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A REVIEW OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING, RESILIENCE, AND QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG WOMEN WITH MIGRANT HUSBANDS

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ABSTRACT

The international migration of husbands for employment has become a significant socio-economic phenomenon, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. While such migration contributes to household income through remittances, it often places a profound psychological and emotional burden on the women left behind. This review critically examines existing literature on the psychological well-being, resilience, and quality of life among women whose husbands have migrated abroad for work. The need for this study stems from the growing recognition that economic gains from migration are often accompanied by psychosocial costs borne by women who must navigate household responsibilities, child-rearing, and social expectations in the absence of their spouses. The findings indicate that women in such circumstances commonly face increased levels of anxiety, loneliness, and emotional stress, though many also demonstrate remarkable resilience through social support, religious coping, and community engagement. However, the impact on quality of life varies across cultural and socio-economic contexts. The review underscores the importance of targeted interventions, such as mental health support, community-based programs, and policy-level recognition of the invisible emotional labor performed by these women. It also highlights a significant gap in gender-sensitive migration policies that account for the psychosocial implications on families left behind. Future research should adopt an intersectional, longitudinal approach to examine how factors such as education, social capital, and digital connectivity influence resilience and psychological outcomes over time.

This would help inform more inclusive policy and support frameworks for transnational families.

KEYWORDS: Psychological Well-Being, International Migration, Women Left Behind, Resilience, Quality of Life, Transnational Families, Emotional Burden, Remittances.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global phenomenon of male labor migration, particularly from developing to developed countries, has created a growing demographic of women left behind in their home countries to manage households, raise children, and bear the psychological consequences of spousal separation. While remittances are often considered a financial boon for these families, the social and emotional costs for women are frequently under-explored in migration studies. The prolonged absence of a husband significantly affects a woman's psychological well-being, resilience, and overall quality of life, warranting a focused analysis of these dimensions (Siriwardhana et al., 2015).

Psychological well-being, in this context, refers to an individual's emotional and mental state, encompassing feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and life satisfaction. For women with migrant husbands, this well-being is often disrupted due to increased domestic responsibilities, emotional isolation, and limited support networks (Dako-Gyeke, 2016). In patriarchal societies, women are frequently burdened with additional societal expectations when their spouses migrate, which can lead to emotional stress and diminished mental health (Bhattarai & Ghimire, 2019).

Resilience—the capacity to cope with adversity and bounce back from stress—emerges as a crucial factor in navigating these challenges. Some women display remarkable resilience by engaging in community activities, accessing informal social support systems, or participating in self-help groups (Yabiku et al., 2010). This adaptability often determines the extent to which they can maintain a stable psychological state and household environment in the face of their husbands' prolonged absence.

Quality of life, a multidimensional concept involving physical, psychological, and social well-being, is also closely tied to the migration experience. Although financial gains through remittances may improve material conditions, studies reveal a complex interplay between financial security and emotional well-being. In many cases, increased financial resources do not equate to higher life satisfaction due to the strain of emotional labor, disrupted marital relationships, and weakened familial ties (Toyota et al., 2007).

Despite the critical implications of these issues, there remains a dearth of empirical research that holistically explores how migration affects the mental health and quality of life of the women left behind. This review aims to bridge that gap by

synthesizing existing studies on the psychological well-being, resilience, and quality of life of women whose husbands migrate for work. Understanding their lived experiences is vital for designing more inclusive migration and mental health policies.

2. METHODOLOGY

This review employs a systematic literature review approach to explore psychological well-being, resilience, and quality of life among women whose husbands have migrated abroad for employment. The primary objective is to integrate evidence from varied geographical, cultural, and socio-economic settings in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial challenges and adaptive experiences of women left behind. The methodological framework was structured to ensure rigor, transparency, and reproducibility throughout the review process.

The review commenced with the formulation of clearly defined research questions addressing the psychological impacts of spousal migration, coping and resilience mechanisms, and overall quality of life outcomes among affected women. These questions informed the design of a structured and comprehensive search strategy.

Relevant literature was identified through electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. The search was restricted to English-language publications released between 2000 and 2024 to maintain relevance and currency. Key search terms and their combinations included "psychological well-being," "resilience," "quality of life," "migrant husbands," "transnational families," and "women left behind."

Studies were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria: (a) peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, or reputable institutional reports; (b) research focusing explicitly on women whose spouses had migrated internationally; and (c) studies examining at least one of the core dimensions—psychological well-being, resilience, or quality of life. Exclusion criteria comprised studies centered solely on male migrants or children, publications lacking empirical or theoretical foundations, and research addressing internal rather than international migration.

