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Article

Economic Orphans: How Parents' Labor Migration Alters the Financial Values of Teenagers in Samarkand

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Abstract: In many developing regions, labor migration is a common phenomenon to address the shortage of economic opportunities at home. While research on labor migration often focuses on macroeconomic factors, its impact on the children of migrant parents remains understudied. In Uzbekistan, where millions of adults work abroad, an increasing number of teenagers are raised without one or both parents, identified as "economic orphans." This paper explores how labor migration affects the financial priorities and behaviors of these adolescents in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, as a case study for broader trends in the region. The purpose of the study is to compare the financial responsibility and decision-making skills of two adolescent groups: those whose parents are currently employed abroad and those whose parents are in the country. Thirty people participated in a survey that assessed their budgeting, remittance usage, saving and spending patterns. According to the findings, adolescents in migrant families are more financially disciplined, more active in paying home expenditures and saving inducement. Youngsters whose parents stayed back in the country are more likely to buy non-essentials and have less control over their finances. The findings indicate that parental migration causes not only a breakdown in family structure but also an earlier financial responsibility placed on children. Adolescents in many migrant families have no choice but to take responsibility for their own expenditure which leads to adult-like financial behaviors.

Keywords: Labor Migration, Economic Orphans, Uzbekistan, Financial Values

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1. Introduction

In many developing countries, such as Eastern European, Asian, African, and Latin American ones, adults often leave in search of better economic opportunities abroad [1].

They often end up leaving their children under the care of other family members for many years. These children, often considered as "economic orphans" in their communities, grow up without at least one or sometimes both parents, which can result not only in emotional impact on the child's development, but also changes to how they view expenses, responsibilities, and consumption [2].

Statistics show that by January 2023, approximately 2.1 million adults had left Uzbekistan for employment abroad [3]. While exact data on the number of children living without one or both parents due to labor migration is unavailable, a rough estimate can be made. Considering that around 547,700 of these migrants were women (Development Strategy Center, 2025) and using the national average fertility rate of 3.4 children per woman, the estimate can be made that over 1.8 million children may have been left at home by their migrant mothers [4]. However, this figure does not account for variables such as children's ages, caregiving arrangements, or the possibility that not all women who migrated are mothers [5].

Research on the diverse impacts of labor migration on both origin and destination countries has mostly focused on skills and their gap, migration patterns, economic and social impacts on both sides, and population dynamics, among other issues [6], [7]. Such studies on labor migration and its impact on Uzbekistan are scarce, mostly focusing on such macroeconomic factors as the patterns of labor migration, its impact on domestic employment macroeconomic conditions leading to the "feminization" of migration from Uzbekistan, among other issues [6], [8], [9]. However, no available studies have examined the effects of parents' labor migration on their children. This research is aimed to fill that gap. Understanding how children adapt financially after the migration of their parents is necessary to implement or form better policies and support systems. Such insights can help better understand the financial behavior of economic orphans to raise awareness of yet another dimension of labor migration impact [10].

Literature Review

Labor migration has been a major subject of study across various fields, but the financial effect on teenagers left behind is largely unexplored. Even though there are studies conducted to evaluate the economic benefits of remittances, a small number of efforts are put into an examination of how this trend shapes financial values and behavior.

Remittances received from migrant workers have a positive effect on poverty reduction and the consumption capacity of households (Adams & Page, 2005). In countries such as the Philippines, Mexico, and Uzbekistan, such remittance incomes have led to greater education access and improved health outcomes for children [11]. However, these benefits are strongly focused on material outcomes, but not the aspect this research will cover.

Financial literacy and values are typically formed during adolescence and by other factors such as family saving and spending habits, peer influence, and socio-economic status [12].

As Castles and Delgado's study found, economic orphanhood in most cases shapes how children view money. In many migrant-sending societies, remittances become symbols of success, and youngsters may associate money with status or love. This, in turn, may shift values creating a guilty mindset when spending money sent by parents who work under complicated conditions [13], [14], [15].

Despite the abundance of data on migration rates and remittances, there is little research on changes in financial values and behaviors.

By surveying economic orphans and regular children, this research will offer new insights into how the migration of parents affects the spending behavior of economic 'orphans'.

2. Materials and Methods

This study will adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys to investigate how labor migration affects the financial values of teenagers whose parents are employed abroad.

