

# Out-Migration of Married Women and Experiences of Left-Behind Husbands in the Nandom Municipality

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## Abstract

*In Ghana, migration has traditionally been dominated by males leaving women and children behind until the late 1980s when females began to migrate independently. Consequently, there is paucity of literature on the experiences of left-behind husbands whose wives had migrated internally. Using the Nandom Municipality as a case study, 331 left-behind husbands responded to a survey questionnaire while 15 others participated in in-depth interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and a binary logistic regression while content analysis based on common themes was employed to analyze the qualitative data that were transcribed. The study shows that the left-behind husbands, who were mostly subsistence farmers with primary or no formal education, approved their wives' decision to migrate based on economic reasons. In the absence of their wives, most men experienced challenges in cooking, drawing water, cleaning the home, shopping, sowing/planting, weeding, harvesting and carting of farm produce home or to the market for sale. In particular, husbands who were older, had secondary education or had younger children experienced more challenges in the absence of their wives. As a coping strategy, most of the left-behind husbands relied on support from the extended family members in both household chores and some farming activities. From the findings, there is the need to provide children of both sexes with the same socialization process to curb gender division of labour in the Nandom Municipality. It is also important to promote female education and skilled training to reduce out-migration of females from the Nandom Municipality.*

**Keywords:** Migration of married women, left-behind husbands, social feminism, Nandom Municipality, Ghana

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## **Introduction**

In Ghana, before the 1990s, males dominated north-south migration because the main job opportunities at that time such as construction works in the mines and roads, security services and labourers on cocoa farms were not favourable to their female counterparts (Songsore, 2003; Tanle and Awusabo-Asare, 2007; Van der Geest, 2010; Tanle, 2010). Within the last three decades, however, females have become part of the north-south migration (including married women) owing to the diversity of job opportunities in the informal sector which include head portering, domestic services and serving as a bar attendant in local food restaurants at the main destination areas in the southern parts of the country.

Although out-migration of both males and females is a common phenomenon in the northern sector of the country, (Songsore, 2003; Tanle and Awusabo-Asare, 2007; Van der Geest, 2010; Tanle, 2010; Bosiakoh et al., 2014), there is scanty literature on gender and migration in the Nandom Municipality. Some females (both single and married) have been migrating independently from the Municipality to the southern parts of the country, especially to the Bono, Bono East, Ashanti and the Greater Accra Regions, for economic reasons but, there is limited literature on their migration and moreover the experiences of husbands left behind has not attracted much research. Furthermore, previous studies on out-migration from the northern sector of the country, focused more on destination areas without interest on its effects at the origin. Meanwhile the activities of the migrants equally affect other family members who do not migrate (Songsore, 2003; Van der Geest, 2010; Abdul-Korah, 2011; Bosiakoh, et al., 2014; Abutima, 2019). Consequently, studies on left-behind household members or spouses in the northern sector of the country (including the Nandom Municipality) have been scanty until recent times (Abutima, 2019). This is the gap in the literature which this study intends to fill. There is the need to understand and document the experiences of left-behind husbands in the study area since autonomous out-migration of females is now a common phenomenon in all the communities within the Nandom Municipality. Moreover, compared with males' migration, female migration exhibits

many diverse socio-cultural and economic implications for household members left-behind (Appianing, 2013; Dungumaro, 2013; Cortes, 2015; Ikuomola, 2015; Pallikadavath et al., 2016; Lam & Yeoh, 2018; Abutima, 2019). In the literature on husbands left behind by their wives who have migrated, different perspectives have been documented mostly in Asia and a few others in Sub-Saharan Africa (Parreñas, 2005; Cortes, 2015; Lam & Yeoh, 2018; Abutima, 2019). On household or domestic activities, some studies have established that left-behind husbands were engaged in tasks such as cooking, cleaning and childcare thereby “sacrificing leisure activities and the freedom to spend an evening out bonding or relaxing with friends” (Pallikadavath et al., 2016: 10; Lam & Yeoh, 2018, 107). The authors noted further that the negative experiences that husbands had to cope with in the absence of their wives led to loneliness, high levels of stress, divorce and extramarital affairs. Other studies have reported that some left-behind husbands take on care-giving and childcare roles with the assistance of other household/family members such as left-behind older children’s siblings, other female relatives, maternal and/or paternal grandparents, aunts and uncles, and to a minimal extent, non-family domestic workers in providing care when their wives are away (Hochschild, 2000; Afsar, 2005; Hugo, 2005; Parreñas, 2005; Cortes, 2015; Lam & Yeoh, 2018). In Ghana, the experiences of left-behind husbands whose wives have migrated have not attracted much research compared to the other way round (Wrigley-Asante & Agandin, 2015). In a study on effects of husbands migration on left-behind wives in the Builsa District, it was noted that majority of the left-behind women in the absence of their husbands cultivated small portions of land due to the absence of hired labour, which resulted in low productivity, and also that they became defected household heads in charge of various household responsibilities but limited in their decision making roles (Wrigley-Asante & Agandin, 2015). The authors further established that some of the women were already experiencing psychological stresses owing to the burden of taking care of children, farming, maintenance of building, loneliness, the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty in the absence of their husbands (Wrigley-Asante & Agandin, 2015). However, in a study that focused on both left-behind