To enhance methodological transparency, the quality of the included studies was appraised using standardized criteria commonly applied in systematic reviews. These criteria included clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of study design, adequacy of sample selection and size, transparency of data collection and analysis methods, and the

robustness of reported findings. Only studies meeting acceptable methodological standards were retained for synthesis.

The screening and selection process was documented using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. An initial pool of 54 studies was identified, and after removing duplicates and applying the eligibility criteria, 28 studies were included for detailed analysis.

The final set of studies underwent thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes, inconsistencies, and research gaps. Findings were organized into three overarching thematic categories: (1) psychological well-being, (2) resilience and coping strategies, and (3) quality of life. Each study was systematically examined in terms of its research design, sample characteristics, principal findings, and relevance to the objectives of the review.

Table 1: Number of Publications Yearwise.

Year	No. of Publications	% of Total Publications
2002	1	4.35%
2004	1	4.35%
2008	1	4.35%
2009	2	8.70%
2012	2	8.70%
2013	1	4.35%
2016	1	4.35%
2017	1	4.35%
2019	1	4.35%
2020	2	8.70%
2021	3	13.04%
2023	2	8.70%
2025	7	30.43%
Total	23	100%

Source: Author

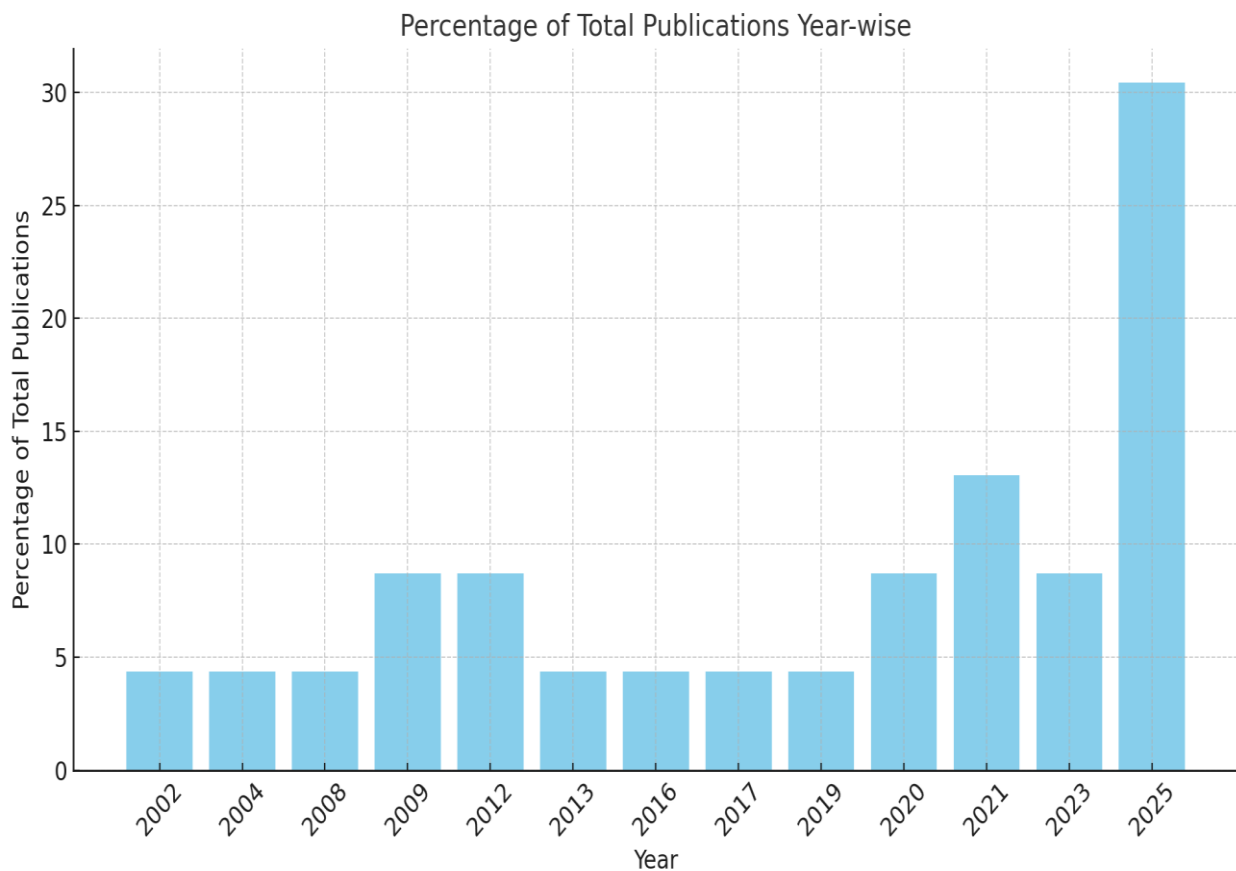


Figure 1: Percentage of Publications Year Wise.

