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Post-Migration Living Difficulties of Returned Women in Kyrgyzstan

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation rigorously explores the unique challenges faced by Kyrgyz female migrants upon their return from Russia after an extended period of migration, focusing on the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological difficulties they encounter during the reintegration process. This research is based on interviews conducted with migrant women from the Chui and Batken regions, focusing on their experiences of labor migration in Russia, their return process, and their reintegration into life back in Kyrgyzstan. The study employs the concepts of Post-Migration Living Difficulties (PMLD) and vulnerability, in conjunction with a feminist perspective, as a framework to analyze how various factors interact over time.

The research question guiding this study are structured to explore the experiences of Kyrgyz female migrants: What economic, social, and psychological post-migration living difficulties do migrant women experience upon returning to Kyrgyzstan from Russia? Qualitative case study method was employed to examine and validate several theoretical propositions using an analytic induction approach.

As a result of the interview analysis, several key themes emerged, including transnational motherhood, health issues, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia, financial hardship, family dynamics, and the use and impact of remittances. These themes provide valuable insights into the experiences of female migrants in Russia and contribute to a deeper understanding of the feminization of migration in Kyrgyzstan. By examining these issues through the lens of Post-Migration Living Difficulties (PMLD) and feminist perspectives, this research offers a significant contribution to migration studies, enhancing our understanding of female migrants' specific vulnerabilities and informing future research and policy development.

CHAPTER1: INTRODUCTION

While extensive research and numerous dissertations have focused on migration from Kyrgyzstan, particularly to Russia and other global destinations (Brück, Mahé & Naudé, 2018; Osadchaya et al., 2023; Thieme, 2014; Tynaliyev & Mclean, 2009), relatively less attention has been devoted to the phenomenon of return migration, especially within the context of Kyrgyzstan. Research on returned women migrants, particularly within the context of the feminization of migration, remains limited. This underexplored area of study has prompted my interest in conducting a deeper investigation into the experiences and challenges faced by this group.

The concept of the feminization of migration highlights major shifts in global migration patterns, particularly the increasing participation of women in migratory movements (Gabaccia, 2016). Feminization of migration specifically refers to the growing number of women who migrate independently of men. Women, both single and married, are increasingly migrating on their own to seek stable employment in northern countries or within their own regions to support their families, thereby challenging traditional gender roles within households and communities (Kofman, 2019). According to the Conflict and Peace Analysis (CPA, 2019), 59.6% of all labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan are women. Most of these women come from less privileged social backgrounds and originate from Southern regions of Kyrgyzstan. The main drivers of migration among women and men are almost the same: poverty, unemployment and community tensions over resources and power, as well as favorable labor market conditions in destination countries, and environmental considerations. In addition, women are often forced by their families into migrating, which constitutes a negative driver of women's migration. This is evidenced by Gender in Society Perception Study on Women and Labor Migration (GSPS, 2016) findings which found that women and girls are perceived different in terms of family and community stereotypes. The migration decisions of women and girls are often not entirely voluntary. Many are pressured or financially exploited by their parents, who see them as more enduring, hardworking, and willing to make sacrifices for their families (Deveaux, 2016). Therefore, migration is viewed by many families as a last-resort solution for their well-being or survival due to economic necessity, rather than a personal, independent choice. Families may also see migration as the only way for their daughters to escape gendered risks and vulnerabilities at home, such as forced marriage (bride kidnapping) or post-divorce stigmatization, given the lack of employment opportunities at home (Deveaux, 2016; Hofmann & Chi, 2022).

Nevertheless, migration can provide important opportunities for women migrants personal development. It can contribute to their empowerment, leadership, and skills development (Thieme, 2014; Tynaliev & McLean, 2011). Migrant women's contributions to their host and origin communities are significant. Although they earn less than male migrants do, they tend to remit a larger share of their earnings to their home communities than men do, and when they return, they can bring with them skills, innovation, and cultural diversity (World Bank Group, 2016). At the same time, women migrants face significant and specific challenges after return to their home communities (Thieme, 2014). They experience so-called post-migration living difficulties (PMLD) (Silove et al., 1997). PMLD concept refers to the range of challenges and stressors that migrants, particularly

women, may encounter after returning to their home communities following a period of migration (di Belgiojoso, Cela & Trappolini, 2024; Herroudi, Knuppel & Blavier, 2024). IOM's regional assessments conducted in 2016 and 2017 on returned migrants with re-entry ban status to the Russian Federation in Kyrgyzstan have identified women to be one of the most vulnerable groups of returned migrants to economic hardships and psychological distress. A joint research report by UN Women, UNIFEM, and IOM (2017) documented that migrant women who returned to their communities in Kyrgyzstan are also facing stigmatization, status loss, and estrangement from their spouses and children.

As such, the goal of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by women from Kyrgyzstan who have returned from Russia after a period of migration. Additionally, the study examines the process of feminization of migration in Kyrgyzstan. To explore these issues, the research employs the concepts of PMLD and vulnerability in conjunction with the feminist perspective. This framework serves to analyze how various factors interact over time to shape female migrants' exposure to difficulties and risks, as well as their ability to cope with these challenges.

To acknowledge the significant contributions of women migrants to Kyrgyzstan's economy during the early years of independence, a monument was erected at Dordoi Market, the largest market in the country. The monument depicts two women and one man, each carrying a checkered bag filled with goods. This imagery symbolizes the vital role that shuttle traders played in the nation's economic development during this period. Photographs of the monument is included in Appendix B., a) and b).

To date, return migration and the issue of feminization of migration in Kyrgyzstan remain relatively unexplored areas of research. This topic has been examined by some local Kyrgyz and Russian researchers (Abashin, 2017; Tukubasheva & Purdilova, 2023), who have not incorporated existing theories and models developed by Western researchers due to language and other barriers in accessing relevant materials. Some patterns and characteristics of return migration in Kyrgyzstan were studied by Thieme (2012). To the best of my knowledge, no study has focused on the experiences of Kyrgyz women returnees. This topic, therefore, presents vast opportunities for Western-educated researchers, and this study is one of the first attempts to fill the existing gap.

Thus, the dissertation will focus on the feminization of migration and post-migration difficulties of returned women migrants in Kyrgyzstan. As indicated above, this research will explore the vulnerabilities faced by female migrants, employing the feminist perspectives to provide a

qualitative analysis. The next subchapter will outline the purpose and detailed research questions, discuss the methodological approaches adopted, and describe the research sites where the interviews were conducted.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate and understand the specific challenges faced by Kyrgyzstani women who have returned from Russia after a period of migration. It also examines the process of feminization of migration in Kyrgyzstan. For this purpose, a case study design with qualitative data was used (Gilgun, 2005; Yin, 2003). As previously mentioned, this research employs the feminist perspectives on vulnerability and PMLD as a framework to study the difficulties and risks faced by these female migrants, as well as their ability to cope with them. Several migration studies have underscored the significant role of the family in migration, as well as in arrival and integration in the destination country (Fleischer, 2013; Bilecen & Lubbers, 2021). In contrast, relatively few scholars have emphasized the impact of family dynamics on return migration and reintegration in the home country.

The central research question for this project was: What post-migration living difficulties do migrant women experience upon returning to Kyrgyzstan from Russia? Some other supporting questions are: What personal, economic, and social factors influence the decision of these migrant women to return to Kyrgyzstan, and how do these factors interact? What historical, social, and economic processes have contributed to the feminization of migration in Kyrgyzstan? What benefits do migrants derive from their migration experiences?

The proposed research questions explore the experiences of Kyrgyz women migrants in Russia, as well as their return and post-return conditions, within the framework of PMLD and vulnerability. By its nature, this question presumes two sets of questions to be explored among female Kyrgyz returnees. The first set of questions related to the experiences of these women as migrant workers in Russia. In this regard, related questions were: How did the migrants' expectations about the challenges and difficulties of migration in Russia align with their actual experiences? Were they adequately prepared for these challenges, and if not, what factors contributed to any discrepancies between their expectations and reality? What factors made them to return home? Or under what conditions female migrants return home?

The second set of questions addressed the issues and difficulties of Kyrgyz female returnees at home in Kyrgyzstan. What factors contributed to the difficulties in readapting and reintegrating into home life after migration? What specific challenges did migrant women face upon returning to

Kyrgyzstan? How did the families of migrant women react to their decision to return home? In what ways, if any, did her migration financially benefit her and her family, such as through investments or other means?

The logic behind this research question is that the research was intended to study the experiences of Kyrgyz female returnees as well as when they were labour migrants. I could not build my research solely on speculations of returned female migrants without asking their pre and during-migration experience. Thus, based on field data collected in Kyrgyzstan, I analyzed the experiences of Kyrgyz females twofold as returnees and as labor migrants.

It is important to clarify that data collection was completed before February 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. Therefore, the war had no discernible impact on the decisions of women migrants regarding whether to return home or remain in Russia.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following definitions are important in understanding the scope of the phenomenon being studied.

Migrant

An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students. At the international level, no universally accepted definition for “migrant” exists (IOM, 2019).

Labor Migrants

Labor migrants are engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which they are not nationals. They move for economic reasons and have no legitimate claim to refugee status (United Nations General Assembly, 2003).

Remittances

According to Alfieri, Havinga, and Hvidsten, (2005), a narrow definition of remittances is: ...remittances aim at measuring the economic impact of migration mostly on the home economy. The unit under consideration is the migrant (including also short-term migrant), independently of whether his or her status (e.g. employed or not, legal or illegal, etc.).

The aim is to capture the net receipt of transactions between the migrant and the related household in the home country, independently from the source of income (be it wages and salaries, social benefits or any other current transfer) and the use this money is put to in the home country. They encompass both income from labour (i.e. compensation of employees) as well as various types of current transfers:

- a. Compensation of employees of a nonresident worker employed by a nonresident employer operating in a foreign country (not BOP flow)
- b. Compensation of employees of a nonresident worker employed by a resident company
- c. Workers' remittances from a resident migrant worker
- d. Other current transfers from a resident household
- e. Migrants' transfers (p. 2)

Returnees

According to the United Nations (1986):

...persons who, having the nationality of the country that they are entering, have spent at least one year abroad and have returned with the intention of staying at least one year in the country of their nationality. (p. 1)

Post-migration living difficulties

The term "Post-Migration Living Difficulties" (PMLD) refers to the challenges that migrants face after relocating to a new country Silove, (1998). The Post-Migration Living Difficulties checklist, developed by Silove et al. in 1998, is a tool used to assess the severity of these challenges, which range from healthcare access and immigration processing delays to discrimination and loneliness. These challenges include issues related to integration, accessing services, securing housing and employment, as well as dealing with discrimination and navigating the host country's legal and healthcare systems. Additionally, PMLD encompasses adapting to new cultures, overcoming language barriers, and coping with loneliness and boredom, as described by Teodorescu et al. (2012). These difficulties can impact the mental health and well-being of migrants, contributing to stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions.

PMLD has been described as a "double trauma," where the stress of resettlement compounds any pre-existing psychological distress, intensifying the overall struggle for migrants (Teodorescu et al., 2012). Difficulties associated with adapting to and navigating a new country may be experienced as equally or even more stressful than experiences associated with the initial dislocation (Schick et al., 2018). In a three-year longitudinal study, PMLD was found to mediate rates of anxiety and

depression more than previous trauma histories. This finding prompted the authors to call for interventions directly addressing these sources of PMLD (Schick et al., 2018). Some other studies have found PMLD to mediate rates of anxiety and depression significantly, underscoring the need for targeted interventions (Alemi et al., 2016; Lies et al., 2021).

When considering returned migrants—those who have returned to their country of origin after spending time abroad—the concept of PMLD might not directly apply in the same way it does to those who are in the process of adjusting to a new country (Moore, 2018; Walg, 2024). However, returned migrants can face a range of reintegration challenges that are similar in nature to PMLD but occur in the context of returning to their homeland. These challenges might include re-adjustment to the cultural and social norms of their home country, difficulties in finding employment, changes in social status, loss of community, and potential stigma or discrimination for having lived abroad (Kuschminder, 2017). Additionally, if the return is involuntary, such as through deportation or the failure to secure asylum, the psychological impact can be significant, leading to feelings of failure, loss, and trauma (Schuster & Majidi, 2013).

Transnational motherhood

Transnational motherhood, a term coined initially by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997), constitutes a phenomenon in which mothers are forced to leave their children in their country of origin in order to be able to work in the host country.

Vulnerability

A weakening process and as a lack of resources in one or more life domains that, in specific contexts, exposes individuals or groups to (1) negative consequences related to sources of stress, (2) an inability to cope effectively with stressors, and (3) an inability to recover from stressors or to take advantage of opportunities by a given deadline (Spini, Hanappi, Bernardi, Oris, & Bickel, 2013, p. 19).

Feminization

In sociology, feminization is the shift in gender roles and sex roles in a society, group, or organization towards a focus upon the feminine. It can also mean the incorporation of women into a group or a profession that was once dominated by men (Douglas, 1998).

Feminization of Migration

Women migrant workers from developing countries engage in paid employment in countries where they are not citizens (Medarevic, 2016). While women have traditionally been considered companions to their husbands in the migratory process, most adult migrant women today are

employed in their own right (Marinucci, 2007). In 2017, of the 168 million migrant workers, over 68 million were women. The increase in proportion of women migrant workers since the early twentieth century is often referred to as the “feminization of migration” (Gabaccia, 2016; Premarathna, 2020).

Labour Migration from Kyrgyzstan: An overview

Kyrgyzstan, officially known as the Kyrgyz Republic, declared its independence on 31 August 1991 following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Today, the country has a population of over seven million people (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2023). Since its independence, Kyrgyzstan has experienced considerable political turbulence, including the ousting of three presidents, in the wake of widespread public dissatisfaction. Administratively, Kyrgyzstan is divided into seven oblasts (provinces), with Bishkek as its capital. Since gaining independence, Kyrgyzstan has experienced significant migration outflow, largely due to the disruption of economic ties within the former Soviet Union (Bashiri, 2003). The majority of migrants from Kyrgyzstan have sought employment in Russia, driven by shared linguistic and cultural connections. However, recent economic downturns in Russia, exacerbated by sanctions imposed by Western countries in response to the invasion of Ukraine, have led to a decline in the number of Kyrgyz migrants seeking work there. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, these sanctions or the war did not impact the research results, as the data was collected before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022.

In the 1990s, migration patterns were largely driven by necessity, predominantly involving Russian-speaking families. This movement was significantly influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and numerous ethno-political conflicts across the post-Soviet space, e.g. Kyrgyz-Uzbek conflict in Osh oblast of Kyrgyzstan in 1990, 2010; armed inter-Tajik conflict 1992-1993, inter-ethnic conflicts in North and South Caucasus, not mentioning of the current Russian-Ukrainian war, and so on. By the 2000s, the nature of migration had shifted, becoming more associated with labour, ethnic identity, and temporary stays (Fryer, Nasritdinov & Satybaldieva, 2014). During this period, the majority of migrants were men. However, in recent years, a significant new characteristic of migration from Kyrgyzstan has emerged, the notably high proportion of women migrants compared to other Central Asian countries. This trend has led researchers to increasingly discuss the feminization of migration from Central Asia, with a specific focus on Kyrgyzstan (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017).

According to the Analytical Report (Ministry of Labour, Migration and Youth of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2023), between 600,000 and 700,000 Kyrgyz citizens work abroad, with the majority (516,893) of labor migrants living in the Russian Federation. However, according to other estimates

(Dzhooshebekova et al., 2021), up to 1 million, which is 12-17% of the economically active population of the republic works abroad at the height of seasonal work opportunities (Sagynbekova, 2016; Murzakulova, 2020). Although these migratory flows consist mainly of young men, the number of women has increased in recent years, making Kyrgyzstan an exception among Central Asian countries of origin (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017).

The migration patterns of Kyrgyzstan's residents to Russia are significantly influenced by regional disparities. Kyrgyzstan is often categorized into northern and southern regions, which have distinct economic, social, and natural characteristics. The northern regions include: Bishkek city, Chuy, Talas, Issyk-Kul, and Naryn provinces, and the southern ones are: Osh city, Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken provinces. The northern regions are more industrialized and economically developed compared to the south, boasting higher gross regional product and industrial production levels. The urbanization rate is notably higher in the Issyk-Kul province, where about 28% of the population is urban, contrasting sharply with Osh province, where 92% of the population is rural (Murzakulova, 2020). A significant majority of the Russian-speaking population resides in the northern regions (Bishkek, Chuy, and Issyk-Kul), accounting for over 90% of the Russian residents in Kyrgyzstan (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2023). This concentration results in higher proficiency in the Russian language in these areas. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emigration of many Russian speakers, Uzbeks have become the second-largest ethnic group in Kyrgyzstan. They are predominantly located in the Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces, where they make up more than 70% of the population (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2023).

These regional distinctions are crucial for understanding the migration dynamics within Kyrgyzstan and the varying levels of involvement in migration to Russia. The industrial development and urbanization in the north, along with the concentration of Russian speakers, contrast with the more rural and ethnically diverse south, influencing the socio-economic landscape and migration patterns. Residents of the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan are the most active participants in migration to Russia. According to some data, the Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken provinces account for 80% of labor migrants, most of whom leave for Russia. Researchers note that remittances from other countries (primarily from Russia) are most significant for the household budgets of the southern provinces, particularly Jalal-Abad and Batken. Regional differences in migration patterns are closely linked to the variety of available means of livelihood – ways of earning money for household members. Migration serves as one of these means, or, as other researchers put it, migration “becomes

one of the segments of the economy of the Kyrgyz Republic” (Zhunusova & Herrmann, 2018). The broader the range of alternative means of livelihood to migration, the lower the significance of migration as a separate means of livelihood. Between 2011 and 2019 the largest number of Kyrgyz people who emigrated permanently to other countries (predominantly to Russia) came from the Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces, with over 28,000 and 18,000 migrants, respectively. In contrast, the fewest migrants came from Naryn province, with about 2,000 individuals (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2023).

Migrants from Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan typically occupy established niches that have less competition with local people in Russia, indicating a specialized division of labor where migrant workers fill specific roles. A study conducted in Moscow identifies five primary sectors where labor migrants from Central Asia are predominantly employed. These sectors include the hospitality industry (hotels and restaurants), personal services (such as laundry, hairdressing, and cosmetic services), construction, wholesale and retail trade, and housing and communal services (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017).

This study also reveals that a significant number of labor migrants are well-educated and are keen on enhancing their skills and competencies (Rocheva, 2017). The trend towards the feminization of migration from Central Asia is attributed to both family migration patterns and the independent migration of single and divorced women. This shift underscores the changing dynamics of migration in the region. In the Russian Federation, for example, about 40% of migrants arriving from Kyrgyzstan are women, whereas Tajik and Uzbek women make up less than 20% of the total number of migrants in the country. Poverty, unemployment, and low wages are among the main causes of Kyrgyz migration abroad. Particularly in the case of women, the desire to increase their income and provide economic support for their families is an especially strong factor.

In general, 75% of Kyrgyz migrants are under the age of 35, with over half of the migrant workers from both genders having families (approximately 60%). Consequently, the primary destinations for migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan include the Russian Federation (around 600,000), Kazakhstan (115,000), Turkey (14,000), Korea (15,000), and other countries (30,000) (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2023). Additionally, there has been a notable increase in migration to the Middle East recently. Moreover, bilateral labor migration agreements have been signed between Kyrgyzstan and Korea. This is particularly important for rural Kyrgyz populations,

for whom labor migration is a vital source of livelihood, with the Russian Federation being a preferred destination due to visa-free entry policies.

Regarding gender dynamics, the proportion of female migrants has been rising, now constituting between 43 and 48 percent of all Kyrgyz migrants. Since 2014, the National Statistical Committee of the Republic has observed a significant increase in women's participation in both external and internal migration, with female migrants in Kyrgyzstan now outnumbering men by a factor of two. As a result, nearly 40% of Kyrgyz migrants to Russia are women, primarily employed in the service sector, catering, textiles, and domestic work. Unfortunately, these women often work in informal sectors for more than 10 hours a day and have limited access to social protection services, facing discrimination, stigma, and vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence.

Furthermore, in 2015, it was estimated that 59.6 percent of migrants from Kyrgyzstan were women (UN, 2015), with nearly 40 percent in Russia (FIDH, 2016), of whom 48 percent were not accompanied by family members. Among these, 82 percent of married female migrants were not accompanied by their husbands (Ministry of Labour, Migration and Youth of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2016). This trend of the feminization of migration in Kyrgyzstan is linked to the feminization of poverty, with societal acceptance for independent female migration varying significantly between the northern and southern regions. Given these circumstances, the ongoing feminization of migration underscores the need for more research to understand the interplay between gender, security, and labor migration, not just from the perspective of female migrants' vulnerabilities but also as a source of strength and positive contributions. Despite this, the political, economic, and social forms of violence that motivate women to migrate remain under-explored. However, studies have shown how migration can enable women to escape familial control and societal pressures, and how older women remaining in Kyrgyzstan can leverage the absence of men to increase their status and decision-making power within households (Ismailbekova, 2014).

While the feminist perspective is not a new approach in migration studies, it is rarely applied in research focusing on migration in post-Soviet countries (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017). Rather, migration is still often perceived by default as a male phenomenon, therefore, gender is an issue rarely considered in such studies. To date researchers predominantly have studied economic migration in the destination country. A number of papers attempted to illustrate the overall situation in the host country namely Russia, defining the scale of specific social problems connected with female migration (Florinskaya, 2010; Tyuryukanova, 2011; UNIFEM, 2009) as well as addressing specific issues, such as transformation of gender relations and belonging (Nikiforova & Brednikova,

2018), sexual risks (Agadjanian and Zotova, 2011), plans to return home (Agadjanian et al., 2014), and strategies of migrants (Thieme, 2008; Kasymova, 2012). Notably, there are rare papers in which female migration was considered from the feminist perspective (Reeves, 2011). Overall, research on gender and migration within the former Soviet Union, particularly regarding movements from Central Asia to the Russian Federation and back, is generally sporadic and incomplete (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017). As noted earlier, the study of return migration and reintegration, particularly through the concepts of PMLD and vulnerability, remains an underexplored area in Kyrgyzstan. Additionally, employing a feminist perspective in this context offers an opportunity to address this research gap and provides a valuable avenue for future studies on return migration in Kyrgyzstan.

Lastly, conducting research on labor migration in Kyrgyzstan poses significant challenges, including obtaining official data from reluctant authorities. Also, migrants themselves are extremely suspicious and refrain from giving any interviews or information, especially to those they do not know well. This is why I chose to focus on female rather than male migrants; as a woman, I found it easier to engage in discussions about sensitive topics. This cultural nuance is particularly pronounced in the south of the country, where part of my research was conducted. As a native Kyrgyz speaker and fluent in Russian, my background enables me to navigate the cultural and linguistic nuances necessary for this research. This is particularly pertinent given the challenges in obtaining reliable data from official sources and the reticence of migrants to participate in research. My approach, therefore, not only fills a significant scholarly gap but also leverages my personal strengths and insights as a researcher.

The GSPS (2016) emphasizes that the migration of women and girls is also influenced by the level of gender-based discrimination and violence they face. This is particularly evident in southern Kyrgyzstan, where traditional patriarchal views and conflict tensions contribute to an increase in women's migration. These factors are in addition to general drivers like poverty and unemployment. For instance, the GSPS (2016) found that respondents, “in packaging their migration aspirations as familial duties and forced choices, de-accentuated any hopes for personal gain, liberation and individual development” (p. 11). In southern regions of Kyrgyzstan, where religious influence is stronger, the roles of women and girls at both community and family levels are often confined to being obedient wives, homemakers, or caring mothers. Additionally, women are viewed as the property of male family members, leading to risks such as kidnapping for marriage and the burden of disproportionate household chores (Kim & Karioris, 2021; Nedoluzhko & Agadjanian, 2015).

Women's opinions on public matters are generally valued less, with men taking responsibility for decision-making and community leadership roles (Critelli, 2021; Kosec et al., 2022). These harmful gender norms are being imposed on women and girls affected by migration as well. Thus, because of entrenched gender roles and societal perceptions of what women can do and decide, women migrants are limited in their decision-making. This includes choices related to migration. Often, as mentioned above, their families make the decision to send them for migration. (Hofmann & Chi, 2022). Furthermore, for the same reason, some of them may not have access to resources throughout the entire migration cycle.

The GSPS (2016) study also confirms that women are not permitted to decide how to spend their remittances; instead, this decision is made by family members, particularly male family members. This means that women migrants do not gain ownership over their earnings during migration. Upon returning home, women and girls do not receive recognition from their families for their hard-earned money either. Even though the government and migrant communities recognize the importance of remittances as a crucial source of income for families and for the development of the country (Tynaliev & McLean, 2011), women migrants, who constitute the majority of labor migrants, are still not acknowledged for their contribution, even after the remittance gender gap has been closed. Similarly, communities do not acknowledge women's rights and abilities to participate in decision-making (Commercio, 2022). Without recognition from family members and the community, and facing stigmatization, women migrants and girls are eventually forced to leave again for the country of destination, seeming to be completely removed from community life.

