Rowing Against Climate Adversity and Lack of Family Support: The Everyday Lives of Migrants' Wives in Rural Mozambique

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Abstract

There are numerous studies on the participation in migratory work by men from the Gaza Province, whether to the mines in South Africa or Mozambican cities, in particular the city of Maputo. However, studies that analyze the psychosocial conditions of migrants' wives about their relationships with their family, friends, neighbors, and their teenage children are still incipient. For this reason, we assert that this study is typical of sub-Saharan Africa and reveals the vulnerability of middle-age and aging women. In all these studies, there are common aspects that characterize the vulnerability of married women, widows, or single women with or without children. They live within a patriarchal context that determines who brings the bread, whom they marry, how many children they should have, their role as caretakers of the family, and the roles of the ones who take care of the farm and the elderly. The dominant patriarchal system in southern Mozambique determines a man's masculinity based on his ability to perform work that generates income for his family. The literature shows that the generational masculine ideology among men in traditional communities begins from childhood and is perpetuated from generation to generation, with the man marrying as many women as he can afford. The female harem is necessary to guarantee the perpetuation of the name or nickname of that lineage. What we endeavor to demonstrate in this article is that all the women's statements, whether in the focus group discussions (FGDs) or individually, reflect the burden of patriarchal relations still dominant in rural Gazan society. We also show that the organization of labor during crisis situations results in a cascade of events that include: women lacking food and other necessities; women forced to sever their relationships with their in-laws, grown and undergrown children, peers, and relatives. This results in stress and other health-related issues, as well as diminished confidence in planning for the future. The paper aims to respond to these questions: (1) What help do women receive from their children, family, and friends when they have a migrant husband? What kind of help does a migrant wife or ex-migrant wife provide to others? (2)What help do women receive from their children, family, and friends when they have a non-migrant husband? (3) To what extent does this contribute to women's well-being? (4) What help do mothers give their children?

Keywords: migrants' wives, climate adversity, family support, rural Mozambique

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INTRODUCTION

There are several studies on men migrating from the province of Gaza, whether to the mines in South Africa or to Mozambican cities, in particular the capital city, Maputo (De Vletter, 2000; Matusse, 2009; Raimundo, 2010; Saíde and Pitrosse, 2012). However, research that analyzes the psychosocial condition of migrants' wives about their relationships with their children, family, friends and neighbors is still incipient. For this reason, we believe that this study is relevant to much of sub-Saharan Africa and reveals the vulnerability of middle-aged and aging women. In all these studies, there are common aspects that characterize the vulnerability of married women, widows, or single women with or without children. They live within a patriarchal context that determines who provides the food, whom they marry, how many children they should have, their role as caretakers of the family, and the role of those who take care of the farm and the elderly.

The dominant patriarchal system in southern Mozambique determines a man's masculinity based on his ability to perform work that can generate income for his family. As WLSA (1997; 2014), Uchendu (2008), Raimundo (2008) and Raimundo et al. (2023) point out, the masculine ideology among men begins from childhood and is perpetuated from generation to generation, with the man marrying as many women as he can afford. The female harem is necessary to guarantee the perpetuation of the name or nickname of that lineage.

This article aims to respond to the following questions: (1) What support do women married to migrants receive from their children, family, and friends? (2) What kind of support do migrants' wives or ex-migrants' wives provide to others? (3) How is this support different from support provided and received by non-migrants' wives? (4) To what extent does this support contribute to women's well-being?

STUDY BACKGROUND

This article is based on several years of meticulous data collection on the reproductive situation and coping strategies of women of reproductive age since 2006. The findings presented here are part of the project, "Women's social ties and psychosocial well-being in a resource-limited patriarchal setting: A longitudinal perspective," which is a continuation of our studies on women married to migrants and those married to non-migrants. These sequential studies, focusing on the same women since 2006, hold significant implications for our understanding of women's reproductive health and coping strategies during crises.

We have studied these women in rural communities in four districts of Gaza Province since they were between 18 and 40 years old (Agadjanian et al., 2012; Raimundo, 2013; Martins-Fonteyn et al., 2016, 2017). The new wave of the project was designed from the perspective of studying the critical importance of the relationship between women and their children, family members, neighbors, and

church members in contexts of change in the rural economy, increasingly affected by the reduction in the migratory work of spouses to South Africa.

Rural southern Mozambique has depended on migratory labor for the mines of South Africa for three centuries (De Vletter, 2000; Gaspar, 2011) and is undergoing transformation for several reasons, including the reduction in labor recruitment in South Africa. On the other hand, although studies show that parental migration delays girls' marriage (Chae et al., 2017; Agadjanian et al., 2021), it is a fact that when the young women get married, they pay less attention to their mothers, who have cared for them for long periods. For this reason, the study intended to evaluate how this abandonment of mothers by their children has a psychosocial impact on the lives of rural women who suffer the burden of caring for young children and the absence of their husbands. We also collected information about women whose husbands no longer migrate. We evaluate the support that husbands provide their wives when they are at home and absent and how this affects their psychosocial well-being. As the province is affected by extreme weather events, we also wanted to assess the support that these women receive from and give to their children, families, church members, and the community.

