be followed by questions concerning the picture.

- **Who matters?** This exercise will help children to identify the main people or institutions in their social life. This will also benefit the research in finding out about whom do the child turns to when s/he feels bad? Do they get the support and is this emotional support adequate?
- **Time-use exercise:** This will help to identify how the child is spending her/his day that includes: schooling, household chores, extracurricular activities and leisure.
- **Semi-structured discussions:** This technique allowed the researcher to ask more questions related to migration issues from the drawings of the children.

3.4 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with children, caregivers and local informants. All the interviews with caregivers were held in their houses in the presence of the children in most of the cases, as there were no extra rooms for the children. The caregivers openly expressed their thoughts concerning migration issues in front of the children and in one case study, a grandmother of two children started using indecent words when referring to their mother who is in Russia. This affected the little girl's feelings and she started to cry.

Local informants were asked to provide a more general overview of their thoughts about the issues around children being left behind and migration in Khorog city.

3.5 Observation

Observation is a crucial element in case studies, which helps the researcher to see interactions happening and to record physical and verbal behavior. In this research, observation was a key method of collecting data, as it provided insights into interaction between children and their caregivers, illustrating and providing information on how the physical behavior influences those interactions. A researcher must both hear and see, as Mulhall (2002) says, “using our eyes as well as our ears”. A one-night stay in two households, more than a week stay in one household and one-day stay in two other households took place,

with in-depth field notes, pictures and discussions.

3.6 Ethical consideration

The time and place for the interviews was chosen by the respondents, however all of them were conducted in their houses, possibly due to lack of options and feeling more comfortable in their own houses. Prior to conducting the interviews and observation, the respondents were asked to sign an informed consent form permitting a stay in their households and engagement of the children in the focus group, held in a school. The informed consent form guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of their names, their responses and the material gathered for this study will be available only to the researcher, the supervising professor and the department of Sociology of the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek. All the interviews were recorded with the agreement of the respondents.

3.7 Limitations

My research had several limitations. Firstly, the timeframe devoted to this research was 2 ½ weeks, during the winter break in Khorog city, Tajikistan. It was a time of New Year holidays and visiting of relatives in the villages. The timings of interviews were many times rescheduled due to household issues. As some of the interviews with caregivers were held in their homes, most of the sensitive questions were not asked due to the presence of the children. Secondly, the study was limited by its small sample size, because finding respondents was problematic, in the sense that some people were reluctant to take part in the research, while others were busy. The participants represented a narrow range of those influenced by migration, thus a larger sample would have benefited the results more. The study shows a brief preview of the hidden world behind migration, which is in need of greater depth of information and observation with a prolonged period of time. Therefore, this research does not claim to show the whole picture of what happens when parents migrate, but illustrates a small vision and sequence of a longer drama, thus is restricted in generalizing.

4. Findings of the study

4.1 Case studies of Migrant families in Khorog city, Tajikistan

According to many psychological researchers, parents or caregivers are assumed to be in charge of children's upbringing, guidance, protection, love and support, provision of material and welfare needs (Kimani and Kombo, 2010). They are considered to be the source of inspiration for the children (*ibid.*) and the main actors in socialization process (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). However, many children grow up without their parents, who are absent due to migration. These children grow up within their extended families in the case of Tajikistan, and in most of the circumstances they live and are raised by their grandparents.

The portrayal of three households are presented here to explore the general picture of the family, with whom the child (-en) left behind live. The first household consists of the grandmother, her daughter (divorced) and her son (7 years old) and children (a girl (7) and a boy (4.5)) of her other daughter, who is in Russia with her husband. The second household consists of a grandmother (62) and a grandfather (66) with their three granddaughters (9, 10 and 11 years old), whose parents are in Russia. And the last household is comprised of a grandmother (80), her married son and their 5 year old daughter, and children (brother (7) and a sister (10)) of her other son, who is in Russia with his wife.

Case study 1

This first household provides an example of a harsh environment mainly with violence, alienation, irritation and fatigue influencing the children as they grow up. The grandmother finished 10th grade in Porshinev, a village close to Khorog and was married immediately after. She works as a nursing assistant in the addiction hospital from 8 am till 6 pm. The three children are left alone in the apartment most of the day, sometimes locked in and sometimes not. They live in a two room apartment on the 5th floor. The household depends on the grandmother's salary and her pension. The mother of the two children took a loan from a bank in order to go to Russia and now the remittances she sends cover her loan

repayments. The reason she went to Russia was to save money and build a house, as they do not have a house of their own. “*She (her daughter in Russia) has no life; she cannot even sustain them (her children). Her other son is in Internat-school. He is now in Rushan. My daughter now calls me and cries. She wants me to take him out from there. I told her that I promised to look after the two kids only, and he is still there*”-said the grandmother. The children had a brother who passed away and an older brother who has been in an Internat-school for almost 2.5 years. Internat-schools in Tajikistan are mostly filled with orphans and children whose parents find it difficult to look after them. As an observer and interviewer I have noticed that for the grandmother, taking care and raising the children of her daughter seemed a “burden”: “*Well, it is very hard to look after someone else's children, but what can I do. Their father was a drug addict, there was another son of my daughter, who lived with me. I raised him up and he was 4.5 years old when he fell off from the balcony*”-[grandmother]. She gave an impression of suppressed anger, while expressing these words. Expressions like “I am forced”, “someone else's children”, “beat”, “tired”, “don't like” and “it's hard” were expressed very often by the grandmother. She seems to be overwhelmed and taking care of her grandchildren is stressful for her.

Due to the lack of educational background of the grandmother, the children complete their homework and studies by themselves. “*I do not know most of their homework, as during my school years, we didn't have such exercises*”-[grandmother]. The little girl, who is in the 1st grade does her studies alone and is not engaged in any extra-curricular activities. The daughter of the grandmother is divorced, therefore lives with them. She works in the militia and according to their neighbor she cares only for her own son, buying him different and better things and shows her obvious dislike of her sister's children. She leaves the house in the morning and comes in late in the evenings as well. The children of the migrant workers do not seem to get any support related to their school achievements.