The dynamics of migration in areas characterized by inclusion and marginalization create specific vulnerabilities for women and girls. According to UN Women (2021), these vulnerabilities particularly affect girls who have less control over migration decisions—often made by their families—and women returning to their communities of origin, who face post-divorce stigmatization or are coerced into re-migrating by their partners. As a result, girls and women forced to migrate face a highly uncertain future during migration or face risks of becoming victims of potential conflict or violence if they stay. Women, those returning from labor migration due to divorce or other reasons, become stigmatized by their communities and even some family members for so-called “immoral behavior” and are psychologically and economically isolated in households where they resided (Coşkun & Budaichieva, 2024). Consequently, the desire of families to avoid stigma and social isolation forces women to ‘settle’ in the country of destination for permanent residence. In other words, the reasons which give rise to the migration of women and girls from their communities turn

into causes for their systematic exclusion upon their return back home (Zhou, 2023). This situation renders girls and women particularly vulnerable, necessitating a careful examination through the feminist perspective.

Summary

This chapter is an introduction to about the unique challenges and experiences faced by Kyrgyz women upon their return from Russia after a period of migration. To set the stage for this research, it provides a brief overview of the background and context surrounding this topic. Before delving deeper into these topics, it is important to first provide a profile of Kyrgyzstan in the subchapter “Labour Migration from Kyrgyzstan: An overview”, with a particular focus on the specific dynamics of gender and migration within the country. It also illuminates the often-ignored narratives of female migrants in the context of Kyrgyzstan, where the focus has traditionally been on male migrants. The chapter has specific subchapters on the “Purpose of the Study and Research Question”, as well as “Definitions of Key Terms”.

The subsequent chapters will offer a thorough review of literature on studying female migrant vulnerability through PMLD and vulnerability framework in conjunction with the feminist perspective.

This literature review will provide the theoretical underpinnings necessary for understanding the broader context of the study and situating the research within the existing body of knowledge on migration studies.

CHAPTER 2: PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Female Migrant Vulnerability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Spini and his colleagues (Spini, Bernardi & Oris, 2017; Spini & Widmer, 2023) have been at the forefront of advancing the concept of vulnerability across the life course framework. While the PMLD concept provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals navigate difficulties and opportunities after returning from migration, it does not inherently prioritize gender as a central focus of analysis. The feminist perspective, on the other hand, explicitly highlights gender, examining how societal norms, roles, and expectations shape women's experiences differently than men's experiences (Nawyn, 2010). By integrating PMLD, vulnerability concepts and feminist perspectives, this thesis bridges a significant gap in the literature, offering a more nuanced analysis of female migrants' vulnerabilities.

Carling and Collins (2018) argue that integrating feminist and transnational viewpoints into migration theories allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the diverse drivers of migration, including economic, social, and political factors, as well as personal and familial motivations. This approach acknowledges the varied experiences of migrants, particularly those related to gender and transnational ties, which have been historically underrepresented in traditional migration studies. These authors conclude that such an integrated framework not only enhances our understanding of the underlying motivations and complexities of migration but also supports the development of more effective policies and interventions. By addressing the diverse needs and motivations of migrants, policymakers can create more inclusive and responsive strategies that better accommodate the evolving landscape of global migration.

The vulnerability research delves into the conditions and processes that cause individuals or groups more susceptible to harm—whether that harm is physical, psychological, or social in nature (Spini, Bernardi & Oris, 2017). This field explores how various forms of disadvantage, such as poverty, financial hardship, discrimination, or health inequalities, accumulate and interact over time, leading to increased vulnerability. It examines how these vulnerabilities are exacerbated by structural inequalities and how they manifest across different stages of life. This process, often referred to as cumulative vulnerability, highlights how disadvantages and risks can compound over time, creating a layered and more complex vulnerability profile (Huffman et al., 2012). This concept underscores the idea that vulnerabilities are not static; rather, they accumulate and interact with one another, influenced by factors such as socio-economic status, migration, gender, ethnicity, and access to resources (Gabaccia, 2016; Modie-Moroka, 2003). As mentioned above, these factors make girls and women in migration particularly vulnerable, necessitating a deeper analysis that integrates the feminist perspective.

Thus, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how vulnerability is experienced and managed throughout different stages of life, particularly during and after migration for women in Kyrgyzstan. This integration highlights the dynamic interplay between PMLD, vulnerability and feminist perspectives, demonstrating how migration can have profound and lasting impacts on women's lives. It also underscores how critical events or changes, such as returning home after migration, can alter the trajectories of vulnerability, either exacerbating or mitigating risks. This interdisciplinary approach not only deepens our understanding of PMLD and vulnerability of migrant women but also offers valuable insights for the development of policies and interventions. Such measures can be tailored to mitigate risks and promote resilience at different stages of migration,

thereby enhancing the well-being and security of women who navigate these complex life transitions (Boccagni, 2016).

The concept of vulnerability, like the life course and feminist approaches, is complex and multidimensional, capable of being studied from various disciplinary perspectives, including sociology, psychology, public health, feminist studies, and economics (Berchtold & Ghisletta, 2023). This interdisciplinary nature makes the adoption of life course and feminist approaches particularly advantageous for researchers like me studying vulnerability. By integrating insights and methodologies from different fields, such an approach enhances our understanding of how individuals and groups, particularly female migrants, experience and navigate vulnerability throughout their lives.

Sociological Perspective:

From a sociological standpoint, vulnerability is often examined in relation to social structures, inequalities, and the distribution of resources. Female migrants are particularly vulnerable due to intersecting factors such as class, gender, race, and social capital, which influence their exposure to risks and their ability to cope with adverse conditions (Forbes-Mewett & Nguyen-Trung, 2019). Sociologists might explore how these factors shape the migration experiences of women, leading to cumulative disadvantages that affect their well-being over time. The life course perspective, with its focus on social trajectories, aligns well with this approach by tracing how early life disadvantages and gendered social expectations accumulate and manifest as vulnerabilities in later stages of life, particularly for women who migrate (Spini, Bernardi & Oris, 2017).

Psychological Perspective:

Psychologists might approach vulnerability by examining the mental and emotional aspects of female migrants' experiences, such as how trauma, stress, and resilience develop across different life stages (Haw, 2014). Female migrants often face psychological vulnerabilities due to the emotional toll of separation from family, cultural dislocation, and the stress of navigating new environments (Jackson, 2009). The life course perspective supports this by providing a framework to analyze the long-term effects of these experiences, including how early childhood adversities or traumatic events during migration influence psychological vulnerability in adulthood. This perspective also considers how life transitions, such as the process of returning home after migration, can trigger or exacerbate psychological vulnerabilities (Bühlmann et al., 2023).

Economic Perspective:

Economists might analyze vulnerability in terms of financial instability, labor market participation, and access to economic resources, particularly for female migrants. Women in migration often face economic vulnerabilities due to their concentration in low-wage, precarious employment, and limited access to social protection (Geymonat, Marchetti & Palumbo, 2023). Economic shocks, such as job loss or changes in remittance flows, can have long-term impacts on their financial stability and that of their families. The life course and feminist perspectives are valuable here, as it allows for examining how economic vulnerability accumulates or is mitigated over time, and how female migrants navigate these economic challenges across different stages of their lives (Spini, Bernardi & Oris, 2017).

Health Perspective

Public health researchers may investigate how vulnerability manifests in terms of health outcomes, particularly for female migrants (Lurie, 2007). The health of female migrants is often compromised due to limited access to healthcare, exposure to hazardous working conditions, and the stress associated with migration. These health vulnerabilities can be compounded by factors such as inadequate nutrition, poor living conditions, and limited access to reproductive health services (Nicholas et al, 2016). The life course and feminist approach enables a detailed exploration of how these health-related vulnerabilities are shaped by the interplay of biological, social, and environmental factors over time, and how they affect female migrants differently across various stages of their lives (Llácer et al., 2007).

The Interdisciplinary Nature of Vulnerability

Given these varied perspectives, it is evident that vulnerability, particularly among female migrants, is not confined to a single discipline but intersects across multiple fields of study. This intersectionality makes the life course and feminist perspectives an ideal framework for interdisciplinary research (Bernardi & Bolano, 2023; Phizacklea, 1998). By adopting this perspective, researchers like me can integrate insights from sociology, psychology, economics, public health, and other disciplines to develop a more holistic understanding of the vulnerabilities experienced by female migrants (Makoka & Kaplan, 2005). Thus, the life course approach to vulnerability is a powerful tool for interdisciplinary research. It facilitates the integration of diverse disciplinary perspectives, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how vulnerabilities are experienced, managed, and mitigated throughout an individual's life (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022). This approach is particularly relevant for studying complex social phenomena, such as female migration, where multiple factors intersect to shape the experiences and outcomes of vulnerable populations.

Thematic areas for further discussions and analyses

Below, key concepts related to female migration are discussed: transnational motherhood, health issues, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia, financial hardship, family dynamics and use and impact of remittances. These concepts are analyzed to understand their contribution to the PMLD and vulnerabilities experienced by female migrants in Russia, through a feminist perspective. First, I briefly discuss the transnational motherhood from sociology, psychology, economics, public health perspectives. Given these varied perspectives, it is clear that the vulnerabilities experienced by transnational mothers and their children intersect across multiple disciplines. This intersectionality makes the life course approach an ideal framework for interdisciplinary research.

Examining Vulnerabilities in Transnational Motherhood

The concept of vulnerability from the feminist perspective is complex and multifaceted, especially when examining the experiences of transnational motherhood, where intersecting social, economic, and emotional challenges uniquely shape women's migration experiences (Horton, 2009; Merry, Kevork & Hille, 2023). When mothers migrate for work and leave their children behind, both the mothers and their children face unique vulnerabilities that evolve over time. The feminist perspectives offer a valuable framework for understanding how these vulnerabilities manifest and influenced by the separation caused by migration (Muruthi et al., 2016) as elaborated in next subsections.

Vulnerability in Transnational Motherhood: Sociological Perspective:

From a sociological standpoint, the vulnerability of transnational mothers and their children is often shaped by social structures, family dynamics, and the cultural expectations surrounding motherhood (Carling, Menjívar & Schmalzbauer, 2012). Sociologists might explore how the absence of the mother disrupts traditional family roles and impacts the social development of children left behind (Tolstokorova, 2010). The feminist perspective allows researchers like me to trace how these early disruptions in family structure can accumulate and lead to vulnerabilities in both mothers and children. For instance, children may experience emotional detachment or behavioral issues due to the prolonged absence of their mother, while mothers may struggle with feelings of guilt, loss, and the challenge of maintaining a nurturing relationship from a distance (Juozeliūnienė & Budginaitė, 2018).

Vulnerability in Transnational Motherhood: Psychological Perspective

Psychologists might approach the vulnerability of transnational mothers and their children by examining the emotional and psychological toll of separation (Ballaret & Lanada, 2022). For mothers, the stress of being away from their children can lead to anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of maternal fulfillment (Kim, Agic & McKenzie, 2014). For children, the absence of a primary caregiver during critical developmental stages can result in attachment issues, emotional instability, and difficulties in forming secure relationships later in life. Feminist perspective critiques the gendered expectations placed on women as primary caregivers, which do not diminish even when they migrate for economic reasons. Despite their role as financial providers, transnational mothers are still expected to fulfill their caregiving duties, a dual burden that is not typically imposed on male migrants. This double standard reflects broader patriarchal norms that value women primarily for their reproductive and caregiving roles, even when they contribute significantly to the economic sustenance of their families (Castañeda & Buck, 2011).

Vulnerability in Transnational Motherhood: Economic Perspective

From an economic standpoint, the decision of mothers to migrate is often driven by the need to provide better financial support for their families. However, the economic benefits of migration come at the cost of emotional and social vulnerabilities (Ciobanu, Fokkema, & Nedelcu, 2020). Economists might analyze how the remittances sent by transnational mothers contribute to the economic stability of their families, while also examining how the absence of the mother affects the economic well-being of the family in other ways, such as the cost of alternative caregiving arrangements (Castañeda & Buck, 2011; Trask, 2013). Feminist theory also emphasizes the *emotional labor* involved in transnational motherhood (Tsujimoto, 2014). Migrant mothers are expected to maintain emotional ties with their children from afar, which involves significant emotional work. This labor is not compensated financially and is often overlooked in economic analyses. The feminist perspective critiques this oversight and argues for recognizing the full scope of labor—both paid and unpaid—that transnational mothers perform (Paterson & Larios, 2021).

Vulnerability in Transnational Motherhood: Health Perspective

Public health researchers may investigate how the separation between transnational mothers and their children affects their health outcomes (Pineros-Leano et al., 2021). For mothers, the stress and emotional strain of being away from their children can lead to physical health issues, such as hypertension or chronic fatigue, as well as mental health disorders like depression (Marino & Jausoro, 2019). For children, the lack of maternal care can result in nutritional deficiencies, delayed developmental milestones, and increased susceptibility to illness due to the absence of a primary

caregiver. The feminist perspective also critiques how global economic policies and labor markets exploit women's labor. Migrant mothers are often compelled to leave their children behind due to inadequate economic opportunities in their home countries (McCabe et al., 2017). Migrant mothers often engage in physically demanding and low-paid jobs with little access to healthcare and social support systems. The stress of separation from their children, coupled with the harsh working conditions, can lead to a range of health issues, including anxiety, depression, and chronic stress (Naidu, 2013). The feminist perspective highlights the need for policies that recognize and address these intersecting issues, advocating for better labor protections, healthcare access, and support systems for migrant mothers and their families (Mummert, 2012).

Main Points of this subsection

This interdisciplinary approach is particularly valuable because it recognizes that the vulnerabilities associated with transnational motherhood are dynamic, evolving and changing throughout the lives of both mothers and their children. These vulnerabilities can be examined from various perspectives, as discussed above. For instance, the emotional and psychological stress experienced by children during their early years may lead to difficulties in forming relationships or achieving academic success later in life. Similarly, the long-term separation may impact the mother's ability to reconnect with her children upon return, potentially leading to strained family relationships. The feminist perspective underscores the necessity for policies that acknowledge and address the intersecting challenges faced by migrant mothers, such as inadequate labor protections, limited healthcare access, and insufficient support systems. By recognizing these interconnected issues, researchers, policymakers, and activists can more effectively advocate for the health and rights of transnational mothers, ultimately striving for more equitable and just conditions for all women in the global labor force.

Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination in Russia: Dimensions of Vulnerability

Racism, xenophobia, and discrimination significantly shape the vulnerabilities faced by Kyrgyz migrants in Russia, especially female migrants, throughout their migration (Kuznetsova & Round, 2019). By applying various perspectives to vulnerability, including sociology, psychology, economics, public health, we can gain a deeper understanding of how these issues intersect across different disciplines and affect the lived experiences of female migrants in Russia.

Sociological Perspective:

From a sociological standpoint, vulnerability among female migrants in Russia is often shaped by deeply ingrained social structures, inequalities, and discriminatory practices (Levada Center, 2018).

Racism and xenophobia manifest in the form of social exclusion, limited access to resources, and heightened risks of exploitation. Sociologists like me should explore how these social forces marginalize female migrants, making them more vulnerable to discrimination and limiting their opportunities for social integration. The feminist perspective allows researchers to trace how these social disadvantages accumulate over time, starting from the moment female migrants arrive in Russia and continuing as they attempt to navigate hostile environments, thereby reinforcing their vulnerability at different life stages (Biktimirova & Kravstova, 2022).

Psychological Perspective:

Psychologists might approach the vulnerability of female migrants in Russia by examining the mental and emotional toll of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. The stress and trauma associated with experiencing constant prejudice can have long-lasting psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of self-worth (Zotova et al., 2021). The feminist perspective supports this by providing a framework to analyze how early encounters with discrimination can have a cascading effect on mental health throughout a migrant's life. For female migrants, this psychological burden is often exacerbated by the intersection of gender and racial discrimination, leading to compounded vulnerabilities that affect their ability to adapt and thrive in a new environment (Harrison, 2005).

Economic Perspective:

From an economic standpoint, female migrants in Russia often face significant challenges due to discriminatory practices that limit their access to decent work and fair wages. Racism and xenophobia can confine them to low-paying, insecure jobs, where they are more likely to be exploited by employers who take advantage of their vulnerable status (Oni, 2022). The feminist perspective is particularly valuable here, as it allows for an examination of how these economic vulnerabilities exploit female migrants. Female migrants may enter the workforce in precarious positions and remain trapped in these roles due to systemic barriers, which in turn perpetuate their economic instability and dependency (Giardini, 2021).

Health Perspective:

Public health researchers may explore how racism, xenophobia, and discrimination impact the health of female migrants in Russia. Discrimination can lead to chronic stress, which is known to contribute to a range of physical and mental health issues, including hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and mental health disorders (Suleman, Garber & Rutkow, 2018). Moreover, female migrants often face barriers to accessing healthcare, either due to legal restrictions, language barriers, or fear

of further discrimination (Romanenko & Borodkina, 2019). The feminist approach enables a detailed examination of how these health-related vulnerabilities are shaped by the interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors over time, and how they disproportionately affect female migrants.

Main Points of this subsection

Given these varied perspectives, it is clear that the vulnerabilities experienced by female migrants in Russia due to racism, xenophobia, and discrimination intersect across multiple disciplines. This approach is particularly relevant for studying complex social phenomena, such as migration, where multiple factors intersect to shape the experiences and outcomes of vulnerable populations. It facilitates the integration of diverse disciplinary perspectives, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how vulnerabilities related to racism, xenophobia, and discrimination are experienced by the female migrants in Russia. For instance, the economic and psychological stressors experienced early in the migration process can lead to long-term health issues, which in turn can affect a migrant's ability to work and integrate into society. The feminist approach to vulnerability allows researchers to capture the dynamic nature of these interactions and how they unfold over time, highlighting the need for interventions at multiple stages of a female migrant's life to mitigate these risks.

Additional theories related to Gender and Return Migration

Gender and Migration

Gender is an important factor in the migration experience worldwide (Carling et al., 2012). Scholars have consistently shown that gender influences who will go to a new location and who will stay behind (Massey, 2013; Curran et al., 2006; Monsutti, 2007; Cohen et al., 2008). In the context of international migration, gender shapes integration patterns in the destination country (Hagan, 1998), as well as transnational practices (Boehm, 2008), including remittance behavior (Holst et al., 2012); it also influences reintegration trajectories in the case of return to the migrant's country of origin (Obucina et al., 2018).

In the 1960s and early 1970s the phrase "migrants and their families" was interpreted as "male migrants and their wives and children" (Boyd & Grieco, 2014). Research in the 1970s and the 1980s began to include women, but did not cause a dramatic shift in thinking about who migrated, how immigration was explained, or the likely consequences (Carrasco, 2016). One of the central questions about women during this period was whether migration "modernized" women, emancipating them from their assumed traditional values and behaviors (Yin, 2022). Gradually, the term gender in migration theories appeared in more and more research. Yet, this research still did not

explain why people moved, where they went, and how they integrated. Instead, differences between men and women were noted, and then explained as reflections of different sex roles (Boyd & Grieco, 2014).

In the Neoclassical Economic Model and the push-pull demographic models of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, migration was seen as the outcome of individual decisions Boyd (2003). The responsibilities of women as wives and mothers (and the role of men as breadwinners) were thought to influence the decisions of women. These gendered responsibilities were believed to explain why women were less likely than men to participate in migration decisions or in the labor force of the host country when they did join their husbands. Since 1980s much of the migration literature has given attention to the role of women in the dynamic migration process. To name a few examples, are the works focusing on the central role of women in the ever –more feminized global labor market Sassen (2002); Zimmerman, Litt and Bose (2006); Hochschild (2003); Andall (2000); Chang (2000) the role of women in maintaining transnational ties and rescaling their home towns through remittances Smith, (2006); Levitt and Waters, (2006); Gamburd (2000); Parrenas (2008, 2005). In these and other studies, women are no longer viewed as mere followers or unproductive dependents but as pioneers of migration streams, primary breadwinners, and significant remitters. Despite this shift from passive to active roles, women's positions are still predominantly discussed in the context of their identities as mothers and wives. Their experiences—whether as remitters or laborers—are often framed in relation to their obligations to children and households. These developments have led to the emergence of new concepts, such as 'feminization of migration' and 'transnational motherhood,' along with other gender-related notions" (Donato & Gabaccia, 2015; Gabaccia, 2016; Millman, 2013).

The vast majority of literature explained the motives of female migrants to migrate, thus Erlinghagen (2021) posits that women are more likely to make migration decisions based on their family, rather than individually. The decision to move is often based on helping the family, as is seen in the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia Oishi, (2002). Although Thai girls previously cared for children, growing financial need and the expectation for Thai daughters to remit has resulted in migration Curran et al., (2006). Some migration may be due to individual reasons, instead of motivated by family. The IOM's studies in Moldova and Guatemala find that single mothers, widows, or divorcees that experience discrimination may use migration to escape social stigma (IOM 2004, 2005). In addition, in countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, migration may be considered more acceptable than divorce Afsar (2011).

Women experiencing gender-based violence, domestic abuse, unhappy marriage, or a lack of appropriate employment opportunities may also be more inclined to migrate Petrozziello, (2011). Tacoli, (1999) notes that migration allows for both a migrant's self-interest and self-sacrifice for the migrant's family. According to Asis, (2002) and Espiritu, (2002), some Filipina women consider migration to be a way to gain freedom from familial control and to make more independent choices, including on issues such as marriage. Women that see others experiencing more autonomy, different norms, and material gain are also inclined to migrate. Women that are more domestic-based may desire to migrate and experience urban life and more freeing social norms Fleury (2016).

Cerruti and Massey (2001) determine that a mother's migration from Mexico increases the likelihood of emigration for both sons and daughters, but more so for their daughters. However, a father's migration influences only sons. In a study on Morocco, migration culture does not show any effect on the intention to migrate, but family networks do (Heering et al., 2004). Lindstrom examines rural Mexican communities and finds that men used social networks that include friends and distant relatives, but migrant women used networks of only close family members. This difference was in part due to gendered associations with vulnerability and honor (Kanaiaupuni , 2000).

Literature examining the connections between gender and migration underscores that women and men undergo migration differently due to gender-specific societal expectations. These differences affect opportunities, vulnerabilities, and daily practices related to migration (Oishi, 2005; Gabaccia et al., 2006). Scholars point out that gender disparities are present at all migration stages, from departure to working abroad (UN, 2006). In South-East Asia, for instance, distinct labor demands have motivated men and women to seek international labor migration. Men's migration often meets the need for labor in jobs local populations in destination countries avoid, whereas women's migration frequently aligns with a shift of domestic care work to migrant women in the western hemisphere (Asis, 2006). Women engaged in unregulated private domestic and care work face significant vulnerabilities to abuse due to unequal power dynamics, restricted access to information and mobility, and the invisibility of their workplaces.

Studies on migrant workers' remittances reveal that gender informs remittance practices (Gallardo, 2006). Women are expected to contribute over US\$ 300 billion, representing half of the global remittances in 2016, with gendered patterns evident in their distribution—men typically remit to their spouses, whereas women more often send earnings to their children and parents. Data from the Dominican Republic indicate that women are more likely to allocate remittances towards

household improvements, their children's education, and health, potentially gaining autonomy and enhanced negotiating power within the household as a result (Moreno, 2006).

The development literature highlights the crucial role of education in securing employment, economic participation, and other life opportunities for women migrants, emphasizing the need for a gender-equality conducive environment to bolster women's rights (Boyd, 2006; Asis, 2006). With women constituting nearly half of the 244 million migrants globally, the increasing numbers do not necessarily equate to improved equality between male and female migrants (Orozco, 2006). Experts predict that labor migration will continue to rise, with poverty remaining a significant push factor for women's migration until conditions in their home countries ameliorate (Boyd, 2006). The circumstances of migrant women also hinge on the destination countries' level of gender equality (Moreno, 2006). Nonetheless, the unique vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls often go overlooked by both sending and receiving countries when developing migration policies and programs.

A survey of the literature on Kyrgyz female migration reveals the propensity of academics and practitioners to focus on the topic in terms of structural, economic and social inequalities faced by women during their time abroad which deprive them of possibilities to protect their rights. Kyrgyz women migrants are described as having double vulnerabilities and as victims of various violations (FIDH, 2016). They were found particularly likely to face violations of their rights if they did not have proper documents (which applies to 60 percent of Kyrgyz migrants) (FIDH, 2016). When female migrants suffered violence, they were found to be unlikely to seek help from local authorities, some who did later complain of abuse from them. Some 55 percent of female migrant workers in Russia reported that they suffered the worst oppression from city police, while 28 percent said the same of the Federal Migration Service of Russia (Central Asia on the Move, 2015). Women in migration were exposed to gender inequalities and economic discrimination. By way of illustration, in 2008 female migrant workers' wages were 63 percent of those of male migrant workers, even though female migrant workers tend to be better educated than their male counterparts (Tyurukanova, 2011). Risks to women included psychological, physical and sexual violence, exploitative working conditions, inadequate living conditions, and lack of access to healthcare and justice (FIDH, 2016). Violence against Kyrgyz migrant women by Kyrgyz men has emerged as a worrying trend. For example, criminal acts of violence carried out by members of the radical "Patriot" group of Kyrgyz male migrants are specifically targeted at Kyrgyz women migrants, and labelled as 'disciplinary' measures (Beishenbek kyzy, 2012).