FEMINIST THEORY IN THE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL RELATIONS OF RURAL WOMEN, WIVES OF MIGRANTS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

In dialogue with Mason's (2021) thinking about the meaning of sociological theory, we posit that it is an ongoing effort applied to understanding the organizational structure of a society and its institutions. However, it can be transformative and difficult to access and understand. This is what we see in the rural family structure in Mozambique as a consequence of the social and economic transformations of recent years that have transformed Mozambique from a centralized economy to neoliberalism (Hansine et al., 2024).

Crossman (2024) argues in his functionalist theory that the family institution exists because it plays a vital role in the functioning of society. In line with this theory, we examine the relationships between family members, between spouses, and the roles of each person in society and in the family. This foregrounds the study of social relations between men and women within the context of work, the family, and in society in general. This structure represents the social organization of work based on the sexual division of labor, where males are positioned in the productive sphere while females are relegated to the reproductive sphere (Andrade et al., 1998; Curado, 2008; Crossman, 2024; Salzinger and Gonsalves, 2024). This constitutes the complementary division of tasks. Here, according to Curado (2008), this social division of labor has two organizing principles: the principle of separation, that is, there is men's work and women's work. The second principle is that of hierarchy, where men's work is accorded higher value than women's work. However, Salzinger and Gonsalves (2024) state that feminist postcolonial theory emerges as a theory of how gender operates in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, problematizing

binary gender and relations of domination, an assumption defended by Jose (2012), whose work highlights women's empowerment in a context in which women are forced to accept their role of subordination to men.

This study, which focuses on women whose husbands are labor migrants or former migrants, highlights the complexity of the situation of these women in both circumstances. In the absence of their husbands, they must guarantee their families' livelihoods (Yabiku et al., 2011), and in this process, their lives become intertwined with their in-laws, children, neighbors, and community church members. Furthermore, women are required to adapt to the changing realities around the drastic reduction of the workforce in South Africa. Moreover, they must find ways of coping with the harmful effects of climatic events as well as the transformation of the Mozambican economy. They increasingly find that what was common and manageable during the last three decades is no longer in place. Most notably, the practice of women supporting one another, as well as their own children, has been eroded, as revealed by the women during the focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews.

Our understanding of the dynamics of relationships between women and their husbands, children, other family members, neighbors, and church members was enhanced by the application of feminist interview research, in which the co-author participated in FGDs with some women from the Chibuto District. Reinharz (1998) considers this a methodological technique used by feminists. Notwithstanding the importance of recognizing the importance of knowing the other side of the psychosocial history of women, this study did not include any men in the interviews.

SOCIAL TIES AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING AMONG RURAL WOMEN: A STUDY CONTEXT

According to the research project, the main objective is to contribute to understanding midlife women's vulnerabilities and corresponding coping strategies in low-income patriarchal rural settings, specifically in southern Mozambique, where society is patriarchal par excellence (WLSA, 1997; Bagnol, 2008; Tvedten, 2011, 2014). The main argument in this type of society is that because of migratory work, women and their children are forced to adopt various strategies to reduce their vulnerability due to the prolonged absence of their husband, partner, or father because of migratory work. Funke et al. (2020) point out that these communities live in challenging climatic environments due to drought, cyclones, and floods that regularly affect those districts. Some coping strategies include *xitique*[3] and *xicoropa*.[4]

Much of the information we bring into analysis refers to this particular study and is data from several years of data collection since we started in 2006. This data helped us understand the scenario of households in rural areas and, consequently, the pressure women endure in the face of an almost hostile climate and children who need assistance. Many of their children are already over 18 years old, and some are

[3] Informal credit system (personal communication).
[4] Harvest assistance system (personal communication).

married. The data used in this study was collected through a survey of 1884 women, FGDs (initially in two communities of Chibuto) and interviews of 74 women who were selected from the survey sample.

Southern Mozambique, a society deeply rooted in patrilineal norms, sustains its economy through agriculture, cattle-rearing, and fishing (Raimundo, 2008; Tvedten, 2011). In this societal structure, men hold more authority than women, and households led by men tend to be in better condition than those led by women (WLSA, 1997, 2014; Tvedten, 2012; Raimundo et al., 2023). This societal context forms the backdrop of our study, where we delve into the vulnerabilities and coping strategies of midlife women in this patriarchal rural setting.

