

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS

Maria ȚONA¹, Cosmin GOIAN², Luiza VLAICU³

Abstract

The migration phenomenon affects the population globally. The most affected by this phenomenon are the children and teenagers left at home, without the support and presence of the parent or parents who have gone to work abroad. The objective of the research is to identify the impact of the migration phenomenon on the relationship between young people and their parents during childhood and adolescence. A semi-structured individual interview was applied to a number of 8 participants aged between 19 and 23 from Timișoara. The results showed that the impact of the absence of parents in the relationship with young people has negative effects in the affective and emotional sphere.

Keywords: migration, absence of parents, teens-parent relationship, communication

Résumé

Le phénomène de la migration affecte la population à l'échelle mondiale. Les plus touchés par ce phénomène sont les enfants et adolescents laissés à la maison, sans le soutien et la présence des parents partis travailler à l'étranger. L'objectif de la recherche est d'identifier l'impact que le phénomène de la migration a eu sur la relation entre les jeunes et leurs parents pendant l'enfance et l'adolescence. Dans cette approche, la méthode de l'entretien individuel semi-structuré a été utilisée, appliquée à un nombre de 8 participants âgés de 19 à 23 ans de Timișoara. Les résultats ont montré que l'impact de l'absence des parents dans la relation avec les jeunes a des effets négatifs dans la sphère affective et émotionnelle.

Mots clés: migration, manque de parents, relation jeunes-parents, communication

¹ Student master, West University of Timișoara, Romania, Address: Bvd. Pârvan Nr.4, Timisoara, Romania, e-mail: maria.tona00@e-uvt.ro

² Professor, Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, Head of the Social Work Department, West University of Timișoara, Romania, Address: Bvd. Pârvan Nr.4, Timisoara, Romania, e-mail: cosmin.goian@socio.uvt.ro

³ Asistent, Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, Department of Social Work, West University of Timișoara, B-dul Vasile Pârvan, No. 4, Timișoara, e-mail: luiza.vlaicu@e-uvt.ro

Rezumat

Fenomenul migrației afectează populația la nivel global. Cei mai afectați de acest fenomen sunt copiii și adolescenții rămași acasă, lipsiți de sprijinul și prezența părintelui sau a părinților plecați la muncă în străinătate. Obiectivul cercetării este de a identifica impactul pe care l-a avut fenomenul migrației asupra relației dintre tineri și părinți în perioada copilăriei și adolescenței. În acest demers, s-a utilizat metoda interviului individual semi-structurat, aplicat unui număr de 8 participanți cu vârsta cuprinsă între 19 și 23 de ani din Timișoara. Rezultatele au arătat că impactul absenței părinților în relația cu tinerii are efecte negative în sfera afectivă și emoțională.

Cuvinte cheie: migrație, lipsa părinților, relația tânăr-părinte, comunicare

1. Introduction

Migration represents one of the most widespread and important problems of today's society. This phenomenon means leaving the place of residence and moving to another region of the same country or to a foreign country, temporarily or permanently, for various reasons. The most common of these are the desire to satisfy certain financial or social needs, poverty and the lack of a decent living (Vadean, Piracha, 2009, apud Bulgaru, 2020).

Migration has a beneficial purpose, parents go to work abroad to ensure financial stability and better living conditions, but in addition to these, migration also has some negative effects. The absence of parents in the child's life, especially during the most important periods, such as childhood and adolescence, in which physical, psychological, and social changes are part of a long and complex process, can lead to problems in development and the social, emotional, and psychological progress of the child.

Tomescu-Dumitrescu (2019) states that with the fall of communism, Romania faced an alarming increase in the migrant population. After the opening of the borders and the introduction of visas and work permits, the number of permanent emigrations decreased, but the number of temporary ones increased spectacularly, having serious repercussions in the economic, social, and psychological fields.

Although some of those who went to work abroad achieved their goals (to provide the family with better financial stability, a better life or succeeded professionally), all of these being beneficial effects, there are also negative implications of this phenomenon, mostly affecting the family and its members. In these cases, the most disadvantaged are the children, whose emotional support is suddenly interrupted (Bulgaru, 2020).