spouses in the northern region, Abutima (2019) observed that husbands maintain their household decision-making powers either as left-behind or migrant husbands whilst left-behind wives still consulted migrant husbands before making some household decisions. This obviously depicts the male dominance in household decision-making based on the way patriarchal norms have constructed men to be superior to women. The same study further revealed that the entrenched imbalances in gender roles and power relations in the patriarchal system influence the benefits and challenges associated with spousal migration and the ways husbands and wives cope with the absence of their spouses (Abutima, 2019). This empirical literature would be employed in the discussion of the experiences of left-behind husbands in the absence of their spouses.

The research questions underpinning the study are: (1) how was the decision to migrate taken between the two spouses? (2) in which ways does the socio-cultural system affect left-behind husbands in carrying out household chores and farming activities in the absence of their spouses? and (3) what coping strategies do left-behind husbands adopt in carrying out those activities in the absence of their spouses?

The main objective of this paper therefore, is to examine the experiences of husbands left behind in the absence of their wives in the Nandom Municipality of the Upper West Region. The findings of the study will add to and update the limited literature in Ghana on experiences of left-behind husbands in patriarchal societies in the absence of their wives. It will also update the limited literature on gender and migration in the Nandom Municipality, especially on the experiences of left-behind husbands in both household chores and some farming activities where gender division of labour is very conspicuous. The paper is divided into six main sections: following the introduction is the study area and contextual issues, conceptual and theoretical framework, data and methods, results and discussion and conclusions.

## Study Area and Contextual Issues

The Nandom Municipality lies in the north-western corner of the Upper West Region of Ghana (Fig. 1). It is predominantly rural (86.0%) and the total population in 2010 was 46,040 comprising more females (51.6%) than males (48.4%) (GSS, 2012). The Municipality has an average household size of 6.2, which is lower than the region's (6.4) but higher than the national average of 4.4. Household compositions show that children (sons/daughters) form 44.4 percent while other relatives are 7.7 per cent. The extended family system (other relatives and non-relatives) constitutes the main household structure (64.0%). More than eight out of ten (86.0%) persons in the Municipality profess the Christian faith and marriage is predominantly monogamous (GSS, 2012).