In the patriarchal systems of southern Mozambique, the man is the breadwinner and, therefore, as Castel-Branco (2020), Bagnol (2008), Covane (2001), Vletter (2000), WLSA (1997, 2014) observe, the man is the one who migrates in search of work and money to feed his family and help their family members. Meanwhile, some studies acknowledge women as breadwinners in cross-border trade (Raimundo, 2010; Chikanda and Raimundo, 2017). First (1977) noted that initially, migratory work to South Africa was limited to the provinces of Gaza, Inhambane, and Maputo. However, in recent times, workers have been recruited from other parts of Mozambique (Saíde and Pitrosse, 2012), bringing about transformations in these societies. That said, in communities where women still do not go out to look for monetary alternatives when their partners are absent for long periods, they expect to receive help from their older children or other family members. When this does not happen, the psychological pressure is enormous and has adverse effects on the individual's well-being and the satisfaction of their needs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research process was conducted sequentially. It began with two FGDs in the Chibuto district, followed by in-depth interviews administered to 74 women in the four districts of Gaza Province (Chibuto, Chókwè, Guijá, and Manjacaze). The first author conducted the FGDs, and the in-depth interviews were conducted by a team of trained interviewers. The primary purpose of the FGDs was to refine the research instruments, particularly about the type of questions to be asked. The in-depth interviews, conducted in two parts, focused on various aspects of a woman's life, including her relationship with her husband, physical and mental health, and psychosocial well-being. Surveys, semi-structured interviews, and FGDs were used with women whose main characteristics included the following: aged between 35 and 60; being married, previously married, separated, divorced, or widowed; with children; and living in the study community. During the interviews and FGDs, we sought to preserve respect for the rights of each interviewee or study participant. Issues such as the importance of the participation of each woman selected for the study as well as how the interviewers behaved toward the interviewee (for example, body language) and during the interview, command of the Changana (the language

spoken in the Gaza Province) language, trust, confidentiality, and not questioning opinions ensured the success of data collection. Respondents were assured that every opinion was valid and that there was no right or wrong answer. Through the signed consent form, we guaranteed them the freedom to be part of the study and assured them of confidentiality and anonymity.

The article is based on qualitative information that resulted from the FGD discussions and individual interviews. The FGDs took place before the interviews to adapt the interview script prepared by the researchers. The interviews were carried out in two different sessions. The FGDs consisted of the following questions:

- The first session consisted of questions on social relationships and the exchange of support, and the second session consisted of questions about physical and mental health and psychosocial well-being, which were always connected with their relationship with their children, and whether this relationship changed as their children grew up and formed their own homes.
- The second group of questions focused on the social support mothers should offer their adult children by indicating differences in contexts, for example, a married daughter or a daughter living in their community, or their home, or outside the community. This complex exploration aimed to uncover the type of obligations and duties that mothers still had in relation to their married children.
- The third group of questions concerned the social support exchanges with other community members, in-laws, their children, family members, neighbors, friends, and church members. From the experience of one of the authors of this article, who grew up knowing that their family is not just their family but their neighbor, and with their neighbor, they can ask for salt, fire, or in the absence of money, they can pay for products or wait until it was time for harvesting cashew nuts to sell and repay the money borrowed.
- We wanted to know how relationships had changed between mothers and their grown children over the years in widowed, separated, or abandoned instances, or eventually in cases where their children got married or moved to other communities.

Regarding the individual interviews, we tried to find out the following:

- Relationship with husband/permanent partner.
- Characteristics of and relationships with biological adolescent and adult children (i.e., children born before 2010).
- We explored the interviewees' characteristics and relationships with "almost-children", that is, individuals born before 2010 whom they considered as their own children, despite not being their biological mothers.
- Relationship with their adult family members.
- Relationship with husband's family.
- Relationship with other wives of the husband/partner (in a polygamous union).

- Relationships with non-family members, such as friends and neighbors, people with whom they work or conduct business.
- Relationship with church members.

In reference to the second part of the interview, we sought to know the following:

- Mental health status and problems.
- Feelings and emotions.
- The impact of extreme weather events and agricultural pests on their lives.
- Access to and use of information and communication technologies.
- Perceptions and expectations about life in general and the future.

In our study, we had to follow some women who had changed residences and settled in the city of Maputo (face-to-face interviews) and others in South Africa (through telephonic interviews). Therefore, we anticipated that there may be a bias in reality, as these women no longer experienced rural reality.

Since both FGDs and interviews were undertaken in Changana, we translated verbatim into Portuguese. After reading the translations, we grasped the real meaning. The interviews were recorded using codes and transcription to guarantee confidentiality and prevent women from being tracked. For the analysis, we did content analysis, where we tried to find the meaning of what they said, considering the context of the study.

RESULTS

The lived experience of being a migrant's wife in rural southern Mozambique

In southern Mozambique, the fact that women are married through bridewealth (*lobolo*[5] in Changana) often leads men to seek employment through labor migration to South Africa or in urban areas such as Maputo (Raimundo, 2008; Pinho, 2011; Penvenne, 2019). Penvenne (2019) states that a woman is paid *lobolo*, which means that the man can have that woman as his wife, and her children would live and work in his home. That practice is known to be virilocal. Some of these women, whose husbands or fathers died in migration, were marginalized and vulnerable to sexual abuse.

A lonely woman who does not have a husband or a male protector is considered a vulnerable woman. This situation continues to affect most of the women we interviewed, with a more significant psychosocial impact on them. Interviewed women said that the current situation is aggravated for women because it is complex, due to poverty. The suffering is widespread, with people having nothing to wear or to

[5] In southern Mozambique, marriage is an exchange of services and goods between families in which the tools – the compensation obtained by the woman's family – establish the union between the two families. *Lobolo* serves both the woman's brother and the father, who "acquires" the wife. It, therefore, has a double material meaning: material and symbolic. By transferring power from the woman's family to the husband's family, transferring to the husband's relatives the responsibility for the maintenance of the woman and making the woman the collective "property" of the new family, *lobolo* legitimizes inequality (Andrade et al., 1998: 49).

eat, highlighting the lack of basic necessities and invoking a sense of empathy in the audience: "We have no one to take care of us."

