Digital Media, Gulf Migration Aspirations, and Masculine Identity among Educated Youth in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper presents the discussion of how digital media affects the Gulf migration desires and masculine self-identification among the educated unemployed youth in the Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A qualitative approach was used in collecting data, which consisted of 12 in-depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions with a total of 30 participants based in Karak, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat. The results indicate that unemployment puts strain on young men to assume provider roles, which results in frustration and identity stress. The social media, including WhatsApp, Tik Tok, and Facebook, amplify the desire to migrate by exposing youngsters to the success of migrants in foreign countries. Migration is perceived as an economic objective as well as a means of earning social respect and masculine status due to remittances. The findings of the study include the conclusion that a digital media influence has a significant role in the formation of aspirations, social comparison, and identity formation among the unemployed youth in the area.

Key Words: *Digital media, unemployed youth, qualitative, KPK.*

1. Introduction

The migration of labor to the Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar has long been a significant component of the South Asian economies. During years, it has been regarded as a means of making money, improving social status and supporting families. Nonetheless, recent research indicates that digital media has now become a significant factor affecting migration as well as

economic factors. Migration theories (de Haas, 2021, 2023) explain that people do not simply migrate due to poverty, but rather due to their aspirations, opportunities, and social factors. In the modern world, there are lots of educated and jobless young people, who consider the migration as the way to get better future. The social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook as well as Tik Tok are significant when it comes to influencing migration ideas. On such platforms, there are success stories of migrants which bring hope, pressure and comparison among the youth.

Unemployment of educated youth is a grave issue in Pakistan. Most young men are frustrated as they are unable to get employed. With a society that expects men to work and provide families, unemployment presents a masculinity crisis. In the theory of Connell, the aspect of being a provider is a significant role in male life.

Migration assists most of the young men to regain their respect and social status since through remittance, families are honored. Bourdieu describes it as symbolic capital whereby money made in foreign countries makes one more socially respectable. In such districts as Karak, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat, there are a large number of young men who use smartphones and social media on a daily basis. They get pictures of success of Gulf countries, including lavish lifestyles and remittances, which make them even more willing to migrate. These pictures evoke such feelings as hope, pressure and comparison. But there has been very minimal research done in Pakistan on the influence of digital media on both the concept of migration and the idea of masculinity (especially in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa).

This paper thus examines the role of social media in shaping migration intentions and masculine identity of educated unemployed young people in the region. It demonstrates that the digital media does not merely share information, but also enhances social pressure and defines the perception of success, adulthood, and respect in the eyes of young men.

Literature Review

Labor migration between countries has been one of the characteristics of South Asian economies, particularly in the Gulf region. The focus of traditional migration studies was put on the economic push–pull factors, but recent scholarship has shown that migration aspirations are becoming more and more influenced by digital technologies and social networks (de Haas, 2021; Leurs and Smets, 2018). Migration is not just an economic choice but within a culturally embedded project of social mobility, prestige and identity formation in the context of educated but unemployed youth.

2.1 Digital Media and Migration Aspirations

Digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, Tik Tok, and Facebook now form a core of influencing the imaginaries of youth migration. As demonstrated by Dekker and Engbersen (2014), social media has the power to reform migrant networks by disseminating edited versions about success stories, which heighten the desire among youths. Likewise, Leurs and Smets (2018) show that online representations of mobility produce so-called digital imaginaries, which shape life decisions in situations with limited opportunities locally.

In South Asia, Rahman (2023) points out that social media is a factor that inspires and causes pressure, whereby exposure online correlates positively with the desire to migrate. It means that the digital media is a mediator of migration not only as an economic strategy but as a social status, peer comparison, and gendered expectations marker. Although increasing research has been done on digital migration in South Asia, little focus has been made on Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa- a region where there is high-educated unemployment and high-gulf migration networks. Furthermore, limited literature examines the role of digital media in the interaction with masculine identity in shaping migration desires.