As the grandmother and her daughter go to work, the little girl is engaged in cleaning the house, washing the dishes and no-one knows if they are eating properly at lunch time or not. And the grandmother herself pays a lot of attention to teaching the girl of her future responsibilities. *"I always ask her to wash her and her brother's socks. I ask her to wash the dishes, so she can learn. When my daughter washes the clothes, I ask her to give her the socks, so she can learn from this age, she will need it in the future. I ask her to do house chores, not heavy ones, but easy ones. She will be thankful that I taught her that"* points out her grandmother. If the children do not listen to their grandmother or her daughter, violent force is used; therefore they are fearful and carry out their duties that the elders put on them. Gender responsibilities are taught from an early age and the grandmother thinks she is doing her job in teaching the little girl of her future duties, however the work is done only because the girl is frightened of being punished. Such an atmosphere surrounding the children influences their well-being and personal development in the long term. *"When they do not listen, I beat them, otherwise they will not listen to me and continue being like that. But what is good is their fear, I tell them that if you will not listen to me, I will come and beat you with a stick. This helps me a lot, they do not do the stuff that makes me irritated and that I do not like"*. Again, the grandmother is overwhelmed and taking care of her migrant worker children seems a burden for her. Adults use violence as a shortcut to attain discipline, obedience and acceptable behavior from the children, yet children perceive their anger and violence differently, which may result in feeling pain, fear, sadness and anger. Their social position is a position with a very little power, as adults have more positional power than they do.

While talking with the little girl, she became nervous and looked down at the floor all the time. I could feel her doubt and fear in answering me about her mood in front of her grandmother. *"The girl is a much closed person; she never goes outside and does not talk to anyone. We force her to go outside sometimes, so she can make friends. Her brother is much*

better, he is active, but she is shy" said her grandmother in front of her and the girl ran into the other room immediately. Seemingly, the children are growing up under stress, fright and violence that influence their personal development and well-being (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). In today's world good communication skills are very important, especially within caregivers and children. They can teach children how to express their feelings, needs and desires, without hurting others or themselves. The use of violence, on the other hand, teaches children the wrong way of solving the problems (*ibid.*).

On the day I visited this household, I discovered that the children are left alone and were waiting for their caregivers to come. I entered the apartment with a friend of mine, who is their neighbor. The kids were very shy and frightened when they saw me. I asked about their grandmother and they said they do not know when she is coming home. I had to wait in my friend's apartment for their grandmother to come and I heard many stories about the life of these children. My friend's family has lived next door to them for almost 12 years, so they knew the kids from an early age. His sister talked a lot about this family, the relations of the caregivers with the children and how they live: "*There was one time when they both left for work (grandmother and her daughter) and the kids put wood inside the stove. When she (grandmother) came back from work, she beat the boy to the extent that his face was full of bruises*" she mentioned. She also pointed out that, their grandmother and her daughter never talk to them nicely and whenever the child of her daughter that lives with her does something, they will always blame the migrant worker's children instead. Thus it seemed that the children are insecure and used as scapegoats by the grandmother to take her frustrations out on if they fail to listen or accomplish their duties on time.

To this end the household and the family arena was filled with anger, beating, and shouting and the children live with fright, stress and insecurity. The caregivers use violence against children with educational arguments, claiming that this will teach them something.

They think that by using violence they have solved the problems, however much of the research states that if the child experiences beating and shouting all the time, then there is a high probability that they will see violence as a way of solving their problems in the future as well (Bugental, 2000). In this case study, caregivers use violence as a tool to achieve obedience, discipline and proper behavior from the children.



Figure1: In the middle the son of her divorced daughter and the children left behind

Case study 2

The second household portrays the lives of the three children raised by their grandparents, but from separate mothers, in a small Pamiri house. While observing and interviewing the grandparents, I witnessed the same environment as in the first case. During my visit to this household, the oldest girl (11) was cleaning the floor when I entered the house. The room was very small and cold, as it was winter outside. Therefore, I had to interview the caregivers in front of the children. Their grandfather is 66 years old and worked in a meat processing plant during the Soviet period and his wife (62 years old) worked in a

mechanized bakery. They have 7 children, 4 sons and 3 daughters, who are migrant workers in Russia. The grandparents of the children finished only secondary school, thus the children do not get support from them, as they do not remember anything from their school years and they do not understand the school programs taught today. “*We help them with their homework if we know something. If I do not know, I can't do anything with it*” said the grandfather. Then there was a moment of silence and one of the girls Mayram said: “*He does not know anything*” and put her head down, while her grandparents were looking angrily at her. The girls were not moving from their places and I had an impression that they were fearful and appeared very shy.

Since their birth, the children have been raised by their grandparents. They had another cousin, who lived with them before, but now she lives with her relatives in the village, as it was hard for the grandparents to take care of all of them. “*It is very hard to raise a child, especially if it is not yours. But we have no choice. We promised our daughters we would look after their children.*” said their grandfather. There are a lot of households in Khorog city, where children of migrant workers live with their extended families, particularly with their grandparents. In many situations children are forced to live separately, as the caregivers are not able to take care of both, therefore for instance, brother and sister can see each other only during holidays.

Not surprisingly, the children are forced to do the housework, otherwise they will be punished. “*If they do not listen to us, the only way is to beat. But they do all the work for us: cooking, cleaning, make the dough and bake the bread. All the house work is on their shoulders. Our duty is to teach them, because they will need it in the future*”. After interviewing my respondents, I have noticed that a lot of attention is paid on teaching girls from an early age about their future duties, related to housework, however very less attention is paid on their studies. The girls are in charge of cleaning the house every day, preparing the

dough every evening and cooking it in the morning before going to school, washing the clothes and sweeping the yard. They go to school and come back home as soon as the school finishes, in order to help their grandparents, therefore most of day they are engaged with house chores, whereas if they refuse, then violent actions are used. Growing up in a violent home can be a traumatic experience for the children. It is an experience that can affect every aspects of child's life, growth, education and their personal development. Researchers have found out that children growing up in an aggressive atmosphere are more likely to be frightened and shy to speak out, as well as develop unacceptable social behaviors (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). What was seen in this household is the fear of the children to speak out, as they were frightened of being punished. (When I asked for a picture, the grandparents refused to let me take one.)

Case study 3

My last household shows a scene of hatred and brutality towards the children of migrant parents. The little girl Shabnam was 4 years old and her brother Anvar was only 2 years old, when their parents decided to leave Khorog. During my winter break, I had a chance to live with this household for more than one week. Shabnam's married uncle and their 5 year old daughter also live with them, only in a separate room. During this period of time, I had an amazing chance to be an observer of the household environment and the atmosphere was very stressful and cruel.