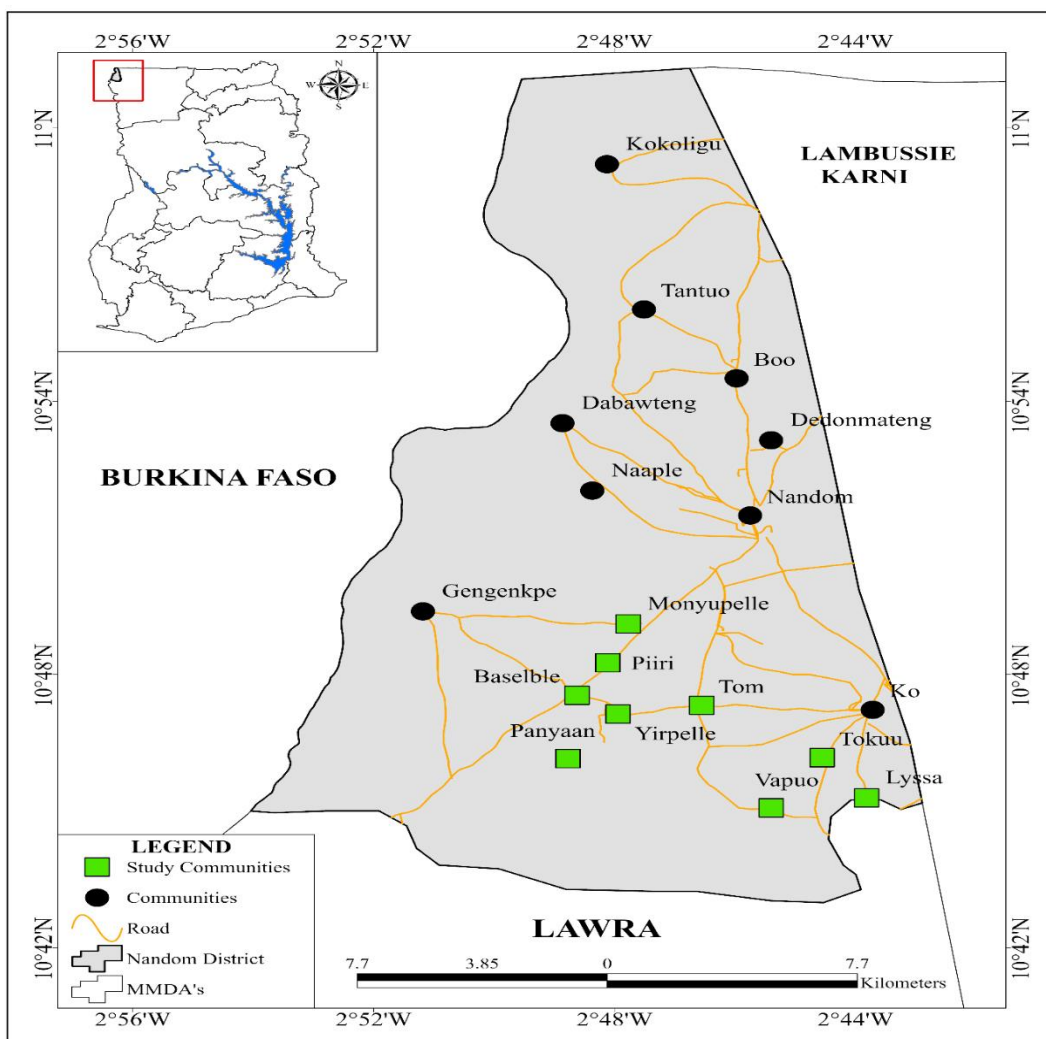


Fig. 1: A Map of the Nandom

Municipality showing the study sites.

Source: GIS and Cartographic Unit of the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Cape Coast (UCC).

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Due to characteristics such as poor soil and low rainfall (single rainy season) mostly from June/July to September/October followed by long dry season from November to May (Dickson & Benneh, 1995), subsistence agriculture is the main economic activity (over 80.0%) in the Municipality. Apart from agriculture, socio-economic opportunities, especially non-agricultural employment avenues, are limited and the incidence of poverty is very high (70.1 %) (GSS, 2014).

The social structure of the people is patrilineal based on clans and patriarchal system (Soum-Dery, 2017; Dery et al., 2020) Gender roles are based on patriarchal system where girls and boys are socialized to perform different tasks based on gendered division of labour. Specifically, females are usually assigned with farming activities such as sowing, harvesting, carting, storing and transporting farm produce to the market for sale, and household chores (including caring works) such as cooking for household members or farm labourers, drawing water, washing and cleaning or providing a variety of care-giving services to other household or extended family members who may need such care owing to illness, disability, old age or being young (Cock, 1989; Apusigah, 2009; Adomako et al., 2009; Anderson, 2001; Evans, 2010; Hanrahan, 2015). The males are however, socialized in clearing of farmland (whether old or new farmland), weeding, poultry, animal rearing and blacksmithing among others (Bekye, 1998; Dery et al., 2020). Females and children constitute the regular household labour force but they are not paid for their labour on the household farms (Carney, 1998; Anderson, 2001).