2.2 Unemployment, Masculinity, and Social Identity

The unemployment rate among youths in Pakistan is well-known as one of the factors contributing to delayed adulthood, social frustrations, and identity anxiety (Kakar et al., 2022; Ahmed and Hussain, 2023). Economic provision is a characteristic of masculinity in the patriarchal societies (Connell, 1995). According to Bridges and Pascoe (2014), the phenomenon of labor precarity disrupts the traditional male roles, whereas Messerschmidt (2018) emphasizes that migration tends to become a strategy aimed at restoring the threatened masculinity. The concept of symbolic capital introduced by Bourdieu (1986) explains the meaning of the remittances as the measure of the social prestige and masculine status. In the Global South, earning overseas means respect, marriageability and influence in kinship networks (Appadurai, 2004). The current literature primarily addresses the effect of economic outcomes and masculinity in isolation but limited studies have been done to link exposure to digital media directly to the construction of masculine identity among unemployed young people in underexplored areas of Pakistan.

2.3 Global Context and Comparative Insights

The other Global South contexts offer some valuable comparisons. The social media in the Philippines transforms migration desires through the promotion of peer comparison and idealized lifestyles in other countries (Yang and Martinez, 2020). On the same note, in Bangladesh, online migrant networks enhance the hope and anxiety among the young people towards foreign employment (Haque, 2019).

The implications of these findings are that digital migration imaginaries are not isolated to Pakistan but instead are reflective of a larger global trend. Nevertheless, local cultural and social settings are also important in influencing the construction of masculine identity through the migration aspirations. In spite of comparative studies, there is a lack of qualitative evidence on how digital media can both affect migration aspirations and influence masculine identity in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

2.4 Research Gap

The existing literature emphasizes the economical, social, and cultural aspects of the youth migration, masculinity, and digital influence. Nevertheless, the combination of these three variables—digital media, masculinity, and Gulf migration desires—has hardly been explored in

Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This is why this study aims to fill this gap by integrating the concept of aspirational vision of de Haas, his aspiration-capability framework, the theory of hegemonic masculinity by Connell and the concept of symbolic capital by Bourdieu to understand the role of digital exposure in enhancing gendered aspirations under economically precocious conditions.

Research Objectives

- The research question is: what is the role of social media in shaping the Gulf migration aspirations among the educated unemployed young people?
- To explore how the digital migration narratives affect the formation of masculine identity.
- To discuss the interactions between economic and social constraints and digital imaginaries to influence youth aspirations.
- To have a perspective on negotiating their dreams and masculine identity within the digital and structural environment; the strategies youth apply to negotiate their dreams and masculine identity in the digital and structural environment.

Research Questions

- How do social media platforms shape Gulf migration aspirations among educated unemployed youth in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
- How do digital representations of migrant success influence the masculine identity of these youth?
- How do economic precarity and local social expectations interact with digital migration imaginaries?
- How do youth negotiate their aspirations and masculine identity in the context of structural constraints and online narratives?

Scope of the Study

This research aims at educated unemployed male youth in the Southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, i.e. in Karak, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat. It looks into the effect of social media on Gulf migration aspirations and masculine identity among young men aged 22-32 years and who have completed at least a bachelor degree. The participants are active users of platforms, like WhatsApp, Tik Tok, and Facebook.The paper examines the ways in which digital media influences their ambitions, perception of social status, and gendered identity through the lens of unemployment and economic precarity. It utilizes a qualitative methodology, which relies on the semi-structured interviews as a way of capturing the lived experiences and perceptions. This research lacks female subjects, other parts of Pakistan, and macro-level economies and concentrates on subjective experience and digital impacts on youth identity.

Significance of the Study

By offering new qualitative data on the role of social media in influencing the Gulf migration aspirations and masculine identity in the cohort of educated unemployed youth. It puts emphasis on the role of digital media in exacerbating aspiration, social comparison, and gendered pressure in circumstances of unemployment by concentrating on Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a region that has been less studied.The results contribute to the understanding of the way young men perceive online depictions of migrant success and how these impact their status and identity. The research also provides viable information to policy makers, educators and development practitioners in Global South, in combating youth unemployment, digital influence and gender based social expectations in the Global South.

Theoretical Framework

The two main sociological theories are used to guide this study in an attempt to understand how social media influences migration aspirations and masculine identity among educated unemployed youths in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Hegemonic Masculinity (R. W. Connell, 1995) describes that societies construct a dominant ideology of masculinity which focuses on economic provision, family responsibility and social respect. When these expectations are not met by the males, identity stress, social stigma, and emotional strain are often experienced. Unemployed educated youth are under pressure to become providers and gain respect in the context of the present research, and the stories of successful Gulf migrants told by the social media increase their feeling of inadequacy or aspiration. The theory developed by Connell could be used to explain how these young men negotiate their masculine identity within peer, family, and online space, and tie together economic precarity to gendered expectations.