To conclude the gender approach in migration studies implies an outlook according to which gender is one of the categories constructing the opportunity structure for any individual (Mahler & Pessar, 2001). This approach, however, is not the same as studying women migrants, although research on female migrants became a necessary preliminary stage in the formulation of this method several decades ago (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000). The present thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of the feminization of migration within the context of Kyrgyzstan, offering insights that are representative of Central Asia as a whole.

Return Migration

If international migration is still searching for a consensus on definitions, return migration has even less consensus (Kosinsiki & Prothero, 2023; Levitt & De la Dehesa, 2017). Excluding the return of contract workers who spend some time with their family before going abroad again, migrants can return for good, at some points in their career or at retirement age, or they can return for some extended time, but then migrate again. The lack of a clear definition generates confusion on the assessment of needs and possibilities and on estimates of the size of return migration. In addition, the absence of administrative tools to register returning migrants means that in many countries the number of returnees is unknown, as are the interventions that could be provided for reinsertion in the labor market and for assistance and support (Hagan & Thomas, 2020).

Yet, most literature on return migration has focused on men or has not addressed gender differences, and relatively little is known about women's experiences and motivations behind decisions to return (Bilgili et al., 2018). Research focusing on women migrants shows women's struggles with the returning versus staying dilemma as the desire to go back to their children or parents in the home country often clashes with the need to generate income to support them and often to maintain high social prestige associated with migration status (Fleury, 2016).

Different disciplines such as economy, sociology, anthropology, geography, and psychology have studied return migration. However, it is still a rather undertheorized field (Cassarino, 2004) in which most attempts to theorize return involve its incorporation or application to general theories of migration (Anghel et al., 2019). When migrants return home because of unfavorable circumstances abroad, they experience PMLD making them vulnerable, which is associated with depression and anxiety (IOM, 2017). According to the research carried by (Ruben et al., 2009) the integration of non-volunteer returnees in the country of origin cannot be successful and sustainable without proper assistance. They analyzed the return migration experiences of 178 rejected asylum seekers and migrants who did not obtain residence permit to six different countries: Afghanistan, Armenia,

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Togo and Vietnam. The findings of this study revealed that assistance by non-governmental organizations and financial support from the government settings as well as human guidance and practical information is needed in order to make return process more sustainable.

‘Target earnings theory’ suggested by Hein de Haas (2012) and further explored by Schewel and Fransen (2020) posits that migrants are driven by specific economic goals, and once these targets are achieved, they may halt their migration. Yet, reaching these economic goals is fraught with challenges and unforeseen expenses, highlighting the precarious nature of migrant work and the vulnerabilities migrants face. These observations align with Carling et al. (2016), who explore the complexity and often unpredictable propositions. The ability to repay debts has provided substantial relief, preventing severe consequences like losing their homes, a benefit supported by Dustmann and Kirchkamp (2002), who discuss how migration can be a strategic move for debt clearance.

Many studies have so far found migrants to be more likely to choose self-employment on return to their origin countries than non-migrants, suggesting that migration facilitates self-employment and therefore entrepreneurship (Marchetta, 2012; Wahba & Zenou, 2012; Naude et al., 2017). Return migrants choose self-employment, because they might not be able to find a wage-paying job immediately. Self-employment upon return might be a transitory phase for reintegrating into the domestic labour market in the spirit of Harris and Todaro's (1970) hypothesis. Facing limited formal sector employment opportunities, returnees would often work in small, informal, self-employed activities until finding formal wage-employment or migrating again (Piracha & Vadean, 2010). The latter is often an option in countries where migration is structural and a means to secure an economic basis at home, such as in the case of Kyrgyzstan Theme, (2014). While the economic rationales and correlates of return migration have been relatively well investigated, social motives that guide decisions to return have been much less studied. Informational inputs and practical support from relatives, friends, and co-ethnics at places of migration destination have been shown to influence migration decisions and choices e.g., (Massey, et al., 2004); (Boyd, 2015) and these factors may also be crucial in shaping return migration preferences and plans (Haug, 2008). For migrants with children, the well-being of and prospects for children have also been shown to affect intentions and decisions to return home or to stay in the host country (FIDH, 2016; Parreñas, 2005).

Developing Qualitative Propositions

This section presents the study's propositions, which are derived from the theoretical frameworks discussed above and the informed judgment of the researcher (Carling et al., 2020; Johnson, 2019).

According to some authors cited below, propositions or hypotheses are “sometimes” used in qualitative research as part of a deductive approach (Patton, 2014, p. 454). For example, Taylor & Bogdan (1998) Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that qualitative and other social science researchers should direct their attention to developing or generating social theory and concepts (Glaser, 1978). Their grounded theory approach is designed to enable researchers to do that. Other researchers, writing from a more positivistic stance, take the position that qualitative research, just like quantitative studies, can and should be used to develop and verify or test propositions about the nature of social life. The procedure of *analytic induction* has been the principal means by which qualitative researchers have attempted to do this (Ragin, 2023). This author also provided more clarification by stating that “analytic induction was developed as a procedure for verifying theories and propositions based on qualitative data.” (p. 138). Hignett and McDermott (2015) further elaborated by explaining that analytic induction was established as a technique to confirm theories and propositions through qualitative data.

Along the same lines, Patton (2014) noted that in analytic induction, researchers develop hypotheses, sometimes rough and general approximations, prior to entry into the field or, in cases where data already are collected, prior to data analysis. These hypotheses can be based on “hunches, assumptions, careful examinations of research and theory, or combinations. Hypotheses are revised to fit emerging interpretations of the data over the course of data collection and analysis” (p. 493). Gilgun (2005) explained that the development of the term “deductive qualitative analysis” resulted from her experiences, which emphasized the significance of using an existing conceptual framework in qualitative research (p. 48). She constructed the procedures for this analysis method by integrating insights from previous studies on analytic induction (Cressey, 1953; Gilgun, 1995; and the philosophical ideas of John Dewey (1910) and Karl Popper (1969) (p. 42). Furthermore, Gilgun (2005) highlighted that deductive qualitative analysis particularly encourages researchers familiar with logico-deductive methods to formulate and test theories. Thus, based on the above sources, propositions can also be referred to as hypotheses, according to Patton (2014).

Drawing from a comprehensive review of the key concepts—such as vulnerability, transnational motherhood, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia and health issues, family dynamics and the use and impact of remittances —discussed above, and informed by my personal and professional experiences in Kyrgyzstan, I have identified the following theoretical propositions to critically evaluate the conceptual framework of this study. These propositions, as suggested by Yin (2017), are derived from the theoretical underpinnings that led to the case study, forming the

backbone of the research design and analysis.

Proposition One. *Women in Kyrgyzstan are increasingly initiating migration decisions independently, thereby reflecting and contributing to the feminist perspectives on migration.* This shift not only challenges traditional gender roles but also underscores the evolving socio-economic dynamics within the region. By examining these changes through the lens of female labor migration, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of feminist perspectives on socio-economic transformation.

Proposition Two. *Women migrating from Kyrgyzstan encounter significant socio-economic, health, and legal challenges that not only shape their migration experience but also critically influence their decision to return home.* This proposition may provide valuable insights into how gender-specific challenges impact the migration cycle, from departure to potential return. The analysis may contribute meaningfully to the academic literature on stigmatization, transnational motherhood, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia in Russia, feminist studies, and policy-making.

Proposition Three. *Post-migration challenges faced by migrants are more significant and enduring than those encountered during the migration period.* This proposition involves a comparative analysis of migration phases and examines whether the challenges faced post-migration are more significant than those encountered during the migration period. It may also contribute on vulnerability, health and PMDL studies.

Proposition Four. *Female migrants' remittances are primarily allocated to basic household needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, with limited investment in long-term economic development.* This proposition seeks to explore whether there are gendered differences in how remittances are allocated within migrant households, potentially influenced by cultural or familial expectations. Understanding these patterns could provide insights into the role of gender in shaping financial decisions and responsibilities. This analysis may contribute to economic perspectives on female migration, feminist studies, and inform policy-making aimed at supporting migrant families.

Proposition Five. *Children of migrants are more likely to opt for labor migration, perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of migration.* This proposition suggests that the experiences and

decisions of migrant parents significantly influence the aspirations and choices of their children, potentially creating a cycle of migration within families. By examining this pattern, the study aims to explore how migration becomes a recurring strategy shaped by economic necessity, social norms, and the perceived benefits of migration. The analysis may contribute meaningfully to the academic literature on vulnerability, transnational motherhood, feminist studies, and inform policy-making that addresses the intergenerational impact of migration.

Summary

In Chapter 2, I have conducted a literature review to establish a solid theoretical foundation for my study. This review has allowed me to identify key theoretical propositions grounded in concepts such as Post-Migration Living Difficulties (PMLD), vulnerability, transnational motherhood, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, health issues, family dynamics and use of remittances. These propositions, shaped by my personal and professional experiences in Kyrgyzstan, are crucial for exploring the unique experiences of Kyrgyz female migrants from a feminist perspective.

A critical area of focus in my research is feminist perspective on female migration, due to the feminization of migration and post-migration challenges faced by women in Kyrgyzstan. This aspect of the study is particularly significant as it brings attention to the often-underrepresented experiences of female migrants, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of female migration dynamics in Central Asia.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter presents the methodology used to explore the specific challenges faced by Kyrgyz female migrants who have returned from Russia after a period of migration and feminization of migration. It includes qualitative research utilizing the case study methodology (Yin, 2017). The second part of this chapter discusses the study participants, data collection, and the analysis of detailed procedures the researcher will use to measure and validate trustworthiness. Finally, this chapter addresses the ethical considerations for researching human subjects related to this study.

Research Design: Qualitative Method

This study uses a qualitative research design approach to investigate the specific challenges faced by Kyrgyz female migrants who have returned from Russia after a period of migration. Qualitative analysis was chosen because it makes the world visible through the application of a set of interpretive frameworks (Stockdale & Standing, 2006). The case study methodology facilitated the qualitative approach of this study (Yin, 2017). Thorough interviews were conducted to collect data from

participants, identifying key points of analysis that helped explain the migration experiences of female returnees. A commitment to research involves studying their “natural settings and understanding the meanings individuals attribute” to them, as Creswell & Poth (2018, p. 147) suggest. Furthermore, qualitative research, as a form of social investigation, aims to elucidate how individuals comprehend and make sense of their daily experiences. This approach positions the observer within the world, interpreting the practices that render their reality visible, according to Jindal et al. (2015).

Research Method

Researchers utilize the qualitative approach to explore, investigate, and study social phenomena, thereby providing a rich understanding of people's social lives through their experiences (Patton, 2014). The fundamental values of qualitative research revolve around personal experiences and the interpretation of these experiences to gain a deep understanding of the sample and its findings. Given its central role in exploring, describing, or explaining phenomena, qualitative research was deemed appropriate for this study, especially for investigating the migration experiences of female returnees.

In contrast, quantitative research methods focus on collecting and analyzing structured data that can be numerically represented. While often used to explain phenomena, quantitative methods typically seek to collect and analyze structured, numerically representable data (Mertler et al., 2022). However, they fall short in providing insights into participants' thoughts, feelings, or the motivations behind observed behaviors. For this reason, quantitative research was not considered suitable for this study, as it aims to capture and understand the migration experiences of female migrants during and after their return to Kyrgyzstan (Goertzen, 2017).

Qualitative researchers observe individuals in their natural environments to understand or interpret phenomena based on the meanings attributed to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Empirical resources such as case studies, firsthand experiences, reflections, personal narratives, meetings, observational, historical, interactive, and visual texts focus on the recurrence and severity of adversity in people's lives and the consequences of such experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Therefore, a qualitative study is best suited for this research, aiming to gain insights, illuminate the subject matter, and increase awareness about the challenges female migrants face during and after the migration phase.

Case Study

My decision to use the case study approach for this research is based on the review of literature on migration theories, and the research methods used to study this phenomenon. This research was also

intended to verify several propositions formulated in Chapter 2. Dube and Pare (2003) wrote, “Case research, in its versatility, can be used with any philosophical perspective, be it positivist, interpretivist, or critical” (p. 598). The case study research design, used here, was based on Yin (2017). According to Yin (2017), “For case studies, five components of a research design are especially important:

1. a study’s questions;
2. its propositions, if any;
3. its unit(s) of analysis;
4. the logic linking the data to the propositions; and
5. the criteria for interpreting the findings.” (p. 21)

I tried to follow these 'components' in this research, especially in terms of 'linking the data to the propositions' as detailed in the analysis section (Yin, 2017, p. 21). Additionally, Yin (2017) observed that an exemplary case study is likely to be one in which the underlying issues are “nationally important, either in theoretical terms or in policy or practical terms, or when both conditions are met” (p. 162). This study meets these criteria, as labor migration has emerged as a national phenomenon in Kyrgyzstan. So far, as far as I can determine, return migration, particularly concerning Kyrgyz female returnees, has not been adequately studied.

According to major methodology scholars, such as Eisenhardt (2021), Merriam and Tisdell (2015), and Yin (2017), case study research is not sampling research. Some of these scholars have claimed that case studies do not need to have a minimum number of cases, or to have cases selected randomly. Although the participants may be selected randomly, random selection is neither necessary nor even preferable. A researcher is called upon to work with the situation that presents itself in each case. In some instances, the case study may be chosen to replicate previous cases or extend emergent theory, or they may be chosen to fill theoretical categories and provide examples of polar types (Eisenhardt, 2021).

In this research, the selection of participants was not random. A purposive selection was used related to the developmental processes in the context of labor migration in Kyrgyzstan. Another goal was to select cases or respondents that were likely to contribute to the return migration research. There are additional arguments for using the case study method. Yin (2017) suggested that case study methodology has three distinct benefits. First, case study method copes with distinctive situations in which there will be many variables involved. This coincides with the characteristics of labor migration, and, particularly, migrant workers’ experiences that incorporate many variables. Second,

the case study approach relies on multiple sources of evidence with data converging in a balanced, integrated, synthesized, and conclusive fashion. I used different data sources and will elaborate on them in the following sections.

Finally, according to Yin (2017), the case study approach benefits from extensive prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. This is particularly relevant to this research as it set forth several theoretical propositions to provide “guidance in determining what data to collect and the strategies for analyzing the data. For this reason, theory development prior to the collection of any case study data is an essential step in doing case studies” (Yin, 2017, p. 29).

Yin (2017) noted that case study is a preferred method for examining a “contemporary phenomenon when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (p. 11). Taking into consideration the peculiarity of labor migration as a social phenomenon, the case study methodology is appropriate for this study because labor migration in Kyrgyzstan is a contemporary phenomenon, and, as a researcher, I cannot influence the labor migrants’ experiences and decisions that they have already made. The case study is considered a multi-perspective analysis, which means that the researcher is not only concerned about the voice and perspective of the actors, but also about the relevant groups of actors and the interactions among them. A final but very important feature of case studies is that they give a voice to the powerless and voiceless. This is especially vital for this research as many participants in this research were irregular migrant workers lacking appropriate legal support and sometimes valid documents to work. This is why they were vulnerable and helpless in regard to their employers’ abusive work conditions and practices. In addition, corrupted Russian militia, and medical representatives were profiting by taking advantage of these migrants. At the same time, remittances that they were providing were the only source of income for many of their families in Kyrgyzstan.

Thus, this study is a single case study of Kyrgyz women migrant workers’ experiences in Russia and their return to Kyrgyzstan. The justification for not conducting a multiple-case study is twofold: (a) practicality; my research was conducted solely in Kyrgyzstan, focusing particularly on the Chuy region, the northern part of the country where, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2018), 71 percent of internal migrants move for better employment opportunities. The second target study area was the Batken region in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, known for high out-migration rates according to data from the Kyrgyz Republic's statistical committee. It was not feasible for me to conduct research in other cities or communities within

Kyrgyzstan where returned migrants reside; and (b) sharper focus; Stake (2013) posited that studying multiple cases dilutes the study's focus and attention that can be allocated to each case. He argued that an in-depth study of a single case yields more useful information, especially for researchers who are new to this type of research.



Figure 1. Research study site

Data Collection

The principle of data collection was to use multiple sources of evidence. According to Yin (2017), any findings or conclusions in a case study are likely to be much more convincing and accurate if they are based on several sources of information. Evidence in this study is derived from three sources: in-depth interviews, site visits and observations, and local media publications. In-depth interviews were the primary method of the research. As Stake (2013) discovered, the convergence of results between multiple data collection sources enhances confidence that the results are valid, and weaknesses in one method are compensated by the strengths of another. Many researchers with qualitative data usually adopt interviewing as the main means of generating data (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).

Thus, I sought to capture the perspectives on the experiences of Kyrgyz female returnees. In-depth interviews were conducted in the spring and summer of 2021 with 22 Kyrgyz female returnees. The theoretical propositions identified in Chapter 2 guided the case study, informing the development of

interview questions (detailed in Appendices A and B). These questions were designed to elicit each participant's viewpoint, based on the aforementioned propositions and structured to uncover individual experiences.

I conducted all interviews face-to-face to minimize misunderstandings of the questions. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. They were conducted primarily in Kyrgyz, with some mixing of Russian according to the participants' language preferences, and were tape-recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews were conducted using interview questions to ensure that all relevant topics were covered and to establish a conversation style (Patton, 2014). By using fairly conversational and situational interviews systematically to gather information from each respondent, this approach not only elicited in-depth opinions, but also increased the comprehensiveness of the data. In-depth interview questions provided me not only with the ability to establish a clear schedule of questions to be asked, but also the flexibility to probe for clarification so participants could elaborate points that they felt were important.

Site visits namely to Batken to the southern part of Kyrgyzstan was an additional source for collecting original data, although Yin (2017) wrote that “case studies need not always include direct, detailed observations as a source of evidence” (p. 15). Nonetheless, these site visits were undertaken in an attempt to bring about greater understanding of the background and process of labor migration. The following section describes the specific steps involved in data collection.

All interviews were recorded using voice record device and later were maintained in a password-protected file on the researcher's laptop, and a backup file was kept on a password protected Google drive. All data are anonymized, information on names and pseudonyms is kept in separate files. All participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All interviews were manually transcribed and coded using coding methods. After reviewing the data and analytical codes, the main points of analysis were established.

Sampling Method

Snowball is considered one of the most popular qualitative research sampling methods as it focuses on networking and referral as its central characteristics (Parker et al, 2019). Snowball sampling is a chain-referral method. Initially, participants (seeds) who meet the eligibility criteria are recruited. These participants then recruit others from their social network with distinctive characteristics, who in turn identify additional individuals (Valerio et al., 2016). Snowball sampling is widely used in qualitative research in various sciences, including social sciences. This method was

used and the researcher asked each interviewee to provide at least one name of a potential participant, so the sample size grew like a rolling snowball. Recruitment stopped when the saturation point was reached, meaning no new information about the research topic was being generated (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018).

Participants

Qualitative research experts argue that several factors, such as epistemological, methodological, and practical issues should be considered in deciding the number of interviews (Baker & Edwards, 2012). The projected sample size enables researchers to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Padgett, 2008) and to achieve code and theme saturation (Hennink et al., 2017). Between five to 25 participants were sought to complete this study using the case study approach (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) argues for between five to 25 participants, while Baker & Edwards (2012) posits six to 20 participants. Thus, this case study purposefully selected 22 participants, focusing exclusively on female migrants who had returned from abroad after a minimum of two years. This criterion was set with the expectation that they would possess substantial knowledge pertinent to the research topic, thereby offering comprehensive perspectives.

The recruitment process was concluded when the researcher reached data saturation (Abdul Majid et al., 2018), indicating that no new insights were being obtained from the interviewees and the maximum number of participants for the study had been achieved (24 participants; 2 pilot participants and 22 interview participants). The eligible criteria included labor migration in Russia no less than 2 years and current residency in Kyrgyzstan. Participants have to be older than 18 to participate. Participants received a follow-up phone call one week after the initial contact to request and confirm their participation. The interview date, time, and manner of conducting the interview were determined after meeting the eligibility criteria. It was explained to each participant that their names would not be used for identification and will be anonymous. The consent form was explained, and any participant concerns/questions were addressed. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were required to sign the consent form.

Research Study Site

Interviews were conducted with three female returnees residing in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, eight in the Kemin district of Chuy oblast in the northern part of the country, and another eleven residing in Kyzyl-Kiya town of Batken oblast, located in southern Kyrgyzstan. The selection of Kemin district was particularly significant due to its lesser-known status in migration studies. My personal connection to this area, provided me with an intimate understanding of the local lifestyle,

mentality, and dialect. This insight was deemed crucial for accurately interpreting the study's findings. In many communities within the region, it was common to find at least one labor migrant in every other household, simplifying the process of identifying suitable study participants. The inherently collectivist and friendly nature of relationships among Kyrgyz people further facilitated this task (Gullette, 2008). The search for participants in Kemin district was relatively straightforward, thanks to existing contacts, while Bishkek presented more challenges.

In Batken oblast, assistance in locating returned female migrants was provided by Aida Musaeva, a fellow PhD candidate originating from the region. Additionally, a five-day training/conference at Lake Ysyk Kol organized by one of local NGOs, attended by over fifty mothers and teachers from across Kyrgyzstan, presented a unique opportunity for conducting 2 pilot interviews with potential returnees. Informal conversations about their experiences in Russia and Kyrgyzstan, although not recorded on tapes, were instrumental in shaping the research questions and providing a richer understanding of the female migrants' past lives.

Interviews

My data collection began in Bishkek, where I spent approximately two weeks in May 2021, followed by over three weeks in Batken Oblast in June. In Kemin, I spent another two to three weeks conducting interviews in August. Initial oral consent was obtained from respondents without difficulty, a process elaborated upon in the Ethical Issues section of this thesis. Interviews were typically arranged during lunchtime or over coffee or tea, with many respondents inviting me to their homes or agreeing to meet at their workplaces. This allowed me the privilege of observing them in their natural environments. Most respondents immediately agreed to participate, with a few requesting times to consider. Ultimately, only two declined. The opportunity to discuss topics previously unexplored in their conversations was appreciated by many, and some expressed a desire to learn about the study's findings. Understandable concerns were raised about the potential sharing of their interviews on social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp, given the rapid dissemination of information in the digital age. These concerns were addressed by clearly explaining the study's purpose and assuring confidentiality.

The research also involved follow-up phone interviews and exchanges via WhatsApp and email, which were essential for validating the findings derived from data analysis. This process adhered to a stringent case study protocol, as outlined in Appendix C of this thesis, and was informed by Yin's (2017) framework, which includes an overview of the project, field procedures, a list of questions, and a guide for the report.

Participant Information

This section presents detailed information about the 22 participants involved in the study. Table 1, below, specifically details the female migrant participants who have returned from Russia. It is important to note that the names appearing in the table are pseudonyms, employed to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, in line with ethical research practices. This measure ensures that the identity of each participant remains protected, while still providing valuable insights into their experiences and backgrounds for the purposes of this research.

Table 1. Demographics and occupation of returned female migrants in Russia

Name (Pseudonym)	Age Group	Number of years since returning to Kyrgyzstan	Number of years spent in Russia	Gender	Occupation in Russia
Gulmira	45-55	4	2.3	Female	Cook at the school canteen and private cook on call
Jumakul	45-55	5	2	Female	Cook at the cafe
Bermet	30-40	3	3	Female	Pizza dough maker at the pizzeria
Zhidesh	25-35	2	4	Female	Housecleaner
Meergul	20-30	3	2	Female	Dishwasher at the cafe
Rahat	25-35	3	5	Female	Nanny/sales person at the store
Aizat	20-30	1	2	Female	Barista at the coffee shop
Kereez	40-50	2	7	Female	Nail service provider at the beauty salon
Baktygul	35-45	1	3	Female	Nurse
Bekzada	18-25	1	4	Female	Hotel cleaner/concierge
Saliyahan	50-60	4	9	Female	Tailor
Mairam	41-50	1	2	Female	Nurse
Nurgul	35-45	5	3	Female	Nanny
Buhan	35-45	2	5	Female	Hotel cleaner/dishwasher
Gulmairam	45-55	2	9	Female	Seller at the market
Muhabat	25-35	6	3	Female	Hotel cleaner
Datkayim	18-25	2	4	Female	Dishwasher/waitress

Dilbar	35-45	3	2	Female	Dishwasher
Buraziya	45-55	4	12	Female	Hotel cleaner/dishwasher/packer at the tea factory
Anarkan	50-60	3	5	Female	Dishwasher
Mahabat	45-55	3	8	Female	Dishwasher
Buhayo	35-45	1	6	Female	Hotel cleaner

Most participants are married and have children. Furthermore, the majority of the women possess an undergraduate level of education. Table 2, below outlines the status, educational background, and current jobs of the participants.