Males usually own and control the use of most resources, especially land but some females may have access to land to grow vegetables, groundnuts or rice mostly for domestic consumption although some may be sold when there is bumper harvest, in order to earn some income (Bekye, 1998; Dery et al., 2020). Owing to the above socio-cultural characteristics of the area, females are disproportionately poor compared to their male counterparts (Government of Ghana, 2007; GSS, 2015; GSS, 2014 (GLSS 6). Consequently, poverty, the limited socio-economic opportunities and the long dry season where most women do not engage in any meaningful economic activities, could be the drivers of

female out-migration from the Nandom Municipality in defiance of the norms and practices of the patriarchal system in the Municipality. Moreover, Abdul Korah (2011) has noted that the Dagaaba autonomous migrant women are challenging the established socio-cultural structures in their home communities using their experiences/exposures from migration.

Thus, seasonal out-migration from the Municipality to the southern parts of the country is one of the options available for some married women to engage in various jobs to earn some income (Songsore, 2003; Awumbila & Arddayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Van der Geest, 2010; Abdul-Korah, 2011; GSS, 2014; Abutima, 2019).

### ***Conceptual and theoretical framework***

Migration may be defined as a spatial movement that involves temporary or permanent change of one's usual place of residence from one defined geographical area to the other at any given time (Baubock, 2013; Tanle, 2014; Tsapenko, 2018). Migration can be international or internal which is further classified into seasonal or *permanent*. Internal migration is further classified into four namely, rural-rural, urban-urban, rural-urban and urban-rural depending on the place of origin and destination. In this paper, seasonal migration refers to movements from the Nandom Municipality to any part of the country and return to the place of origin in the course of the year.

This paper is guided by the social feminism approach and the new economics of labour migration. Social feminism is a two-pronged theory that integrates Marxist feminism's argument on how capitalism contributed to oppression of women in both their productive and reproductive lives and radical feminism's theory of the role of gender and patriarchy. (Hartmann, 1981; Toni & Bailey, 1991). Social feminism posits that capitalist and patriarchal relations are responsible for gender roles and gender division of labour in society (Toni & Bailey, 1991). Capitalism and patriarchal perspectives have had some effects on women's position in African societies, particularly regarding land ownership, unpaid roles in domestic and farming activities, access to formal education, access

to salaried work, inheritance, household headship, decision-making and possibilities to become self-reliant. These have all worked together with other contextual issues indicated above to make women disproportionately poor compared to their male counterparts which could be the reason why some women are engaged in seasonal out-migration (in defiance of the norms of the patriarchal system) from the Municipality to the southern sector of the country in order to earn some income. The gender division of labour in the patriarchal system, could inform the discussion on the experiences of left-behind husbands in household chores and some farming activities.

The main tenet of the theory of new economies of labour migration is that migration decisions are not made by isolated individual actors but rather by household or family members (Stark, 1991; Arango, 2000; De Haas, 2008). A household that is economically vulnerable may encourage a member to migrate so that remittances from that member could be used to reduce poverty. Studies in gender and migration have documented how the entire migration process from origin to destination is gendered, especially in terms of decision-making, remittances home and main purpose of remitting home (Reed et al., 2010; Abdul-Korah, 2011; Awumbila, 2015; Teye et al., 2017; Abutima, 2019). From the theory of the new economics of labour migration, the decision to migrate could be taken by both spouses or it could be the independent decision of a wife, which could be contrary to the norms of the patriarchal society where women are expected to obtain permission from their husbands in every endeavour.

This paper adopts the definition of a household given by the Ghana Statistical Service as a person or a group of persons, who live together in the same house or compound and share the same house-keeping arrangements (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2012). Households differ in size, composition, structure, economic status (See study area) and socio-cultural status, whether patriarchal or matriarchal household. This study focuses on households in a patriarchal society where there is gender division of labour, particularly in farming activities and household chores.



## **Data and methods**

The study, which is based on the pragmatic philosophy, combined both quantitative and qualitative methods using a questionnaire and an in-depth interview guide in order to ensure that the weakness of one method is compensated for by the other. Also, the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data will ultimately improve upon the quality of the paper. The questionnaire covered themes such as background characteristics of the husbands and challenges experienced in both household chores and farming in the absence of their wives or spouses. The qualitative questions focused on the decision to migrate, main motive of migration and the implications of the migration of the women on their husbands left behind. The field assistants were four students who completed their first-degree programme (two males and two females) from the Department of Population and Health, University of Cape Coast. They had a day's training on the instruments and pre-tested the instrument on the second day in a community not included in the study but has similar characteristics as the target communities.