The prestige, honor, social recognition that people acquire because of accomplishments or socially esteemed behaviors are known as Symbolic Capital (Pierre Bourdieu, 1986). Remittances in the case of Gulf migration is not an ordinary flow of money but a representation of status and social respect, as well as masculine success within the community. Migration is seen by the youth as a source of getting symbolic capital and improving their social status. The theory developed by Bourdieu enables this research to examine how the participants perceive the online successful stories and the social value of migration, relating economic benefits to identity formation and social recognition.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study is qualitative research design to examine how social media impacts migration aspirations and masculine identity among educated unemployed youth in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Qualitative research enables one to have a first-hand feeling of personal experience, perception and social reality of the participants which are not captured in a quantitative research. The selected area is Karak, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat, which have experience of high youth unemployment as well as high aspirations of gulf migration.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to collect data. It involved a total of 12 IDIs each consisting of 4 participants in each district to capture detailed personal accounts about the use of social media, migration aspirations and experiences of masculinity identity. Also, 6 FGDs were conducted, 2 FGDs per district, and 3 participants in each FGD, to observe collective discussions, peer interactions and shared views on migration and masculinity.

The IDIs and the FGDs were carried out independently, that is, the participants of the IDIs did not take part in the FGDs. This strategy was necessary in order to make sure that the personal contemplations and the discussion in a group are not biased. This combination of the two methods offered a holistic perspective of the phenomenon and the personal and social aspects.

4.3 Sampling Technique and Participants

The sample size was carefully chosen to include 30 participants (12 participants of IDI and 18 participants of FGD). Participants were aged 22-32 years, had at least a bachelors degree and were actively using digital applications, including WhatsApp, Tik Tok, and Facebook. To achieve the objective of gathering information related to the impact of digital media on the migration aspirations and masculine identity, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants who would be able to give relevant information on the influence of digital media on migration aspirations and masculine identity.

The participants were distributed across the three districts as follows:

District	IDIs	FGDs	Total Participants
Karak	4	6 (2 FGDs × 3)	10
Bannu	4	6 (2 FGDs × 3)	10
Lakki Marwat	4	6 (2 FGDs × 3)	10
Total	12	18	30

4.4 Data Analysis

The research used the thematic analysis as a systematic way of interpreting qualitative data. All focus group discussions and interviews were verbatim transcribed, and codes were developed based on emerging patterns, which included social media influence, migration aspirations, and masculinity. Themes were subsequently discovered to reflect common ideas, oppositions, and unconventional views among the participants. The IDIs and FGDs increased credibility, richness, and depth of the findings.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics were highly adhered to. The participants had been informed in full about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and had given a voluntary consent. A sense of anonymity was upheld, and cultural sensitivity was ensured, taking into consideration the social norms of Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Finding of the study

Theme 1: Provider Failure and Frustrated Masculinity

This theme is a reflection of the extreme pressure and frustration of unemployed educated youth in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in that they are unable to live up to the socially expected roles of a provider. A 27-year-old man, who is a native of Karak, said, "I am a loser at home. My friends in the Gulf are sending money home, supporting their families, but I cannot even buy my mother small gift. People consider me as a loser. Likewise, one of the participants of Bannu has said that, I have finished my education, and I am already unemployed. I see my cousins getting married because they are earning outside the country. During group discussions, these experiences were reinforced by the group members. In one of the Lakki Marwat FGD, one of the participants commented by saying that even when we see our friends in WhatsApp groups, we can see our friends who are overseas sending money. We are ashamed to discuss our life here. Another added, it is not only about money but about respect and is being a man before your family. The researcher noted that such a theme appeared because the lack of work and the social norms and digital exposure intersected. Young people continually contrast themselves with digitally connected peers in other countries, and it heightens their sense of inadequacy, and some tried to cope with the stress of masculinity passively, without directly challenging social conventions. The given theme is consistent with the existing literature, which underlines that education and unemployment are the main factors that contribute to frustration, delayed adulthood, and social marginalization in South Asia (Kakar et al., 2022; Ahmed and Hussain, 2023), and social media exacerbates all of these pressures (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Messerschmidt, 2018). It satisfies the first research question, to investigate the effects of social media on the social and economic self-perception of young men, and answers the research question of how the social media influences the social and economic self-perception of young men. In theory, Hegemonic Masculinity (1995) by R. W. Connell, explains that masculinity of dominance comes with economic provision and social respect, failure of which produces identity stress, and the Bourdieuian symbolic capital (1986) highlights that failure to provide economically and socially results in a loss of social recognition. To conclude, Theme 1 reveals that provider failure leads to a masculine identity crisis among the youth, which is culturally formed, through peer competition, and digital media, and thus proves that unemployment is not just a matter of economics but a matter of social and psychological depth and intensity.