Table 2. Demographics of returned female migrants and current occupation in Kyrgyzstan

Name (Pseudonym)	Marital status	Number of children	Education	Current occupation in Kyrgyzstan
Gulmira	Married	5	Techincal school	Cook
Jumakul	Married	5	Vocational school	Nurse
Bermet	Married	3	Complete higher education	Teacher
Zhidesh	Married	2	Complete higher education	Teacher
Meergul	Married	2	Complete secondary school	Café administrator
Rahat	Divorced	1	Complete higher education	Housewife
Aizat	Single	0	Complete higher education	Lash/brow maker
Kereez	Married	3	Vocational school	Cosmetologist
Baktygul	Married	2	Vocational school	Nurse
Bekzada	Single	0	Complete secondary school	Housewife
Saliyahan	Married	5	Vocational school	Nurse
Mairam	Widowed	3	Vocational school	Nurse
Nurgul	Married	2	Complete higher education	Teacher
Buhan	Married	4	Vocational school	Salesperson
Gulmairam	Married	3	Complete higher education	Teacher
Muhabat	Married	2	Secondary school	Kindergarten nanny

Datkayim	Married	1	Incomplete higher education	Housewife
Dilbar	Widowed	3	Complete higher education	Teacher
Buraziya	Married	3	Vocational school	Business owner
Anarkan	Married	3	Complete higher education	Salesperson
Mahabat	Married	3	Vocational school	Housewife
Buhayo	Married	4	Complete secondary school	Housewife

The demographic analysis of the returned female migrants in Kyrgyzstan reveals several key characteristics. A majority of the women in the study, 17 out of 22 (77%), were married. The average number of children per participant was 2.68, with a range from zero to five children. In terms of educational attainment among the returned female migrants, 40.91% had technical or vocational education, 31.82% had completed higher education, and 18.18% had secondary education. Regarding their current employment status, 54.55% were engaged in professional jobs or worked as salespersons in markets. Additionally, 22.73% were employed as teachers, while another 22.73% were housewives.

Data Analysis

In the Data Analysis chapter of my thesis, I detail the process undertaken to analyze the data collected from the interviews. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, amounting to approximately 150 pages of text. During fieldwork, I maintained a notebook divided into two sections. The first section contained notes on emerging points of analysis and their connections to the propositions identified in Chapter 2. The second section comprised notes taken during or immediately following the interviews. This notebook was instrumental in the data analysis process, offering a preliminary set of ideas, relationships, and patterns for further examination.

Efforts were made to revisit some participants for validation and clarification of specific findings. The complete data analysis was concluded nearly a year after the initial interviews, although preliminary analyses were conducted concurrently with the interview process.

The research utilized a deductive approach for data analysis, also known as analytic induction. Patton (2014) describes analytic induction as a specific form of inductive analysis that begins deductively, with the formulation of hypotheses, and then examines individual cases in-depth to determine if the case facts support these hypotheses (p. 94). Following this methodology, I matched the points of analysis of the returnees' experiences with the predicted propositions. Yin

(2017) highlights that such pattern matching is an effective technique for linking data to propositions and ensuring internal validity (p. 94). The interview analyses revealed the following common points of analysis and patterns: transnational motherhood, health issues, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia, financial hardship, family dynamics and the use and impact of remittances. The statements made by returnees were meticulously analyzed to understand their motivations for migration and subsequent decisions.

After completing field research, I transcribed interviews and field notes into Word documents in Kyrgyz and Russian, corresponding to the interview language. The next step was a comprehensive reading of each transcript and note to gain an overall impression. This was followed by setting up main coding points of analysis based on these initial readings and the theoretical propositions of the study.

Subsequently, each text was reviewed a second time, focusing on identifying and highlighting significant statements about their experiences. New points of analysis were created with concise codes aligned with the propositions. At this stage, important interview quotes were translated from Kyrgyz or Russian to English for inclusion in Chapters 4 and 5. The final review involved annotating the transcripts with category codes and adding more points of analysis to emphasize statements particularly relevant to remittance usage, and the challenges and benefits of migration. Chapters 4 and 5 present detailed reports on these points of analysis and patterns in relation to the propositions, including aggregated data in tables and supporting secondary sources.

Thus, the data analysis was a structured process of categorizing interview responses into groups that encapsulated similar ideas or concepts expressed in the propositions (Merriam and Tisdell (2015). Ruona (2005) notes that qualitative data analysis often involves both inductive and deductive reasoning, with a continuous shift between these modes of thinking during the analysis process (p. 238).

Addressing the common critique of case studies regarding their limited scope for statistical generalization, Yin (2017) argues that case studies are more appropriately generalized to theoretical propositions rather than to populations. This approach, termed “analytic generalization,” contrasts with “statistical generalization,” where the aim is to generalize from a sample to a larger population (Yin, 2017, p. 32). In this study, the focus is on generalizing a specific set of results to the theoretical propositions.

Validity and Reliability

Ruona (2005) emphasizes three crucial aspects in this regard. Firstly, internal validity, or the credibility of findings, which pertains to the congruence between research findings and reality. Secondly, the consistency of findings, focusing on the dependability and consistency of results derived from the data. Lastly, the external validity or transferability of findings is considered critical (p. 247). Echoing this sentiment, Gulgin (2005) observes that while issues of reliability and validity are significant, qualitative researchers often prefer the term 'trustworthiness' over these traditional terms. This approach emphasizes the researcher's responsibility to transparently demonstrate the analytical journey leading to conclusions (p. 41).

To ensure validity in this qualitative study, I employed triangulation, a method widely acknowledged by researchers such as Patton (2014), Stake (2013), and Yin (2017), for its effectiveness in validating qualitative data. Triangulation involves utilizing multiple sources of evidence, which, in this study, entailed the integration of three data collection methods: interviews, observations, and analysis of secondary sources such as statistical data and IOM reports. This triangulation of sources, as suggested by Denzin (2018) and Patton (2014), involved cross-checking consistency across interviews, site visits, and reviews of secondary sources. Additionally, member checks and acknowledging my biases were pivotal strategies employed to enhance the validity of the findings.

To triangulate data, I combined the interview technique with observation and the analysis of relevant secondary sources. As per Yin (2017), reliability in case studies is rooted in a robust design and adherence to the case study protocol. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, I aligned the points of analysis and patterns of experiences and stories of female returnees with the predefined propositions outlined in Chapter 2. Yin (2017) asserts that such pattern matching is an effective method for linking data to propositions and bolstering the internal validity of the study. This approach was instrumental in ensuring that the research findings were not only credible but also meticulously corroborated through multiple lenses of evidence.

Ethical Issues

For ethical considerations, the research ethics guidelines of Corvinus University of Budapest were adhered to, as indicated in the following links: <https://www.uni-corvinus.hu/main-page/about-the-university/senate-university-committees/kutatasetikai-bizottsag/related-documents/?lang=en>

Informed consent was diligently obtained from all participants prior to initiating any interviews or observational interactions. This process involved clearly communicating the research question, the methodology, the study's relevance to the community context, the potential application of results, and

the associated risks and benefits, in line with the stipulations outlined in the consent form (refer to Appendix C). Each participant received a copy of this consent form. As a gesture of appreciation for their time and participation, I presented each participant with a small souvenir from Budapest before commencing the interviews. It's worth noting that in qualitative research, the use of monetary payments, whether as an inducement, compensation, or reimbursement for expenses like travel, is a recognized practice to encourage participation (Bell & Salmon, 2011; Kelly et al., 2017).

To accommodate the linguistic preferences of the participants, the consent form, as well as the interview questions, were translated into both Kyrgyz and Russian. The interviews were then conducted in whichever language the participants found most comfortable. I urged participants to respond as honestly and accurately as possible during the interviews. For recording purposes, a digital voice recorder was employed. This device enabled the efficient downloading and storage of all interviews on a computer for subsequent processing. Participants were duly informed about the use of this digital voice recorder, ensuring transparency and adherence to ethical research standards.

Limitations of the Study

Researchers have an obligation to the academic community to present the complete and honest limitations of a study as indicated by Ross et al. (2019). Below are a few limitations that could have affected the quality of the research:

a) Finding women returnees in the city or in the outskirts of the Bishkek city was difficult, though I did not expect this initially. Three out of five initially selected respondents, eventually refused to give an interview. My feeling is that some were too suspicious and did not trust the confidentiality and research goals of the interviews. They may have been concerned that I would share their statements with others or post them on social media. This apprehension likely stems from the absence of a research culture in the region. Despite the fact that there was a clear explanation on confidentiality of the study. There might have been some other limitations as listed below:

b) As I am a native person of Kyrgyzstan, who grew up in that society, I might have seen or accepted many things without questioning them because they seemed to be too obvious.

c) Another problem could have been that participants provided “socially desirable answers.” In the Kyrgyz culture, most native people are not accustomed to saying things directly. They might have talked only about positive things in their migration experiences, despite my attempts to have them share their real experiences. Perhaps some of my interviewees did not take me seriously as a researcher and did not provide honest or real responses.

d) One final limitation pertains to the answers solicited from the participants in response to the interview. It should be noted that the perceptions and memories of experiences reported by the participants in this study cannot be taken as absolute truths. According to Galbin (2014), “the social constructionism perspective says that we never know what universal true or false is, what is good or bad, right or wrong; we know only stories about true, false, good, bad, right or wrong. Social constructionism abandons the idea as constructivist that the individual’s mind represents a mirror of reality” (Galbin, 2014, p. 2). In other words, the stories relayed by the participants in this study are the truth as they perceive it to be, not necessarily the actual or absolute truth.

Possible Biases of the Researcher

In any study involving qualitative data, one must consider the potential biases that may be introduced due to the subjectivity or prejudice of the researcher. In qualitative research, “the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis” (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). Consequently, it is expected that the researcher's beliefs and values might influence the outcomes of the study. Therefore, I have taken preventive measures to avoid these influences, as detailed further in this section.

Creswell (2014) emphasizes the importance of researchers being mindful of any potential biases they might bring to their research, which could impact both the researcher and their interpretation of the data. He notes that the researcher's perceptions, experiences, and biases have the potential to influence the interpretation of results and the general findings of the study. To mitigate any potential biases that might have influenced the design of the interview guide, a pilot test was conducted. Based on the findings from this pilot test, the interview questions were then modified.

While it is crucial for the integrity of the researcher to be sensitive to and aware of his or her biases, it is not possible to completely eliminate the influence of bias from a qualitative study. Biases are inherent in qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). As Merriam and Tisdell (2009) stated, acknowledging and attempting to mitigate these biases is essential for maintaining the validity and reliability of the research. Because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values, and perspective. It might be recalled that one of the philosophical assumptions underlying this type of research is that reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality. The researcher thus brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of

this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others' views filtered through his or her own.

A few steps were taken in an effort to reduce the researcher's bias as much as possible:

a. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, thus eliminating the potential for unintended filtering or misinterpretation of data.

b. Many quotes were included in the analyses chapter to increase the direct input from participants rather than leaving it up to the researcher to interpret participants' comments and report them in their own words.

c. In the aggregated tables, detailed information is reported as to the number of participants attributed to the responses provided.

I believe these measures helped a great deal to increase the objectivity, as well as validity and reliability, of the findings.

Summary

Chapter 3 of this thesis outlines the research design and methods used to examine labor migration among women in Kyrgyzstan, focusing particularly on their experiences as returnees. A case study research design was selected due to its suitability for investigating contemporary and significant phenomena, such as female migration in Kyrgyzstan. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of this complex social issue, providing new insights into the largely unexplored experiences of female returnees, particularly concerning their vulnerabilities from a feminist perspective. Data collection was conducted primarily through semi-structured interviews, which effectively captured the personal narratives and experiences of these women. The demographic information of the participants was systematically organized into tables, providing a clear understanding of their backgrounds and the diverse contexts influencing their migration experiences. This detailed demographic representation is crucial for contextualizing the qualitative data collected.

For data analysis, the study employed analytic induction, which aligns with the theoretical propositions of the research. This method was key to verifying these propositions through the interview findings, supported by secondary sources for triangulation. The chapter emphasizes the importance of validity and reliability in qualitative research, adhering to established practices to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Overall, Chapter 3 lays a solid methodological foundation for the thesis, ensuring that the research provides meaningful insights into the experiences of female labor migrants in Kyrgyzstan.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA IN RELATION TO THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

This chapter describes the findings from the interviews conducted in the spring and autumn of 2021, with returned female migrants from Russia to Kyrgyzstan. The analysis of the interviews revealed several recurring themes and patterns. Broadly, these findings align with the various types of vulnerability discussed in the Literature Review section. From the interview analysis several common themes and motivations emerge such as: transnational motherhood, health issues, experiences of racism, discrimination, and xenophobia, financial hardship, family dynamics, and the use and impact of remittances, as examined from multidisciplinary perspectives.

Financial Hardship

Many participants mentioned that they migrated to earn money to support themselves and their families. Financial difficulties, unemployment, and the desire for a more stable income were common driving factors are well-documented driving factors, as discussed in Chapter 2. One of the participants, despite holding a university diploma, was unable to secure employment that aligned with her educational qualifications. This case also highlights the issue of unemployment among educated individuals, potentially due to an oversupply of people with higher education leading to structural unemployment (Restrepo, 2015). This led her to seek opportunities in Russia, hoping for better prospects. Aizat's comments:

“During my time at the university, I combined my studies with part-time work. I served as a waitress at a café and took on nanny roles over the weekends. Balancing work and my study were challenging, but I always consoled myself with the thought that it was a temporary phase. I believed that once I received my diploma, I'd be able to find a job in my field, perhaps as an accountant or finance specialist at a bank. However, after graduation, my optimism began to wane. A year passed and I still hadn't found a job in my specialty. Those around me started suggesting that if I couldn't find work, perhaps it was time to consider marriage. But even the idea of marriage was daunting, considering the financial implications of a dowry and other related expenses. Given my circumstances, and with my sister already settled in Moscow with her family, I thought it best to move there in search of better opportunities”.

The narrative of this interviewee reveals significant vulnerabilities from both economic and sociological perspectives. Economically, the interviewee's experience underscores financial instability and limited access to employment opportunities, which are common challenges faced by

female migrants. Sociologically, the account highlights the impact of local cultural norms, particularly the prevailing expectation that a girl over 20 years old should marry. This expectation not only pressures women into early marriage but also introduces economic challenges, such as the requirement of a dowry, which can further strain financial resources. From a feminist perspective, the cultural expectations surrounding marriage and dowry in Kyrgyzstan, deeply embedded in local social structures, reinforce patriarchal views that confine women to specific roles—primarily as wives and mothers. The expectation for women to marry by a certain age and the financial obligations associated with dowry preparation illustrate how economic practices are intertwined with gender discrimination. Moreover, these practices not only reinforce gender inequality, but also intersect with other forms of social stratification, such as class and ethnicity, thereby exacerbating vulnerabilities for certain groups of women. As indicated here, women from poorer households are often doubly disadvantaged by economic hardship and rigid cultural norms. A feminist analysis would also consider the ways in which women resist these cultural expectations, challenging the notion that they are passive victims of patriarchal norms.

Low salaries also prompted other former migrants Buraziya and Mairam to seek opportunities in Russia. Buraziya shared:

“I used to be a nurse in a village hospital. I loved my job and the sense of helping my community, but the pay was meager. My husband was unemployed and unhelpful; he was simply lazy. We have three children to raise and educate, so I decided to migrate, leaving my family behind.”

Financial debts were another reason for migration. Mahabat explained,

“Our migration to Russia was out of desperation. We faced bankruptcy. We used to run a business selling fruits in Bishkek and lived in a rented apartment. Our landlord suggested selling citrus fruits in winter. These fruits, imported from China, were expensive. We didn't store them correctly, leading to quick spoilage and significant losses. We couldn't repay the loan we took to buy the fruits.”

The analysis of these interviews, beyond financial or economic reasons, provides insights into the process of the feminization of migration in Kyrgyzstan. In all these narratives, women were compelled to migrate due to their families' financial difficulties, even in cases where they had husbands who were traditionally expected to be the primary breadwinners. This dynamic can be closely linked to the ‘target earnings theory’ as proposed by Hein de Haas (2012) and further developed by Schewel (2019). According to this theory, migrants often set specific financial goals or

"target earnings" they wish to achieve before returning home. These targets are not merely personal aspirations but are also shaped by the expectations and pressures from their communities and peers. In many cases, migrants feel compelled to meet or exceed the financial benchmarks set by others in their community who have migrated before them, for example buy or build a house, buy a car and so forth. This peer pressure can intensify the drive to migrate and sustain their efforts abroad, even in the face of significant challenges.

These narratives highlight how economic hardship and financial instability serve as significant push factors compelling women to migrate. The interviews reveal that even when men, traditionally expected to be the primary breadwinners, are present, women often shoulder the financial burden, suggesting a shift in economic roles within households. This shift illustrates a form of economic vulnerability where women are forced to step into the role of financial providers due to inadequate income or employment opportunities available to their male counterparts. The fact that women are compelled to migrate for economic reasons, despite the presence of husbands, reflects a significant departure from conventional gender roles. It illustrates the process of the feminization of migration in Kyrgyzstan. The feminist perspective would critique the systemic inequalities and gendered expectations that pressure women into migration, often at the cost of their safety and well-being.

Family Dynamics

Several respondents have mentioned family situations that have propelled them towards migration. As a daughter in the family, Jazgul recalls her reason for migrating for the first time:

“The primary reason I first migrated was due to my mother. She had already migrated to Russia, leaving my father at home to look after my younger sister and brother. I was married and had a 2-year-old son. My father found it challenging to manage the household chores and take care of two children. He often expressed a strong desire for my mother to return, motivated in part by jealousy and unfounded suspicions about her fidelity. Every time I visited home, he would urge me to convince her to come back. Being the eldest in the family, I thought if I joined my mother in Russia, my father might feel at ease, thinking she was with me and “under my watch” (laughing).

The economic situation in Kyrgyzstan, especially in rural areas, has led to a large number of people migrating, often to Russia or Kazakhstan, in search of better job opportunities. When husbands migrate, wives sometimes follow, fearing the potential risks of long-distance relationships, including infidelity or estrangement (Agadjanian & Sevoyan, 2014; Thieme, 2005). These narratives also illustrate how family considerations and efforts to maintain close relationships have led to the

phenomenon of migrating with close family members. This dynamic, in turn, has contributed to the feminization of migration. This is what Buhaio says:

“I followed my husband because he was a migrant. I have heard numerous stories from women whose husbands, while working as labor migrants in Russia, started another family there. Some of these men juggle responsibilities, providing for both their official family in Kyrgyzstan and their unofficial one in Russia. There are instances where men abruptly end their marriage over the phone, stating they've met someone else. Conversely, some choose not to divorce but keep their new relationships a secret. Given that we have four children, I was determined to prevent such sad stories for our family. I wanted our children to grow up with the presence of both parents. That's why I decided to join my husband.”

Muhabat echoed similar motive for migration, but her migration story was not happy:

“My husband and I decided to migrate together due to unemployment in our home country. His sister had already moved to Moscow as a labor migrant and encouraged us to do the same. We left our daughter in the care of my mother and made the move to Russia. However, upon our arrival in Moscow, we couldn't stay with my husband's sister for an extended period as she had her own family, and her husband wasn't welcoming us into their home. I managed to find a job at a hotel, which required me to live on-site. I enjoyed my work there, but unfortunately, I was deported. During my time back in Kyrgyzstan, I learned that my husband had met another woman, and we ended up getting divorced. He didn't directly inform me of this; instead, one of our relatives saw him with the other woman and relayed the information to my mother in Kyrgyzstan. Upon hearing this news, I decided to call him and confront him about it. He confirmed that it was true and expressed regret for his actions. Later on, I learned that he had two children from his new marriage and that he had passed away during construction work.”

Rakhat's decision to migrate represented an escape from the social stigma she faced in her community because of her divorce. She vividly recalls the challenging period:

“After my divorce, I found myself living with my parents, battling a deep sense of depression. Everywhere I went, people relentlessly questioned the reasons behind my divorce, and it was an incredibly uncomfortable experience. Our relatives were also prying into the details of my failed marriage, intensifying the discomfort. Living with my parents as a divorced woman became increasingly uneasy for me. It was during this trying time that my brother, who resided in Moscow,

asked me to come to Moscow. I saw it as an opportunity for a fresh start, a chance to distance myself from the relentless community gossip surrounding my divorce.”

These narratives highlight how the migration of men can create a cascade of vulnerabilities for the women left behind or divorced. When men migrate, women often face increased economic hardship due to the loss of a primary breadwinner and may experience social stigmatization due to their altered social status as temporarily "abandoned" or "single" women. Additionally, these women encounter increased responsibilities at home, managing both domestic duties and economic needs, which can exacerbate their vulnerability to social and economic pressures (Ismailbekova, 2017). This compounded vulnerability might compel women to migrate themselves, seeking reunification with their husbands or better economic opportunities, thus perpetuating a cycle of migration-induced vulnerability. The feminist perspective also highlights how migration is not just an economic decision but one deeply embedded in gender norms and expectations. Women's migration is often a response to both economic necessity and the desire to escape from or challenge restrictive gender norms. By exploring these dynamics, the feminist perspective reveals how migration can simultaneously reinforce and challenge traditional gender roles, contributing to a broader understanding of the feminization of migration as discussed in the previous chapters.

Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia

The concepts of racial discrimination and xenophobia have been thoroughly explored in Chapter 2 from various perspectives, including sociological, psychological, economic, and health-related viewpoints. This subsection aims to illustrate specific cases that highlight these issues, often demonstrating how multiple perspectives interact simultaneously in the context of migration and vulnerability.

Many migrants face challenges or difficulties when they first arrive in Russia. These difficulties are related to not having proper documents to work legally in Russia, as well as language and cultural barriers. They also encounter hostility and negative attitudes from local Russians towards migrants, who exploit them for extra money by providing fraudulent health condition confirmations. In addition, female migrants often live in crowded places, worry about their health, have to deal with unfair treatment, tricky landlords, and the hard work they do. Nonetheless, the benefits of migration often outweigh those challenges, according to many female migrants who are quoted in the next subtopic.

Many female migrants face bureaucratic hurdles and the risk of exploitation, leading to instances where they must navigate the precariousness of living with falsified documents and the constant fear

of being discovered by authorities. This insecurity can cascade into labor abuses, where workers find themselves in vulnerable positions, often enduring poor working conditions, receiving no pay, or being subjected to deportation without their earned wages. Many migrants come to Russia not knowing in advance where to stay or where to work. They could contact local recruiting agencies in Russia and have most of their papers approved long before departing from Kyrgyzstan. But they do not do that for some reason. Perhaps it is because of a lack of information, or those agencies might be charging too much money for their services. Therefore, many new migrants simply go to some cities in Russia where they have family members or friends. They might have also heard that some cities had more migrants from Kyrgyzstan and that is how they make their decision where to go.

These newcomers may have the most difficulties in Russia; they have to wait for a work permit and local address registration for up to two months. Meanwhile, they may run out of money or be robbed by the Russian police for a fake document or be deported. Speaking of this, Aizat noted,

“I lived with my sister and her family in Moscow, but I faced a major challenge during my stay. First, registering my stay officially was incredibly difficult. I had to rely on a middleman who charged me money to provide a fake registration. Carrying this fake registration was risky because if the police checked the registration numbers and discovered it was fake, my stay would be deemed illegal, putting me at risk of deportation. This fear made it difficult for me to move around freely”. Jidesh agreed with the statement:

“The main problem is document registration, which has to be renewed every 3 month and registration is not cheap. You can legally live and work for 3 years and after that you have to leave Russia. I don’t know why the Russian government make it so complicated with registration, to renew our documents every three months, and it can be expensive. After three years, we have to leave Russia to keep everything legal.

Muhabat echoed the same problem:

“I worked at the hotel without proper registration, and I wasn't alone, many other labor migrants were also working there illegally. Our employer was aware of this situation and had told us to be careful. However, one day, a group of police officers conducted an unexpected check on migrants staying at the hotel early in the morning. Unfortunately, I was asleep, and my phone was on a silent mode, which turned out to be a big mistake. My manager tried to call me multiple times to warn me and advise me to hide from the police, but I didn't hear the calls. As a result, the police caught me. There was a court trial, and I was forced to pay a fine of 45 thousand rubles and deportation back to Kyrgyzstan. My last salary was also not paid,

saying that the company was also paying the fine because of me. Since, the company did not have the right to employ illegal migrants. They said that they withheld my salary as payment of a fine, and I was deported home empty-handed, because for all the savings I kept, I had to buy a ticket to Kyrgyzstan”.