2. Psychosocial effects of parental migration on children

Currently, the temporarily separated family is becoming a widespread phenomenon, which brings several problems in the sphere of interactions between family members. Normally, in families where both parents are present, the responsibilities are shared, complementing each other, but when there is only one parent, the responsibilities increase with frustration and strain, especially when

the child lacks the support of both parents and is left to assume obligations and tasks by himself or with the help of grandparents or other relatives (Lupaş, 2018). This phenomenon, by which the child is forced to give up his own needs in favor of siblings or other family members, can have consequences that are reflected in adult life, as well as in the social life: friends, life partners, co-workers (Hoper, 2007, apud Bulgaru, 2020).

Most of those who migrate, do so for the well-being of the family, which usually remains in the country. Research on the phenomenon shows that the situation of those who remain is quite optimistic, from a financial point of view, but it is notable that there is significant loss in other areas, which cannot be equated with the satisfaction of a better financial situation (Hendricks, Bartram, 2019). Gherasim (2016) claims that the effects of migration are varied depending on the aspects of the separation, such as the time spent in the absence of the parents, the way of communication between parents and the child and the gender of the emigrant parent. Longer separation from parents leads to an increase in children's anxious and depressed states, feelings of abandonment and dissatisfaction with their own lives, although contact is maintained through technology, even with parents returning home, this process of separation and reunification is psychologically difficult for children.

As Gorbunov (2020) states in his study, the quality of life of children with migrant parents is significantly lower than that of children unaffected by migration, the first group showing low values in the sphere of psycho-social and emotional health. The child's need to receive affection from the parents is reduced by the increase in the period spent in their absence.

Staying at home, children and teenagers found different coping methods, more or less beneficial, depending on each person's personality and how they viewed the experience of separation from the parents. Seeking the support of friends, family members or teachers is one of the most beneficial ways to cope with the emotions and stressful situations caused by the absence of a parental figure (Muller et al., 2020). Iurchevici and Toşa (2021) observed that social support, especially in the lives of children and adolescents whose parents are abroad, represents an „essential protective factor” increasing the level of resilience. However, it should be noted that the relationship with the parents remains an important part of the child's social and emotional life, being defining in the development process. On the other hand, the lack of control over the child can push them towards deviant behaviors. Children may start using alcohol, tobacco, drugs, be violent, drop out of school, steal, all out of a desire for revenge and to show their dissatisfaction with the situation they are in, being deprived of the presence of the parent (Lazariuc, 2012).

Despite the fact that they understand the reason for their parents' departure, children face a rather difficult time from an emotional point of view, experiencing emotions such as longing, loneliness, sadness, anxiety, fear and even depression. These feelings are mostly due to the separation from parents, reduced communication, the imbalance of the parent-child relationship, as well as the

awareness of the parents' sacrifice (Lobos *et al.*, 2019). But there is also the less positive side of things, caused by neglect and lack of supervision on the part of parents or those in whose care the children are left. The difficulty of maintaining the parent-child bond, as well as the lack of communication and the impossibility of the parent to supervise the child can be observed during the child's school period, through the child's low results, lack of motivation and desire to learn (Antia *et al.*, 2020).

3. The purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to identify the relationship difficulties between the young person and the parent caused by their migration abroad during childhood and adolescence.

4. Research objectives

1. Identifying the difficulties faced by young people in the relationship with their parents following their migration during childhood.
2. Identifying the differences between the effects of one parent being absent and both parents being absent.
3. Identifying young people's perception of the phenomenon of parents' migration abroad.

5. Research questions

1. What are the relationship difficulties between young people and their parents who were abroad during their childhood?
2. What are the differences between the effects of single-parent migration and the effects of both-parent migration?
3. What is the young people's perception of the phenomenon of parents' migration abroad?

6. Participants

The study participants were young people/students from Timișoara whose parents were abroad for more than three months, especially during their childhood. The research group is made up of eight young people aged between 19-23, who were identified and selected via the snowball method. The data was collected between May and June 2022. Out of the eight participants in the study, four of them experienced the departure of the father abroad, three felt the absence of both parents and only one, the departure of the mother (Table 1).

Table 1. Age, gender, and occupation of study participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Occupation
AS	21	female	student
CC	20	female	student
GB	20	female	student
CM	22	female	student
DI	21	male	student
EA	22	female	student
LH	23	female	student
AH	19	female	student

7. Procedure

This research is based on a qualitative method. The instrument was the semi-structured interview, with the aim of collecting data on the effects and perceptions of young people on the migration of their parents, thus serving to understand the problem from the perspective of the respondents. The topics addressed in the interview are related to the relationship and communication between parents and respondents, as well as those with the rest of the members, the experiences in the absence of parents, the changes felt with the departure of parents, as well as the perception of young people towards the effects of migration on the family.