Theme 2: Digital Migration Aspirations

The theme of how social media sites like WhatsApp, Tik Tok and Facebook influence the migration intentions of educated unemployed youth in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is highlighted. One 24-year-old male Bannu resident confessed to scroll through Tik Tok everyday and watching videos of his friends working in Dubai and sending money home. It gets me to reason, why am I here, without even a little job? Another respondent in Karak said, even within WhatsApp groups, people are sharing their stories of life in the Gulf, and it seems like everyone is moving forward and I am being left behind. During group discussions, participants were able to recount to the group their shared experiences of being compared online. In one of the Lakki Marwat FGDs, one participant responded that we discuss in our group chats who went abroad first and who is sending money, it becomes a competition of who is more successful. One other one added, even by watching small videos on TikTok, you dream about living a better life somewhere abroad. It is everywhere, school friends, cousins, everyone is speaking about it. The researcher noted that digital exposure leads young people to actively construct imagined futures based on their social status and aspirations, with social media constantly updating on migration opportunities, remittance flows, and lifestyles abroad, which enhance aspirations and highlight the gap between current status and desired social position. This theme is connected to the second research objective, to study the role of digital platforms in the development of youth migration aspirations, and answers the research question of how digital platforms play a role in the formation of youth migration aspirations. In theory, the symbolic capital of Bourdieu (1986), which explains that migration and remittances are the signs of social prestige and respect in the community, is relevant because, according to Connell, Hegemonic Masculinity theory (1995) explains that migration and earning abroad is viewed as a way to meet the masculine expectations. These results are confirmed by international literature, which demonstrates that digital media has an impact on the migration imaginaries and creates aspirational pressures among the youth in South Asia (Appadurai, 2004; Rahman, 2023). In short, Theme 2 shows that the digital media serves as an effective source of migration aspirations as online exposure, imagined futures, and social comparison are connected to the development of masculine identity.

Theme 3: Family Dependence and Social Pressure

This theme brings to the fore the social pressure that unemployed educated youth go through due to financial dependence on their families that affect their masculine identity and self-esteem. In the IDIs, one male respondent aged 26 years reported to live with his parents and that he left everything to them. Another Bannu resident told us, my parents are trying their best to support me but I feel like a burden, as I see my friends sending remittances. At the FGDs, the participants thought about the family expectations collectively. Even in the locality of Lakki Marwat, one participant noted, "Even when parents are understanding the society looks down on you when you are not earning. Another added, It is not all about money, it is about honor and respect, Family dependence makes you a less a man in the society. The researcher noted that participants were concurrently negotiating internal frustrations, and external social pressures and that the family expectations were cementing the cultural construction of masculine success as financial independence and provision. This theme will answer the first and third research questions exploring the role of family and social pressures on the sense of masculinity of unemployed youth. In theory, this conforms to the Hegemonic Masculinity theory (1995) by Connell, who observes that men are expected to be providers in society and that Bourdieu (1986) symbolic capital theory is effective in explaining that the economic dependence of a person leads to the absence of social recognition and perceived authority within the family and community. These findings are supported by international literature, which illustrates that unemployment among educated youth in South Asia is a phenomenon that generates emotional stress, social stigma, and familial tension, especially whereby the masculine identity relates to the provision and independence (Ahmed and Hussain, 2023; Kakar et al., 2022). Summing up, this theme shows that family dependence and social pressure exacerbates the masculine identity crisis among unemployed educated youth and makes them interdependent, subjected to social pressures and expectations, and digitally compared to each other a central challenge of youth masculinity.