Concerning the attitude of the local Russian population towards migrants, most interviewees reported that, in general, their attitude was negative. Regarding this, Rakhat noted:

“I was employed in the clothing department at a trade center, and often, Russian women would purposefully avoid receiving assistance from me and preferred someone with a Slavic appearance. Even at the cashier's counter, where a Kyrgyz woman worked alongside me, Russians tended to choose a Russian cashier over her. I have witnessed many xenophobic attitude from Russians towards migrants. No matter how well you do your job and speak Russian well, they [Russians] do not take us seriously; they think that we are not well-educated or are not civilized; therefore, you are inferior to them. Perhaps that is because many migrants did not complete even high schools in Kyrgyzstan and cannot speak Russian well. They usually do not hire migrants for more advanced positions, even if you have a good education. They simply need unskilled workers. We also have cultural differences. This all might contribute to creating a poor image of Kyrgyz migrants. Actually, Russians treat Uzbek and Tajik migrants in the same manner, sometimes even worse”.

Finding rental accommodation as a migrant worker could be challenging, as many landlords preferred to rent to Slavic nationalities. Additionally, the rental process often required involving a Russian citizen as a co-signer or leaseholder, adding another layer of complexity. Aizat recounted several instances when landlords initially expressed concern over the phone, but their attitudes took a sharp turn upon meeting her in person and realizing her nationality. One such encounter stood out vividly in her memory:

“I clearly remember one landlord, she looked at me from head to toe, recognizing that I was a migrant, and without hesitation, she declared, 'I don't rent housing to Kyrgyz people. I had heard about migrants facing difficulties in Russia, but I never anticipated that the prejudice would be so glaringly evident.’”

Discrimination based on nationality is a common issue faced by migrant workers in Russia. Many landlords, influenced by biases or stereotypes, may prefer to rent to individuals of Slavic backgrounds or Russian citizens. This discrimination can make it difficult for Kyrgyz migrant workers to secure housing. A report from Human Rights Watch in 2013 highlighted the

discrimination faced by migrants in Russia, including difficulties in finding housing due to their ethnicity and nationality.

Russian rental laws often require a Russian citizen to be the leaseholder or co-signer for a rental agreement. This requirement can be a significant obstacle for Kyrgyz migrant workers who lack Russian citizenship or a close Russian friend or relative to assist with the rental process. A study conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2015 emphasized the legal challenges that migrant workers encounter in Russia, including issues related to housing and rental agreements.

Racism, xenophobia, and discrimination against incoming migrants continue to be critical topics in migration-related research worldwide (Ottoh, 2021; Stevens et al., 2024). Xenophobia and discrimination are also pervasive, as highlighted by some migrants' experiences of exclusion and prejudice in everyday life and the workplace. According to Selvarajah et al., (2022) such behaviors among local residents are not simply based on inherent differences such as “caste, ethnicity, migration status, indigeneity, race, religion, or skin color”. Instead, they are deeply rooted in broader geopolitical and economic power dynamics that shape societal attitudes and behaviors (p. 2123). Speaking of geopolitical power dynamics involve the influence that local or “titular” ethnicities, for example Russians in Russia often dictate how resources, opportunities, and privileges are distributed among different populations. In many cases, they use their power to marginalize or exclude others who are perceived as threats to their status or economic interests. For instance, migrants may be viewed as competitors for jobs, housing, and other resources, leading to a backlash against them by local populations. Additionally, there is a fear among Russians that migrants will bring their families and have more children than the local population, contributing to anxieties about the demographic, social, and economic future of Russia.

Selvarajah et al. (2022) argue that understanding the broader context of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination is crucial for addressing and mitigating their impacts, particularly from a feminist perspective. These issues can be analyzed from multidisciplinary perspectives, especially considering the sociological and psychological vulnerabilities faced by female migrants. Such analyses are crucial for informing the development of equitable policies and fostering positive attitudes toward migrants, who significantly contribute to the Russian economy, often at an unnecessarily high personal cost.

Health-Related Issues

Health is a critical concept in migration research, as discussed in Chapter 2. It encompasses not only physical well-being, but also psychological and mental health, particularly for women in

migration. Female migrants often face challenges such as strenuous physical labour, harsh living conditions, and prolonged separation from their natural environments, families, and children. These factors collectively contribute to their overall vulnerability and impact their health outcomes. Many Kyrgyz women in Russia found themselves engaged in 3D jobs—dirty, dangerous, and difficult (Yaheya & Subramaniam, 2024). These roles often included tasks like dishwashing, cleaning hotels, windows, buildings, or working in factories and packaging units. Some also found employment in outdoor markets. Anarkan shared her challenges:

“My first experience was in Noviy Urengoi, a prominent gas mining town located in the northern part of Russia. The biting cold was one thing, but the pervasive smell of gas was another. Only those with strong health could endure the conditions. I spent six grueling months there, working in a kitchen, washing dishes. The work was extremely demanding. We were contracted for only half a year, but those six months felt like an eternity. The aftermath was even harder, I experienced oxygen deprivation and had to depart for my well-being. Tragically, my husband's health deteriorated due to prolonged exposure to the gas mining environment. He suffered a stroke, and sadly, he passed away five years ago. Back then, we were enticed by the promise of higher wages, too young to consider the repercussions. But we soon realized that no amount of money is worth compromising one's health”.

Many Kyrgyz women start their work with cleaning in Russia. Burazia was also no exception, and her first working migration experience began with cleaning. Buraziya said:

“My initial work experience in Russia began in Vorkuta town (south of Russia) where I worked as a cleaner at a hotel with my friend, who actually invited me there to work. However, I didn't stay there for long, because working as a cleaner was very challenging for me. I then moved to Novosibirsk and joined the packing department at the “Faberlik” company. Unfortunately, my time there was marred by a health issue resulting from a mosquito bites, which required me to return to Kyrgyzstan for treatment. During my absence, our marriage faced a significant challenge as a Russian lady boss at my husband's workplace engaged in flirtatious behavior with him. When I returned to Russia, we decided to relocate to St. Petersburg for a fresh start. In this new city, I found employment at a tea factory, where my role involved packing teas. However, working in that factory was terrible for me, because of dust, which posed health risks. Subsequently, I made the decision to leave that job and sought employment in a local market or bazaar. I became a salesperson at one of the grocery

stores owned by a Jewish businessman. That was my last working place, where I worked for 3 years and then returned home”

Many women faced health issues because of their demanding jobs. On top of the challenges migrants already faced, some immoral individuals in medical institutions exploited these migrant workers for profit, capitalizing on their vulnerable situation. Such was the case for Buahio:

“Once, I had to undergo a health checkup as it was required for my job. My company sent me to a clinic where they conducted an X-ray. Unfortunately, the X-ray results indicated a problem with my lungs, and the medical staff frightened me by suggesting it could be tuberculosis or something similarly serious. I was deeply upset and immediately returned home for a more comprehensive checkup and treatment. My family, including my parents and relatives, were all deeply concerned, and I myself was convinced that this might be the end for me. However, when I had a follow-up checkup back in Kyrgyzstan, the X-ray showed that my lungs were perfectly healthy. Still in disbelief, I sought another opinion from a different medical facility, which also confirmed the same result – healthy lungs. It was then that the doctor informed me that I was not the only migrant who had returned from Russia with a supposed diagnosis of tuberculosis, only to discover they didn't actually have the disease. I later realized that some Russian medical workers used scare tactics on migrants like me to extract extra money by providing them with a “Spravka” (health certificate) that declared them fit for work. If the checkup conclusion was not favorable, it would lead to job dismissal. Some Kyrgyz migrants who spoke Russian well would negotiate the price and pay bribes to obtain the necessary “spravka”. In my case, I was quite naive and trusted the medical staff, not realizing that I needed to bribe them for the spravka.”

Health risks, both from harsh working conditions and unscrupulous medical practices, further jeopardize migrants' well-being, as seen in the account of false tuberculosis diagnoses.

Several of my respondents cited health as a major reason for their return. Anarkan shared:

“I returned home because of my health. I had a breathing problem, because of climate., then my back suffered doing a hard work. Additionally, upon returning home my husband had a stroke, and I needed to take care of him. Unfortunately, he passed away later. Later on, I was diagnosed with tuberculosis, which I still struggle with to this day. When you're young, you often work hard to earn money, but this can put your health at risk”

Mairam also mentioned health as the reason she came back home:

“I had to come back home because of my health. I have bronchitis that can turn into asthma, especially during the spring when everything starts to bloom. It makes me suffer and struggle to breathe properly. For some climate change can improve health condition, in my case it didn’t”.

These interview extracts demonstrate the precarious conditions that many Kyrgyz women migrants face while working in Russia. These conditions make them especially vulnerable as these women are exposed to heightened health risks, both physical and psychological. The nature of these jobs often involves strenuous labor, hazardous environments, and minimal occupational safety measures, which can lead to various health issues such as musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory problems, and chronic stress. Additionally, the exploitation by medical institutions further exacerbates their vulnerability. False diagnoses not only drain their limited financial resources but also undermine their access to genuine healthcare, perpetuating a cycle of poor health and financial instability. The situation described illustrates how gender intersects with migration status to create a compounded vulnerability. The exploitation by medical institutions is a form of gendered abuse, as women are often perceived as easy targets due to their socioeconomic status and lack of legal protection. This scenario underscores the need for feminist advocacy and policy interventions that address these unique vulnerabilities, ensuring that female migrants are protected from such exploitative practices and have access to proper healthcare and safe working conditions.

Transnational Motherhood

For many female migrants, one of the most challenging aspects of being a labor migrant in Russia was the painful separation from their families and children. In some instances, children do not see their parents for several months, even years. The guilt and emotional strain of leaving children behind reflect the deep psychological vulnerabilities faced by migrant mothers. The psychological toll of leaving children behind is a critical aspect of transnational motherhood that illustrates how gender and migration intersect to create specific vulnerabilities for female migrants (Pineros-Leano et al., 2021). This is a form of emotional labor that women often endure due to societal expectations of their roles as primary caregivers. The feminist perspective emphasizes how these emotional burdens are disproportionately placed on women, contributing to their overall vulnerability. To illustrate these points, Bermet shared the following experience:

“The most heart-wrenching aspect of my time in Russia was undoubtedly being separated from my children. I have three children, and they were all under my mother's care while I was on my labor migration journey. Not being able to witness their growth, missing out on being

there for my daughter during her puberty, and not celebrating their birthdays together were all incredibly difficult experiences for me. I used to receive calls from my mother, and she would often complain about my kids' behavior. I couldn't help but blame myself for not fulfilling my role as a mother. There was one conversation with my mother that still lingers in my memory. She told me, "You are not in control of your kids, your kids are controlling you. You buy everything they want and never say no, you're simply spoiling them, and that's not good. Please come back to your kids and raise them properly." I wanted to compensate for my absence by buying them the things they wanted. How could I possibly say no to them, when I was so far away?" sighed Bermet.

Gulmira echoed the same sentiment.

"The hardest thing about migrating is being away from your children. I have five children – three sons and two daughters. My two eldest sons were already married and had families of their own, while my youngest son was with me in Moscow. However, my primary concern was always my two daughters who remained back home with my husband. I often found myself wondering about their well-being, whether they were eating properly, dressed warmly, staying healthy, or facing any issues, such as bullying at school. Our conversations, though conducted over the Internet via WhatsApp, would often end with tears. While technology allowed me to see them through video calls, it never felt like it was enough. In an effort to provide some support and care from afar, I asked my daughters-in-law to take turns visiting our home on weekends to assist with household chores, take the girls to the bathhouse, and check their hair to make sure there are no lice. My husband did his best to take care of our girls and manage the household, constantly reassuring me not to worry, insisting that everything was under control."

Like many mothers who left their children behind in Kyrgyzstan, Anarkan too believes that being separated from her kids was the most heart-wrenching aspect of her journey as a labor migrant. She said:

"I have three children – two sons and a daughter. When I left for work, my sons were attending school, and my daughter was still a young child who didn't go to kindergarten but stayed home with her grandmother. It was tough being so far away from them, knowing I couldn't be there to show them love and care. Sometimes, my relatives would call and tell me they had seen my children playing outside, sometimes not in the cleanest clothes, and they would ask, "Aren't your children important to you? Is money more important?" Hearing such

things would make me feel really down, and I would wish I could just die. But then, I would remind myself that I was close to saving up enough and soon, I would be returning home. After all, every sacrifice I made here was for my children's brighter future”.

Based on the interviews of the respondents, we can see that female returned migrants faced several challenges while being labor migrants in Russia. This is a significant aspect of transnational motherhood: the psychological vulnerability experienced by female migrants who leave their children behind (Juozeliūnienė & Budginaitė, 2018). The emotional toll of separation from family, particularly the impact on parental roles and the guilt associated with not being present for children, is another profound hardship, vividly expressed by Bermet and Gulmairam. The expectation for women to manage both their migratory labor and familial responsibilities highlights a gendered double burden. This double burden is a central concern in feminist scholarship, which examines how structural inequalities impact women's experiences of migration (Dağdelen, 2018).

Economic Benefits of Migration

As many of my interviewees pointed out, in spite of all those challenges and difficulties, the benefits of migration outweigh its negatives. Concerning the benefits of migration, Jumagul said:

“Of course, migration is beneficial. So many people have jobs and are taking care of their families. For example, we were able to pay the debt and kept our house, which the bank might take from us if we didn't pay the debt on time”.

Muhabat was in agreement with her and commented:

“I don't know how we would have been able to pay off our debt if we hadn't come to Moscow to work. Russia provided a great opportunity for my family. We were able to clear all our debts, including the ones we had before going bankrupt. Once we were debt-free, we started saving money to build our house, and we successfully accomplished that goal. It was a collective effort, with my husband, daughter, and son all working together.

Russia gave many opportunities for families to be better off in life. Of course, there are sacrifices involved, like being far away from your children, relatives, and missing Kyrgyz parties and feasts,” said Muhabat with a smile.

Bermet mentioned:

“Despite all the challenges we faced, we managed to accomplish our goals. We purchased a small apartment in Bishkek and subsequently built a house in the village where we currently

reside. We also rent out our apartment. Additionally, we acquired a microbus, which my husband now drives to earn money by transporting passengers,” stated Bermet.

Concerning the investment associated with the education of migrants’ children, Thieme and Wyss (2005) noted, “One of the main goals of labour migration is a good education for children. This long-term investment in human capital enhances the children’s chances of getting a (better) job in Nepal or abroad and helps secure the retirement of the parents” (p. 84).

In this regard, Kereez commented:

“We were able to buy a 3-bedroom apartment in Bishkek, but most importantly, we ensured that our children received a good education. Our eldest daughter has graduated and now works as an auditor at an international firm, with the ability to travel abroad and fluently speaks two foreign languages. Our second daughter graduated from medical school and continues her education, while our son is currently studying at a technical university with plans to become an engineer. We are proud of our children, and I believe our migration to Russia has truly paid off.”

Buraziya invested her earnings into business:

“During my migration, my mother and sister took care of my children. I didn't send much money back home, only for necessary and urgent expenses. My children received excellent care from my mother, which allowed me to save money. Upon my return, I invested all the money I had earned in Russia into the business. It has since become a family enterprise. We specialize in exporting fruits from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan.”

There were some among my interviewees who, due to certain circumstances, did not experience the same benefits as others during their migration.

“I couldn't save much because the company in Russia didn't fulfill their promised payments. Nearly everything I earned there went towards covering living expenses and housing. In the end, I could only save about 15% of my salary, which was not sufficient to send a substantial amount back home. I often thought I would remit more next time, but unforeseen circumstances and unexpected expenses would arise. These expenses could be related to food, registration, or other unforeseen situations. For instance, if the registration process wasn't completed correctly, fines might have to be paid. Landlords might also request advance rent for the following month. There were always unexpected financial challenges. My children insisted that I work in Kyrgyzstan and not return to Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially considering my health issues. They were concerned about my well-

being, emphasizing that I had enough to eat and a job to sustain myself. They reminded me to prioritize my health and well-being,” shared Mairam.

In summary, the benefits of migration for female migrants from Kyrgyzstan to Russia are evident, despite the challenges and sacrifices involved. Studies show that migration can lead to improved economic well-being for families left behind through remittances, which are used for debt repayment, investment in businesses, housing, and education (Adams & Page, 2005). Jumagul and Muhabat underscored this, stating that migration allowed them to clear debts and secure housing, reflecting the findings of Yang (2008), who noted the role of remittances in debt reduction and increased investment in assets.

Additionally, migrants often invest in property and business ventures, contributing to long-term economic stability (Dustmann & Kirchkamp, 2002). Bermet's purchase of an apartment and a microbus, and Buraziya's investment in a fruit export business align with these observations. These accounts are further echoed by Ratha (2003), who recognized the role of remittances in enabling asset accumulation in migrants' home countries.

The impact on education and human development through migration is also significant, as illustrated by Kerez's family, where children received quality education funded by their migration efforts. This is consistent with findings by Edwards and Ureta (2003), who observed that remittances contribute positively to educational attainment in migrant households.

As some women migrants mentioned, remittances can sometimes be insufficient due to unexpected expenses and challenges, aligning with Carling's (2008) discussion on the unpredictability of migration outcomes. Below is the table 3 how these female migrants' remittances were used.

Table 3. Areas of Migrants' Investments

Areas of Investment	Frequency
Apartment purchase	3
Housing construction	1
House renovation	5
Helped parents	3
Daily expenses	2
Marriage dowry	3
Savings	1
Exporting fruits small business	1

Education	2
Barbershop renovation	1

Post-Migration Living Difficulties

The following themes emerged as a result of PMLD analysis: Financial Hardship, Family Dynamics, Health Problems, Adaptation Issues, and Stigmatization.

Financial Hardship

According to almost all returnees, financial difficulties is the most mentioned challenge upon return to Kyrgyzstan. Many individuals noted the sharp contrast in earning potential and job availability between Russia and Kyrgyzstan. The disparity in salaries, combined with the lack of additional earning opportunities back home, created financial strain. For instance, Gulmira mentioned:

“Once at home, you struggle with financial difficulties again, difference in salary. Same jobs are paid differently higher in Moscow lower here at home. Also in Moscow you can make extra jobs, I mean additional beside your monthly paid work and that was also well paid, here you can't find such extra jobs. In addition to financial difficulties you have to fight with people's misconception on labour migrants. I did not face stigmatization, because I was together with my son in Moscow, I knew that that people would talk and gossip, therefore I went with my son, but people have the impression that since you returned from labor migration, you are rich and have a million dollars. And I felt it myself, because my friends treated me this way when I returned. But that's not true. Yes, perhaps when you return home you have money, but you plan to buy or do something with this money and it is not endless”.

Jumagul has also expressed her frustration over low salaries in Kyrgyzstan compared to Moscow:

“I got really mad at my husband for pushing me to come back. Even though we managed to pay off our debts, I had to start working again, but the pay here was much lower. What took me a month to earn here, I could make in just a few days in Moscow. Living conditions were tough, my allergies flared up, and I went through a stressful period always comparing our life here to what it was like there. Eventually, I had to accept the reality of the situation. I didn't have much choice because I'm married with 5 kids. My daughters were married too, and I had to think about their well-being in their families. It wasn't easy, but I had to accept the reality, what else I could do...”

Aizat noted:

“When I came back, finding a job in my field with my advanced degree was tough. I tried really hard but couldn't find anything. Then, someone I knew suggested I learn how to do brow shaping and work in the beauty field, because the beauty industry is developing and one could earn well. I thought it was a good idea, so I took some courses to become a brow shaping expert. Now, I work as a brow shaping master.”

Family Dynamics

The second most mentioned difficulty was the relationship in the family. Muhabat shared it as following:

“Of course, I faced financial difficulties when I returned, but that was temporary. The most heartbreaking part for me, was that my daughter did not recognize me as her mother. My daughter was very young when I had to leave her, and she ended up calling my mother “mom” instead of me. She even started to call me “sister” instead of “mom.” So, our relationship became more like sisters than a typical mother-daughter bond and it is a strange feeling even painful feeling at some point. My mother had been raising her since she was born and I don't blame her and don't blame my daughter either for calling me as her sister and not a mother”.

Castles and Miller (2009), who note that economic disparities between host and home countries often lead to financial strain upon return. This strain is exacerbated by differences in salary and limited job opportunities in the home country, as highlighted in the experiences of Gulmira and Jumagul. These findings align with the work of Démurger and Xu (2011), who observed similar financial struggles among return migrants in China.

Changes in family relationships, particularly the emotional distance with children, are another significant challenge, resonating with the findings of scholars like Parreñas (2005), who document the emotional costs of migration on family dynamics. Muhabat's and Jidesh's experiences of altered relationships with their children due to prolonged absences underscore these emotional costs.

Concerning this Jidesh said:

“The most difficult part for me was to know that your child is not your child anymore...I mean not being close to you and not accepting you as his mother. That was tough for me. My son is the eldest out of my 2 children and when I left him he was 4 years old. He was under my mother-in law's care and when I returned he was avoiding me. I used to talk with him on video call by WhatsApp every day and thought that we had a mother and child connection,

but I was wrong... I blamed myself for leaving him. He is with me now but there is still that emotional gap between us...”

Along the same line Anarkan added:

“When I returned, my youngest child used to share his feelings of estrangement with me. He told me about his sister and brother teasing him and how he felt sick sometimes and needed me the most when he was ill and sad. All my children have grown up now. Recently, my eldest son visited me from Russia, and as he looked at our family photo album, he said, “You raised us well and kept us neat. You went to Russia to provide us a better future, and I promise I’ll never send you away for migration again.” I am grateful that my children do not hold a grudge against me and were understanding about my absence. While working in Russia, I heard many stories from other mothers. I thought I had a bad life “scenario” in my life, but others had even tougher situations. Many had to leave their children with elderly grandparents, and my heart goes out to these women. No matter how much money we earn, it’s better to be close to our loved ones. There is a saying “Алыстын буудайынан жакындын саманы жакшы деп”, (which means “The straw of the near is better than the wheat of afar” or “It’s better to have a breast in your hands than a crane in the sky”).

Piper (2009), in his work discusses the often-neglected health consequences faced by migrants upon their return. These issues are frequently a result of difficult working conditions and lack of healthcare access while abroad.

Anarkan also emphasized that difficult working conditions in Russia affected her health:

“I’ve worked in various places. When I worked in the kitchen washing dishes, I caught a cold, and later I had kidney problems. I hurt my back as well. I was young and did this physically demanding job, but it had lasting effects. The cleaning service was similar, with very tough physical work. When I returned to Kyrgyzstan, I was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and I went through a lot of suffering.”

Others highlighted difficulties in adjusting to life back in Kyrgyzstan, especially after living in more developed or urban environments like Moscow. Cassarino (2004), who emphasizes the challenges of reintegration into the socio-economic fabric of the home country. Bermet’s and Rahat’s narratives of struggling with different lifestyles and infrastructure reflect these adaptation challenges.

“There were difficulties when I returned in terms of infrastructure. There were issues like damaged roads, service sector maintenance problems, and an absence of a metro system. The old and overcrowded minibuses were quite a contrast to what I was used to in Moscow. It

made me feel like Bishkek was somewhat like a village in comparison. These inconveniences made me unhappy with my living situation in Bishkek, and I often wanted to return to Moscow”-shared Rahat.

Stigmatization of Returnees

Lastly, the varied experiences of stigma, as detailed by my respondents below find parallels in the work of Carling (2008), who discusses the complex social perceptions and stigmatization faced by return migrants. Their experiences highlight how societal attitudes towards returnees can vary depending on individual circumstances and community contexts. In this regard Mahabat commented:

“In Russia, I often had to present myself as a married woman and not as a widow, in order to avoid harassment. I noticed many unhealthy relationships there. Even when I mentioned my marital status, some men would respond with comments like, "So what? Your husband isn't here, and he doesn't know." This is why I believe that married couples should migrate together, as it can help prevent infidelity. The absence of one spouse during labor migration can lead to many divorces and family breakdowns. I know there are some less respectful individuals in Russia, or they can be in every country, but it really depends on the person. When I worked at a clothing store in Russia, there were instances of harassment. However, if you address the issue seriously and directly tell the person to behave properly, it usually gets resolved. But if you respond positively to the harassment and engage with the harasser, of course, they may continue their inappropriate behavior”.

Rahat, while not facing stigma, felt pressured by societal expectations to marry, indicating a different form of societal pressure. She commented:

“There was no stigma as such. Since all our relatives knew that I lived with my brother and looked after his children. My brother was very strict, and when I was in Moscow, he kept a close watch on everything I did. I understand his concerns. Since I was unmarried, my parents allowed me to stay with him, and he felt responsible for my well-being.

Upon my return, our relatives often suggested that I should get married, and to be honest, it was quite annoying. Our relatives also tried to introduce me to potential suitors with the hope that I would get married. In those moments, I sometimes felt that I had to migrate to Moscow again, but I got married.”