One evening, I was watching TV with the grandmother when suddenly I heard a cry from the other corner of the room. I turned my face back and I saw the uncle beating Anvar (8 years old now) and shouting at him. I had no idea of what was going on and why he was beating him so hard. They had Anvar's book in front of them and from the words of the uncle I understood that, Anvar confused one letter with another, so his uncle got angry and reacted violently. Anvar, who is only in the 1st grade, was even afraid to cry out loud. His

grandmother started to yell at him as well and saying that all he does is go outside and come home late. His uncle forced him to read the book loud and shouted: “*You will cry and study, even if you do not want. You will never see the street again, do you understand me?*”. Anvar barely read the letters loud with tears in his eyes. The shouting continued for almost an hour and Anvar was crying inside and not saying a word, but listened.

“*I do not care about your painting class and do not hang your paintings on the wall, we do not need them. All you do is cry, like a woman*” shouted his uncle to him. Anvar likes drawing and he wanted to put his painting on the wall, but his uncle did not let him do that. His grandmother was shouting that she is tired of them (of Anvar and his sister) and that she does not love them, because they do not listen to her. The children are growing up in violence and fear from an early age and beating is the main tool of solving all the problems. Punishment signifies the aggressive behavior of the caregivers, which they impose on the children. Hence, it seems that children are being expected to know what to do and how to behave without being told and can be loved if they accomplish and follow exactly the desires of their caregivers: “*When something will happen to you, you will be on my shoulder. You are not a human being, you do not understand anything*” shouted his uncle. Once more, left behind children are seemed to be a burden for the caregivers and by “*you will be on my shoulders*” he meant that he will have to take the responsibility for him. Caregivers rely on criticism and negative language believing that this will make the child responsible. Children like Anvar, at the age of 8 are still in heavily dependent on their parents or whoever is taking care of them, and are not able to cope with their emotional distress. If the child hears negative views about himself all the time, then he is more likely to internalize those destructive views of himself. Such negative statements impact their emotional development and children might feel that they are unloved, unwanted, unprotected and undeserved. Love seems to be

conditional and the children are loved if they will listen to what their caregivers say and it seems a reward for being obedient rather than a pure sign of support.

Their grandmother like my other respondents pays a lot of attention to housework. “*A real girl should have five fingers and ten skills*” [Pamiri proverb] she says and for the grandmother a ‘real girl’ should be exactly like this. She thinks that, if the girl can cook, clean the house, make bread and sweep the yard, she will find a good husband and her new family will like her. Therefore, she always tells Shabnam to do the housework, to learn these skills from her early years, because she will need them in her future, but whenever the girl does not appear to listen to her she always says: “*She does not do any housework, she is a bad girl. If I tell something, the only thing she does is cry, only cries. When she gets mad, she goes outside and comes home very late. She didn't wash the dishes, is she a girl? She is neither a girl, no sand*”. Abusive and hurtful words that caregivers use to communicate with children, further affects their cognitive, emotional and social development (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). The child will start feeling that s/he is constantly being watched with critical vision and he will have the feeling of being judged all the time. Hurtful words have a very profound influence on the self-esteem, therefore children living with verbally abusive caregivers may even be driven to commit suicide (*ibid*).

There was no specific day schedule for the children, thus they went to school in the morning, came home and went outside. When I talked with the children, they told me that they like to be outside more than sitting at home, because at home they are blamed. Their grandmother goes to sleep at 10 pm, but the children watch television till 2 am. The little boy wets his bed sometimes and every time when it happened, his grandmother started yelling and beating him and saying how bad and how tired she is of him. However, I understand that his grandmother is close to eighty, she is old and tired; therefore she is too overwhelmed to take care of these children and all she does is shout and beat them as a way of feeling that she can

regain some control of the situation. In addition, Anvar was coughing all the time and I have discovered that he recently had surgery on his nose, because he could not breathe properly and the doctors found an obstruction inside his nose that disturbed his breathing. The girl was coughing too and her grandmother said that: “*we buy medicine, but it does not go away, they always cough even in the summer*”. The children rarely see a doctor, unless the health problem is serious.

Shabnam is a very emotional girl and whenever any of her caregivers shouts at her, she starts crying and goes outside. One time, her father sent 100\$ and she wanted her uncle to buy her a new sweater. He said that she does not need any clothes, because she has plenty and that she should study instead of thinking about clothes. Shabnam became desperate that her wishes were rejected and started crying. For the caregivers this does not mean anything, because they are used to her crying and they had become desensitized to it. During my observation, I understood that there is a lot of pressure from all the relatives on these children to do what they want them to do. However, if the child does not learn of what is socially accepted and what is not through explanation, discussion and experience, but rather through control, force, rejection and violence, then the child’s development of autonomy can be damaged (Bugental, 2000).

Due to the strong emotional challenge of this study, it was necessary to consider the emotional responses of the observer to the information and the complexity of this may mean that not every relevant point is represented here. Given the familiarity of the material to the observer and the process of stepping back and viewing it more objectively, more time and reflection is perhaps required.

4.2 Subjective perception of children of their current situation

One of my research questions is the subjective perception of left behind children on their current situation. I wanted to show how it feels to be a child left behind and how they

feel about their life, therefore to explore their current situation through their eyes and experiences. Two of my respondents are from the households that I have described above and one of them is from another household.

Case study 1

I met Mayram, a 15 year old girl, when I visited the household she lives in. Up to 5 years of her childhood she lived with her aunt and then her mother sent her to live with her grandmother. From that moment she and her sister Shukriya (8) lived with their grandmother, however their other cousins live with them as well. The grandmother is taking care of 3 more children, two children of her son's (6 and 8 years old) and a son of her other daughter (2 years old). They live in a small Pamiri house all together.