Source: Author.

The graph represents the percentage of total publications for the selected references, year-wise. From the data, we can observe the following trends:

1. 2025 stands out with the highest percentage of publications, contributing 30.43% to the total publications. This indicates a significant surge in research and interest in the area in recent years, especially in topics related to migrant families and psychological well-being.
2. 2021 follows closely with 13.04%, showing that there has been a consistent effort in the recent past to explore the impact of migration on psychological factors like resilience, well-being, and coping strategies.
3. 2020 and 2019 both contributed 8.70% each, suggesting a notable volume of research in

these years, likely reflecting a growing interest in how migration affects mental health, especially amidst global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. A consistent number of publications were seen in 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2016, and 2017, each contributing around 4.35%. These years reflect foundational studies that likely laid the groundwork for more contemporary research in this field.

Overall, the trend indicates an increasing academic focus on the psychological effects of migration on women, particularly the mental health and resilience of left-behind spouses, with a marked increase in recent years (2020-2025)

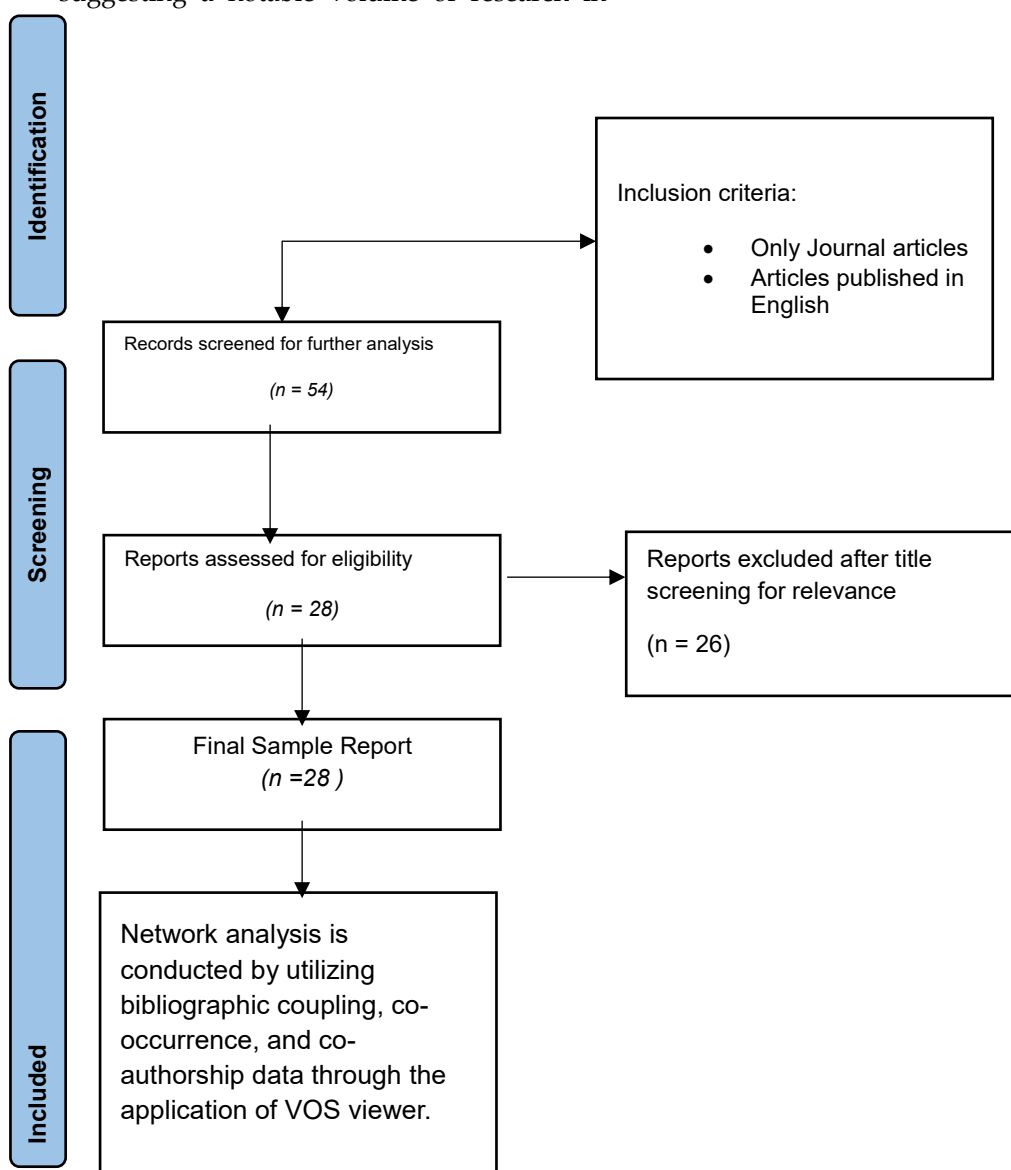


Figure 2: Prisma Flowchart. Source: Author.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN WHOSE HUSBANDS HAVE MIGRATED INTERNATIONALLY FOR EMPLOYMENT, WITH A FOCUS ON EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING, MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES, AND SOCIAL ISOLATION.

The international migration of men for employment often leaves their wives behind to manage emotional and practical responsibilities alone, resulting in significant psychological impacts. A consistent theme in the literature is the profound emotional toll associated with prolonged spousal separation, which disrupts familial bonds and destabilizes emotional well-being. Aryal et al. (2020) found that Nepali women whose husbands migrated internationally reported higher levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness due to prolonged separation and social expectations to maintain family unity despite emotional hardship. This echoes Irbah et al. (2025), who emphasized that emotional well-being in long-distance marriages is severely compromised unless supported by strong coping strategies.