The research paper consists of comparisons between two groups:

a. Group A - 15 teenagers whose parents work in the country of permanent residence of a child.
b. Group B - 15 teenagers whose parents left the country for job opportunities.

A convenience sampling method was adopted to recruit the participants in the author's social circles and acquaintances in Samarkand. The respondents were explained the research goals and eligibility criteria to identify their interest and suitability for the criteria.

The survey questions included demographic data (age, gender, parents' employment place) and specific questions on their financial behaviors. The survey asked specific questions on teen financial values and spending behaviors such as financial attitudes, spending and saving habits, and remittance handling (for migrant families). Moreover, the participants in group B, whose parents were labor migrants, were given an option to provide additional comments about their situation and behavior that was used to enrich their survey responses.

Respondents' selection of multiple-choice options were done by the author in a face-to-face setting, anonymously.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis is based on survey data that explored their spending priorities, saving behaviors, and tracking methods. The comparison highlights differences, providing information on how family structure influences financial literacy in teenagers.

Spending Habits of Group A

As the first question, they were asked to list their top three expenses. In Group A, eating out, clothing, and transportation were the most frequently reported spending expenses. Entertainment activities included going to movies, concerts, and gaming clubs. As shown in the chart, a significant number of Group A participants stated that they spent most of their money on entertainment and eating out. This indicates a tendency to give priority towards leisure activities.

The data shows a group of children with relatively few financial responsibilities. Since their parents tend to pay for their basic needs, children in this group appear to spend more money when it comes to non-essential items. This independence results in a spending pattern that puts lifestyle and enjoyment above necessities for survival or housekeeping.

Spending Habits of Group B

Participants in Group B were asked the same question regarding their top three expenses. The results were different. The expense that Group B mentioned the most was food, as well as clothes and school supplies. Unlike Group A, entertainment was rarely cited as a priority. Children in Group B are more likely to spend their money on necessities and education than on leisure activities, which makes the difference notable.

Often, they have taken on additional responsibilities at home, like managing their parents' remittances. Their financial decisions are therefore wiser and demonstrate that they place a higher priority on necessities than desires.

Saving Habits and Attitudes

The next survey question asked participants whether they save money. The majority of children in Group A mentioned that they save money at times. Their saving habits were not consistent; they tended to put money aside only when they happened to have extra money. Some mentioned saving small amounts regularly, but it was not a habit.

Responses from Group B differed. Nearly all of the participants in this group reported saving money on a regular basis. Saving money wasn't a habit for many, but rather a necessity.They stated they are careful to set aside money and control money management, to cover specific needs like school supplies, unexpected bills, or family-related expenses.

Some of the household finances are frequently left to these kids to manage. This greater responsibility encourages a more consistent and careful approach to saving.

Tracking Spending and Financial Awareness

Another important question in the survey asked whether participants track their spending. This question was intended to determine whether children attempt to manage their fiancees and how aware they are of their financial behavior.

Most Group A participants indicated they don't monitor their spending. In fact, eleven of the fifteen participants accepted that they did not have a system or method in place to keep track of their financial expenses.

In contrast, Group B demonstrated a significantly higher level of commitment to financial monitoring. Roughly 75% of respondents claimed to closely monitor their spendings. Children made efforts to keep track of their spending through the use of apps, notebooks, or mentally. Their actions indicate that they possess self-control and budgeting.

Additional Insights from Group B

Participants were asked to consider the aspects that affected their financial habits in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the reasons behind Group B children's actions. Many claimed that being forced to take on greater responsibility at an early age was a result of their parents' absence.nChildren often have important roles in managing the family budget in households where remittances are their main source of income.

They control their own finances and frequently take part in decisions regarding household expenses. This could be helping younger siblings with everyday expenses, paying school fees, or going grocery shopping. When a child is capable of carrying out such tasks, they become more financially literate and mature.

Table 1. Compares the top expenses between Group A and Group B — showing that Group A spends more on entertainment, while Group B prioritizes food and school supplies.

No	Expense category	Group A (%)	Group B (%)
1.	Food	30	35
2.	Clothing	25	30
3.	Transportation	20	10
4.	School Supplies	5	20
5.	Entertainment	20	5

Table 2. summarizes saving habits — only 20% of Group A are regular savers compared to 80% in Group B.