Mayram was a very shy person. She was confused in her answers and always asked me if she is right or wrong. She felt uncomfortable in answering my questions, either she was afraid of her grandmother or inhibited by me. I wanted to meet her the next day somewhere else without relatives present, however I discovered that she went to stay with her relatives in the village. Her mother works as a conductor in Dushanbe-Russia-Dushanbe train and she comes to visit her children once a year. The girls grew up with their grandmother. "*My father has two wives. He got divorced with his first wife and married my mother. Now they are divorced as well. I grew up with my grandma from my early years*" said Mayram. She appeared sad, when saying this and looked at her sister. When I asked her about her mother, she became hesitant: "*I was very little when she left (her mother) and I didn't understand anything. When I saw her the first time, I didn't recognize her and I didn't even know that she is my mother. I told my aunt that she is not my mother, you are my mother. Later, when I became older, I started to know that she is my mother*" replied Mayram. The age at which parents leave their children is very important and Mayram from her very young age lived with

her aunt first and moved to live with her grandmother, therefore she does not have any feelings towards her biological mother and she became a source of money only.

Their grandmother does not consider their thoughts and opinions, their wishes and desires, but is happy when all the house chores are done. “*I do all the house chores, I take care of the kids, I wash the clothes and cook bread. I help my grandmother with home tasks and she is happy with that*” said Mayram and looked at her grandmother. She smiled back at her and said: “*She is very helpful. Child upbringing is very difficult, they make you crazy. However, our living conditions force us to do so, otherwise we will have a much harder life*”. The grandmother promised her children to take care of their children, so they can send money to her. All of her children are in Moscow, who send remittances of 100 \$ only every three to four months, therefore the household depends on her 2500 soms (50\$) pension. The grandmother might be stressed when she does not receive money from her children in Moscow, thus becoming angry and susceptible to using violence.

Mayram was muddled and afraid of telling me about her feelings. She said the only person she trusts is her best friend, who knows everything about her and whom she loves a lot: “*whenever I feel bad, I turn to my friend. Only she can understand me*” said Mayram sadly and looked down to the floor. During our 30 minute talk, she always tried to avoid eye contact and played with her dress or looked at the floor. Mayram appeared to me as an overwhelmingly sad and depressed character. She seemed to be uncertain about every word she said and it gives the impression that she does not have any confidence in herself. Nevertheless, I was surprised to hear the goal that Mayram set for herself against the background of her seemingly depressed state. She has passion to learn English language and work as an interpreter in the future. She seemed very happy when telling me about her future plans.

To sum up, Mayram feels depressed and overwhelmed of having the responsibility for taking care of the children and with all the household responsibilities, she has less emotional connections with her biological parents and turns only to her friend if she feels sad and in need of support.



Figure 3: Mayram is in the left next to her grandmother and her sister is in front of her

Case study 2

Nuriya (11) is from the second household that I have mentioned above. Nuriya is also the oldest of the children, who lives with and is being raised by her grandparents. I had a chance to have lunch with her in one of the cafes in Khorog, which gave us a chance to be alone to share our feelings and thoughts. Her parents left for Russia when she was five and after five years she saw them again. The Khorog event (military action in Khorog, 2012) gave her parents a reason to visit Nuriya and her sister.

Nuriya likes being by herself. She has only one friend in school and she is the closest person to her. *“I hate people, I hate my classmates and I always get in fights with them. They hate me too and because of that I always sit alone. I like to be alone, everyone irritates me”* said Nuriya. What could be the reasons of her hatred to the rest of the society? According to

the theories, such behavior can be assumed to be the result of her parental absence and secondly, such a negative perception of the environment could develop due to the influence of people responsible for her upbringing. The environment where the child (en) is raised influences her/his actions and behavior (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). Nuriya is growing up in the environment where her grandparents are dominant and use violence and aggression as tools to enforce the compliance of the children. Therefore, Nuriya uses aggression in her interactions with the rest of the society around her. “*If I don't do the house chores or don't listen to my grandma, she will kill me. She starts yelling and yelling. I get mad and don't talk to them for a week*” [Nuriya]. According to Grusec and Davidov (2007), socialization of the children should be internalized according with their willingness and choice, rather than out of fear or hope of reward. Nuriya is overwhelmed with the responsibilities her grandparents place on her, and whenever she refused to carry them out, she is physically forced if not yelled at. Therefore, she is hurt and angry at her caregivers and this might be reflected in her hatred towards other people.

Nuriya said she lies to her grandparents constantly, because they are old and they do not understand anything: “*I lie to my grandparents, and they don't notice anything [laughing]. If I get an F from any subject, I don't show them my journal (дневник) and they will never see my bad grades. Or, I tell them to go to the market and buy me a notebook. Then I come home very late. I hang out with my friend. I don't like home*”. To my point of view, she has pressures at home of carrying out all the house chores, therefore she likes to hang out with her friend more than she wants to go home and do the tasks. And, as the grandmother pays more attention to house chores rather than on her studies, Nuriya does not care about her studies as well, as she mentions: “*I do my homework by myself if I want, I sometimes help my sister too. If I don't know something, I will copy the answers from my classmates the next day. I cheat during the exams and I always sit in the last row to use my cheat-sheet*”. In this

situation and based on my interviews and observation, the grandparents of Nuriya have only a secondary school education and since they did not have any supervision from their parents for continuing their studies further, this probably affected their view as well, thus the grandparents are from a generation, who still value domestic work more: “*My grandpa does not know anything. My grandma does not even know how to read and write [laughs]. She doesn't even know how to write her name*” said Nuriya. Based on the theories used in this research, the educational level of the caregiver can have a great impact on children’s schooling, thus more educated caregivers are more likely to encourage their children to do well and stay in school. In Nuriya’s situation, there is no motivator and no-one who can help her learn and study. In addition the educational background of the caregivers is very crucial for the children’s upbringing, because it will influence their approach to the children’s future well-being (Bakker, Elings-Pels and Reis, 2009).

When I asked Nuriya about her parents, she said she does not know them much and she does not miss them: “*Why should I miss my parents. My mother comes and leaves again. I don't love my father. He visited only once and I don't really know him*” said Nuriya. The physical and emotional distance between parents and their children alienates them and suppresses feelings of love, hope and tenderness (Bugental, 2000). Nuriya grew up without the presence of her parents and now she has no emotional feeling towards them, but her little sister does: “*My sister misses them a lot. She feels sad when my grandparents yell at her. My mother does not yell at us, so for her it is very hard*” said Nuriya. What could be a reason for the responses of sisters to be so different from each other despite having the same experience? There can be a variety of reasons that could have pushed Nuriya to have a weaker emotional attachment to her family, it could be her age, maybe she feels she is being treated differently than her younger sister, and the answer to this would need a much more detailed observation of her particular case. On the other hand, although, their mother has been brought up in the

same manner that involved violence, she does not seem to share such a view on upbringing her own children or this could be due to the fact that she does not have the full care of the children. Another possibility is the difference between the two generations, for the grandparent's child beating and shouting is a normal thing and part of the upbringing; however for their parents it might be not, because they have been abroad and learned that there is a different way of raising their children. Violence in the house influences the child's confidence, not reaching their potential at school, lack of compassion and if there is a repeat cycle of violence, then there is a probability that the children will be violent to their children (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). Children need to know that they are important and not just because they accomplish their duties that are put on them. It seems that Mayram is loved if she does what her grandmother is pleased with. Love seems to ask something in return.