Social isolation is another prominent issue. The absence of a spouse often forces women to shoulder full domestic and parenting responsibilities, which limits their social engagement and heightens feelings of loneliness (Jo, 2020). Such isolation can also erode their perceived self-worth and contribute to deteriorating mental health. Women with limited access to social networks or emotional support systems are especially vulnerable to depressive symptoms and chronic stress (Cheung, 2008).

Mental health challenges experienced by these women are further complicated by their restricted autonomy and increased household burdens. Chen et al. (2022) note that immigrant women facing family separation experience greater psychological distress than their counterparts due to the compounded trauma of losing daily interaction with spouses, often paired with limited socioeconomic resources. Many women internalize emotional pain, fearing stigma or social judgment,

which can exacerbate mental health symptoms and delay seeking help (Akcan et al., 2023).

Resilience emerges as a critical mediating factor in how women cope with their husband's migration. Studies have highlighted that resilience not only mitigates the psychological effects of separation but also supports emotional adjustment and long-term mental health stability (Cakır, 2009; van der Ham et al., 2014). The presence of family resilience - shared beliefs, communication patterns, and mutual support - has been linked to higher life satisfaction and emotional well-being among women facing such adversities (Yousefi Afrashteh et al., 2024).

Social support systems play a vital protective role in maintaining psychological health. According to Kong et al. (2021), strong social networks enhance psychological resilience, which in turn improves health-related quality of life. Women with access to community networks or peer support often report reduced feelings of abandonment and greater emotional control. Programs such as *La Maison Bleue* in Montreal exemplify how community support can be harnessed to foster resilience among women separated from their spouses due to migration (Aubé et al., 2019).

Finally, cultural and structural factors influence psychological well-being. For instance, Yang and Wang (2011) argue that immigrant women's well-being in transnational marriages is influenced by levels of acculturation and the degree of social integration. Where women are culturally marginalized, their mental health often suffers further, particularly if they are economically dependent on absent spouses.

In summary, the psychological impact on women whose husbands migrate internationally for work is shaped by emotional strain, mental health vulnerabilities, social isolation, and the presence or absence of support systems. Resilience, both individual and collective, appears to be the most effective buffer against these negative outcomes, with social support playing a crucial enabling role in this process.