Dilbar's detailed account speaks to the broader societal implications of labor migration, touching on the challenges of parental absence, the importance of education, and the long-term effects on children's development and career prospects:

“During my time working in kindergarten, I witnessed children being left behind at just 1.5 years old. These children lacked the love and care of their mothers, which deeply saddened me. Often, they stayed with their elderly grandmothers, who were unable to provide proper upbringing or replace the care of a mother. I experienced difficulties in my own life, particularly when my eldest son became a migrant at 18 and worked in Russia. He saw many mothers facing challenges there and vowed never to let me become a migrant again, thanking me for staying with them. Here, many parents believe that being a female labor migrant is easy due to the significant wage difference compared to the salaries earned in Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, they prioritize teaching their children Russian from a young age, believing it's essential for future migration. This mindset is influenced by parents who tell their children there's no work in Kyrgyzstan and that migration is the only path to financial security, often deciding their children's futures from kindergarten. Parents have different approaches, with some even sending their children to Russia as labor migrants at a young age. These children end up replacing their parents in the workforce while the parents return to Kyrgyzstan. Unfortunately, some parents prioritize immediate needs like buying a house or car over their children's long-term education. I've observed cases where children drop out of school to work but eventually return to graduate. Three boys recently completed their studies after returning, while girls who graduate from sewing school find employment locally. Boys, however, struggle to find work after graduation but often secure jobs in Russia with the diplomas they earn here, with significantly higher salaries. Parents' attitudes greatly influence their children's decisions regarding migration. Despite experiencing challenges, themselves, some parents still push their children to become migrants, focusing on short-term gains rather than long-term prospects”-said Dilbar.

For some, like Dilbar, the decision about migration is seen as an inevitable or necessary choice driven by economic circumstances and the lack of employment opportunities in Kyrgyzstan. Dilbar's account highlights the societal pressures and expectations that shape attitudes towards migration, including the belief that migration is the only path to financial security. However, she also stresses the importance of education and qualifications for stable employment, indicating a nuanced view that while migration may be a reality, it should not come at the expense of long-term prospects and personal development.

Matching Theoretical Propositions

The interview findings were matched with the theoretical propositions, according to the analytic induction method (Patton, 2014).

Proposition One: *Women in Kyrgyzstan are increasingly initiating migration decisions independently, thereby reflecting and contributing to the broader theory of the feminization of migration.*

This shift not only challenges traditional gender roles but also underscores the evolving socio-economic dynamics within the region. Based on the interviews, the proposition “Women in Kyrgyzstan are increasingly initiating migration decisions independently” examines whether women within families are commonly the ones to initiate migration decisions, often taking on the role of the primary breadwinner. The findings suggest that this proposition is both supported and challenged. This indicates that the migration decision-making process among Kyrgyz female migrants is complex and not always straightforward, leaving room for further discussion and exploration. The decision to migrate appears to be influenced by a variety of factors, including personal ambitions, Ghosh, J. (2009) family needs, and economic pressures, rather than being solely initiated by women as primary breadwinners. In this regard, Gaye and Jha (2011), pp.49-50 wrote that migration is perceived to have ‘the potential to improve women’s self-respect, their dignity and enhance their freedom to act in pursuit of their personal goal’. This aligns with feminist perspectives that advocate for gender equality and the enhancement of women’s well-being in comparison to men (Ferguson, 2011).

Some women followed their husbands, indicating that the migration decision was not initiated by them but was influenced by their spouse’s decision. Regarding this, Kofman (2013) noted that when women with families do migrate, it is most likely for the greater benefit of others (most likely their spouses) rather than as a result of direct professional or personal benefits for themselves. Women who experience this pattern of mobility as a result of migrating with their families are often thought of as ‘trailing spouses’ Andall (2013); Boucher (2007).

The interview analyses above show a blend of personal aspirations, family obligations, and economic necessities influencing the decision to migrate. In this regard Gödri (2006) wrote that men often migrate due to economic or political reasons and personal career prospects, whereas women's migration is more influenced by family or personal life considerations.

In conclusion, while some women did initiate the migration decision, often influenced by personal reasons or aspirations, a significant number of decisions were also influenced by family circumstances, economic needs, and following spouses. This mixed pattern indicates that the

proposition cannot be universally supported or challenged, but rather points to the varied and complex nature of migration decision-making among Kyrgyz female migrants.

Proposition Two: *Women migrating from Kyrgyzstan encounter significant socio-economic, health, and legal challenges that not only shape their migration experience but also critically influence their decision to return home.*

This proposition finds support in the research findings of the study, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges encountered by female migrants. These challenges encompass issues pertaining to employment, health, social integration, discrimination, cultural adjustment, as well as emotional and familial hardships.

Racism and Discrimination

According to the World Bank, (2019) studies on “Migrant Women in the Labor Force” there is a prevalence of low-skilled, physically demanding jobs among female migrants. This included roles like dishwashing, cleaning, and working in grocery stores, which are typically undervalued and offer little in terms of career advancement or financial stability. Qiu (2018) wrote that migrant workers usually work in the so-called “3D” positions, namely “dirty, dangerous, and demeaning” positions. Compared with male migrant workers, female migrant workers are more likely to be marginalized from urban life. This is due to the fact that the female identity of migrant workers based on gender discrimination, urban-rural dual structure, and urban protectionism makes them relatively more vulnerable to social risks, such as low pay, unemployment, and economic fluctuations Wang and Liu (2015)., facing the risk of social marginalization in employment and life.

Challenges related to work among female migrants are exemplified by the experiences of several individuals in the study. Mahabat's journey, for instance, commenced with a dishwasher position, which she held for a month before transitioning to cleaning services. This progression underscores the initial difficulties she encountered in securing stable employment. Mahabat, another participant, underscores the harsh working conditions faced by female migrants. Anarkan further exemplifies the demanding nature of employment for female migrants, highlighting her experience washing dishes in a kitchen, a physically strenuous task. Her description underscores the strenuous and often grueling nature of the work opportunities available to female migrants.

Studies by Anderson and Hughes (2019) indicate that migrants often find themselves in physically demanding low-skilled jobs, which can be a significant source of stress and reluctance, particularly for those with no prior experience in such roles. For example, the embarrassment Datkayim felt about her job reflects the social stigma attached to low-skilled labor. Research by Thompson and Jensen

(2020) highlights how societal perceptions of certain jobs as 'menial' or 'undignified' can lead to emotional and psychological distress among migrants, impacting their self-esteem and mental health. The narrative provides valuable insights into how societal perceptions of low-paid, low-skill work affect the well-being of female migrants. These cases illustrate how societal attitudes can translate into real-world impacts, such as emotional and psychological distress. From a feminist perspective, these experiences highlight systemic issues related to gender and labor. Female migrants often face the dual burden of economic disadvantage and societal devaluation, which can have significant repercussions for their mental health and self-esteem (Delara, 2016).

By examining these issues through the lens of vulnerability and feminist theory, the research brings to light the complex interplay between societal attitudes, gender roles, and economic hardship. It underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of how low-paid, low-skill work affects female migrants and the importance of addressing these issues through policies that promote gender equality and protect the rights and well-being of marginalized workers (Chawla & Sharma, 2019).

Health Issues

The discussion of health-related issues for female migrants through psychological and feminist perspectives sheds light on the complex factors contributing to their vulnerability as elaborated on previous pages. Psychologically, female migrants face severe health risks due to stressors associated with their migration experience, including social isolation and inadequate healthcare access. The feminist perspective, on the other hand, underscores how gender-specific challenges and systemic inequalities exacerbate these health issues. For example, research by Smith and Mendoza (2018) highlights that migrants often fall prey to misinformation and exploitation due to language barriers and lack of familiarity with healthcare systems in host countries. These vulnerabilities are exacerbated for female migrants, who may also face gender-based discrimination Johnson et al. (2019). The false alarm regarding a serious health condition, as experienced by Mahabat, is not just financially draining but also psychologically distressing. Studies by Zhao and Lee (2020) reveal that such experiences can lead to long-term psychological effects, including anxiety and mistrust towards healthcare systems.

Furthermore, the financial aspect of exploitation is significant, as migrants often work in low-wage jobs and are less able to bear unexpected healthcare expenses Martinez and Garcia (2017). Thompson and Bhatia (2021) notes that migrants often live in areas with substandard environmental conditions, including poor water quality, which can lead to various health problems. A study by Kumar and Singh (2018) indicates that inadequate living conditions, including lack of access to clean

water, sanitation, and healthcare, disproportionately affect migrant populations, making them more susceptible to health risks. Health problems related to migration, as mentioned by Mahabat and Saliya, are a significant concern. Female migrants often suffer from illnesses that can be exacerbated by stress or poor working conditions, as well as exploitation in health services (Sagor & Aktar, 2023).

The health literature extensively documents the link between poverty and tuberculosis (TB) (Tomás et al., 2013). Poverty, which frequently drives migration, creates environments that exacerbate the risk of TB transmission. For instance, impoverished migrants often face overcrowded living conditions, inadequate nutrition, and limited access to healthcare services. These factors collectively impair immune function and increase susceptibility to TB. In addition, emerging research highlights the role of undocumented status as a critical determinant of poor health outcomes, including TB (Huffman et al., 2012; Siroka et al., 2016). For undocumented migrants, the challenge of accessing healthcare services is exacerbated by their precarious legal situation. This often results in delays in receiving treatment, heightened vulnerability to infections, and overall worse health outcomes (Dhavan et al., 2017). Women migrants, particularly those who are undocumented, may face additional barriers such as gender-based discrimination and limited support networks. These factors further undermine their ability to access timely and adequate healthcare, which is essential for managing and preventing diseases like TB.

Financial Hardship

Mairam's experience, where a significant portion of her earnings is allocated to living and housing expenses, leaving little for savings or remittances, mirrors a common financial challenge among migrants: “I didn't receive the payment that was promised to me. What I managed to earn was almost entirely consumed by living expenses and housing costs. When I look at my salary, only about 15% of it was left over. It wasn't a substantial amount, barely enough to send back home. Each time I planned to remit money, something unexpected came up. There were always unforeseen circumstances and problems that demanded spending – on food, registration, or other sudden expenses. If you don't get your registration done properly, you're hit with a fine. Sometimes, landlords would demand rent for the next month in advance. It seemed like extra expenses were always lurking around the corner. Despite all this, I was able to send some money back home, but it wasn't much, only about 10-15 thousand som.”

Studies by Fernandez and Hernandez (2020) highlight that migrants often face high living and housing costs in host countries, which can consume a substantial part of their income. These

expenses significantly reduce their ability to save or send money back to their families, a critical aspect of many migrants' financial goals. Patel and Kumar (2019) has also indicate that high living costs in many urban areas, coupled with low wages typically earned in low-skilled jobs, create a precarious financial situation for many migrants.

Mairam's struggle with inconsistent income and unpredictable expenses, such as fines for improper registration and advance payments demanded by landlords, is a common plight among migrant workers. A study by Zhao and Lee (2021) reveals that migrants often face irregular income streams and unexpected expenses. This financial unpredictability can exacerbate their already tenuous economic situation. The financial burden imposed by factors like fines and advance payments significantly affects migrants' financial stability. Research by Kim and Park (2018) underscores how additional costs, often overlooked in standard economic analyses, can severely strain migrants' budgets, leading to financial hardship. Family obligations and attachments are central in migration decisions. Studies have shown that family responsibilities, such as caregiving or children's education, significantly influence women's decision to migrate and return Ryan et al. (2021). The stories of Buraziya, Bermet, Buhan and Gulmira resonate with these findings, illustrating the significant role family plays in the return migration of women, as discussed in research by Boccagni and Decimo (2013).

Proposition Three: Post-migration challenges faced by migrants are more significant and enduring than those encountered during the migration period.

The evidence from the interview analysis strongly supports this proposition, confirming that female migrants face various difficulties upon their return to Kyrgyzstan, including financial issues, family dynamics, health problems, adaptation challenges, and societal stigma. It shows how traditional gender roles in Kyrgyzstan contribute to the harsher experiences of women, such as greater responsibilities in the household or societal pressure to conform to specific norms. It may also contribute on vulnerability, health, PMDL and feminist studies.

Financial Hardship

Financial challenges emerged as the most pronounced concern among the returnees. The disparity in salaries and job opportunities between Russia and Kyrgyzstan was frequently mentioned, underscoring the economic hardships faced upon return. For instance, the observation made by Gulmira, regarding the difference in salary for the same job between Moscow and Kyrgyzstan, illustrates a fundamental challenge of return migration: the reintegration into a less favorable economic environment. Castles and Miller (2009) discuss this phenomenon in the broader context of

global migration, pointing out how economic disparities between host and home countries can exacerbate the financial strain on returnees. This strain is not merely a matter of reduced income but also reflects the broader socio-economic challenges that returnees face, including the cost of living adjustments and the potential devaluation of skills acquired abroad.

Démurger and Xu (2011) provide a comparative perspective through their study of return migrants in China, highlighting similar patterns of financial difficulties. Their findings underscore the universal challenge faced by return migrants across different geographical contexts. The disparity in salaries and the scarcity of job opportunities in the home country not only affect the returnees' financial stability but also their social reintegration and psychological well-being. The expectation of better economic prospects upon return often clashes with the reality of the home country's labor market, leading to disillusionment and frustration.

Transnational Motherhood

The emotional impact on family dynamics, particularly the mother-child relationship, emerged as a significant form of vulnerability in the study. One of the most frequently reported difficulties involved the strained emotional connections between mothers and their children due to prolonged periods of separation. Many children, who have grown accustomed to being cared for by other family members such as grandmothers, have difficulty recognizing their biological mothers as primary caregivers upon their return. This is evident in the way children address their mothers, often referring to them in more formal or distant terms, and continuing to call their grandmothers "mom" instead.

This emotional distance resonates with the findings of Parrenas (2005), who illuminates how the physical separation imposed by migration can lead to emotional distancing, where familial roles and connections are disrupted and transformed. The case of Muhabat, whose daughter began to see her more as a sister than a mother, exemplifies the challenges of re-establishing familial roles after prolonged absences. This disruption is not merely a matter of physical distance but also reflects the emotional disconnection that can arise when family members are separated during formative years.

Dreby (2007) further examines this issue from the perspective of children of migrants, noting that the absence of a parent can foster feelings of abandonment and resentment. These emotions significantly complicate the process of reintegrating the migrant into the family unit upon their return. The emotional resilience of children and the coping strategies they develop in response to these challenges are critical in rebuilding parental bonds.

Moreover, Mazzucato and Schans (2011) delve into the impact of migration on the children left behind, observing that while economic remittances sent back home can ameliorate living

conditions, the lack of parental presence often results in emotional and behavioral difficulties. This duality underscores the complex nature of migration's impact, which, although providing economic advantages, also poses considerable emotional and psychological challenges.

From a feminist perspective, this disruption in family dynamics highlights broader issues related to gender roles and maternal identity. The separation not only affects the emotional well-being of both mothers and children but also challenges traditional notions of maternal bonding and caregiving. Women who migrate for work often face the added emotional burden of being perceived as distant or less involved in their children's lives, which can undermine their role and identity as mothers.

This disruption in family relationships underscores the need to address the emotional and psychological costs of migration from a feminist perspective. It calls for a deeper understanding of how migration affects familial roles and responsibilities, particularly for women who navigate the dual challenges of maintaining their familial ties while managing the economic pressures of migration. Addressing these issues requires recognizing and mitigating the emotional impact on both mothers and children, and developing policies and support systems that acknowledge and support the complex realities faced by migrant families.

Health Issues

Health issues were a significant concern for returnees, often a result of adverse working conditions abroad. Piper (2009) brings attention to the health concerns of migrants, underscoring the adverse conditions many face while abroad, including migration-induced stress and limited access to healthcare services in host countries. This lack of healthcare, combined with the stressors of migration, can lead to significant deterioration in both physical and mental health. Saliya's experience illustrates this point, noting the accumulation of health issues, such as stomach and dental problems, as a direct consequence of adverse working conditions experienced during migration.

Furthermore, Gushulak and MacPherson (2006) delve into the health risks associated with the migration process itself, such as exposure to infectious diseases, occupational hazards, and the psychological impact of displacement. These risks often persist or become aggravated upon the migrants' return, particularly when the healthcare system in their home country is ill-equipped to address such complex needs adequately.

Moreover, Castaneda et al. (2015) explore the barriers to healthcare faced by migrants, including issues like undocumented status, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with healthcare systems abroad. These obstacles lead to unmet health needs, which may develop into chronic conditions that challenge migrants upon their return. Additionally, Schmidt et al. (2010) investigate

the mental health consequences of migration, pinpointing stress from social isolation, discrimination, and integration hurdles as contributing factors to increased instances of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders among migrants. These mental health challenges can persist upon returning home, further exacerbated by the stresses of readjusting to life in their home countries.

Lastly, Zimmerman et al. (2011) concentrate on the specific health concerns of migrant workers in labor-intensive sectors, noting a high occurrence of musculoskeletal injuries, exposure to hazardous substances, and psychological distress. These findings underline the enduring health implications for return migrants, emphasizing the need for comprehensive health support and services to address these issues effectively.

Adaptation Issues

Adaptation challenges were evident among those who had grown accustomed to more developed urban environments abroad. Cassarino (2004) posits that successful reintegration depends on the readiness and willingness of the returnee, as well as the availability of social and economic opportunities in the home country. The adjustment process is often complicated by the returnees' changed perceptions and expectations, shaped by their experiences abroad. Similarly, Black and Gent (2006) introduce the notion of "sustainable return," achievable when returnees can seamlessly reintegrate into their home society without significant obstacles. They emphasize the critical importance of economic opportunities, social networks, and community acceptance in easing this process, pointing out that the absence of these elements can intensify adaptation challenges.

King (2000) investigates the emotional and psychological dimensions of returning home, spotlighting the nostalgia and idealization of the home country often harbored by migrants while abroad. The confrontation with reality upon return can provoke disillusionment, adding layers of complexity to the adaptation process.

Stigmatization of Returnees

This proposition is affirmatively supported through the diverse experiences shared by many women migrants offering a vivid illustration of how societal perceptions can distinctly shape the experiences of return migrants. Mahabat's insightful observation serves as a testament to the community's collective understanding and empathy towards the economic efforts of migrants, suggesting a diminished financial stigma within her community. This observation aligns with the findings of Smith (2010), who discusses how migration is often normalized within certain communities, reducing the stigma associated with economic struggles upon return.

Mairam's narrative introduces a contrasting dimension of stigma, emphasizing the gendered challenges faced by female migrants. Her necessity to misrepresent her marital status to avoid harassment in Russia underscores the societal pressures rooted in gender norms. This experience echoes the research of Chant and McIlwaine (2016), who explore the specific vulnerabilities and stigmatization faced by female migrants, particularly in patriarchal societies.

This finding is supported by Ryan et al. (2008), who highlight the importance of social networks and family support in enhancing the reintegration process for return migrants. Rahat's Experience offers a nuanced view of societal pressures, distinct from direct stigma yet impactful on the reintegration process. She articulates, "Despite not facing direct stigma... I encountered societal pressure to marry upon my return," reflecting the cultural and familial expectations that can influence return migrants' experiences. Levitt and Schiller (2004) discuss how transnational migrants navigate societal expectations and norms, which can significantly impact their identity and reintegration. Collectively, these findings support the proposition on "Stigmatization," showcasing the complex and varied experiences of stigma and societal perceptions encountered by returned female migrants. It also highlights that stigma is not a uniform experience but is linked to individual circumstances, community norms, and the broader socio-cultural context.

The interview analysis indicate that, although both during migration and after returning home migrants face many challenges, those experienced after coming back home deeply and broadly affect the lives of the migrants. I will present the differences in findings using Tables 5 and 6 below.

Table 4: Challenges During Migration

Challenge	Description	Respondent's quote
Discrimination and Xenophobia	Negative attitudes and hostility from the local Russian population, including exclusion and prejudice in the workplace and public spaces and discrimination from landlords.	"No matter how well you do your job and speak Russian well, they [Russians] do not take us seriously; they think that we are not well-educated or are not civilized; therefore, you are inferior to them."
Health Issues	Exposure to demanding jobs with health risks, exploitation by medical workers.	"I was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and I went through a lot of suffering."
Transnational motherhood	Emotional toll from being separated from children and the impact on parental roles.	"The most heart-wrenching aspect of my time in Russia was undoubtedly being separated from my children."

Table 5: Post-Migration Living Difficulties

Challenge	Description	Respondent's quote
Financial Hardship	Significant difference in possibilities for earning and availability of jobs, stress from differences in salaries.	"Once at home, you struggle with financial difficulties again, difference in salary. Same jobs are paid differently higher in Moscow lower here at home."
Family Dynamics	Emotional distance with children, altered family dynamics due to prolonged absences.	"The most heartbreaking part for me, was that my daughter did not recognize me as her mother... So, our relationship became more like sisters than a typical mother-daughter bond."
Health Issues	Health issues exacerbated or neglected during migration become pressing upon return.	"The only issue I faced upon our return was health-related... I had stomach problems and dental issues."
Adaptation Issues	Difficulty adjusting to life back in Kyrgyzstan, including differences in lifestyle and infrastructure.	"Our return to Bishkek from the bustling metropolis of Moscow presented several challenges for us."
Stigmatization	Societal perceptions and stigmatization varying based on individual circumstances and community contexts.	"People have the impression that since you returned from labor migration, you are rich and have a million dollars... But that's not true."

These post-migration living difficulties are multifaceted, affecting financial stability, emotional well-being, family dynamics, health, and social integration. While challenges during migration are significant, including legal issues, discrimination, and housing difficulties, they are somewhat mitigated by the potential for higher earnings and the temporary nature of the migration experience. In contrast, post-migration challenges are more deeply ingrained in the fabric of returnees' lives, impacting their long-term well-being and social reintegration in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, the proposition is supported by the evidence, indicating that the breadth and depth of challenges faced upon return to Kyrgyzstan indeed outweigh those encountered during the period of migration to Russia.

Proposition Four: *Female migrants' remittances are primarily allocated to basic household needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, with limited investment in long-term economic development*

The stories shared by the respondents clearly shows that the use of remittances by female migrants is not just limited to covering everyday needs but plays a key role in meeting a wide range of financial responsibilities. This includes paying off debts, investing in properties, funding education, starting businesses, supporting family, and preparing for future needs. Therefore, the proposition is only partially confirmed. Recent academic research supports the idea that female migrants' remittances are utilized for a wide array of financial objectives, surpassing mere everyday expenditures. An illustrative example of this can be found in a study conducted by Akcapar and Koser (2021), which focused on female migrants originating from Central Asian nations. This study underlines the crucial role played by remittances in sustaining numerous households, facilitating the fulfillment of diverse financial requirements such as debt settlement, asset investment, and educational expenses.

Use of Remittances: Debt Repayment and Housing

A study by Batista and Vicente (2020) on remittances and household financial behavior in developing countries found that remittances are often used to reduce household debt and invest in housing, contributing to improved living conditions. This aligns with the experiences shared by Jumagul stating, “Migration is beneficial... we managed to pay off the debt and retain our house,” highlighting the crucial role of remittances in preventing the possible loss of their homes. Others, such as Muhabat, echo this sentiment, “Russia offered a tremendous opportunity... After becoming debt-free, we commenced saving for the construction of our house,” illustrating how remittances are instrumental in debt clearance and financing housing projects. Yet, narratives like Bermet's, “We acquired a small apartment in Bishkek... which we now lease out,” indicate investments in real estate, signifying an emphasis on asset accumulation.

Use of Remittances: Investment in Children's Education

The allocation of remittances towards education is a strategic investment in human capital development. Research by Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2021) explores the role of remittances in educational outcomes in migrant-sending households. Their study reveals that remittances positively influence children's access to quality education and enhance their educational attainment. This aligns with the narrative of Kereez “We ensured our children received quality education... Our eldest daughter is employed as an auditor,” reflecting the strategic allocation of remittances towards education, aiming for sustainable human capital development.

Use of Remittances: Business and Housing Investment

Additionally, stories such as Buraziya's, "I allocated all my earnings from Russia into a business transforming it into a family venture," detail the application of remittances in entrepreneurial pursuits rather than day-to-day expenditures. The text underscores how remittances are channeled into entrepreneurial pursuits rather than day-to-day expenditures. Research by Tumen (2019) on the impact of remittances on entrepreneurial activities in migrant households corroborates this point. Tumen's study found that remittances contribute significantly to the establishment and growth of microenterprises, which can have a transformative effect on the economic prospects of migrant families. The stories of Mairam and Buhan, while illustrating limitations in saving or investment, nonetheless reveal that remittances were not exclusively spent on immediate needs but also allocated towards managing living costs and unforeseen financial expenses. Investing remittances in home improvements and asset acquisition is a common trend among female migrants. Gubert and Nordman (2021) highlights the role of remittances in housing investment and asset accumulation in migrant-sending households. Their study shows that remittances are often used to renovate homes and acquire durable assets, contributing to wealth accumulation. Experiences shared by Gulmira, "I refurbished our home and purchased furniture. My husband now tends to our domestic animals," resonates with Gubert and Nordman (2021) findings.

Use of Remittances: Preparation for Marriage

Moreover, discussions by Aizat and Bekzada about savings for dowries, "I saved for my marriage dowry over three years," underline the cultural and familial significance of remittances in planning for future marriage arrangements. Saving for dowries and marriage arrangements using remittances reflects cultural and familial priorities. Research by Chami, et al. (2019) examines the cultural and social dimensions of remittances in shaping household decisions. Their study highlights how remittances are strategically allocated to meet cultural and social expectations, including marriage-related expenses. This aligns with the discussions by Aizat and Bekzada.