Case Study 3

My last respondent is Shabnam (10). I had a great chance to talk with this young girl about what she likes and does not like, how she depicts her life and the relations of her caregivers with her. Shabnam is a very sensitive girl. She gets hurt very quickly and cries often. Based on my observations and interviews with her extended family members, Shabnam's crying is just a habit that she uses in order to defend herself from not getting yelled at or asked to do work. However according to Shabnam every tear she sheds is for her family, when she feels sad and when she is hurt: "*I cry very quickly and all the time, because they (caregivers) always say something about me. I cry because of them, I love them. But they don't love me at all. I don't like it*" said Shabnam. It was difficult for me to listen to the story of a 10 year old girl, because of the hardships and depressive nature of the situation. She feels no love, no motivation and no support. She feels she is living with people who hate her and dislike her and what she does, therefore this influences her self-confidence, her behavior, inspiration and her life in general. "*I love kissing my grandmother, but she does not let me do*

it. She says I am bad" said Shabnam. Her grandmother is overwhelmed and exhausted. What is essential and desirable for Shabnam is denied by her caregivers. There is a strong need for inter-personal communication between the caregivers and the children, since it plays a substantial role in the socialization process (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). Further, I asked with whom she talks if she feels sad and she replied: "*I like watching TV a lot. Whenever I am sad and I cry, TV helps me to forget everything*". Television has replaced a human being, therefore for Shabnam it is better to communicate with television rather than with a human, because television does not yell at her, it makes her feel good and she forgets everything that happened. One of the reasons of such a response to television might be the hope of something better, because many of the movies and programs that were shown on TV reflected a happy family or a happy ending. Therefore, whenever Shabnam watches it, she might picture a happy image of her family, who she said will come this summer.

I was very surprised when she told me that her uncle's wife teases her and verbally abuses her by calling her different names like *black* and *bad girl*; and she does not treat Shabnam and her brother equally with her own daughter: "*Sometimes if she is angry with my brother, she will not talk to me as well. She always buys her daughter many things and teases me and my brother with that. Then I tell myself that, my parents will come and they will buy me everything that I want as well (smiles)*". Shabnam as any other child wants attention, but instead she receives rejection and dislike from her uncle's wife, who by boasting about buying her daughter toys and other things, hurts the feelings of Shabnam and her brother. This scene emphasizes the results of the parental absence in the life of children, who compare themselves with other children living with their parents and experience feelings of sadness, loneliness and being marginalized. Shabnam misses her parents a lot and wishes them to come back as soon as possible. "*I am shy to tell them come back. I want it and I miss them*" said Shabnam with tears in her eyes. Her father called her every other day to know how she is

doing, what is she up to and how are her studies, however Shabnam never told him about her emotional feelings and how her caregivers treat her. She might have been fearful about the tension that may emerge between her father and his family or the punishment she might face, or the distance resulted in an uncertainty and mistrust in her. She gave me her diary to read, where she wrote about her daily life, what happened and in what was she engaged. I went through the diary and it was fascinating, how she emphasized the main points of what have happened and how she feels about it.

The underlined sentences (Figure 4) touched me a lot, where she says: “*I was yelled at again. My mother X called me an ungrateful person. I cry every day. I want my mom and dad to come back soon*”. Shabnam feels desperate and lonely, thus television and her diary are being her only source of hope, one making her feel better when she is sad and the other allows her to express her feelings and emotions.

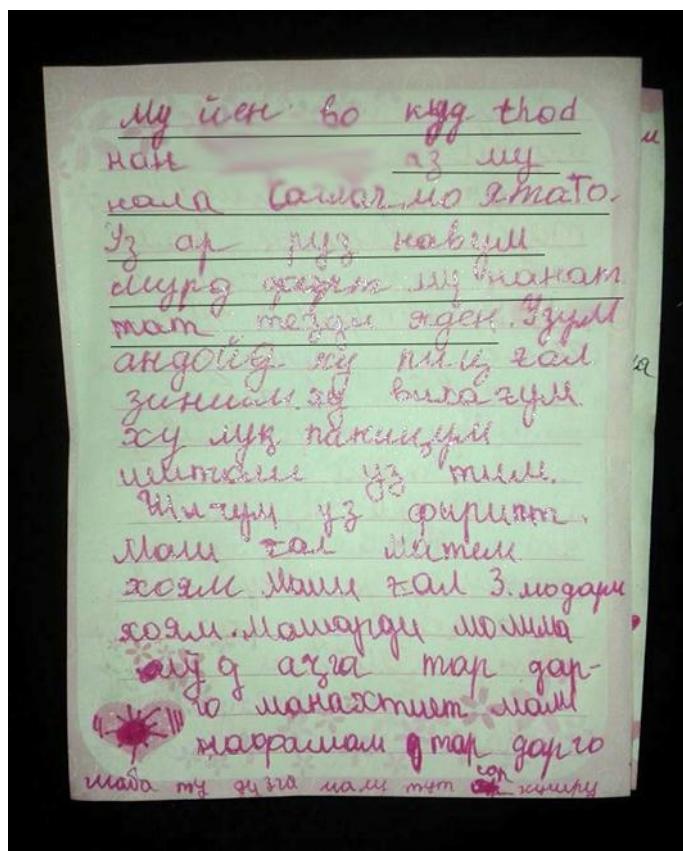


Figure 4: A shot of one page from Shabnam's diary

All the children depicted their lives differently, nevertheless there are sensitive feelings in all of the three cases and each of them experiences their emotions differently. The children's living environment was harsh and violent, notwithstanding the children have to accept it. One may draw her/his own conclusions about these cases; however, this is an attempt to see the world through the eyes of children that are left behind due to migration of their parents.