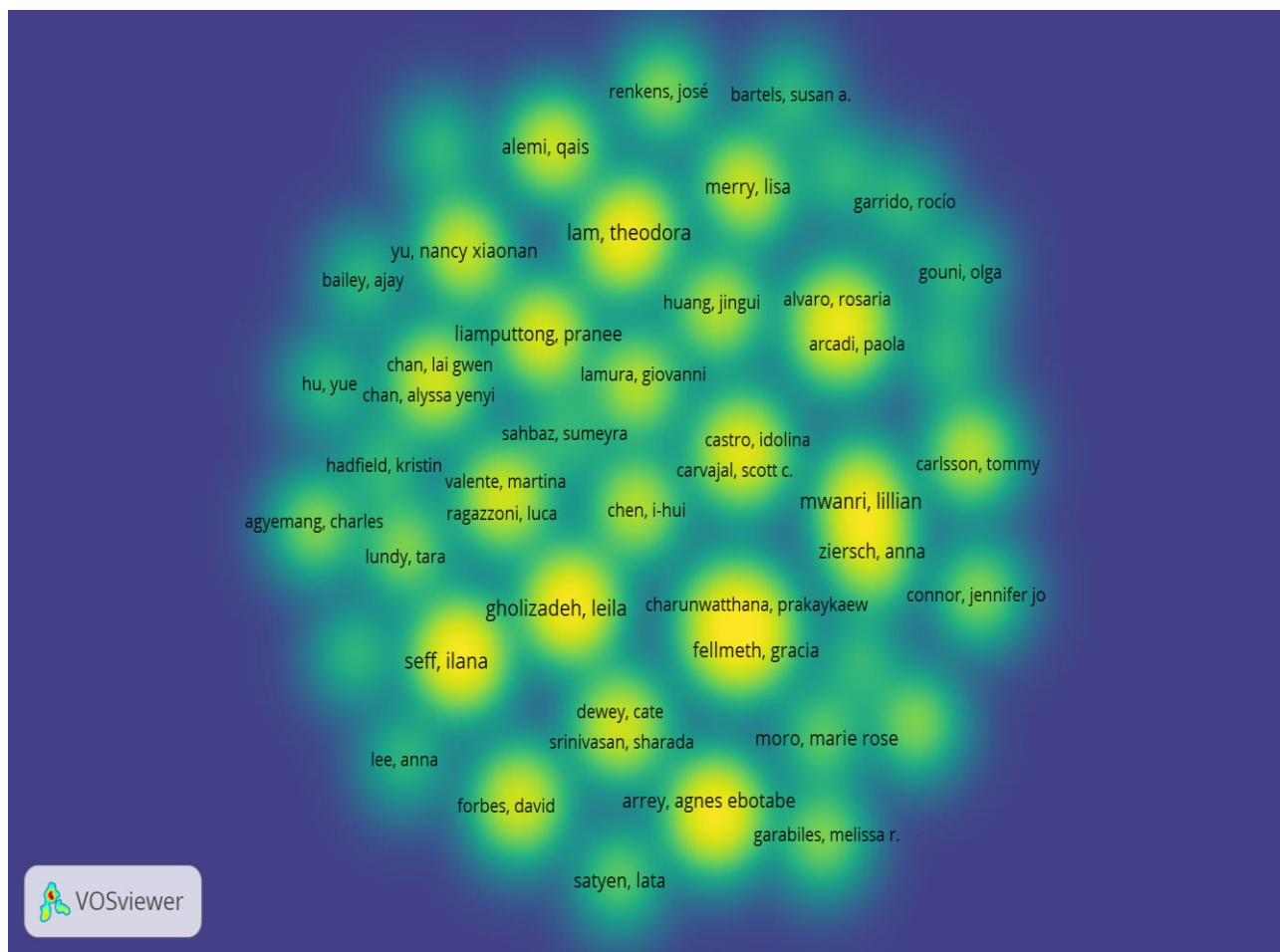


Figure 3: Density Visualization of Authors' Reoccurrence.

Source: Author.

4. COPING MECHANISMS AND RESILIENCE STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THESE WOMEN IN MANAGING HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES AND EMOTIONAL STRESS IN THE ABSENCE OF THEIR SPOUSES

Women managing households in the absence of their spouses—whether due to migration, work obligations, military service, or other factors—often face dual burdens of emotional strain and expanded domestic responsibilities. The literature reveals that such women adopt various coping strategies and resilience mechanisms to maintain psychological well-being and ensure family stability.

A central coping strategy identified in the literature is the adoption of *emotion-focused and problem-focused coping*. Emotion-focused strategies include seeking emotional support, practicing spiritual or religious activities, and engaging in leisure activities to reduce stress (Indrastuti & Herawati, 2023; Iwasaki et al., 2005). Problem-focused coping, on the other hand, involves actively

organizing household tasks, time management, and financial planning to address practical challenges (Aluko, 2009; Fatoki & Kobiowu, 2015).

The concept of *family resilience* emerges as a vital theoretical framework. Walsh (1996) emphasized that resilience in families is facilitated through shared belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes. Women often serve as the emotional anchors during their spouse's absence, maintaining routine, discipline, and emotional connection with children, thereby reinforcing family resilience (Lapp et al., 2010).