However, a married woman also has the duty of taking care of her husband, according to this statement:

> Yes, I can talk about it – the journey of my life with him, of loving and caring for each other. As I sit in my backyard at home with *madala* [elder], these marriage things make me obligated to my husband. I tried to go out to do other things, but I couldn't, so I returned and sat with my *madala*. However, *madala* does not see; his eyes are dead [blind], poor thing [*Mbuia Nguana*]. (Interview, 16 November 2023).

Support networks for women with migrant husbands: Receiving help from children, family, friends, and the church

Unlike in urban areas, rural women are still very dependent on a man and his employment status, as the breadwinner. Our extensive research on the wives of migrants has uncovered a significant differentiation between being a wife of a migrant laborer and being a wife of a man who is not a migrant laborer. Paradoxically, it is the woman whose husband is a migrant laborer who seems to have more support than the woman whose husband is not; as the popular saying in Gaza goes: "The water of the river goes to the ocean where there is already water and not to the desert."

Studies also demonstrate that it is this woman who has a high social-status migrant husband who is "sitting well," as respondents say, and then the rest because they have someone who "wears pants" as he can provide for his family. Even the occasional work that men do in South Africa transforms them into providers, as one interviewee shared:

> Where he can do odd jobs, he can give us money, but the money is not much; it gives us food and soap.

However, when these men are at home without paid work, they demonstrate their adaptability by seeking local alternative sources of income. As one interviewee shared:

> I also support him by going to the farm. I get things from the farm; at that time, when we get things [from] the farm, he goes to work on other things at home.

To ascertain the well-being of these wives of migrant workers, we asked them from whom they got support and whether they paid *lobolo* or not. We found a range of different situations regarding who supported them. Their husbands should be the ones to take care of them, as per customary law. However, in many cases, these women have to rely on friends or neighbors, as this woman said:

> I am fortunate to have a strong relationship with my neighbors. They are the ones who usually support me even when I am not at home. When I am out, I am confident about leaving my children as even now, they are there, looking

> out for them. This sense of community support is comforting and reassuring in our lives.

Even though this general trend of lacking support persists in some communities, it is important to hear the personal experiences of those affected. As one woman shared,

> I am saying that I have support from my neighbors. The reason for this statement is that even if I do not have anything to put on the fire, while they do, they can give it to me. So, I believe we live well. Yes, because they know our friend has nothing to eat.

Occasionally, in-laws play an essential role in the absence or presence of their son. A married woman's family is formed by her in-laws, as by *lobolo*, she belongs to that family. However, with the change in the economy in rural areas and the increase in poverty, these relatives disappeared and no longer paid attention to that woman, especially the widow, which contradicts the tradition that a widow still belongs to that family until she gets married again.

The widows declared themselves as not having a family because of their widowed status. This happens in the case where the relatives passed away, as one participant said:

> My family all died. I have no family. My family members are my children. I have no family here with my body if they all died.

Some rely on their children:

> When it comes to advice, they support me. For example, I told you that we advise children when there is something they are not doing right, and they tell me I will support them; we support each other, educate children, you see.

They also trust in the church:

> So, I also, when there are things that are pressing on my neck [things that I can't find a solution for], for them, and I see that this isn't right, when I can't do it as I'm alone, I go to church, as I pray. I present it at church, so they can support me to counsel these children.

Tragically, the most prevalent situation is where women lack support from their children and husbands. As one woman lamented,

> Nothing! They haven't given me anything yet.

The relationships between sons and daughters and their mothers change over time. According to those interviewed in the FGDs, the main issues are as follows:

> In our times, children listened to their parents more than they do today. Young people skip stages these days and get married prematurely. On the young

> women's side, they establish multiple relationships, get pregnant very early, and are not able to identify who the child's father is.

Mutual aid in rural communities in Mozambique is common. This social support is offered during weeding or harvesting on the farm or through monetary loans, advice, and in situations of need. The support often occurs between family members, church members, and neighbors. However, it is expected that this support exists between sons and daughters, especially in cases of children who already have some financial income. Nonetheless, that support is more significant among women who have secure income, for example, from remittances sent by their migrant husbands, than those who do not have a secure source of income. In these types of situations, the woman who asks her children for support is not necessarily asking for money but to resolve domestic problems. For example, a woman, when asked about her sources of support for health issues, shared this:

> My children who live with me assist. I have a child who resides with me, and my daughter-in-law creates conditions to take care of me, including work in the *machamba* [farm], as I was incapacitated and unable to do anything at the time.