Theme 4: Social Comparison and Peer Pressure

his theme shows how the aspirations, disappointments and self-concepts of unemployed educated young people in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are shaped by peer interactions and social comparisons, which are often mediated using social media. In IDIs, a 25-year-old male in Karak explained that he scrolls through WhatsApp, and sees his friends in Dubai sending money home. Sometimes I get small and insignificant in front of them, like I am failing as a man. Another Bannu participant said, "We are left behind each time we see them. In FGDs, participants talked about peer pressure in one group; in Lakki Marwat, one participant commented, When we talk about friends abroad, everyone feels tension. We compete within our group about who is earning more or sending gifts home. Another one added, that even little WhatsApp posts about salaries or gifts put a strain on you. You cannot avoid it, and it impacts your confidence. The scholar noted that respondents constantly compared themselves with other people and digital media enhanced the comparison process, raise irritation and nervousness. This theme corresponds to the third research objective, which studies the effect of peer influence and social comparison on the unemployed youth, and answers the research question about the effects of peer influence and social comparison on unemployed youth. In theory, this resonates with the symbolic capital of Bourdieu (1986) because the social standing is measured in relation to economically active peers, and the Hegemonic

Masculinity theory of Connell (1995) which presupposes that male status is measured in relation to the economically active peers, and the symbolic capital of Bourdieu (1986). These findings are supported by international literature, which indicates that digital platforms establish virtual social hierarchies, which strengthen desires, anxieties, and pressures among the young generations (Appadurai, 2004; Rahman, 2023; Kakar et al., 2022). Overall, this theme demonstrates that a social comparison and peer pressure, which are enhanced with the help of social media, have a significant impact on masculine identity, connecting digital exposure, social judgement, and gendered expectations in a larger conception of unemployment and youth masculinity.

Theme 5: Delayed Marriage and Suspended Adulthood

This theme points out the effects of unemployment among educated young people, resulting in delayed marriage, delayed life milestones, and delayed adulthood affect masculine identity and social recognition in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In the case of IDIs, a 28-year-old man of Bannu said, "Last year I wanted to get married, but I can not. With no job, no family will allow me to propose. Every wedding of relatives and friends reminds me that I have been left behind. Another respondent who was a respondent in Karak said, "My family members are constantly asking me when I will get a spouse. I feel embarrassed because I have nothing to offer financially. I feel that I am stuck in adolescence. Participants in FGDs talked about the overall effects of delayed adulthood. In Lakki Marwat, one participant mentioned, "We feel incomplete as men when we cannot marry or support a family. Social media makes us feel that other cousins abroad are married and successful, which puts pressure on us. Another one added, even in case the parents are supportive, the society keeps on reminding you of your failure to live up to the expectations of masculinity. The researcher noted that interrelated causes of unemployment, family expectations, and social norms led to a sense of suspended adulthood and lack of progression in life of the participants. This theme has been linked to the fourth research objective, which is the social and personal impact of unemployment and the answer to the research question is how unemployment impacts on masculine identity and life milestones. Theoretically, it is connected with Hegemonic Masculinity theory of Connell (1995) which assesses the social roles of men based on their capacity to provide and establish a family and Bourdieu symbolic capital (1986) as the delayed marriage reduces the social recognition and prestige. These results are supported by international literature, which revealed that delayed marriage and postponed adulthood in unemployed educated youth in South Asia create social stigma, emotional stress, and identity tension, which are exacerbated by digital platforms (Kakar et al., 2022; Ahmed and Hussain, 2023). Overall, this theme shows that delayed adulthood and postponed marriage are the key findings in the masculine identity crisis, which connects the lack of economic activity with the social acknowledgment, psychological happiness, and cultural anticipation.