Several studies underscore the importance of *social support systems*, including extended family, neighbors, and peer networks, in mitigating stress (Tchombe et al., 2012; Labrague, 2021). In contexts where formal support is limited, informal networks become critical in providing emotional and logistical aid. Women also draw on cultural values of duty and sacrifice, which shape their perception of stress and coping (Akinbode & Carter, 2025).

Adaptability is another recurring theme in the literature. For instance, women in long-distance

marriages often redefine gender roles and expand their skills in decision-making, financial management, and emotional regulation (Irbah et al., 2025; Saltzman et al., 2011). This role adaptation is a key factor in developing psychological resilience and maintaining family cohesion.

However, the burden of *emotional labor* remains a challenge. Women frequently suppress their emotional needs to maintain harmony and stability at home, which can lead to internalized stress and feelings of isolation (Neff & Broady, 2011; Zou et al., 2025). Leisure, spirituality, and community engagement have been found effective in countering these effects and fostering personal growth (John & Wani, 2025).

The literature also points to *gendered expectations* as a double-edged sword—while societal norms often pressure women to manage alone, these same expectations may bolster resilience by fostering a sense of purpose and identity rooted in caregiving roles (Ajibade et al., 2013; Price et al., 2010).

In conclusion, women adopt a blend of practical and emotional strategies to cope with the compounded responsibilities and psychological stress in their spouse’s absence. Their resilience is not merely an individual trait but is embedded in relational dynamics, cultural norms, and socio-economic contexts. Supporting such women requires a multi-level approach that acknowledges their strengths while addressing systemic gaps in support.

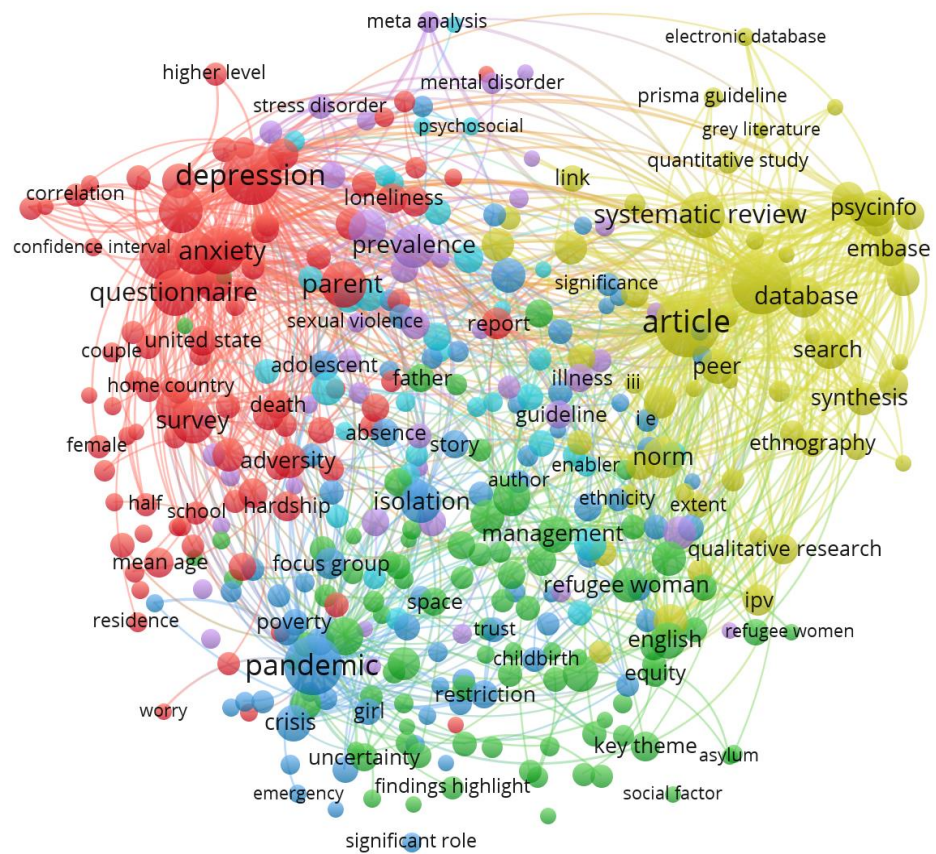


Figure 4: Network Visualization of Keywords Reoccurrence. Source: Author

Table 2: Ranking of Journals Based on Article Count.