The woman can also ask her neighbors or community residents for support during harvesting. Under these circumstances, she can pay them, or she will repay someone in need on the next occasion. In Mucotwene, aid can come from the community, or as the inhabitants believe, that the greatest help of all can only come from God, as illustrated by this testimony:

> Even though there is someone to support, the most significant thing is to deliver to God. When you seek human support, you may receive conflicting ideas that only add to your confusion. However, when you align with God, you will find that things improve and pass. Instead of listening to the opinions of people that can fill your head, focus on the improvement that comes from God's guidance.

Meanwhile, about the friends, she said:

> The friends I live with, in most cases we support ourselves during ceremonies and, in some cases, in the *machamba*, especially when I have a big bush. I say friends, and we will clean it. I have money, and I give them back, too. It happens to me, too. I support when someone has a bush or needs support with family issues or from the household.

She expects to receive support from her family in the event of illness or death. One of the women said this about the family's support:

> When we have problems, we bring the family together. We sat down, talked, and agreed. When I talk about the family, I refer to the family members who are my husband's parents. If necessary, my parents, too, usually participate.

Sometimes, there is still a traditional relationship structure in which the mother advises her married daughters regarding relationships with children. This is the case with one interviewee, who spoke of the support she receives from her children and the support she provides to them:

> I support them. Supporting them means praying for them because nothing is easy in their lives. All things require patience.

This mutual respect is a testament to the depth of their bond. In general, women in the category of traditional mother-daughter relationships are socially and economically stable. However, only a small percentage of women were found in this category during the study, indicating its rarity in contemporary society.

The interviewees expressed their tiredness with their children in this scenario. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for their children to give them any support. On the contrary, they are the ones who support their children even though they have nothing to offer, as they said. This selflessness is a clear demonstration of the love and sacrifice in the relationship.

The contribution of socio-economic support structures to women's well-being

Well-being can mean many things, but in Changana, the word well-being means *kutsamissekile* or "well seated" (verbatim translation). When someone is well seated, it means they cannot fall (personal comment). However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2011) considers well-being as a concept of subjectivity. In this article, based on current data, we considered social connections, and some look at environmental quality conditioned by the climate conditions.

The main concern of the United Nations (UN), as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, is that countries must ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages (UN, 2015). Moreover, the UN indicates factors that can impair good health, which include the environment, access to healthcare services, access to good quality services, water of good quality, financial hardship, and the limitations of countries, particularly those in development. Understanding health in the context of our study means going beyond physical health and considering the social aspects, which means understanding women's emotions as migrants' wives and understanding the nature of their marriage – whether formal (civil registration) or traditional (*lobolo*). That is to say, if that man followed the formalities or the rules. In this regard, the interviewees cited instances where the male partners did not follow the rules, which in Changana means *cupola*, or that the woman was regarded as an intruder in that family because he did not pay *lobolo*. As an "intruder," she was not deserving of aid.

In any circumstance of a woman needing support, whether she has a migrant husband or not, support is essential and contributes to social and psychological well-being. Although there are differences in social status between women with migrant husbands and women whose husbands either were migrants or are no longer

migrants, it was possible to demonstrate through several interviews that regardless of their position, there are always moments when they need social support. The fact that the husband is a migrant does not necessarily mean that he provides appropriate assistance. On the other hand, a migrant husband does not always earn enough to send money to his family. There are also cases where the man is in South Africa, but, "He is sitting. He does not work or does occasional work. So, there is no way for him to [provide] support."

However, the money that is sent is sometimes administered by the mother-in-law or the husband's family, as we saw in earlier stages of the study. In this instance, the contribution is regarded as social support in general.

These statements suggest a certain conformity on the part of the woman, a situation that significantly deteriorates the living conditions of her and her immediate family, such as her children or almost-children.

Nonetheless, our research uncovered instances where husbands provided support to their wives. This was observed mainly in cases where the couple lived together, and the husband's job had ended or been interrupted by illness. For instance, one wife shared,

> My husband supports me with many things, especially when we take the hoe and go to the farm with me. We cultivate the lowland [*bilene*] and the uplands [*ntlavene*]. Because when we get corn there, we get it. In the forests, we grow corn, cassava, and sweet potatoes; it supports us here in the backyard. He cut reeds, put bundles [*ti nhandza*] of reeds. When people come to buy, they buy, and we can take that money to support us with what is needed here in the backyard.

The relationship between mothers and children

When asked if her husband is a migrant worker, one of Chihaquelane's interviewees said,

> My husband works. It is in Cape Town. He works when he can in the construction area. I relate very well with him. There is communication between us and the brothers; we also speak well with them. When we make a mistake, we resolve the problem among ourselves.

Meanwhile, a woman from Chalucuane, whose husband is not a migrant, said the following about resolving health problems and other problems:

> I didn't do anything; he wasn't in South Africa; he was here at home, then he went to South Africa when the situation worsened.

Therefore, going to South Africa is a mechanism to minimize marital problems, whether in the economic or social areas. Working itself brings about positive changes in the marriage situation, as a woman from Chalucuane said.