Theme 6: Coping Strategies – Religion, Migration, and Withdrawal

This theme is explored through coping strategies used by unemployed educated youth in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to manage frustration, social pressure and crisis of masculine identity that occur due to lack of employment. In IDIs, a 26-year-old male originating Karak mentioned that religion gives him the strength to cope with shame. One of the Bannu participants replied by saying that when he is frustrated, he does not attend social gatherings since he cannot face people who

would want to know what he does or where he is going to marry. Lakki Marwat participant added, I am always planning to migrate. Although, it is now but a dream, just thinking about leaving gives me hope and purpose. In the FGDs, participants talked about coping with each other. Bannu One of the participants said, “Everyone is different in how he or she manages stress. Another in Karak added, even when we meet in a group we discuss plans to go abroad and how we will succeed and how it will make our families feel about us. The researcher found that these strategies developed as the participants negotiated internal frustrations and external expectations at the same time using religion, future oriented migration and social withdrawal to manage tension and hold self-worth. This theme is directly related to the fifth research objective, which is the manner in which unemployed young people respond to social and economic pressures, and answers the research question regarding coping mechanisms in the face of masculine identity challenges. In theory, it can be compared to the Hegemonic Masculinity theory developed by Connell (1995), since coping strategies reflect ways of sustaining masculine self-respect when deprived of economic provision, and with Stigma theory of social withdrawal developed by Goffman (1963) since social withdrawal is the means of managing spoiled identity and reducing embarrassment. These findings are supported by the international literature, which indicates that the youth in South Asia tend to rely on religion, future planning and selective socializing in order to cope with the stress associated with unemployment, at the same time being amplified by digital media both in terms of stress and hope (Rahman, 2023; Ahmed and Hussain, 2023). Overall, this theme shows that coping strategies are necessary in dealing with psychological and social pressures and that individual resilience is tied to cultural expectations and negotiation of masculine identities.

Theme 7: Remittance Aspirations and Social Status

This theme underlines the fact that hopes to send remittances across the gulf countries are closely associated with social status, respect and masculinity in the unemployed educated youths in the Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In the case of IDIs, when a 27-year-old male resident of Karak was asked to explain, he replied, saying, that, when he goes abroad, and remits money to his family, people will finally respect him. Right now, he feels like he is a ghost because he can provide nothing. Another interviewee who is a resident of Bannu said, "People who are sent even a small amount of money, outside the country, gain a status within the village, this is because they are seen to be responsible and capable. An interviewee of Lakki Marwat replied, that sending money back home is more than money, it is evidence that you are a man that fulfils duties and is respected. Participants in FGDs talked about how remittances were important collectively. One Bannu participant said, we discuss who has a relative abroad, how much they send. who sends money is admired, who does not send money in spite of his or her education, is ignored. Another added, you even see through WhatsApp groups remittances of friends. It becomes a gauge of success. The researcher noted that the remittances are perceived by the participants as a resolution to the masculine crisis and that remittances may provide social validation and economic autonomy and that peer discussions reinforce symbolic hierarchies based on financial contribution. This theme is directly related to the sixth research objective, which is exploring how the economic aspirations through migration create masculine identity, and answers the research question of the relationship between remittance culture and social recognition among unemployed youth. Theoretically, it relates to the theory of symbolic capital as suggested by Bourdieu (1986) since remittances can be viewed as a form of social and symbolic capital, and given the theory of Hegemonic Masculinity

proposed by Connell (1995), since remittances can be viewed as a form of social and symbolic capital. These findings are supported in international literature as it demonstrates that remittances increase social status and solidify masculine identity in South Asian communities that send migrants (Appadurai, 2004; Rahman, 2023; Kakar et al., 2022). Overall, this theme shows that remittance aspirations are a key process by which unemployed youth negotiate social recognition, masculine identity, and linking financial contribution, social prestige, and gendered expectations to a unified social process..