No	Group	Regular Savers (%)	Occasional Savers (%)	Non-savers (%)
1.	Group A	20	50	30
2.	Group B	80	15	5

Table 3. details financial tracking behavior — most of Group A doesn't track spending, while 75% of Group B uses some form of tracking.

No	Tracking method	Group A (%)	Group B (%)
1.	No Tracking	70	25

2.	Mental Tracking	20	35
3.	Notebook/App Tracking	10	40

Figure 1 bellow visually compares the percentage of regular savers and those who track spending between both groups, showing Group B's stronger financial responsibility.

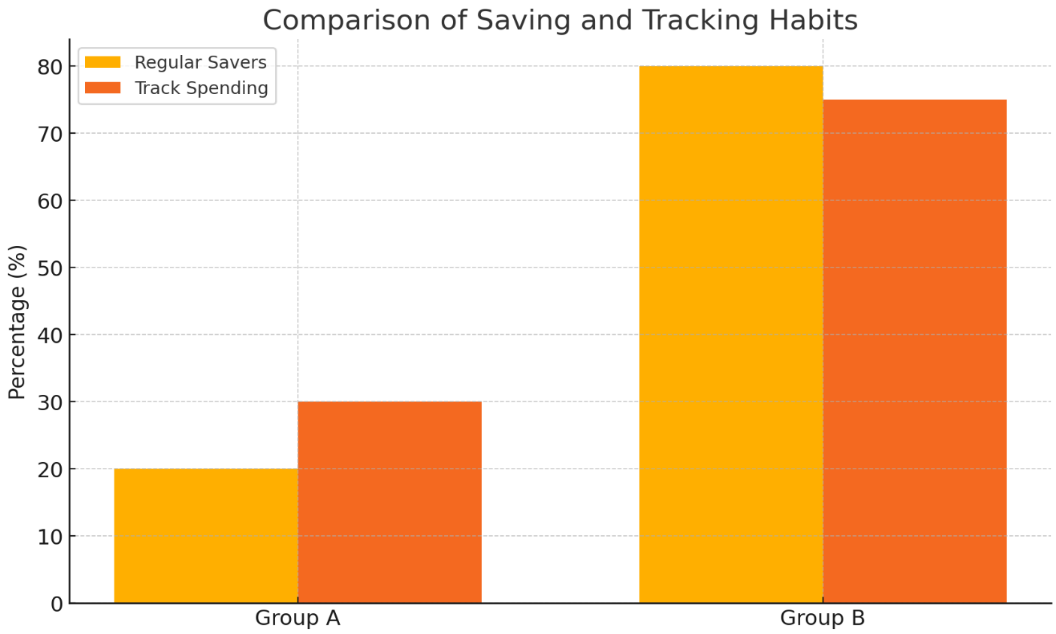

Figure 1. Comparison of saving and tracking habits.

Some children also mentioned that their financial habits were influenced by watching older siblings or guardians manage money. In the absence of direct parental guidance, they learned by observing others or through trial and error. Others expressed a sense of duty to use their money wisely in honor of the sacrifices their parents made by working abroad.

4. Conclusion

This research paper examined the influence of labor migration on teenagers' financial values and behavior in Samarkand who grew up with and without their parents around. The results indicated several differences between the two groups - adolescents whose parents stay in the country (Group A), and their counterparts whose parents are employed abroad (Group B). Interestingly, Group B adolescents were more likely to be responsible with the money they have, keep savings, and track expenses. Group A teenagers spent more on entertainment and did not show the same consistency in budgeting. Absence of parents due to migration can possibly lead to children possessing financial responsibility and independence earlier. Yet there might be a psychological cost to financial independence at such an early stage of life - young people in Group B often reports feelings of aloneness, emotional remoteness from their parents, and the need to succeed financially, perhaps because they realize the sacrifices of migrant parents. Many also expressed anxiety about the future and a lack of emotional support during critical developmental years. These hidden emotional struggles can affect how they see themselves, how they connect with others, and how they handle life in the long run. Therefore, while labor migration may promote financial maturity, it can leave deep emotional gaps, as well.

Looking ahead, future research would be fascinating to either make a larger group across different regions to find potential regional differences. Moreover, researchers could study how the involvement of the community or the government could influence the financial behaviors of such adolescents. Moreover, longitudinal studies are needed to track the long-term effects of parents' labor migration on their children in adulthood throughout different life stages.

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