Continuing with our findings, we postulate that one of the significant transformations recorded in rural areas is that daughters, who in the past provided support to their mothers, no longer do so. This scenario upsets the mothers, who no longer know what to do. There are several reasons for this new way of life for daughters and their relationship with their mothers. The reasons are as follows:

> Life is more difficult for them from my point of view. Nowadays, some young women have to have implants, which later cause health problems and prevent them from getting married later. Nowadays, young women make life decisions on their own. As mothers, it is difficult for us to see the life they lead. Young women today respond to the government's call to prevent early pregnancy and forget to prevent sexually transmitted diseases.

Meanwhile, their sons behave as follows:

> Young people leave because they are tired of their mother and do not want to support her; young people are often pressured by their wives to leave their mother's house. Sometimes, they leave because the family is enormous and the space is too [small]. When they become adults, children raised only by their mothers are induced by their parents to accuse their mothers of being witches and abandon them. On the other way, our sons drink a lot, do not have a job, and most are on antiretroviral treatment, and all of these are violent towards their families.

A good relationship between children and their mothers can only exist when the mother is mature, as per the following statement:

> What makes the difference, is the mother's maturity and maintaining a productive dialogue with her children. It is essential that mothers do not interfere in the lives of married adult children and that mothers establish an understanding between the mother, the sons, and the daughter-in-law.

Social support received from children by women with migrant and non-migrant husbands

Migrant work is dominant in rural families in southern Mozambique. Several generations of families have always lived off migrant work, whereas the women who remained behind played a crucial role in farm work, a role that is often underappreciated. So, it is not surprising that women with migrant husbands are seen by society as being the ones who are doing well. Migratory work gains more importance in arid and semi-arid areas of the Gaza Province, such as the districts under study, where drought does not guarantee sustainable agriculture capable of feeding the family throughout the year. The various testimonies clearly show that women with migrant husbands are in better conditions than the others, especially when this man sends money to, for example, hire someone to help clean the forest, deforest, or even, in some cases, harvest. The tangle of relationships developed in these communities, whether with children, relatives, non-relatives, or church members, should not be neglected. What

stands out is that in the four districts, women are in a situation of extreme vulnerability due to their high dependence on their husbands' work and expect to have support from children and other relatives. One respondent explained:

> When I, the mother, have things that require their advice, I encourage them to support me because the big person supports the little one, and the little one supports the big one. Until now, the teaching is that children, even when they are 6 or 12, have a say among you in the backyard when you live together. It is necessary to give them a speech; to speak, they can. Because you can leave, this child won't support me at all, while there will be a word to support you big ones here in the yard.

Support provided by women with migrant and non-migrant husbands to their children

The support that women give to their children, whether their husbands are migrants or non-migrants, varies significantly. However, there is a saying that, "Where you eat, two can eat, regardless of whether you have income or not."

Also, anyone can give support, as the women themselves said. Support may not necessarily be financial; it can be through life advice:

> We advise our daughters to know how to behave at home. There are also cases where they support build[ing] a home (*kuyahkela a munti*) or make an excellent farm to prevent plagues or cure some diseases.

It is a considerable burden when a woman raises her children without their father or support from other family members, including in-laws. This situation creates anxiety and stress because they feel helpless in caring for or providing assistance to their children, as one said:

> My daughter has already left school, as she studied for [the] seventh [grade], and so, the money for me to pay for her further studies couldn't do it. I didn't have money. So, I told my daughter to learn to cultivate, like me, her mother who lives off managing a hoe. (Nalaze, 20 November 2023).

Furthermore, they get stressed when they lose their houses due to wind or rain, according to the same interviewee:

> What kills me hard, is suffering with the house, my friend. You see, our homes here in our community are not good. When there is rain, there is this: it collapses. You can find something to do. But where capacities are low, you can't do it. The heart hurts, yes. Even more serious is that there is no support in this nature.

Scholars of psychoanalysis such as Santos and de Souza Minayo (2020) and de Macedo Bezerra (2018), quoting Sigmund Freud, demonstrate that mothers are more attached to their children than fathers. This relationship continues into adulthood, marriage, or outside the parental home. A mother always bears her child's pain.

Regardless of the support she may or may not receive from her child, she will always do her best to support them. One participant explained:

> We advise them to go to church and to pray. My children are mine. It doesn't matter the age. When they are sick or lack the money to go to the hospital, I must support them. I give them money to go to the hospital because there is a hospital nearby, but there is another one where you have to take a bus and go to Chibuto. So, when I have money, I have to give it. (Mucotuene, 11 November 2023).

Critical shifts in post-independence Mozambique: Shortage of assistance and interpersonal connections

After independence, many mutual aid, support, and assistance practices changed. These changes were exacerbated by the neoliberal economy that Mozambique began to adopt from the 1990s onward (Hansine et al., 2024). Even more so, poverty and the effects of extreme weather events appear to be factors in these transformations in rural areas. That situation hinders any possible aid, as related by a woman of Nalazi:

> [It] happens nowadays when I have concerns here at my house, they don't even approach me, they don't come.