The respondents were husbands whose wives, within the last five years, had ever migrated but failed (in one stance) to return home during the farming season for reasons best known to them (wives). Since the total number of such husbands was unknown, the snowball sampling procedure was adopted, although there are some strengths and weaknesses associated with its use, including the following: It is quick to find subjects as they come from reliable sources, also useful in a situation where the target population is hard to locate but the researcher has little control over the sampling method, and representativeness of the sample is not guaranteed. In each of the nine communities (Tom, Lyssa, Piiri, Monyupelle, Basalble, Panyaan, Vapuo, Yirpelle and Tokuu) (See Fig. 1), the survey was first conducted by the field assistants.

A husband whose wife had migrated was first contacted and assisted to answer the questionnaire, and through him information about another eligible husband was obtained. Through this process, 331 husbands who met the inclusion criteria in the nine communities constituted the sample size for the

survey. The researcher and one field assistant (with some experience in qualitative data collection) interviewed husbands until a saturation was reached on the 15<sup>th</sup> person. That is, 15 husbands were interviewed using an in-depth interview guide.

Two separate outcomes on challenges husbands experience in the absence of their wives were employed in the study: one on household chores and the other on farming activities because gender division of labour is much more pronounced in these two domains as explained above. Based on the existing literature, the household chores mostly carried out by women in the study areas are cooking, drawing of water, cleaning and shopping while that of farming are sowing/planting, weeding, harvesting, transportation of farm produce home, storage and sale of farm produce. An index with responses ranging from 0-4 was created for the four household chores while that for the six farming activities ranged from 0-6. The outcome variable defined as partly involved or fully involved in the household chores and/or farming activity is dichotomous. For the household chores, partly involved was less than two and coded '0' while fully involved which ranged from two to four was coded '1' In the case of the six farming activities, partly involved was less than three and coded '0' while fully involved which ranged from three to six was coded '1'. The explanatory variables used were age, level of education and number of children alive. These are deemed to be most relevant in this study and also, they are among the most common demographic characteristics often use in most studies (Appianing, 2013; Dungumaro, 2013; GSS, 2014; Lam &Yeoh, 2018). The study however, acknowledged the fact that household size should have been used not children alive. Age can influence active participation in farming activities among subsistence farmers because most of the activities are carried out by themselves and their household members (wife, children and other dependents) constituting the farm labourers (Bekye, 1998; Apusigah, 2009; Evans, 2010; Appianing, 2013; Dungumaro, 2013; Lam & Yeoh, 2018). In Ghana, it has been noted that most subsistence farmers have little or no formal education (Van der Geest, 2010; GSS, 2012), and this is also evident in Table 1 above.

### ***Data analysis***

Through STATA version 13, the quantitative data were analysed using both descriptive statistics and a binary logistic regression model. Since the outcome variable was a dichotomous variable, the binary logistic regression was employed given that this technique is more appropriate for dichotomous variables. A key assumption underlying the binary logistic regression model is that the dependent variable should be dichotomous in nature and the data should not have any outlier (Sarantakos, 2013). The questions that were asked covered themes such as background characteristics, decision-making prior to migration, main motives for migration, challenges experience in both household chores and farming activities and support or assistance received in those two areas (household chores and farming activities). The qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis based on common themes and direct quotes from respondents. The data were used to support some of the results from the quantitative data and also to describe the challenges of left-behind husbands in household chores and some farming activities.

## **Results and discussion**

### ***Background characteristics of husbands left-behind***

The background characteristics of the respondents can influence their experiences in the absence of their wives and perceptions about out-migration of married women from the Municipality to the southern parts of the country. About a third (32.3%) of the husbands were young (30-39) while a little more than a third (34.7%) were aged between 50 and 60 years or above (Table 1). About half (47.7%) of them were illiterates, three-quarters (75.0%) had between one and six children and they were mostly subsistence farmers (88.0%). The background characteristic of the respondents are in sync with the socio-demographic characteristics of the population of the Nandom Municipality, which shows that more than half of the population are aged between 30 and 60 years or above, high level of

illiteracy (49.2%), agriculture as the main occupation (83.7%) and large household sizes (6.2) (GSS, 2012).