5. Discussion and Analysis

While remittances on one hand have some positive effects on the household, on the other hand there are adverse impacts that have been not taken into consideration hitherto. In almost all of the cases children receive little or no emotional nurturing from their caregivers and experience a sense of abandonment by their parent's prolonged absence and there is a generational gap, when children are living with their grandparents. The most important factors identified by qualitative and observation methods were lack of parental guidance, aggression and depression amongst children, fear and uncertainty, neglect and conditional love or support, gender responsibilities, especially girl's engagement in housework, less attention on education, and increased health problems. Surely, such violent behavior is regarded as common and part of the upbringing in the lives of many children; nevertheless the study tries to demonstrate the possible destructive effects that can be caused by the absence of parents in the lives of their children and the enforced violent behavior used by the caregivers.

The analysis part is structured by area of impact: psycho-social well-being, education and health. Qualitative and observation findings are presented together with literature and theories to present evidence on the impact of parental absence as a result of migration on their children. Interviews with teachers express that, even though there are some economic benefits from migration, children are affected negatively by the absence of their parents, with particular impact on their psycho-social well-being. A quote from a teacher in school #8

echoes some of these issues, highlighting several dimensions through which children are affected: “*We have one student in the 4th grade. When he lived with his parents, they took care of him, they tracked his school performance and attendance, he never missed any classes and was always looking clean. Now his parents are both in Russia and he lives with his uncle’s family. He comes to school and gets in fight with his classmates. I called at his house and his uncle’s wife answered. She started to shout and told him that she will call his parents, she is tired of him. The kid started to cry and now make a conclusion out of it. I know that she is tired of him and I could see the hate in her eyes.*” Children as old as 8 to 10 years still view their parents as a main foundation of all types of emotional support and seek physical closeness to them when feeling upset or anxious (Bugental 2000). Parental absence in the lives of the child creates tensions, disciplinary and motivation problems, which may affect the child’s academic, social, emotional and psychological progress (*ibid.*). She also emphasized: “*He does not talk with his classmates, he does not talk with us. Therefore, no one will replace the love and care of parents. As a result he gets engaged in criminal acts, like starting fights with his classmates. So what will come out of him?*”. In a small society of Khorog, the role of parents and in general the role of family is considered to be very important. Therefore, children whose parents are absent due to migration are seen as aberrant, shy, lost, dirty, rough and they seem to bring problems to the community. While doing my fieldwork, I heard these words a lot, especially from teachers. They also emphasized that, most of the left behind children skip classes frequently and many of them do not continue their studies after graduating from school and this is due to lack of parental supervision, who would actually care about their children’s future, while the caregivers generally do not. Another quote from NGO member “Madina”, who has experience in researching migration states: “*The effects are very high. Children living with their caregivers are engaged in more housework, which takes their time away from their studies. And caregivers, which are mostly older generation, are*

used to traditional way of bringing up the children, which brings harm to the children's development and the future of the whole society. When we did our research all over the GBAO region, we discovered that most of the children drop out of school and get engaged in destructive behaviors such as: hooliganism, become a member of a gang group, and engage in stealing. They are the future generation and the future of this society". He emphasized the importance of positive upbringing by claiming that some caregivers still use violent methods in child rearing, therefore this may have an effect in the long term and children may start to smoke cigarettes, engage in drug selling and drug use, alcoholism and increase in crime. Such a remark was also observed during the fieldwork, thus, parents being absent in the lives of their children can practice more unfavorable outcomes. Customs, values and standards are not simply transmitted from one generation to the next, but to some extent constructed by each generation as well, therefore for grandparents the use of violence in socialization of children might be a normal thing, in contrast the generation after them might look at it differently (Bugental, 2000; Grusec and Davidov, 2007). Hence, parents in this sense are helpers in setting the stage for their children to become well-functioning members of the society (ibid.). Almost all the caregivers themselves, social workers, doctors and teachers claimed that, "*No one can replace parents*". Arguments from the literature suggest that, such children can develop resentment in regard to their parents and society in general. Sanghera, Ablezova, and Botoeva (2011) propose that children growing up with their relatives experience abandonment and develop insecure attachment bonds with their biological parents, thus it can negatively affect their personal and social relationships in childhood and later life. Olga Bidenko, a psychologist with the Centre for the Protection of Children in Kyrgyzstan claims: "*This resentment and lack of love will affect the child and are liable to have difficulties in school*" (Toktonaliev, 2014).

In regard to the observations, violence against left behind children was frequently used, whether physical, emotional or psychological. An example is the case of Anvar (8), who was beaten by his uncle, because of confusing one letter with another. Words such as “bad”, “sponger”, “stupid”, “ungrateful” and “lazy” were used often by all caregivers during the stay in their houses. Such emotional abuse can damage the child’s sense of autonomy and self-confidence, who by hearing such words all that time will think that s/he is actually the problem and therefore anticipate blame (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). According to Bugental (2000) children seek protection and safety from their parents (caregivers) by maintaining closeness to them. And it’s here she says, when they learn to trust adults as “responsible and well-intentioned caregivers” and to regulate “negative affect associated with distress that could potentially interfere with positive social behavior”. Albeit it was interesting to see how children from the age of 5-10 picture their closest person. During the focus group, the children were asked to draw their closest person, whom they trust and talk to about their feelings. The results were somewhat chaotic, as the children were confused and uncertain about who these people might be, that they drew each other, they drew me and one of them even drew the president of Tajikistan, even though the group just met and did not know each other before. It is clear that, trust does not function within the household, even though it is essential. According to socialization theory, having trust in the caregiver facilitates self-expression and self-confidence, as well as the willingness to express their needs. Trust is rooted in love, care, protection and security, therefore close relationships within the family give children the trust they need to explore and establish relationships outside their household (Rothbaum and Trommsdorff, 2007). Nasritdinov and Schenkkan (2012) additionally found that children of migrant workers have no one to talk to concerning their problems, and are more vulnerable emotionally if caregivers do not treat them as their own children. According to Montgomery (2009), alternative caregiving is, most of the time, a “parent centered” rather

than a “child centered” process, therefore children’s desires, thoughts and viewpoints in the decision making process is not considered (as cited in Sanghera, Ablezova, and Botoeva, 2011). For instance, during the observations it was noticed that love seemed to be conditional rather than a pure sign of support. If the child obeys all the rules and orders of her/his caregiver, then s/he will be treated well and if not then the relations are very harsh. Shabnam (10), who likes kissing her grandmother is rejected, yelled at and as well called “bad girl”, thus she thinks that no one loves her. Such an attitude may promote negative socialization outcomes like: decrease in school attendance and performance, shyness, low self-esteem, uncertainty and fear.