Ranking	Journal	Count
1	Journal of Child, Family, and Consumer Sciences	2
2	Scandinavian Journal of Psychology	1
2	Trauma, Violence, & Abuse	1
2	Gender and Behaviour	1
2	BMC Public Health	1
2	BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth	1

2	Social Politics	1
2	International Journal of Social Psychiatry	1
2	International Migration	1
2	Journal of Population Research	1
2	European Scientific Journal	1
2	Social Indicators Research	1
2	Journal of Child, Family, and Health	1
2	Journal of Family Psychology and Welfare Studies	1
2	The China Journal	1
2	Gender, Place & Culture	1
2	Empowering Women Through Rural Sustainable Practices	1
2	Health and Quality of Life Outcomes	1
2	Gender Issues	1
2	Journal of Human Rights and Social Development	1
2	On the Move: Women and Rural-to-Urban Migration (Book Chapter)	1
2	Psychological Studies of Social Transformation	1
2	Journal of Population and Social Studies	1
2	South African Journal of Psychology	1
2	Psychology and Education	1
2	Family Process	1
2	Family and Environment Research	1
2	Journal of Happiness Studies	1

Source: Author

Dominant Outlet: The *Journal of Child, Family, and Consumer Sciences* appear **twice**, making it the most frequently used journal among the listed publications. This suggests a recurring research focus related to family and consumer sciences.

Diverse Publication Spectrum: Most journals (27 out of 28) have only **one article each**, indicating a wide range of academic outlets covering varied aspects of psychology, sociology, migration, and gender studies.

Interdisciplinary Nature: The spread includes fields such as public health (*BMC Public Health*), psychology (*Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*), gender studies (*Gender and Behaviour*, *Gender Issues*), and migration (*International Migration*), reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the research themes.

Book Chapter Inclusion: One source (“On the Move...”) is a book chapter, highlighting that not all significant research findings are published solely in journals.

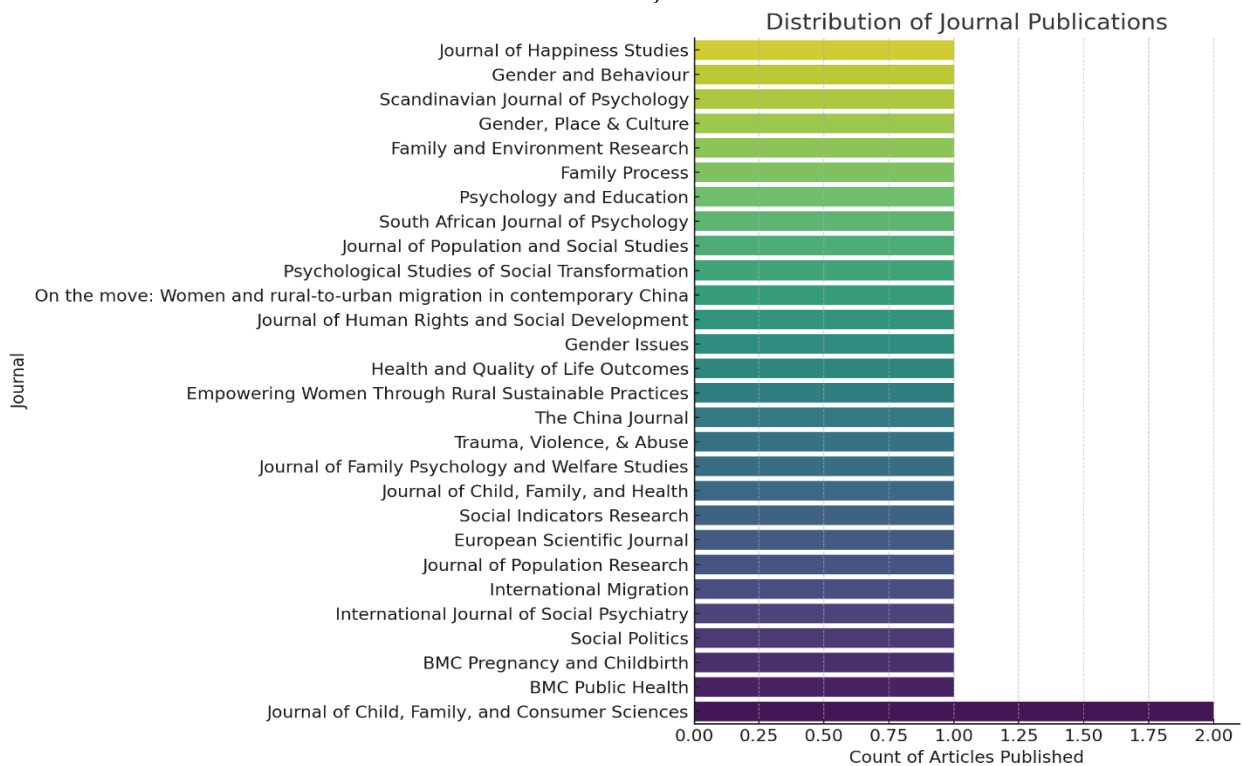


Figure 5: Ranking of Journals Based on Article Count.