Theme 8: Emotional Consequences and Mental Health

The theme is the psychological and emotional consequences of unemployment, social pressures and migration dreams on educated youth in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A 28 year old male of Bannu shared in the course of IDIs, that he experienced a lot of anxiety and depression. Every wedding, every success of my cousin makes me feel that I am losing. I sleep late thinking about my future. Another Karak participant said, "There are times when I do not talk to people, I feel embarrassed and frustrated that I cannot provide or migrate yet. One of the Lakki Marwat participants added, I feel hopeless at times, because social media keeps reminding me that other people are moving ahead and I am stuck. Participants in FGDs spoke about the mental and emotional burden shared. One of the Karak members commented, "Even when we are together, we feel under pressure. We discuss migration, jobs, and money but it also reminds us of what we do not have. One more added, we sometimes joke to conceal our frustration, however, all of us feel pressure, experience anxiety, and fear of losing respect in the family. The researcher noted that mental health issues are directly related to pressures to conform to masculine identities, showing that emotional distress in youth is closely connected to the pressure to conform to masculine identities. This theme is related to the seventh research objective, which is to examine personal and social consequences of unemployment, and the research question of how masculine identity crises can affect their emotional well-being. Theoretically, it corresponds to the Stigma theory of Goffman (1963), as participants coping with a spoiled identity through stress and withdrawal, and the Hegemonic Masculinity theory by Connell (1995), since the failure to meet masculine norms causes psychological and social pressure. These findings are supported by international literature, which indicates that unemployment among young people in South Asia is associated with anxiety, low self-esteem, and frustration worsened by social comparison and exposure to the internet (Rahman, 2023; Ahmed and Hussain, 2023; Kakar et al., 2022). Overall, this theme shows that emotional implications and mental health strains are the most important aspects of the masculine identity crisis, which connects the dimension of mental health to the dimension of social, economic, and cultural pressures in the Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Discussion

This paper has discussed the role of social media in the Gulf migration desires and masculine identity of educated unemployed youth in the region of Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The results indicate a significant pressure on young men due to unemployment, exposure to digital media and cultural expectations that the young men are under, resulting in frustration, unmet life goals and feelings of failure at playing the role of the provider. The social comparison was made between oneself and their colleagues working overseas, thus, adding to social pressure and identity stress.

These trends can be related to the hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell, 1995) and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) when economic success has been used to define a male.

Social media platforms such as Tik Tok, WhatsApp and Facebook had a strong impact on migration aspirations through demonstration of success stories of migrants which gave both hope and anxiety. This is a manifestation of the digital imaginaries (Appadurai, 2004) and it goes hand in hand with earlier studies that digital media enhances desire to migrate and social comparison (Lopez, 2009).

Masculine identity crisis was even more brought on by family dependence and peer comparison. The young people were under pressure to be able to become economically independent but remittances were viewed as a major source of respect and social status. The same tendencies are observed in the other countries of the Global South, where the digital comparison influences the aspirations and self-esteem.

Unemployment also postponed marriage and adulthood, and was both embarrassing and psychologically distressing. The coping strategies employed by the participants included religion, withdrawal, learning skills, planning future migration, which was in line with the stigma and aspiration-capability theories (Goffman; de Haas).

The hopes of remittance became the main focus of the restoration of masculine status because a source of revenue in another country was viewed as an indication of responsibility and honor. On the whole, the research indicates that digital media is not only the mirror of the migration culture but contributes to the increase of aspirations, pressure, and emotional stress and shapes the masculine identity among unemployed young people in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Conclusion

This paper explored the case of unemployed educated young people in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, based on their Gulf migration desires, digital media, and masculinity. The results indicate that unemployment, with high levels of digital exposure, enhances social comparison, family pressure, and the necessity to match traditional male roles of providers. This has led to delayed marriage, poor self esteem and emotional straining among the young men.

Tik Tok, WhatsApp, and Facebook are examples of social media that have a strong impact on migration aspirations, as they provide a list of success stories of migrants in other countries, which shape future expectations and pressure. Another stress factor among the participants is identity stress as participants compare themselves to their peers who are working in the Gulf countries.

The youth employ strategies to deal with these challenges and they include religious practices, withdrawing themselves, acquisition of skills, and future migration planning. Remittances are regarded as one of the major means to acquire respect, status and masculinity in the society.

On the whole, the research concludes that digital media does not solely shape the ideas of migration but also increases the pressure of masculine identity and emotional pressures among the unemployed youth.

Recommendations

1. Vocational training, internship opportunities, and skill development strategies should be used to strengthen the youth employment programs to minimize the rate of unemployment and financial reliance.
2. The services and programs related to mental health support such as counseling and peer support groups should be made accessible to help the youth deal with stress, anxiety and identity pressure.
3. Stigmatization of unemployment should be decreased, and the notion that social value does not depend solely on income should be promoted.
4. Migration guidance programs are to be offered to give real-life information concerning the Gulf employment, remittances and safe migration planning.
5. The connection between digital media, unemployment and masculine identity within under-researched areas such as Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa needs further research.

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