Table 1: Background characteristics of husbands left-behind

Variable	Husbands Frequency N=331	Percentage (100%)
<i>Age</i>		
20 – 29	32	9.7
30 – 39	107	32.3
40 – 49	77	23.3
50 – 59	68	20.5
60+	47	14.2
Total	331	100
<i>Occupation</i>		
Farming	292	88.2
Mason	4	1.2
Carpenter	5	1.5
Retired	3	0.9
Others	27	8.2
Total	331	100
<i>Children alive</i>		
0	18	5.4
1 – 3	113	35.0
4 – 6	135	40.0
7 – 9	61	18.9
10+	4	1.2
Total	331	100
<i>Level of education</i>		
None	158	47.7
Primary	74	22.7
Middle/JSS	70	21.5
Secondary	20	6.1
Higher	9	2.8
Total	331	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2021.

### ***Decision to migrate***

The decision to migrate can be a composite of the following factors: one's own idea, influence of household member(s) or friend (s). Some previous studies on female migration have documented the influence of return migrants on potential migrants through the provision of information either through

direct contact or indirectly through demonstrative effects associated with returnees such as the display of material wealth or mere improvement in their physical appearance (Ouedraogo, 1995; Anarfi et al., 1999; Tanle & Awusabo-Asare, 2007).

It is important to know how the decision to migrate was taken at the household level because it could have implications on the experiences of husbands left behind. The decision to migrate was solicited from respondents through the in-depth interviews conducted. The narratives generally revealed that the decision to migrate was mostly approved by their husbands as indicated by two of them in the following excerpts:

*I permitted my wife to travel to Kumasi. I support female out-migration once there are no jobs available over here. Their migration to the southern part of Ghana enables them to earn some income to support the household financially in terms of feeding as well as paying children's school fees (Farmer, 42 years).*

*We usually agree before she migrates. She usually returns home with some cash and food stuff as well. (Farmer, 37 years).*

The approval of the decision to migrate by some husbands might be a household strategy to reduce poverty because the Nandom Municipality is one of the poorest areas in Ghana (GSS, 2014). This is also consistent with the tenets of the new economics of labour migration where a household approves the migration of a member with the hope that remittances from that member could improve the household's economic situation.

Although others did not support the migration of their wives, they could not prevent them from migrating because they could not provide their (wives) needs, and also to avoid possible conflicts arising between them (both spouses) from such a decision. The main reasons given by those husbands were as follows: It leads to shortage of farm labourers, breeds mistrust and suspicion in marriages while some of them indulge in adultery or prostitution at the destination which has resulted in conflicts among marriage couples or divorce as indicated in the following narratives:

*Female out-migration brings mistrust and suspicion among spouses. I personally don't support female out-migration because it leads to shortage of farm labourers and destabilization of marriages (Farmer, 52 years).*

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*I regret for a neighbour who terminated his marriage with the wife who incidentally indulge in adultery at one of the destinations (Farmer, 29 years).*

From the findings, some husbands (six out of ten) approved the decision to migrate before their wives could migrate, although reluctantly in some cases as one of such husbands narrated:

*I do not support out-migration of females from this community but I cannot prevent my wife from migrating because I cannot provide her with her needs (Farmer, 31 years). This is evident of the imbalance in power relation between men and women as embedded in the gender and power relations in social feminism.*

Out-migration of married women from the Nandom Municipality could be a means by which women are moving from unpaid domestic work as espoused by capitalism to paid informal jobs in urban areas. It could also be a planned decision with their husbands in order to minimize poverty or maximize benefits associated with migration as stipulated by the theory of new economics of labour migration.

A few (26.0%) left-behind husbands however, reported that their wives migrated without their consent as narrated by one of them:

*My wife travelled to Berekum without my consent due to some little misunderstanding that occurred between us. Due to that she never returned during the farming season (Farmer, 40 years).*

It can be concluded that most husbands co-operated (reluctantly in some cases) and approved their spouses' decision to migrate for three main reasons: the benefits of their (spouses) migration to the household, they (husbands) cannot prevent their spouses from migrating because they could not afford to provide the needs of their spouses at home and lastly, the possibility of conflict occurring at home if husbands attempt to prevent their spouses from migrating. This means that in poor patriarchal communities such as the Nandom Municipality, husbands are more likely to compromise their patriarchal characteristic of dominance over household decision-making, and co-operate with their spouses who migrate. The assumption is generally that their migration could benefit the household (Abutima, 2019). It must also be noted that those women migrating without the consent of their spouses is evidence that some women have begun to challenge the capitalist and patriarchal status

quo imposed on them. It also underscores the fact that through migration some females are empowered and therefore, are able to challenge the existing socio-cultural norms and beliefs which are inimical to their (females) socio-economic development (Abdul-Korah, 2011; Abutima, 2019; Tanle, 2014).