The young people's participation in the study was voluntary, the interviews took place on the Google Meet platform. Before starting the actual interview, the subjects gave their consent, and were that their identification data will remain confidential. They had the right to choose whether they wanted the interview to be recorded, though three of the participants rejecting this. Interview scheduling was done at a convenient date and time.

8. Results

8.1. Difficulties

In this first section, we wanted to present the difficulties faced by young people in the absence of their parents during childhood/adolescence and the experience of the absence of parents from an affective point of view. The results differ depending on the age at which the young person first experienced the departure of the parent and the length of time spent in the absence of the parent. In the case of the respondents, the youngest age at which the parents went abroad was four years old, respectively the oldest was sixteen years old, and the longest period in the absence of the parent was three years, the shortest being four months.

Separation from a parent was not easy for any of the study participants, with the impact being felt on an emotional level mostly through longing, frustration, anxiety, and confusion. One of the participants stated that „The absence of the father figure was felt (...) the grandfather fulfilled the role very well.”

(DI), and another claimed that - „I didn't necessarily feel safe.” (AH). Regarding the difficulties they faced in the absence of their parents, half of them stated that it led to poor communication and that they felt a lack of support - „You also need support. (The boyfriend) is making up for dad.” (CM), especially in household chores, but also the physical presence of the parents: „Communicating with him, because I was used to his presence at home daily.” (AH). There were also respondents who said that they did not feel any difficulty in the absence of their parents „I encountered no difficulties. I knew how to manage my father's absence very well (...) through phone conversations, through the awareness that he is doing this for me.”(DI).

When asked if they considered that they were given additional responsibilities during the absence of their parents, three young people claimed that in the absence of their mother they had to learn how to manage their own household „When I was left alone, I had to make my own food and pay the bills” (EA), only two of the other participants stated that they did not feel that extra tasks were added to them „Nothing more was added to what was already a responsibility for me.” (LH)

Six of the eight participants in the study answered that they did not feel that they lacked anything in childhood, but two of them confessed that they lacked the presence and emotional support of their parents „I saw children going to kindergarten or school with their fathers (...) I wanted my father to take me to school too”(CM).

8.2. The parent-youth relationship before and after going abroad

In the second section, the relationship between the young people and their parents was described, both before and after going to work abroad. The focus was on identifying the changes in the relationship and communication patterns.

Regarding communication between parents and young people, they stated that it was not a problem, it was mostly done daily or every other day, the answer being the same now, communication being facilitated by technology and various social networks. All participants also stated that their current relationship with their parents is much better and closer as they grow „(Dad) is my best friend.” (CM), „My mother is my best friend” (EA), „I always had a good relationship with my parents.” (DI) and that the experience of their parents leaving made them more responsible, more mature „It increased my level of resistance in more difficult situations; helped me see this side of the world too, with harder things to do.”(AS). One of the participants stated that he felt more motivated after realizing that his parents left to provide him with a better life „I was motivated because I realized that they work for me and I had to repay them, and this year I did it, finally. (...) They are very proud of me.” (DI).

Regarding the changes in the relations with the parents produced by the migration, three of the young people claimed that there were no changes, two of them felt some distance from them „I was much more open with them before they left (...) I didn't really know what to say.” (GB), and the other three confessed that

they started to communicate more often with the parents „we started talking more than we did before he (father) left.” (AH)

8.3. Differences between one parent leaving and both parents leaving

The third theme had the purpose of identifying the differences between the migration of one of the parents and the departure of both parents and the way in which their absence was felt by the young people. It should be noted that three out of eight participants come from single-parent families following divorce.

Two of the three young people with both parents gone abroad declared that the situation would not change at all if only one of the parents left: „No (there was no difference). Even though they were gone, I always felt both of them close.” (DI), „The departure of both parents does not have much relevance for me” (CC). There were also affirmative answers, with two of the respondents saying that the mother's departure would have brought them even more responsibilities: „It would have been more difficult, I don't think I would have coped.” (AH), „The responsibility would have fallen on my shoulders, and it would not have been easy at all (...) we were too young to miss our mother.” (LH). One of the respondents affected by the divorce of his parents stated that „It would have been different. (...) it would have suited me better if my father was the one who left (...) It would have been much easier for me from an emotional point of view to have my mother by my side.”(EA)

8.4. Relationship with family members

In the fourth theme, we wanted to present the relationship of young people with the rest of the family members, considering the change of roles in the family and the effects produced by the absence of one or both parents. It is important to state that five of the young people mentioned that during that period they remained in the care of their grandparents, while the other three remained with their mother. The majority of those who were in the care of their grandparents mentioned that during adolescence they stayed alone at home, taking on various duties and responsibilities, the level of dependence on their grandparents decreasing considerably.