There are many explanations for the relationship between mothers and their children and vice versa; each is valid, depending on the context. The interviews reflect the entire post-independence Mozambique journey, which includes the 16-year war, forced displacement, and integration between people of different origins. This complex situation, as one of the women highlighted, underscores the importance of reciprocity in community support:

> Why don't they support me? I'm at a loss. They don't assist me because of their lack of work habits. They're idle. So, without a job, I also realize what can you do? Can you aid others when you have nothing to sustain yourself? You go, the person until you support him is because you also take it, take it, then, you can support your other brother to be well.

INTERSECTION OF WOMEN'S HEALTH, CLIMATE SHOCKS, AND SPOUSAL ABSENCE IN RURAL MOZAMBIQUE

Following the interview guide, we discuss three kinds of health problems: physical, spiritual, and mental, which are shown to be the most critical for rural women. Regarding their physical health, our interviewees indicated that headaches, uterine pain, and fever constitute the primary diseases.

Rural women's narratives on the impact of extreme weather events on physical health

Living amid significant economic challenges, the absence of a breadwinner and a rural environment devastated by extreme weather events render rural women's situation even more complicated. That situation worsens when they do not have systematic support and cannot support their families. Common illnesses reported are malaria and body aches, as stated by this interviewee from Nalaze:

> I sometimes have pain, but then it gets better. I go to the hospital, and it gets better.

Asked about whom she goes to when she is sick, she replied:

> In a situation of illness, I go alone. No one accompanies me to the hospital. I haven't gotten sick of not being able to handle anything yet. I get sick, finding that my head hurts. I go to the hospital; I have Metical (Mozambican currency) to pay. I hand it in, and they give me pills, and I take them. And it ends up getting better. (Nalaze, 20 November 2023).

Another reported physical illness is pain in the uterus and feet, according to an interviewee from Matola-Rio, Maputo. This woman is from the Guijá district but changed her residence to Maputo. She said the following:

> This year was challenging because my husband was at home and did not work. So, now I had to do something. Now I see it does not seem very easy when you don't work. I've been experiencing persistent pain in my uterus and feet. It's a sharp, stabbing pain that makes it difficult to move. I went to the hospital; I went everywhere; they gave me pills. I always take tablets; I apply balm when the temperature changes. The one who supports me is my husband, who accompanies me to the hospital. But my uterus has been hurting; I went for a test, and those tests thought that maybe it was cancer, but the results showed that it was not cancer; it just hurt the uterus. Yes. It hurts. I only got the balm part. (Matola-Rio, 22 December 2023).

Impact of spiritual issues on rural women's health

Many interviewees believe in spirits and feel mistreated by them. The leading cause of these spirits is a woman who has yet to go through the *lobolo* ritual, which still needs to be completed. Bagnol (2008) points out that although *lobolo* is no longer a compulsory practice among some families, it is a moral duty to compensate the bride's family for the creation and for the fact that her family is losing someone who helped them. When the *lobolo* does not occur, evil spirits can torment this woman and generate social disagreements. As one interviewee said:

> Attacks from spirits occur frequently. It has happened to me, but I quickly throw them away. I don't keep them in my heart. Otherwise, it could give me illnesses that I no longer get. (Nalaze, 20 November 2023).

Rural women's narratives on mental health

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) reports that mental health disorders and anxiety are increasingly prevalent among adults of working age, often stemming from social issues like inequalities. It also highlights a significant barrier to addressing these issues – societal taboos. This was evident in our interviews, where many participants viewed mental health through the lens of a "madness disease." Yet these women are keenly aware of the daily challenges that contribute to their anxiety and stress. One interviewee from Matola-Rio poignantly expressed this, stating:

> I can say that it doesn't exist, but when you think about it too much, it causes illnesses. Just thank God when I wake up. I had mental health problems when I lost my father and mother, but then it passed in my heart because people helped me to comfort me in those problems. (Matola-Rio, 22 December 2023).

WOMEN'S COPING STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS: IMPORTANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

Climate change, with its diverse and unique impacts on different regions, presents an opportunity for positive change through effective disaster risk reduction (INGC et al., 2003). The Atlas for Disaster Preparedness and the Response in the Limpopo Basin (2003), the Master Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction 2017–2030 (República de Moçambique, 2017), and Pereira et al. (2018) all point to the Limpopo Valley, particularly the Gaza Province, as a disaster risk zone. This region is characterized by cyclical floods and prolonged periods of drought, with a very high risk due to the influence of subtropical high pressures, leading to erratic and unreliable rainfall (INGC et al., 2003).

Currently, climate change has a greater impact on communities than before. In the recent past, people helped one another in different ways, such as offering a cup of flour or maize or even doing some work at a neighbor's or friend's *machamba*; however, these days those relations have been broken. One participant's statements illustrate these changes:

> Our *machamba*, dependent on the rain, struggles under the intense heat. In the absence of external aid, our community's support is crucial. When we come together as a family, we can navigate the complexities and support each other. In the absence of such unity, and with no other work to be found, we must rely on our own resourcefulness from the break of dawn.

The migratory work of men, often viewed through the lens of masculinity or family economy, has changed as a response to the adverse impacts of climatic events and economic change. This work becomes a crucial alternative when agriculture is rain-fed, and women lack food reserves. The phrase "every man for himself and God for all" takes on a practical meaning in extreme crises.