School performance, including school attendance, grades, and behavior, are among the key indicators of a child’s well-being (Nasritdinov and Schenkkann, 2012). Thus, the education level of the caregiver can have a great impact on child’s school performance. For instance, according to the literature more educated caregivers are more likely to encourage their children to stay in school. Among all the respondents, they have education below Grade 10 only, which they explain by growing up in a different time. In this regard, very less attention is paid to the studies of the children, consequently children lie about their progress in school by claiming that their grandparents do not care and understand anything. But in contrast, caregivers paid a significant attention on teaching gender responsibilities, especially females. In all the households, girls were engaged in indoor and outdoor chores, which distracted them from education. Research conducted in Kyrgyzstan by Nasritdinov and Schekken (2012), has shown that children of migrants are more likely to miss school, because of the domestic obligations and insufficient guidance, in contrast to children living with their parents. For example, Hegland (2010) argues that the gender socialization of girls to be engaged in house chores, to marry and raise children, fosters low participation of girls in education (as cited in UNCEF, 2011). As claimed by Mavluda Fazinova, head of Integration of Communities, an

NGO focused on migration issues in Kyrgyzstan: “*teachers report that children from migrant families account for a high percentage of those who miss classes, display aggressive behaviour or get into trouble*” (Toktonaliev, 2014). A teacher from school #7 of the UPD district adds: “*I have a student in my class (5th grade). His parents are in Russia. It is just impossible to work with him, he does not listen to anything I say. Whenever he comes unprepared to the class, I tell him that I will call his grandmother, but he just does not care. She is old and even when we have parent's meeting, she does not come. So, who knows what this child is up to*”. Because of the fact that most of the caregivers are old, they maybe often regard caregiving as burdensome and overwhelmed, especially when they are taking care of several children. In research conducted by UNICEF (2011) a 17-year old girl from a migrant household reported that, she does not see any reasons to learn, therefore she stopped going to school after 9th grade. Kiyal Tukubaeva, deputy head of a school in the town of Balykchi, Kyrgyzstan, pointed out: “*Caregivers are more interested in using them [the children] to do household chores or other work outside the house*” (Toktonaliev, 2014). Such a statement reflects the findings of this study as well. Researchers conducted in Kyrgyzstan come to conclusions similar to this study, claiming that absence of parents in lives of children due to migration, leads to decrease academic performance and psychological implications for the latter. Household decision-makers attitude to schooling and gender roles play a significant role in determining the school attendance and performance of the children. Almost all the caregivers appeared to pay more attention to gender roles and housework rather than to education, which makes it very likely that the children will perform poorly in their studies and even drop-out of school prematurely. In addition, children's engagement in extra-curricular activities seemed to be very low and, for instance, in the case of Shabnam (10), her desires to be involved in her hobbies were completely rejected by the caregivers. Therefore, migration can negatively affect academic achievement through reducing parental supervision and

assistance, through children being distracted by other work within the household and through lack of motivation.

Based on the literature, there are two possible effects of parental migration on the health of children left behind. Firstly, remittances sent home by migrant parents increases access to health care, services and food. On the other hand, lack of parental care may result in inadequate attention to health related issues. From the results of the study, insufficient attention was paid to the health of the children, unless the issue became very serious. For instance as Nuriya (11) explained: "*I have all type of diseases. I had a small tumor on my neck. We thought that it is nothing, but then it became bigger. Last year I had an operation*". The case of Shabnam (10) and her brother Anvar (8) shows the same situation, when their grandmother mentions: "*We buy medicine, but it does not go away, they always cough even in the summer*". Thus, children see doctors very rarely, unless the health situation of the child is worsened. A family doctor pointed out: "*Grandparents are not able to give the children the care that their parents would give. They are old and they are not able to bring the children for checkups and giving their analyses on time. Because of that, children suffer from many diseases like stomach diseases, nausea, flu and other ailments detrimental to the child's development*". In addition, there is no proper control over the children's daily schedules, nutrition as well as personal hygiene practices like teeth brushing, bathing and changing clothes. These observations match with the finding of Nasritdinov and Schenkkhan (2012) in Kyrgyzstan, who discovered that, because parents are not present, conditions in such families may be less sanitary. Finally, children who live with their grandparents are more likely to be taken to traditional healers and to be treated traditionally rather than using modern medicine. Hence, a long-term in-depth research needs to be conducted on the well-being of children, in order to learn about the actual scope of the problem by addressing hospital visits and access to healthcare, nutrition and food diversity, health practices and morbidity.

Children being left because of their parent's migration can be perceived as a threat if there is no "goal-setting within the relationship, to negotiate plans, to manage conflicts, and to take the perspective of others" (Sanghera, Ablezova, and Botoeva, 2011), so that children are not reassured about biological parents lack of accessibility and responsiveness. In this section we have discovered how caregiving by relatives, especially grandparents is complex and abusive, and how children like the case of Shabnam (10), Nuriya (11) and Mayram (15) perceive their own situations, which lack support, motivation and love. Socialization in the family and social domain theories invite us to evaluate a different way of upbringing from a "child-centered" perspective, rather than only focusing on the caregiver's needs. These theories emphasize how children growing up with fear, sadness, resentment and anger can develop negative outcomes within family relations and practices in adulthood (Grusec and Davidov, 2007; Bugental, 2000). Therefore, children were missing their parents as the main socialization agents, because they find it difficult to communicate with their caregivers and live in fear, which destroys the trust. Grusec and Davidov (2007) emphasize the importance of protective caregiving in the process of socializing the children. Such methods of caregiving ensure the safety and well-being of the children. They also point out that caregivers should provide the help and support in times of need, as well as to ensure a safe environment for the children, so that s/he becomes a well-functioning member of the society (*ibid.*). Parent's (caregivers) role in a nuclear family according to structural functionalism is central to its harmonious existence and survival as a unit. Therefore, if the center is malfunctioning, the whole structure will hardly hold together, with consequences for the whole society, placing social norms in jeopardy.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The phenomenon of parental absence as a consequence of migration is becoming a big issue in Tajikistani society generally and in Khorog particularly. While parents migrate in

hope to make money and improve their financial situation, their children in contrast are living in an environment where violence is used on everyday basis, whether it is verbal, physical, emotional or psychological. Due to the destructive effects of such upbringings on the well-being of children, their adulthood can be accompanied by personal dysfunctions (Kimani and Kombo, 2010). It has been already proven by many psychological and sociological researchers, that violence towards children increases the probability of stress, anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, poor socialization, low performance in school and in some cases children drop out from school, have greater health problems and social and emotional issues (Kimani and Kombo, 2007; Park, Lee and deBrauw, 2010; Nasritdinov and Schenkkann, 2012; Grusec and Davidov, 2007). Making use of the theories we may assume that, such an upbringing not only affects the survivor, but the whole society in general.