Both those who remained in the care of their grandparents and those who stayed with their mother stated that they have a good relationship with them, one of the participants saying that „My grandfather compensated for my father's presence since I was little, and I see them as friends (on grandparents)” (CC). Regarding the relationship with siblings, four of the young people claimed that it has improved, that the departure of their parents has made them more responsible and understanding towards each other „He (the brother) is more understanding and helps me with household chores” (CC), „We were more united”(LH).

Asked if they feel comfortable talking to their parents about everyday issues, most said they are open and can talk anytime, anything with their parents „For me their opinion is very important. I don't really do things without them knowing, and I consult with them often. They support me in everything.”(AH).

There were also reserved answers, young people claiming that they turn to their parents depending on the problems „It depends on the problems. If there are more love problems, I come to my friends because it's more comfortable for me (...) We've never had this close relationship to talk about relationships and how we feel and feelings.” (EA).

To the question „What makes you feel safe in your family?”, the most common answers were the care they receive from their parents and the fact that they feel accepted and supported „I know they are always there for me. They are there every time, ready to listen and help me.” (EA). All respondents confessed that, as far as conflicts between themselves and family members are concerned, they are very rare and that they rather identify them as contradictions, which are easily resolved through communication „We don't really have conflicts, it happens quite rarely that we have misunderstandings (...) It's nothing serious, we communicate, and everything is resolved.” (AH)

8.5. Young people's perception of migration

The last section's goal was the identification of young people's perception of the effects of migration on the family. Each young person responded by referring to their own family, indicating the existence of a positive side as well as a negative side. The unanimous answer regarding the benefits brought by migration was financial well-being, moreover, some of the participants stated that the period helped them to become more responsible and independent: „For me, for example, it had a more positive impact, I am a stronger, more independent person”(CM).

As a general response, the participants highlighted the negative impact the phenomenon has on the family, especially the children, who are deprived of emotional support and parental affection. One of the young men confessed that „I put the relationship with my parents on the back burner, especially in adolescence. Friendships have replaced family for me.” (CC), indicating another negative impact that parents being abroad was poor communication. The young people highlighted the importance of communication in the family, its lack being the trigger factor in all the problems a child can face in the absence of parents „There are children who take up vices, such as drugs or alcohol. These, from my point of view, should also be managed by the family (...) through communication.” (DI). A participant also stated that the impact of migration on children is also influenced by the child's personality, how he sees the situation „It also depends on the children, on their personality. In my case there was a lot of accumulated frustrations, rebellion that at some point erupts. I don't think it's normal for a parent to be gone for more than two months, say, especially if they're both going.” (LH).

9. Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to present the difficulties caused by migration that young people and their parents faced in their relationship during childhood. The results led to the identification of difficulties in the affective and emotional part of young people, in communication, as well as regarding changing

roles in the family. From the answers of the participants, it was found that the number of cases in which the father goes to work abroad is higher compared to the number of cases in which both parents or only the mother migrates abroad. It is also a known fact at the global level, fathers migrate more frequently and in greater numbers compared to cases where both parents or the mother decide to go to work abroad (National Institute of Statistics, 2021).

Regarding the difficulties encountered in the absence of parents, the most important were those felt on an emotional level through feelings of longing and frustration (Botezat, Pfeiffer, 2014). It was noted that young people substituted the absence of parents with grandparents or friends, depending on the needs, due to the fact that parents could not be contacted every time. Insecurity, lack of physical presence and lack of emotional support led to states of anxiety and confusion, even feelings of abandonment.

Regarding communication, balanced results were observed, half of the participants answered that they felt an improvement regarding communication between them and their parents when they were abroad, being open to any subject. The other half mentioned that they experienced a cooling of relations with the departed parent, communication being less frequent. Communication is one of the essential elements in relationships of any kind. This involves active listening, empathy, attentiveness, and clarity. Regardless of how the communication is done, whether through a phone call or face-to-face, the communication between the child and the parent should be based on the principles mentioned above.