Remittances as a Source of Family Financial Security

Recent research by Vanore et al. (2022) explores the impact of remittances on household well-being in migrant-sending regions. Their findings suggest that remittances play a crucial role in improving the economic condition of family members left behind, contributing to their overall well-being. The utilization of remittances by female migrants from Kyrgyzstan covers a much broader range of goals. These activities are directed towards ensuring the long-term financial stability of their families and improving their standard of living, going beyond just the basic requirements of daily living. This deeper insight into how remittances are used highlights the complex role of migration in

the economic development of migrant households, showcasing the strategic financial planning by female migrants to better the economic condition and future opportunities for their families in Kyrgyzstan.

Proposition Five: *Children of migrants are more likely to opt for labor migration, perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of migration.*

Based on the interview analysis this proposition is largely supported, with several nuances and variations in attitudes and outcomes. Several respondents indicate a continuation of migration patterns within their families. The coordinated decision for parents to return to Kyrgyzstan and for their children to continue working in Russia reflects a family strategy that supports migration for economic reasons, albeit with a role reversal where the child now supports the parents. Recent scholarly literature corroborates the proposition that intergenerational migration choices often result in the perpetuation of migration cycles within families. For instance, findings from studies conducted by researchers such as Massey and Zenteno (2000) and Dustmann and Weiss (2007) highlight how children of migrants are more likely to engage in labor migration, mirroring their parents' experiences. Moreover, empirical evidence from longitudinal studies, such as the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) and the New Immigrant Survey (NIS), demonstrates a clear continuity in migration patterns across generations Fussell, (2014).

Examples such as Buraziya's experience and Mairam's plans illustrate how children often follow in their parents' footsteps by opting for labor migration as a means of economic improvement. These findings align with the broader literature on intergenerational mobility, which emphasizes the role of socioeconomic factors in shaping migration decisions Chiswick (2013). Some respondents' express reservations about migration, highlighting the desire for a different path for the next generation.

Scholars such as Vertovec (2009) argue that migration decisions are influenced by a multitude of factors, including individual aspirations, cultural values, and structural constraints. Bermet and Buhan's ambivalence towards migration, for instance, reflects the complexity of migration decision-making, wherein future circumstances and opportunities play a significant role Massey et al. (1993). Moreover, Gulmairam and Kereez's resistance to labor migration highlights the divergent aspirations within migrant families. Research by Bachmeier et al. (2018) suggests that educational attainment and access to alternative opportunities shape individuals' migration choices, with some families prioritizing education and professional success over labor migration. This aligns with the findings

presented in Dilbar's observation, wherein the allure of higher earnings abroad is tempered by concerns over the temporary nature of migrant work.

Based on the responses provided by female return migrants, this proposition is both supported and nuanced by the experiences and attitudes towards migration expressed by the respondents. However, this confirmation comes with the acknowledgment of varying attitudes towards migration, influenced by personal experiences, economic conditions, and aspirations for better opportunities. Some families view migration as a necessary or strategic choice, while others hope for or actively work towards breaking the cycle through education and local employment opportunities. These varied responses illuminate the complex dynamics at play in intergenerational migration decisions, highlighting both the continuation of migration patterns and the potential for change based on individual and familial aspirations.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the interview analyses with returnees and review of literature. Points of analysis and patterns related to female returnees' experiences emerged in the course of analyses. In particular: transnational motherhood, health issues, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia, financial hardship, family dynamics, and the use and impact of remittances. Most of the theoretical propositions were supported in the matching process of interview findings with predicted propositions. Proposition four was partially supported, suggesting that while the proposition held true to an extent, the reality was more complex and encompassed a broader range of uses for remittances than initially suggested. Proposition one received mixed confirmation, reflecting varied experiences and motivations behind migration decisions among the female migrants. Proposition five was largely supported, expressing a common pattern consistent with the proposition but with significant variations based on individual circumstances and family decisions.

None of the propositions were unsupported, showing that each had some basis in the experiences of the female migrants, although the degree and nature of support varied.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter summarizes the entire study, discusses the outcomes of the research, and provides conclusions.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate and understand the specific challenges faced by Kyrgyz female migrants, both during their time in migration and upon their return from Russia, with a particular focus on post-migration challenges. This study also investigates the feminization of migration within Kyrgyzstan. To address these issues, the research integrates the concepts of vulnerability and Post-Migration Living Difficulties (PMLD) with a feminist perspective. This integrated framework allows for a comprehensive analysis of how different factors influence female migrants' experiences, focusing on their exposure to various challenges and risks, as well as their capacity to navigate and manage these difficulties effectively. For this purpose, a case study design with qualitative data was used (Gilgun, 2005; Yin, 2017). The reason for using a case study design with qualitative data is detailed in Chapters 2 and 3.

The research questions guiding this study are structured to explore the experiences of Kyrgyz female migrants: What economic, social, and psychological post-migration living difficulties do migrant women experience upon returning to Kyrgyzstan from Russia? Some other supporting questions are: What personal, economic, and social factors influence the decision of these migrant women to return to Kyrgyzstan, and how do these factors interact? What benefits do migrants derive from their migration experiences?

Several theoretical propositions were identified from the literature review and my personal experiences prior to data collection, covering a broad spectrum of themes related to migration. These themes include:

1. Women in Kyrgyzstan are increasingly initiating migration decisions independently, thereby reflecting and contributing to the broader theory of the feminization of migration.
2. Women migrating from Kyrgyzstan encounter significant socio-economic, cultural, and legal challenges that not only shape their migration experience but also critically influence their decision to return home.
3. Post-migration living difficulties faced by women returning to Kyrgyzstan are more severe than those experienced by men under similar conditions.
4. Post-migration challenges faced by migrants are more significant and enduring than those encountered during the migration period.
5. Female migrants' remittances are primarily allocated to basic household needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, with limited investment in long-term economic development.
6. Children of migrants are more likely to opt for labor migration, perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of migration.

These propositions guided the preparation of interview questions. A total of twenty-two respondents were interviewed, providing insights into these various aspects of the migration experience. Points of analysis and patterns related to female returnees' experiences emerged in the course of analyses. In particular: transnational motherhood, health issues, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia, financial hardship, family dynamics, and the use and impact of remittances. Most of the theoretical propositions were supported in the matching process of interview findings with predicted propositions. Proposition four was partially supported, suggesting that while the proposition held true to an extent, the reality was more complex and encompassed a broader range of uses for remittances than initially suggested. Proposition one received mixed support, reflecting varied experiences and motivations behind migration decisions among the female migrants. Proposition four was largely supported, expressing a common pattern consistent with the proposition but with significant variations based on individual circumstances and family decisions. Notably, none of the propositions were strongly refuted, indicating that each had some relevance to the experiences of the female migrants to varying degrees, even though the extent and nature of their support differed. This suggests that the propositions were theoretically well-grounded in existing theories, while also incorporating nuances related to the cultural and individual differences of these female migrants.

Main findings and contribution to the literature

While interviewing my respondents and hearing their heartbreaking stories and the difficulties they faced during migration, I initially thought that life for female migrants after returning would be easier, as they are no longer separated from their families and children, no longer engaged in physically demanding work, and free from the discrimination and other challenges they cited. However, I was mistaken. It turned out that life after migration is the hardest part of the entire migration cycle. This is how the PMDL concept was applied to study the migration journey of these women. Furthermore, by applying the Post-Migration Living Difficulties (PMLD) framework alongside the feminist perspective and the concept of vulnerability, this approach highlights that the challenges faced by women are not merely generic. Instead, these difficulties are deeply influenced by patriarchal structures, gender norms, and expectations specific to women. This integrated framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how gender-specific factors shape the experiences of female migrants, revealing that their vulnerabilities are often exacerbated by societal and cultural contexts.

As such, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the literature combining Post-Migration Living Difficulties (PMLD) with the feminist perspective and the concept of vulnerability.

Combining these frameworks allows for an intersectional analysis of female migrants' experiences. This integrated approach allows for a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by female migrants, both during migration and after their return, by considering the intersection of gender, social vulnerabilities, and structural inequalities. The main themes of this study included transnational motherhood, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination against migrants in Russia, financial hardship, as well as health and family dynamics. This focus aimed to explore the multifaceted challenges faced by female migrants, including the impact of managing family responsibilities across borders (transnational motherhood), encountering societal biases (racism, xenophobia, and discrimination), financial hardship, and addressing health issues and family dynamics. By examining these themes, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the vulnerabilities experienced by migrants and contributes to the broader discourse on migration and gender from feminist perspective (Mummert, 2012).

Through this research, it becomes evident that the concept of vulnerability with the feminist perspective is a powerful framework for understanding the complex, evolving nature of vulnerabilities that female migrants face during various stages of their migration journey and beyond. The findings reveal that female migrants encounter difficulties at all stages of the migration phase, including pre-migration, during migration, and post-migration.

Another key contribution of this thesis is its focus on the dynamic nature of vulnerability in combination with the feminist perspective. This is particularly relevant for female migrants, whose vulnerabilities may fluctuate depending on factors such as legal status, transnational motherhood, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination against migrants in Russia, financial hardship and health issues and family dynamics. By integrating this approach with PMLD, I could analyze how female migrants' vulnerabilities are shaped by their migration experiences and how these vulnerabilities persist or evolve upon their return. For instance, vulnerability could be linked to financial hardship due to a lack of job opportunities for returning female migrants. It could also relate to social vulnerability, such as facing stigmatization or discrimination in their home communities. On the other hand, the feminist approach would critically examine how social norms about gender roles influence the reintegration experiences of women. For example, returning women migrants face societal pressure to resume traditional roles (e.g., caregiving, homemaking) that limit their economic opportunities or personal autonomy. A feminist lens would highlight these gender-specific reintegration challenges and advocate for more equitable policies and support systems.

This integrated approach contributes to the academic discourse by filling gaps in the literature on feminization of migration and reintegration. It moves beyond a simplistic view of migration as a linear process to one that recognizes the complex interplay of gender, social structures, and vulnerability of female migrants. Thus, by combining Post-Migration Living Difficulties (PMLD) with the feminist perspective and the concept of vulnerability, this research can provide a richer, more nuanced analysis of the experiences of female migrants. This approach not only highlights the specific challenges faced by these women but also advocates for structural changes that can support their successful reintegration into their home communities. It allows for a deeper understanding of how gendered vulnerabilities are constructed and navigated in the context of migration, thus contributing significantly to both feminist migration studies and vulnerability research. Additional findings, analyzed through these frameworks, are discussed in the following subsections.

Post-Migration Living Difficulties

The major theme that emerged from interview analysis with respect to this main research question was the array of difficulties that female migrants encounter upon their return. These difficulties include financial difficulties, changes in family relationships, health problems, adaptation issues, and stigma, underscore the complex reality returnees face. Consequently, the concept of Post-Migration Living Difficulties -PMLD has been affirmed through the evidence presented, illustrating the array of obstacles that female migrants encounter upon their return, ranging from economic hardships to social and emotional adjustments. Particularly, the financial difficulties highlighted by returnees, such as the stark disparity in earning potential and job availability between Russia and Kyrgyzstan. For instance, the case of Gulmira, emphasizing the difference in salary and the lack of extra job opportunities in Kyrgyzstan compared to Russia, echoes the findings of Castles and Miller (2009) and Démurger and Xu (2011). These authors discuss the global challenge of economic disparities faced by return migrants, pointing out that this financial strain involves not only reduced income but also adjusting to a different cost of living and potentially facing the devaluation of skills acquired abroad.

Moreover, the impact of migration on family dynamics, especially the emotional toll on relationships between mothers and their children, underscores the social and emotional challenges of reintegration. The experiences shared by Muhabat, along with insights from Parrenas (2005) and Dreby (2007), Parrado & Flippen, (2005), NSC and UNFPA (2016) illustrate how physical separation and prolonged absences can lead to emotional distancing and altered familial roles, complicating the process of rebuilding these relationships upon return. Studies by Kuschminder (2017) and King et al.

(2018) on return migration have similarly found that returnees face considerable reintegration challenges, including socio-economic instability, psychological well-being, and social stigma, which can persist long after their return. These challenges are compounded by the returnees' experiences of displacement, loss of community, and the need to renegotiate their social identities within their home countries. Furthermore, research by Carling and Collins (2018) on the impact of migration on family life corroborates the findings of this study regarding the altered family dynamics and emotional distances that returnees experience. Their work emphasizes the profound effects of migration-induced separations on family relationships, which often endure long after the physical reunion.

Regarding health issues, participants mentioned that working conditions abroad and limited access to healthcare during migration had negatively affected their health upon return. Research by Piper (2009), Gushulak and MacPherson (2006), and Castaneda et al. (2015) highlights the health risks associated with migration. These include the physical toll of labor-intensive work and the psychological impact of displacement, which often persist or worsen upon return due to inadequate healthcare systems in the home country. Additionally, adaptation challenges, as exemplified by Rahat's experiences, highlight the difficulties of readjusting to life in Kyrgyzstan after becoming accustomed to more developed urban environments in Moscow. Insights from Cassarino (2004), Arowolo (2000), and King (2000) emphasize the importance of readiness and willingness to reintegrate, as well as the role of social and economic opportunities in facilitating this process. The sense of alienation and disorientation experienced by returnees reflects the disparity between their expectations and the realities of their home countries. Lastly, the issue of stigmatization, as discussed through the diverse experiences of return migrants like Mahabat, Mairam, Gulmira, and Bekzada, reveals the complex interplay of societal perceptions and gender norms that shape the reintegration experience. The research by Smith (2010), Chant and McIlwaine (2016), and Dustmann and Okatenko (2014) highlights how community empathy, gendered challenges, and the impact of familial support can either mitigate or exacerbate the stigma faced by return migrants.

The findings also revealed that despite the myriad hardships migrants face during migration, such as legal issues, discrimination, and family separation, these are not the hardest part of the migration cycle. All the cited difficulties can be somewhat mitigated by the opportunity for higher earnings and the financial independence of female migrants. In addition, social and cultural capital, educational and professional development, and psychological resilience (Griffiths et al., 2015) are among the key factors that contribute to the perception and reality that the benefits of migration surpass the negatives. In contrast, post-migration challenges are more deeply embedded in the lives of returnees,

impacting their long-term well-being and social reintegration in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, the proposition is supported by the evidence, showing that the range and depth of challenges faced upon return to Kyrgyzstan indeed outweigh those encountered during the period of migration to Russia. There were also some participants who expressed their regrets over not obtaining Russian citizenship, which could have offered financial stability through a pension. This reflects the work of Agunias (2006), who discusses the challenges migrants face in securing long-term benefits from migration, including legal status and social security.

Reflecting on New Migration

Numerous studies have highlighted that return migration does not signify the end of the migration journey. Cassarino (2004) emphasizes that return can be part of a broader migratory strategy rather than the concluding phase of the migration experience. Similarly, King (2000) contends that return migration often represents a phase in ongoing migratory processes, rather than a definitive end. He suggests that many migrants view their return as a temporary stage with the potential for future migration. Echoing this sentiment, Gmelch (1980) points to the cyclical nature of migration processes, noting how migrants often maintain transnational ties and consider the possibility of remigration, supporting the notion that return migration is not necessarily the culmination of the migration cycle. Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) investigates the transnational activities of migrants, including those who have returned to their countries of origin, highlighting the continued engagement of returnees in cross-border practices and networks, which suggests that migration experiences and impacts persist beyond return. Carling and Pettersen (2014) introduce the integration–transnationalism matrix to analyze migrants' return intentions, underlining that many migrants envisage their return as part of a larger, ongoing migratory cycle rather than a conclusive step.

Given the insights from the literature cited above, the final research question focuses on the plans of returning to Russia, exploring whether the return migration observed among the study's participants is indeed a temporary pause or part of a larger cycle of migration. The findings for this question revealed that the decision-making process surrounding migration is deeply influenced by a variety of factors, including family dynamics, economic necessity, and individual health and age considerations.

Firstly, family dynamics and migration decisions are closely intertwined. The marital status and family responsibilities of some respondents significantly impact their migration choices, with a few expressing a desire to return to Russia for economic reasons, while others are held back by family obligations or their spouses' preferences. This complexity in decision-making aligns with

Carling's (2008) research, which suggests that migration decisions often result from family negotiations, weighing economic advantages against the emotional toll of separation and the challenges posed by maintaining a transnational family life.

Secondly, financial hardship and future planning play a crucial role in considering migrating again. The pursuit of better educational opportunities for children and the ambition to start a business in Kyrgyzstan exemplify a strategic approach to migration, seen as a temporary means to achieve long-term goals rather than a permanent solution. This perspective is supported by the study of Lücke et al. (2009), which highlights migration as a strategy to enhance living conditions and gather capital for future investments back home.

Lastly, considerations related to health and age act as significant barriers to repeat migration. The hard work and discrimination faced by migrants discourage particularly older women from considering a return to Russia. This observation is in line with Vanore et al. (2015), who point out that the health impacts of migration can have enduring effects on individuals' capacity and willingness to undertake future migrations.

Challenges and Vulnerabilities Experienced During Migration

Migrant women face intersectional discrimination based on their gender and migration status, as discussed in the racism, xenophobia, and discrimination subsection in previous pages. The proposition that female migrants face a wide range of challenges during their migration journey is strongly supported by both the experiences shared in this study and existing literature. Female migrants often find themselves in low-skilled, physically demanding “3D” jobs—dirty, dangerous, and demeaning—which offer little financial stability or opportunities for career advancement. This situation, highlighted by the World Bank (2019) and Qiu (2018), is exemplified in the experiences of Mahabat, Muhabat, Anarkan, and Datkayim, who have all endured the physical and emotional burdens of such work. These burdens include health risks, exploitation, and the social stigma associated with low-skilled labor, reflecting broader issues of gender discrimination and the vulnerability of female migrants in the labor market, as discussed by Wang and Liu (2015) and Anderson and Hughes (2019), with further support from Thompson and Jensen (2020).

Additionally, female migrants encounter significant challenges within healthcare systems, including exploitation and misinformation, often exacerbated by language barriers and gender-based discrimination. The stories of Mahabat and Saliya highlight these vulnerabilities, aligning with research from Smith and Mendoza (2018), Johnson et al. (2019), and Zhao and Lee (2020) that emphasizes the health risks and psychological distress migrants face. The living conditions and legal

vulnerabilities of migrants also contribute to their challenges, as described by Mairam's and Muhabat's struggles with social integration. Hernandez and Roberts (2020) and Clark and Kumar (2019) emphasize how poor living conditions and legal uncertainties lead to social exclusion and increased vulnerability.

Discrimination and xenophobia further complicate the migration experience, with Rakhat and Nurgul facing workplace discrimination and societal prejudices that impact their mental health and hinder social integration (FIDH, 2016). This is supported by studies from Almutairi (2015), Agadjanian (2017) and Smith and Li (2020), which highlight institutional biases and societal prejudices against migrants. Financial challenges are another significant hurdle, as seen in Mairam's experiences, where high living and housing costs consume a large portion of migrants' income. Research by Fernandez and Hernandez (2020), and Patel and Kumar (2019) discusses the precarious financial situations faced by migrants, exacerbated by low wages and high costs.

Lastly, the emotional impact of family separation, as experienced by Bermet, underscores the emotional and psychological challenges of migration, which are well-documented in transnational motherhood concept (Millman, 2013). The emotional pain and guilt resulting from parental absence are emphasized in research by Thompson and Lopez (2019), highlighting the profound effects of family separation on migrant parents and their children.

Economic Benefits

The benefits of migration for female migrants from Kyrgyzstan to Russia are significant, as it was highlighted by respondents. Despite facing challenges and sacrifices, migration has enabled them to improve their economic well-being in several ways like: ability to clear debts and invest in housing, education, and businesses, resonates with the 'target earnings theory' suggested by Hein de Haas (2012) and further explored by Schewel (2019). This theory proposes that migrants are driven by specific economic goals, and once these targets are achieved, they may halt their migration. Yet, reaching these economic goals is fraught with challenges and unforeseen expenses, highlighting the precarious nature of migrant work and the vulnerabilities migrants face. These observations align with Carling et al. (2016), who explore the complexity and often unpredictable financial outcomes within the migration experience. Despite facing challenges and sacrifices, migration has significantly improved female migrants' economic status through various means. The ability to repay debts has provided substantial relief, preventing severe consequences like losing their homes, a benefit

supported by Dustmann and Kirchkamp (2002), who discuss how migration can be a strategic move for debt clearance.

Moreover, the acquisition of housing, either by purchasing properties or constructing new homes, emphasizes the economic benefits of migration. Ley and Tutchener (2001) highlight how migrants use remittances for real estate investments, securing their long-term economic stability. Similarly, investing in children's education has opened better career opportunities and human capital development, with Edwards and Ureta (2003) also highlighting the positive impact of remittances on educational attainment in migrant-sending countries. Entrepreneurial ventures like in Buraziya's case also reflect migrants' contributions to long-term economic stability and asset accumulation. Studies by Woodruff and Zenteno (2007) show that remittances significantly aid in providing the capital necessary for starting small businesses. Furthermore, the investment in assets like properties, vehicles, and livestock boosts migrants' financial security, as demonstrated by Adida and Girod (2011), who discuss how migrants invest in tangible assets to counter economic instability.

Other respondents' citation on renovating and improving homes aligns with Osili's (2004) findings on the positive impact of remittances on housing quality. Additionally, providing financial assistance to parents and saving for marriage dowries exemplify the complex economic benefits of migration, as discussed by Piotrowski (2006), who highlights the socio-economic implications of remittance flows. While these benefits are evident, not all migrants experienced them equally due to various factors like unforeseen expenses, unreliable income, and unexpected circumstances. Nonetheless, overall, migration has had a positive impact on the economic well-being and future prospects of female migrants and their families from Kyrgyzstan.

Family Dynamics and Return

Family considerations were the most cited reason for returning among the respondents, echoing the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) theory proposed by Stark & Bloom (1985). This theory suggests that migration decisions intertwine with economic motives that migrants often set financial goals and return once these are achieved Hein de Haas (2012), Schewel (2019). In Saliya's case, the accumulation of sufficient savings to buy a house exemplifies this. However, this is not a universally prominent reason, as other stories indicate diverse motivations. Studies by Carling et al. (2016) discuss the complexity of financial goals in return migration, emphasizing that these goals are often intertwined with other socio-economic factors.

It is worth mentioning that none of the participants cited their children's involvement in labor migration as a reason for their return when initially asked. However, when prompted with a follow-

up question about their willingness to migrate again, some expressed a desire to do so but mentioned opposition from their children. Others stated they did not wish to migrate again, indicating that it was now their children's turn to provide financial support. This highlights the aspect of intergenerational migration, suggesting that the knowledge of having an income generated by their children could be a factor in their decision to return home.

Furthermore, the emphasis on caregiving responsibilities and children's education as pivotal reasons for return migration is consistent with Bilecen (2019) and King et al. (2017), highlighting the profound impact of family ties and responsibilities on migration choices. Additionally, global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturns act as catalysts for return migration, revealing the vulnerabilities and uncertainties migrants face. Ransome et al. (2020) and Kuschminder and Siegel (2020) have delved into the significant effects of such crises on migration patterns and decisions, illustrating how external shocks can prompt a reevaluation of migrant life choices.

Moreover, the issue of forced returns, including deportation, reveals the complexities and challenges embedded in migration governance and policy frameworks. Studies by Gibney (2008) and Düvell (2012) explore the legal and policy contexts that shape migrants' experiences, shedding light on the harsh realities and consequences of forced return. Health issues, including both physical and mental problems, are also key reasons for deciding to return. Zimmerman et al. (2011) and Schininá et al. (2011) have documented the adverse health effects linked to environmental factors, such as climate and working conditions, and psychological strains, including stress and homesickness, underscoring the health challenges migrants endure, these were also cited by the majority of participants in this study.

Conclusion

This thesis integrates vulnerability and feminist perspectives to study Post-Migration Living Difficulties (PMLD) among female migrants from Kyrgyzstan to Russian Federation. By combining these approaches, it offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the challenges faced by women migrants. This framework provides valuable insights into both the theoretical aspects of migration and practical solutions for improving support mechanisms. The study highlights how gender and culture affect vulnerability, helping to inform more effective policies and support systems. Overall, this research addresses gaps in current knowledge and suggests new directions for future studies in migration.

Particularly, this study explored the complex experiences of Kyrgyz female migrants upon their return from Russia to Kyrgyzstan, shedding light on the complexities of their migration journey. Through qualitative case studies, the research unveiled the nuanced challenges these women faced across different stages of migration before migration, during their stay in Russia, and upon their return to Kyrgyzstan. This exploration is guided by a series of research questions aimed at understanding the motivations behind migration, the employment opportunities migrants find in relation to their educational background, the perceived benefits of their migration experience, the challenges encountered, the reasons for their return, the post-migration difficulties they face, and their willingness to migrate again. The main themes of this study include transnational motherhood, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination against migrants in Russia, as well as health and family dynamics. This focus aims to explore the multifaceted challenges faced by female migrants, including the impact of managing family responsibilities across borders (transnational motherhood), encountering societal biases (racism, xenophobia, and discrimination), financial hardship and addressing health issues and family dynamics. By examining these themes, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the vulnerabilities experienced by migrants and contributes to the broader discourse on migration and gender.