Education has a great social importance especially in today's industrialized and globalized world. Through education young people prepare for future occupational positions, in order to sustain themselves and develop their own community, thus young people should be enabled to play a productive role in the society. However, what has been observed and identified in this study is the lack of attention to the children's education, with consequently higher chances of these children not attending university and becoming long term unemployed in the future (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). This leads to more poor living conditions as well as less skilled people in the market economy, which influences the overall economic development, which results in less innovativeness and competitiveness in the global production market. Therefore, there is a very high probability that the children when grown up will see migration as the only option to decrease their poverty and become financially independent (UNICEF, 2011). The member of the NGO "Khirad", whose mission is to improve the socio-economic and cultural well-being of the most vulnerable levels of the population, especially youth and children from needy families, points out: "*Uneducated*

people will always find migration the easiest way to reduce poverty, because you don't need knowledge to clean the streets and work on construction. Because of the lack of professionals and educated people, our society will never be improved". Thus, education plays a huge role in cultivating societies and providing younger generations the tools and mindset required to increase their standards of living and contribute to the greater good within their own societies.

Personality and behavioral problems among children, who experience violence in the home, can take the forms of depression, suicidal tendencies and bed-wetting (Grusec and Davidov, 2007; Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999). Anvar, who wets his bed and is physically and psychologically punished for it all the time, is a clear example of this. Whenever I wanted to talk with him, he ignored me and seemed very distant. When a child hears the words "you are bad", "you are not a human being", "you are ungrateful" and "you are an animal" all the time, it can be expected that they undergo emotional stress that can harm the development of their brains and is detrimental to their cognitive and sensory growth (Bugental, 2000; Grusec and Davidov, 2007). As they grow, children who are exposed to violence may continue to show signs of problems. Children in their early years of development view their caregivers as an example of socially acceptable behavior, therefore if violence is used in everyday basis by their caregivers, then it becomes normal to the children as well (Bugental, 2000), thus the cycle of violence will continue. The teacher from school #8 mentioned: "*We had a student and his parents were in Russia. He grew up with his grandmother. Now the boy is grown up and created a group of young people. They go to schools and beat students, they steal money, they just don't listen to anyone. They came here and started cursing us*". From here we may assume that, behavioral problems may occur among children, hence criminality may increase within the whole society in general. In addition, depression, fear and loneliness is certainly not likely to contribute to personal development of children but rather lead to its stagnation,

which in future can be an obstacle for effective academic performance, and consequently contribution to the development of the society as a whole.

Hence, society on the other hand needs to overcome such problems and search for solutions in order to maintain stability and development. Such programs like Early Childhood Education by Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), which make efforts in helping parents, caregivers and pre-school teachers to use international best practices in the early childhood development in the Khorog society, should pay more attention to those children whose parents are in migration. This programs already functions in the area, however not all are fortunate enough to attend it. It also aims to provide experience for the children before they reach primary school, in order to maximize their learning potential afterward, thereby such programs are important for the children to become well educated youth for their future and community. The other issue is the lack of any psychologists in Khorog and in Tajikistan overall, therefore attention should be paid to increasing the number of psychologists who could work with people in general to overcome stress, depression, trauma as well as easing the effects of parental absence in the lives of the children. Or at least social workers can visit schools and respond to children who are in need of support and help, as well to introduce mental health education and a curricular in schools that will focus on child development to prevent from abuse and neglect. It would be better as well if social protection policy in Tajikistan could pay attention to children of migrants by conducting at least once a year research based on their living conditions and try to intervene when children are at risk by informing the education department, the finance department, the health department of the state to organize some support for such children, who are being negatively affected by parental absence. For instance, in schools the teachers could be informed in due time that children of migrants are experiencing loneliness and stress, because their grandparents are old and are not able to take care of them, thus teachers can develop different ways of engaging the children to study and

do well in their academic progress. The state itself can redesign its policies, so that those regions with high migration rates, including GBAO, receive additional funds, more teachers in schools and supplementary programs for the caregivers, in order to reduce the use of violence within the family and in addition some financial support for the migrant household. And if the awareness of such issues improves the engagement of NGOs, international donors and organizations may be increased as well.

The conclusions and analysis of this work rest on the assumptions acquainted by the theories, which explain children well-being, socialization and upbringing. The findings indicate that none of the caregivers tries to replace the parent of the children. However, on the other hand caregivers accept the forces that drive the parents of the children to migrate and offer justifications for their choice. But, there was always a judgment and the ‘burden’ of taking care of someone else’s child. In conclusion the findings claim for greater attention to the children of migrant workers by taking into consideration the fact that, even if migration is significant in economic development of the country, there can be cost associated with the negative outcomes of child development within an extended family. Such a negative outcome due to the absence of migrant parents in the lives of their children can have serious consequences in terms of future living standards.

7. Suggestions for further researches

The suggestions presented here pertain to the issue of left behind children’s well-being as a consequence of their parental absence due to migration. Due to the limited time devoted for this study, the findings cannot be applied to the whole population. Such questions were formulated after the fieldwork: What determines the severity of these effects? What are the long-term effects of experiencing violence for the children? What will happen to the society if more children are left behind every year? What about the economic, political and social life of the community? A similar study with longitudinal design with more cases involved would

allow detailed analysis and deeper information about the nature of migration and its hidden costs. The paper has outlined a number of issues and risks that migration poses to families and in particular to the children left behind, however the author understands that there is much wider range of types of violence used against children, which requires further research on the subject to differentiate between their forms and expressions they take in the given society.

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