Regarding the current relationship between young people and parents, it was found that as the children grow, the relationships are closer and better. However, the results indicated that the young people felt some compulsion towards early maturation and responsibility, especially in the case of young people whose mother was absent. In response to the existence of differences between the departure of one or the departure of both parents, the answers also considered the family situation of the respondents, therefore they showed that the absence of the mother would have been much more devastating in the case of young people with absent fathers. Those with both parents gone did not express the existence of a difference, considering that their situation would not have changed much if only one parent was missing, his absence would have felt the same.

From the young people's way of looking, one can identify an acceptance of the positive side of the migration phenomenon, namely the improvement of the financial situation.

Considering the results of the study, it can be concluded that the impact that migration had on the family, especially on the relationship between parents and young people, had mostly negative effects, of an affective, emotional, and communicational nature. Feelings of longing, sadness, and anxiety, as well as the lack of physical presence, cannot be reduced by a phone or video call, just as material well-being does not replace children's need for emotional and affective support from their parents.

However, the quality of the current relationship between young people and their parents, as well as the way of communication between them, has improved compared to the childhood period, when the parents went abroad. It is noteworthy that the departure of the parents motivated the young people to repay their parents for their sacrifice. Even so, the young people are not satisfied with the material benefit brought by their parents going abroad, but highlight the states of anxiety, confusion, the feeling of abandonment and the lack of affection they faced during that period and which they tried to improve with the support of grandparents and the social group. According to young people, the absence of their mother had a greater impact on their emotional state as well as an increased number of responsibilities.

Although the time when the parents were away from the young people can no longer be recovered, it is essential to make conscious positive actions daily for building a strong relationship where emotional support is felt bilaterally.

References

- Antia, K., Boucsein, J., Deckert, A., Dambach, P., Racaite, J., Šurkien, G., aenisch, T., Horstick, O. & Winkler, V. (2020). Effects of International Labor Migration on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Left-Behind Children: A Systematic Literature Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(12), 4335, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124335>.
- Botezat, A. & Pfeiffer, F. (2014). The Impact of Parents Migration on the Well-Being of Children Left Behind – Initial Evidence from Romania (April 15, 2014). *SSRN Electronic Journal*, Paper No. 14-029. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2432946>.
- Bulgaru, M. (2020). Consecințele migrației părinților la muncă în străinătate asupra copiilor. *Integrare prin cercetare și inovare*. Universitatea de Stat Moldova. https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/234-238_6.pdf.
- Gherasim, L. R. (2016). Impactul migrației parentale asupra copiilor rămași acasă. Stan. L. (ed.) *Educația timpurie. Probleme și soluții*. Polirom Publishing, Iași.
- Gorbunov, G. (2020). Assessment of the quality of life of children marked by parental labor migration according to the PedsQL™ 4.0 questionnaire: cross-sectional study. *Moldovan Journal of Health Sciences*, 25(4), 67-79. https://ibn.idsi.md/vizualizare_articol/145595.
- Hendriks, M. & Bartram, D. (2019). Bringing Happiness Into the Study of Migration and Its Consequences: What, Why, and How? *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 17(3), 279-298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2018.1458169>.
- Iurchevici, I. & Toșa, G. (2021). Profilul psihosocial și școlar al preadolescenților cu părinți plecați la muncă în străinătate. *Educația în fața noilor provocări*, Vol. 2, 149-159. https://ibn.idsi.md/vizualizare_articol/149334.
- Lazariuc, C. (2012). Children of migrants: the reason for emigration and/or the motivation for return. *Moldoscopy*, 58(3), 51-71, https://ibn.idsi.md/vizualizare_articol/21702.
- Lobos, J. D. C., Juliata, B. M. & Peñalba, E. H. (2019). Consequences of Parental Absence due to Migration: A Qualitative Inquiry into Adolescent Students' Well-being. *Faculty Journal*, 8, 9-18.
- Lupaș, A. (2018). The effects of migration in society and the family. In Sinaci, M. & Mădușa, C. (eds.), *Communication, culture and society*. Trivent Publishing, Vol. II, 135-143.
- Muller, H. A., Brewer, T. A., Patel, S. G. & Desai, D. (2020). A qualitative exploration of parental separation and coping: Attachment disruptions among newcomer immigrant

adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 35(2), 179-200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558419839227>.

Tomescu-Dumitrescu, C. (2019). Migration in Romania and demographic perspectives. *Annals of the University „Constantin Brâncusi” from Targu Jiu. Letters and Social Sciences Series*, 79-86.