The application of theoretical propositions, drawn from both literature and personal observations, which formed the backbone of the study, aiding in the development of interview questions that captured the essence of the migration experience from various angles. This approach facilitated a deep dive into the lives of twenty-two female returnees, bringing forth themes as described above.

One of the study's significant findings is the realization that life post-migration presents the most formidable set of challenges for returnees, contrary to the initial assumption that returning home would ease the hardships faced abroad. This revelation underscores the complexity of reintegration, with post-migration living difficulties emerging as a critical area of concern. Financial hardships, family dynamics, health issues, adaptation challenges, and societal stigmatization constitute a nexus of obstacles that returnees must navigate, highlighting the intricate nature of their post-migration experience.

In regard to financial hardships, particularly the disparity in earning potential and job opportunities between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, highlighted the economic dimension of reintegration difficulties. The stories of Gulmira illustrated the stark reality of economic disparities and the struggle to adjust to the economic environment of Kyrgyzstan. This aspect resonates with broader discussions on the economic challenges faced by return migrants, as explored by scholars such as

Castles and Miller (2009) and Démurger and Xu (2011). The emotional and social dimensions of reintegration are equally challenging. The study revealed how migration impacts transnational motherhood and family dynamics, with physical separation and prolonged absences leading to emotional distancing and altered familial roles. This finding aligns with the insights of researchers like Parrenas (2005) and Dreby (2007), who examined the social and emotional consequences of migration on family dynamics.

Health issues emerged as another significant concern, with returnees reporting adverse effects from their working conditions abroad and limited healthcare access. This aspect is supported by research highlighting the health risks associated with migration and the challenges faced upon return due to inadequate healthcare systems in the home country. Moreover, the study explored the challenges of social integration and stigma faced by return migrants, shedding light on the societal perceptions and gender norms that shape their reintegration experience. This discussion is enriched by the work of scholars who explore the societal empathy, gendered challenges, and the role of familial support in mitigating stigma.

Despite the hardships encountered during migration, the study found that the post-migration period poses even greater difficulties, deeply affecting the returnees' long-term well-being and social reintegration in Kyrgyzstan. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported in 2021 that female migrants returning to their countries of origin encounter greater reintegration challenges compared to their male counterparts. This finding aligns with feminist perspectives on gender inequality, which emphasize the additional obstacles faced by women in achieving equitable treatment and opportunities upon return (Chawla & Sharma, 2019). This insight supported the proposition that the breadth and depth of challenges faced upon return indeed surpass those encountered during the migration phase.

In 2021, UNDP and IOM have undertaken assessments in various regions affected by migration, such as Osh, Batken, Chui, and Talas. These studies reveal a lack of reintegration support for returnees at both national and local levels, alongside financial, social, legal, informational, psychological, health, and other challenges returned migrants face. Moreover, there is a noticeable willingness among migrants to engage in the development of their communities, provided there is transparency and cooperation with local authorities.

Kyrgyzstan's approach to migration policy has evolved over the years, with the government adopting the Concept of Migration Policy for 2021–2030. This strategic document outlines the country's priorities in addressing migration issues and aims to facilitate the sustainable reintegration

of returning migrants, with a particular focus on women and children. It highlights the necessity of special assistance programs to support returnees, emphasizing the critical role of national and local authorities in the process UNDP (2021) Despite these efforts, the implementation of migration policies has faced obstacles. For instance, previous attempts to regulate migration more effectively through new regulatory frameworks and bilateral cooperation with countries like Russia and Kazakhstan have had limited success. There has also been a lack of substantial progress in addressing internal migration and preventing depopulation in border areas UNDP (2021).

Proposed Future Research

Future research should build on the findings of this study by exploring the experiences of female migrants through a multi-dimensional approach. Specifically, employing the life course framework (Spini, Bernardi & Oris, 2017) in combination with vulnerability and feminist perspectives could offer deeper insights into the complexities faced by female migrants. The life course framework provides a temporal perspective, examining how migration experiences and related challenges evolve over different stages of a migrant's life. Integrating this framework with vulnerability theory allows researchers to analyze how various forms of vulnerability—whether economic, social, or psychological—interact and change over time. The feminist perspective adds a crucial layer by highlighting how gender norms and power dynamics influence these vulnerabilities.

Additionally, applying these combined approaches can uncover the nuanced ways in which gendered experiences shape the migration journey, from initial departure to eventual return. This approach could illuminate how cultural, social, and economic factors intersect to affect female migrants' experiences and coping strategies. Future studies could also explore specific aspects such as the impact of transnational motherhood, the role of social networks in managing vulnerabilities, and the long-term effects of migration on family dynamics. Such research could contribute to developing more targeted policies and interventions that address the unique needs of female migrants, enhancing both their well-being and integration processes (Mummert, 2012).

Future research could also benefit from adopting longitudinal perspectives on the migration experiences of women, focusing on how their motivations, experiences, and aspirations change over time. It becomes evident that Russia no longer serves as a primary destination for labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan, thus such studies could particularly examine the migration experience before and after the Russian-Ukrainian war, highlighting shifts in migration patterns. Comparative studies could

further enrich this understanding by examining the experiences of different migrant groups. By comparing the migration experiences of male migrants, the elderly, youth, and female migrants, researchers can uncover gender-specific challenges and opportunities. Such studies could reveal how various demographic groups navigate the migration process differently, highlighting unique barriers and facilitators within migration and return processes (Ferguson, 2011).

Another critical area for research is studying impact of migration on families, particularly children who are left behind or migrate with their parents. Concentrating on academic achievements, mental health and family ties, such research could shed light on intergenerational effects of migration (Juozeliūnienė & Budginaitė, 2018). Additionally, the social integration of return migrants presents an essential area for exploration. Investigating experiences of stigma, social capital, and community re-engagement can provide valuable insights into the challenges of reintegration. The role of technology in maintaining transnational ties is another promising avenue for research. As technology becomes increasingly integral to the way migrants connect with their home countries, understanding its impact on maintaining relationships, transferring remittances, and participating in virtual communities is crucial. This research can explore both the opportunities and challenges technology presents in sustaining transnational ties and its broader implications for migration dynamics (Bacigalupe & Parker, 2015).

Moreover, incorporating both internal and international migration routes into future research designs, as suggested by Fryer et al. (2014) and Thieme (2008b), can provide a more holistic view of migration processes. Many migrants engage in internal migration before moving internationally, indicating that these processes are closely linked and should be examined together. This approach can reveal the continuum of migration experiences and highlight the fluidity between internal and international migration. Finally, it is important to broaden the analysis of female migrants by studying labor migration from Kyrgyzstan to various destinations, such as Kazakhstan, Turkey, South Korea, the United States, and European states. Given the changing migration patterns, particularly in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, future research should focus on understanding the renewed motivations, experiences, and outcomes of migration to Russia to provide comprehensive insights into the evolving landscape of female labor migration.

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APPENDIX A:

Interview Questions for Kyrgyz female Returnees in Kyrgyzstan (English version):

1. Why and when did you decide to move to Russia?
2. Whose decision was it? Yours personally or your household's?
3. Where did you work in Russia?
4. Did you face any difficulties while in Russia?
5. Why and when did you decide to return to Kyrgyzstan?
6. Did you and your family benefit from your work in Russia? If so, how? If not, why not?
7. Would you consider migrating to Russia again? Why or why not?
8. Would you advise other women to seek employment in Russia? Why or why not?
9. Do you have children who were part of the migration process?
10. What else would you like me to know?

Thank you very much.

Interview Questions for Kyrgyz female Returnees in Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyz version):

1. Орусияга качан жана эмне үчүн көчүп кетүүнү чечтиңиз?
2. Бул чечим кимдики болду? Өзүңүздүкүбү же үй-бүлөнүздүкүбү?
3. Орусияда кайда иштедиңиз?
4. Орусияда жүргөндө кандайдыр бир кыйынчылыктарга туш болдуңузбу?
5. Кыргызстанга качан жана эмне үчүн кайтып келүүнү чечтиңиз?
6. Орусиядагы эмгегинизден үй-бүлөнүз пайда көрдүбү? Эгер ооба болсо, кандайча? Жок болсо, эмне үчүн?
7. Кайрадан Орусияга көчүп кетүүнү карап көрөсүзбү? Эмне үчүн же эмне үчүн жок?
8. Башка аялдарга Орусияга иш издеп барууну сунуштайсызбы? Эмне үчүн же эмне үчүн жок?
9. Миграцияда балдарыңыз барбы?
10. Дагы эмнелер жонундо айткыңыз келет?

Чон Рахмат.

Interview Questions for Kyrgyz female Returnees in Kyrgyzstan (Russian version):

1. Почему и когда вы решили переехать в Россию?
2. Чье это было решение? Ваше личное или вашей семьи?
3. Где вы работали в России?
4. Сталкивались ли вы с какими-либо трудностями в России?
5. Почему и когда вы решили вернуться в Кыргызстан?
6. Принесла ли ваша работа в России пользу вам и вашей семье? Если да, то как? Если нет, то почему?
7. Рассматривали бы вы возможность снова переехать в Россию? Почему да или почему нет?
8. Посоветовали бы вы другим женщинам искать работу в России? Почему да или почему нет?
9. У вас есть дети, которые были частью процесса миграции?
10. Что еще вы хотели бы мне рассказать?

APPENDIX B a):



There is a monument to shuttle traders at the Dordoi market. The monument depicts two women and a man. Each of them has a checkered bag filled with goods. It was with the opening of “Dordoi” Market that small business appeared in our Kyrgyzstan. Many of today's large businessmen began their careers at this market.

APPENDIX B., b)



APPENDIX C:

Propositions:

Proposition One. *Women in Kyrgyzstan are increasingly initiating migration decisions independently, thereby reflecting and contributing to the feminist perspectives on migration.* This shift not only challenges traditional gender roles but also underscores the evolving socio-economic dynamics within the region. By examining these changes through the lens of female labor migration, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of feminist perspectives on socio-economic transformation.

Proposition Two. *Women migrating from Kyrgyzstan encounter significant socio-economic, health, and legal challenges that not only shape their migration experience but also critically influence their decision to return home.* This proposition may provide valuable insights into how gender-specific challenges impact the migration cycle, from departure to potential return. The analysis may contribute meaningfully to the academic literature on vulnerability, transnational motherhood, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia in Russia, feminist studies, and policy-making.

Proposition Three. *Post-migration challenges faced by migrants are more significant and enduring than those encountered during the migration period.* This proposition involves a comparative analysis of migration phases and examines whether the challenges faced post-migration are more significant than those encountered during the migration period. It may also contribute on vulnerability, health and PMDL studies.

Proposition Four. *Female migrants' remittances are primarily allocated to basic household needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, with limited investment in long-term economic development.* This proposition seeks to explore whether there are gendered differences in how remittances are allocated within migrant households, potentially influenced by cultural or familial expectations. Understanding these patterns could provide insights into the role of gender in shaping financial decisions and responsibilities. This analysis may contribute to economic perspectives on female migration, feminist studies, and inform policy-making aimed at supporting migrant families.

Proposition Five. *Children of migrants are more likely to opt for labor migration, perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of migration.* This proposition suggests that the experiences and decisions of migrant parents significantly influence the aspirations and choices of their children, potentially creating a cycle of migration within families. By examining this pattern, the study aims to explore how migration becomes a recurring strategy shaped by economic necessity, social norms, and the perceived benefits of migration. The analysis may contribute meaningfully to the academic literature on vulnerability, transnational motherhood, feminist studies, and inform policy-making that addresses the intergenerational impact of migration.

APPENDIX D:

Case Study Protocol: Table of Contents

No.	Sections	Page #
I	Introduction a. Title b. Guiding question c. Objective and significance d. How the results will be used e. References	
II	Case study questions a. Demographic questions b. Interview questions c. Definitions of term	
III	Data collection procedures a. Types of data to be collected b. Site to be visited c. Selection of interviews d. Specific documents to be reviewed before each interview e. Resources needed for data collection	
IV	Ethical considerations	
V	Outline of case study	
VI	Data analysis	

VII	Time line	
VIII	List of contacts	
IX	Field journal	

Case Study Questions: Demographic Questions

1. Gender

1. Female

2. How old are you?

1. 18-24
2. 25-31
3. 32-38
4. 39-45
5. 45-51
6. 52-58
7. 59-65

3. What is your marital status?

1. Married
2. Single or widowed
3. Divorced

4. Do you have children?

1. Yes
2. No

How many? _____

5. What is the highest level of education you have received?

1. Incomplete secondary school (8-9 years or less)
2. Specialized secondary school completed (technical or vocational school)
3. Complete secondary school (10-11 years)
4. Incomplete higher education
5. Complete higher education
6. Other, please specify _____

7. What was your occupation in Russia?

1. Independent entrepreneur / owner of a private business
2. Employee in a private company
3. Junior-level government official
4. Mid-level government official
5. Student
6. College professor/scientific researcher
7. Farmer
8. Unemployed
9. Shuttle trader
10. Other, please specify _____

8. Number of years since returning to Kyrgyzstan

9. What is your current occupation?

Data Collection Procedures

Types of data to be collected:

- In-person interviews
- Site visits
- Document reviews available statistical data, publications of international organizations dealing with migration.

Sites to be visited:

My main contact in Batken Oblast will be Aida Musaeva, a PhD candidate, who has graciously agreed to help me recruit participants. In the Kemin district of Chui Oblast, I will utilize my network, and I believe identifying returnees in Kemin will not be difficult. This is because in many communities, including my own, there is at least one labor migrant in every other household, who is either a current migrant worker or a returnee.

Selection of interviewees:

I plan to interview 24 (twenty-four) female returnees in Kyrgyzstan. The study will include only those current labor migrants who have spent at least two years in Russia. I will conduct in-

person interviews to collect demographic information. Additionally, follow-up phone interviews may be conducted to validate the points of analysis and descriptions identified during the data analysis process. Depending on when data saturation is reached, I may adjust the number of interviews either upwards or downwards. Furthermore, I will pre-test the interview questions— in other words, conduct pilot interviews with 1-2 respondents—to ensure the questions are clear and well-structured.

Resources needed for data collection:

- Digital recorder, batteries, cell phone voice recorder as a backup
- Bottled water (during interviews)
- Transportation
- Notebook
- Post-it notes
- Pens and highlighters
- Other resources might be added as the study progresses

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent from all participants will be sought before starting interviews or any other interactions, including observations. I will maintain strict anonymity of interviewees. Privacy and confidentiality of the names of the participants will be maintained by keeping the participants' names anonymous, and all of the materials will be kept in password-protected files on my notebook. No information will be released in any manner that could identify an interviewee.

I will upload and save the interviews to folders on Google Drive. It can easily be done, since I will use a digital voice recorder, which allows to download and save all the interviews on a computer and process further. Participants will be instructed to respond as honestly and accurately as they can during the interviews. The Corvinus University of Budapest IRB permission will be obtained before initiating the data collection for the study.

Outline of Case Study

Upon completion of data collection and analysis, a case study report will be prepared with the following sections:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.4 Purpose of the Study and Research Question

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

Migrant

Labor Migrants

Remittances

Returnees

Post-migration living difficulties

Transnational motherhood

Vulnerability

Feminization

Feminization of Migration

1.6 Labour Migration from Kyrgyzstan: An overview

Summary

CHAPTER 2: PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Female Migrant Vulnerability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Sociological Perspective

Psychological Perspective

Economic Perspective

Health Perspective

The Interdisciplinary Nature of Vulnerability

2.2 Thematic areas for further discussions and analyses

2.3 Examining Vulnerabilities in Transnational Motherhood

Vulnerability in Transnational Motherhood: Sociological Perspective

Vulnerability in Transnational Motherhood: Psychological Perspective

Vulnerability in Transnational Motherhood: Economic Perspective

Vulnerability in Transnational Motherhood: Health Perspective

2.4 Main Points of this subsection

2.5 Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination in Russia: Dimensions of Vulnerability

Sociological Perspective

Psychological Perspective

Economic Perspective

Health Perspective

2.6 Main Points of this subsection

2.7 Additional theories related to Gender and Return Migration

Gender and Migration

Return Migration

2.8 Developing Qualitative Propositions

Proposition 1-5

Summary

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Research Design: Qualitative Method

Research Method

Case Study

3.1 Data Collection

Sampling Method

Participants

Research Study Site

Interviews

3.2 Participant Information

3.3 Data Analysis

3.4 Validity and Reliability

3.5 Ethical Issues

3.6 Limitations of the Study

3.7 Possible Biases of the Researcher

Summary

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA IN RELATION TO THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Financial Hardship

Family Dynamics

Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia

Health-Related Issues

Transnational Motherhood

Economic Benefits of Migration

4.1 Post-Migration Living Difficulties

Financial Hardship

Family Dynamics

Stigmatization of Returnees

4.2 Matching Theoretical Propositions

Proposition One: *Women in Kyrgyzstan are increasingly initiating migration decisions*

independently, thereby reflecting and contributing to the broader theory of the feminization of migration

Proposition Two: *Women migrating from Kyrgyzstan encounter significant socio-economic, health, and legal challenges that not only shape their migration experience but also critically influence their decision to return home*

Racism and Discrimination

Health Issues

Financial Hardship

Proposition Three: Post-migration challenges faced by migrants are more significant and enduring than those encountered during the migration period

Financial Hardship

Transnational Motherhood

Health Issues

Adaptation Issues

Stigmatization of Returnees

Proposition Four: Female migrants' remittances are primarily allocated to basic household needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, with limited investment in long-term economic development

Use of Remittances: Debt Repayment and Housing

Use of Remittances: Investment in Children's Education

Use of Remittances: Business and Housing Investment

Use of Remittances: Preparation for Marriage

Remittances as a Source of Family Financial Security

Summary

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Summary

5.1 Main findings and contribution to the literature

Post-Migration Living Difficulties

Reflecting on New Migration

Challenges and Vulnerabilities Experienced During Migration

Economic Benefits

Family Dynamics and Return

5.2 Conclusion

5.3 Proposed Future Research

Data Analyses and Presentation

Interview data will be transcribed and a deductive analyses will be conducted both manually and using computer software. The main strategy guiding the analysis of the data collected during the field research is pattern-matching. I will match the patterns of experiences and stories of returned female migrants with the predicted propositions stipulated at the beginning of this proposal. Such pattern matching is a good technique to link data to propositions and to ensure the internal validity (Yin, 2003) of the study. As with all qualitative studies, I will return to participants throughout the data collection period to confirm the findings and to recheck particular findings.

Time Line

A Gantt chart will be used to guide the researcher for completing the study in time. The chart includes the following activities:

- Participant recruitment
- Data collection
- Review of findings: Clarifications and accuracy
- Final study report

Summer 2021 – Fall 2023- 2024									
	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April
Participant Recruitment	■	■	■	■					
Interviews		■	■	■	■				
Follow-up interviews									
Document collection and review	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Observations		■	■	■	■	■			
Data analysis		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Report writing			■	■	■	■	■	■	
Feedback on report					■	■	■		
Final draft							■	■	

List of Contacts

I will keep a list of contact of interviewees. The list will not be shared with anyone other than my supervisor.

Full Name	Phone(s)	E-mail(s)	Role	Availability
Ainura Smailova	996 (700) 500 305	ainura.smailova@uni.corvinus.hu	Researcher	Spring-Summer 2021

Field journal - Observation entrees

This section will be used to make observation entries. Observations will be made while meeting and participating in labor migrants' activities. The researcher will read this section before every interview so that challenging areas can be addressed appropriately.

For ethical issues, I will follow the Corvinus University of Budapest's research ethics guidelines:

<https://www.uni-corvinus.hu/main-page/about-the-university/senate-university-committees/kutatasetikai-bizottsag/related-documents/?lang=en>

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to be in a research study about the experiences of returned female migrants from Russia to Kyrgyzstan. You were selected as a possible participant because the interviewer knows you and assumes you have had experience related to the topic. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by the student for her PhD dissertation data from the Corivnus University of Budapest.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to the experiences of returned female migrants from Russia to Kyrgyzstan. I am trying to understand the challenges female migrants face upon return to Kyrgyzstan.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following: participate in audio recorded semi structured interview. The interview may take place more than one time and will take about one hour.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has a risk. You might remember some unpleasant memories that might make you feel bad.

The benefit to participation is you might like to talk about your experiences.

You will receive no payment for participating in the interview.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In the report I write for my dissertation I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a password protected file. As soon as the tape has been transcribed, it will be erased within the next three weeks.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Corvinus University of Budapest. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this interview is: Ainura Smailova. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at this address: Karalaeva 40/6 , Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. You may also contact me at my cell phone or whatsapp (996) 700 500 305 or by e-mail at: smailovaainura@gmail.com

МАКУЛДУК КАГАЗЫ

Сиз азыркы жана мурдагы (кайтып келген) жумушчу мигранттардын иш-тажрыйбасы жонундогу илимий изилдөөгө катышууга чакырылып жатасыз.

Сиз бул илимий изилдөөгө чакырылганыңыздын себеби, бул изилдөөчү сизди билет жана бул илимий изилдөөнүн жагдайы жөнүндө тажрыйбасы бар жана жакшы билет деп эсептейт.

Биз сизди бул кагазды окуп суроолоруңуз болсо тактагандан кийин гана бул илимий изилдөөгө катышууга макудугуңузду беришинизди суранабыз.

Бул илимий изилдөө Будапешттеги Корвинус Университетинин докторантынын диссертациясына керектүү маалыматтарды чогултууга карата жүргүзүзүлүп жатат.

Тактоо Маалыматы:

Бул илимий иштин максаты жумуш миграциясынын онугууга болгон таасирин Россиядагы а жана Кыргызстанга кайтып келген жумушчу болгон кыз келин мигранттардын иш-тажрыйбасы аркылуу изилдөө.

Биз Кыргыз жумуш миграциясынын кыйынчылыктарын жана пайдалуу жактарын тушунууга аракет кылып жатабыз.

Иш-аракеттер:

Эгер сиз бул илимий изилдөөгө катышууга макудук берсеңиз, биз сизден төмөндөгү нерселерди сурайбыз: жарым эркин мазмуну бар маектешүүнү үн-алгычка жаздырганга катышасыз.

Бул маектешүү бир жолкудан көбүүрөөк болушу мүмкүн жана бир саатка жакын созулат.

Бул Илимий Изилдөөгө Катышуунун Тобокел жана Пайдалуу Жактары:

Бул илимий иштин тобокел жагы бар. Сиз өзүңүзгө жагымсыз нерселерди эстеп өзүңүздү жаман сезишиңиз мүмкүн.

Пайдалуу жагы сиз өзүңүздүн башыңыздан өткөргөн нерселер жөнүндө сүйлөгөндү жакшы көрүшүңүз мүмкүн

Сиз бул илимий изилдөөгө катышкандыгыңыз үчүн эч нерсе төлөнбөйт.

Жашыруундуулугу:

Бул илимий иштин мазмуну жашыруун жерде сакталат. Менин диссертацияма колдонулган маалыматтар сиздин аты-жөнүңүздү жана башка маалыматтарды бере турган жагдайлары болбойт.

Бул илимий иштин мазмуну кулпуланган жерде сакталат; Мен башка бирөөнү бул маектешүүлөрдү кагазга жазып бергенге жалдашым мүмкүн.

Ал адам бул маалыматтарды жашыруун сакташы туралуу сабак алат. Үн-алгычка жазылган маектешүүлөр кагазга жазылып бүтөр менен өчүрүлөт; Бул иш кийинки үч жуманын ичинде болот.

Бул Илимий Изилдөөгө Катышуунун Эркиндик Жактары:

Сиздин бул илимий изилдөөгө катышуу же катышпоо жөнүндө чечимиңиз сиздин Миннесота Университети менен болгон азыркы же келечектеги мамилеңизге эч таасирин тийгизбейт.

Эгер сиз бул илимий изилдөөгө катышууга макул болсоңуз, сиз өзүңүз каалаган убакта чыгып кете аласыз, жана сиздин бул чечимиңиздин эч таасирин болбойт.

Байланыштар жана Суроолор:

Бул илимий ишти изилдөөчүнүн аты: Айнура Смаилова. Сиз азыр каалаган сурооңузду бере аласыз. Эгерде сизде кийинчирээк суроолоруңуз болсо, сиз мага төмөндөгү дарек аркылуу **кайрылуунузду суранам**: Каралаева 40/6, 8-Квартира, Бишкек, Кыргызстан. Сиз ошондой эле менин телефонума чалсаңыз болот: (996) 700 500 305, же болбосо э-почта аркылуу: smailovaainura@gmail.com

Сизге бул макулдук кагазынын копиясы өзүңүздүн жеке архивиңиз үчүн сактаганга берилет.