Psychosocial stress escalates hopelessness and frustration among those who have been hit by climate extremes and the economic crisis. The situation is compounded as spouses either stop working or engage in occasional work, leaving men without the support they need in these dire circumstances. When asked how they cope with climatic events, some women in different communities responded, "Sit down." Others rely on the resources they manage to store or the goodwill of family members. However, it is clear that even in extreme crises, the solidarity networks that once provided support within the community are diminishing.

Xivunga or *matsoni*, a type of traditional support in rural areas, is a beautiful example of mutual benefit. Low-income households tackle complex jobs such as *kurimela* (doing farming for someone), providing agricultural services in exchange for food or money (WLSA, 1997, 2014). Even when a woman is without money, she can still survive by offering *kurimela* in exchange for it. In such a situation, both she and the farm owner can benefit. However, the current crisis has limited these opportunities, making their situation even more challenging. These transformations have significantly altered kinship relationships, particularly in the context of extended and explicit families. In the past, it was common for children to visit their mothers and assist with fieldwork. However, currently, even their own husbands find it challenging to provide the same level of support.

Under extreme climatic events, solidarity among women and support from others in rural areas are more crucial than ever. As these events become more frequent, women may witness more and more broken relationships, as their children no longer take care of them. Additionally, their husbands, who work in precarious conditions, can no longer support them. Extreme climatic events disturb their livelihoods, and in the immediate future, they will no longer be able to handle the situation. As a consequence, they will be in extreme psychosocial straits.

THE NEW LABOR MIGRATION STANDARD CAUSED BY EXTREME CLIMATIC EVENTS: IMPACTS ON MIGRANTS' WIVES

The recurrent extreme climatic events, namely droughts, floods, and cyclones in the Limpopo Basin, have led to increased migration, as the studied districts are in the so-called risk zone to climatic events that induce forced migration (INGC et al., 2003). Therefore, despite the reduction in migratory work, men from these districts, with or without a work contract, seek means of crossing the border in search of ways to support their families. The study shows that those who suffer the most are the women who are affected by extreme drought or those found in the riverside areas of the Basin. It is these districts, particularly Guijá, Chókwè, and Chibuto, that are most adversely affected by the floods (INGC et al., 2003; Funke et al., 2020).

South Africa is the country that continues to receive Mozambican migrants, either as cross-border migrants or as irregular or undocumented individuals who once fled the 16-year war and in the process escaped the effects of floods and droughts (Funke et al., 2020). However, while climatic events are sharpening and

men opt for migration, it is evident that this is no solution. Once these men are in South Africa, they are not readily integrated into formal work due to their irregular migration status, resulting in their inability to remit adequate money or food home.

CONCLUSIONS

This work is based on data collected as part of the "Women's Ties and Psychosocial Well-being" Project in all four rural districts, highlighting that women struggle daily because of the break of their relationships with their relatives and children. The interviews unveiled the importance of a male presence in rural areas, as women often rely on them, primarily for financial support. However, we also witnessed a shifting landscape, where some women were actively seeking employment to secure their income while others contemplated a departure from their communities.

- Throughout the interviews, it was evident that rural women regularly suffer various types of stress and physical illnesses; their primary coping mechanism is the occasional support they receive.
- The significant reduction in the type of aid was justified by the scarcity of a means of livelihood. Despite their best efforts, women can only provide limited support to their children, often in the form of advice. Few women receive support from their children.
- Having a husband who is a migrant who remits money makes a big difference in the rural communities of the Gaza Province, as it provides a crucial financial lifeline that supports these families in coping with the challenges of rural life.
- The situation worsens due to climatic factors – lack of rain, inundations, and floods – and a shortage of jobs for their children, who hardly feed their families.
- Poverty is widespread, and inequalities are increasing among women dwellers, including their children, regardless of whether they are married or not, or living with them or not.
- As wives of migrants, these women were doing well, as they could provide material support not only to their children (even as grown-ups) but also to other family members and neighbors. They had the means to offer psychological or associated support. However, with their husbands losing their jobs in South Africa and other cities, they were limited in providing support to others.
- Support from their children has also diminished because of the transformations in rural areas where children regard their mothers as burdens with multiple needs.
- Whatever prevailing support between mothers and their children should continue. This mutual support is not just a necessity but a shared responsibility that both parties should strive to uphold.

It is evident that rural areas have been affected by the reduction in labor recruitment to South Africa over the last few decades. These women have always depended on the migrant work of their husbands. The income from this work was used to improve

agricultural activities through the purchase of work instruments and the payment of people who support them by cultivating or harvesting. These women received support from family, neighbors, and church members during this period. The reduction in migratory work and the harmful effects of extreme weather events are indicators that their aid has been reduced. Neither the children nor the closest relatives support them any longer. Isolation, the lack of alternative income, and the lack of support from others have powerful psychosocial impacts on these rural women. Relationships deteriorate because mutual support has become nonexistent. This situation affects women and their children, who have limited opportunities to study. When their children get married because they do not have work, it eliminates any potential support that mothers were hoping for, rendering their lives even more precarious.

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