### ***Left-behind Husbands' experiences in household chores***

As stated above, the study focused on household chores such as cooking, drawing of water, cleaning, shopping and caring for children at the household setting which is predominantly patriarchal. All the husbands involved in the study admitted that they experienced some challenges in all the four main household chores because they were all socialized in gendered division of labour in patriarchal communities and were also in monogamous marriages, which implies that they had no other spouses to take care of household chores as happens in polygamous marriages when other spouses migrate. Two of them remarked as follows:

*It is difficult to carry out household chores as a man (Farmer, 48 years). The most difficult situation I face in the absence of my wife is cooking for the children, drawing of water, and cleaning the house (Farmer, 58 years).*

These sentiments expressed by left-behind husbands were expected because in the Nandom Municipality, males are not socialized in household chores and therefore, left-behind husbands are bound to experience some challenges when performing such tasks. This means that out-migration of married women from the Nandom Municipality transforms gender roles of left-behind husbands and also provides the opportunity for some husbands to learn some household chores that could gradually minimize the existing gender division of labour.

Besides the household chores, some of them have other responsibilities to perform outside the home as one of them indicated in this narrative:

*It over burdens me; taking care of children and at the same time attending other important activities like funerals is always a headache (Farmer, 49 years).*

Owing to this, some husbands reported that their leisure time with friends outside the home has been compromised as noted in other studies (Paul, 2015; Pallikadavath et al., 2016; Lam & Yeoh, 2018). This is one of the narratives: *The absence of my wife normally prevents me from hanging out with my colleagues* (Farmer, 48 years). This reduces left-behind husbands' chances of building social capital and participating in communal responsibilities in their communities. It is also a threat to masculinity in patriarchal societies.

The results from the logistic regression model showed a significant relationship between those aged between 40 and 49 years and 50 and 59 years and the challenges experienced in household chores in the absence of their wives. However, between the two age groups, those aged between 50-59 years experienced much more challenges, more than 16 times the reference category (Table 2). This could be because they are older and could feel the burden of doing household chores more compared to those who are young.

There was no significant relationship between education and challenges experienced in household chores but those with secondary education are more likely to experience challenges in household chores compared to those with no formal education, the reference category. However, those with higher education are less likely to experience challenges in household chores compared to those with secondary education. This is expected because students in higher education in Ghana prepare their own meals unlike their counterparts in the secondary school who are fed by the school. Consequently, husbands with higher education are more used to some household chores than their counterparts with secondary education. Formal education could serve as a means of addressing gender differentiated roles in patriarchal societies as some husbands with higher education adapt to the new gender norms, which contradicts the finding that gender norms are usually resistant to changes (Benatar, 2013; Bingenheimer, 2019; Beniamino & Heise, 2020). The results further indicate a significant relationship among those who had between four and six children. From the odd ratios, they were less likely to face challenges in household chores compared to those with one to three children which is the reference



category. For those with children, the challenges experienced could depend on the ages and sex of the children. Where the children are females and old enough to assist in some household chores, which they have already been socialized to do, the challenges could be minimal compared to the opposite situation. The following excerpt from the interviews support this conclusion:

*When my wife travels, I do almost all the household chores; cooking, cleaning, drawing water, bath the youngest to go to school together with his senior sister because my children are young (Farmer, 34 years).*

This is consistent with other studies, which found that when wives migrate and leave their husbands behind, the left-behind husbands take over domestic activities such as taking care of the family, shopping for food items, cooking and cleaning which hitherto were the responsibilities of their wives based on the gendered division of labour in the household (Evans, 2010; Thao & Agergaard, 2012).

In conclusion, the challenges that some left-behind husbands experienced in household chores in the absence of their spouses were significantly associated with some of their socio-demographic characteristics such as age and number of children available.