Source: Author.

5.2. Economic Autonomy

Economic autonomy is another area where the impact of spousal migration is keenly felt by women left behind. In many parts of the world, women are financially dependent on their male spouses, particularly in rural areas where access to formal employment opportunities is limited. With the migration of their husbands, many women are left to manage household expenses and make critical financial decisions (Jacka, 2012). This responsibility can lead to increased stress, particularly for women who may not have had prior experience in managing finances or dealing with economic uncertainties.

On the other hand, the migration of a spouse can also open up new avenues for economic independence. Some women, in the absence of their husbands, might take up employment or entrepreneurial activities that were previously inaccessible to them. For instance, women in migrant households may engage in agricultural work, start small businesses, or take on non-traditional roles within the community. These new responsibilities can offer them a sense of empowerment and greater economic independence (Gartaula et al., 2012). However, these opportunities often come with their own set of challenges, such as balancing work and family obligations, which can further stress the quality of life for these women.

5.3. Subjective Well-Being

The subjective well-being of women left behind by migrant spouses is often a mixed experience. Subjective well-being refers to an individual's overall assessment of their life, including emotional reactions and cognitive judgments (Luo et al., 2017). The absence of a spouse can create both positive and negative outcomes in terms of well-being. On the negative side, the emotional toll of living without a partner for extended periods can be considerable. Feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and emotional stress are common among women in such situations (Desai & Banerji, 2008). The uncertainty surrounding the return or the future of the marriage can contribute to prolonged emotional strain.

Conversely, some studies suggest that women may experience an increase in their subjective well-being when their husbands migrate. In some cases, the absence of a controlling or authoritarian spouse allows women to experience greater autonomy, which can lead to increased satisfaction and independence (Luo et al., 2017). These women may experience a sense of freedom and control over their own lives, leading to an improvement in their overall well-being. However, these benefits are often

tempered by the social and economic challenges they face.

, the impact of spousal migration on subjective well-being is often influenced by factors such as the length of the separation, the economic conditions of the household, and the availability of social support networks (De Jong et al., 2002). In communities where migration is a common experience, women may adapt to the absence of their spouses and develop coping strategies that improve their well-being. However, in contexts where migration is less common, the absence can lead to significant psychological distress and a decrease in life satisfaction.

The prolonged absence of a spouse due to migration has profound effects on the quality of life of women left behind. While the impact on social participation, economic autonomy, and subjective well-being is generally negative, it is important to note that these effects are not uniform. They vary depending on cultural context, the socio-economic status of the family, and the length of the separation. While some women may experience empowerment and increased autonomy, others may struggle with isolation, economic uncertainty, and emotional distress. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics of migration and the role of gender in shaping the experiences of left-behind women.

6. CONCLUSION

The psychological well-being, resilience, and quality of life of women with migrant husbands are shaped by interconnected social, economic, and psychological factors. The literature consistently shows that spousal migration places women at heightened risk of emotional distress due to prolonged separation, increased responsibilities, and concerns about their husbands' safety. Feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and social isolation are common, often intensified by cultural stigma surrounding women who are left behind. At the same time, migration can create opportunities for economic improvement that positively influence household stability and future prospects.

A key insight from the reviewed studies is the dual impact of migration on women's lives. While emotional strain and role overload negatively affect mental health, financial remittances frequently enhance living conditions, educational opportunities for children, and overall material well-being. These economic gains, however, do not automatically translate into improved quality of life, as emotional fulfillment, social connectedness, and relationship

satisfaction remain critical components of well-being.

Resilience emerges as a central factor enabling women to navigate these challenges. Many women adapt by strengthening social networks, engaging in community activities, and exercising greater autonomy in managing family and economic responsibilities. Access to social support and community resources significantly enhances their capacity to cope with stress and sustain psychological well-being over time.

Overall, the experiences of women with migrant

husbands reflect a complex balance between emotional costs and economic benefits. Policies and interventions should therefore extend beyond financial support to include mental health services, community-based support systems, and programs that strengthen social inclusion and personal agency. Future research should focus on long-term mental health outcomes and evaluate context-specific interventions that promote resilience and quality of life across diverse socio-cultural settings.

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