Table 2: Challenges husbands faced in household chores by some background characteristics

Variable	Odds ratio	95% Confidence interval
<b>Age</b>		
20 – 29	Ref	Ref
30 – 39	1.57	0.32 – 7.74
40 – 49	8.77*	0.97 – 78.85
50 – 59	16.21**	1.14 – 236.73
60+	2.2	0.28 – 17.41
<b>Education</b>		
None	Ref	Ref
Primary	0.93	0.07 – 1.12
Middle/ JSS	0.33	0.05 – 2.15
Secondary	1.48	0.16 – 13.65
Higher	1	
<b>Children alive</b>		
1 – 3	Ref	Ref
4 – 6	0.29*	0.07 – 1.12
7 – 9	0.33	0.52 – 2.15
None	0.41	0.06 – 2.64

Ref = reference category \*p<0.10 \*\* p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.001 Source: Fieldwork, 2021.

### ***Challenges left-behind husbands faced in farming activities***

Like the case of household chores, some husbands are likely to experience challenges in carrying out some farming activities in the absence of their wives owing to the existing gender division of labour. The results showed that 88.2% of husbands (See Table 1) who were mostly subsistence farmers, reported that they experienced challenges in carrying out all those farming activities that traditionally are prescribed for females such as sowing/planting, weeding, harvesting, transportation of farm produce home or to the market for sale and storage of farm produce. This is consistent with the findings of Apusigah (2009) and Dungumaro (2013) in Ghana and Tanzania respectively. The qualitative results also support this conclusion as indicated in the following narratives:

*During the farming season, the problems I face in her absence are usually sowing/planting, weeding and transportation of the farm produce home (Farmer, 46 year).*

*When it comes to the farming activities; sowing/planting and weeding are usually my main problems, but my mother and the community women always assist me (Farmer, 53 years).*

This is evident of the impact of the gender division of labour that left-behind husbands experience in patriarchal households. This is consistent with the literature that some left-behind husbands obtain assistance from some other relatives and/or community members in the absence of their wives (Thao & Agergaard, 2012; Pallikadavath et al., 2016; Lam & Yeoh, 2018; Abutima, 2019). This also underscores the fact that in Ghana some extended family members could at times be very supportive (Tanle, 2010).

The results from the logistic regression showed a significant relationship between husbands aged 60 years and above and challenges faced in farming activities. From the results, those aged 60 years and above were more than two and a half times likely to experience challenges in farming activities compared with those aged between 20 and 29 years, the reference category. This is expected because the aged (60+) are old and might not have younger children available in the house to support them in farming.

In terms of formal education, the results showed significant relationship between those with secondary education in particular and challenges faced in farming (Table 3). Those with secondary education were about six times more likely to experience challenges in farming compared with those with no formal education, the reference category. This could be due to the fact that those with no formal education have been involved in farming activities over the years and thus, have some experiences compared to those with secondary and higher education. Those with higher education experienced less challenges compared with their counterparts with secondary education. The former are more likely to be earning some income which they could use some of their incomes to engage some women group to assist them in their farming activities in the absence of their wives.

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The results further showed statistically significant relationship between husbands who had seven to nine children and those who had one to three children (reference category) and challenges encountered in farming activities in the absence of their wives. The odd ratio of 0.24 implies that those husbands (with seven to nine children) experienced less difficulties or challenges in carrying out farming activities compared with their counterparts with one to three children which is the reference category. Although data were not collected on the ages of the children, the former group might have older children who might not be staying with them anymore but could assist them in their farming activities indirectly through the provision of some financial support to hire farm labourers. This is a common practice in some households in the study area, especially among older children who earn some income. This was evident in the interviews as indicated by these two respondents:

*My children are all grown and some of them send money to me to hire farm labourers in the farming season (Farmer, 57 years).*

*My children are young; any time my wife migrates to Kumasi, sowing/planting and harvesting of farm produce becomes my main challenges (Farmer, 37 years).*

It is important however to acknowledge here that, data were not collected on sex and age of the children, which could have informed the discussion on which of the two main areas (household chores and farming activities) that children could best perform given the existing gender division of labour and also whether or not they were old enough to assist in those activities.

Table 3: Challenges husbands faced in farming by some background characteristics

Variable	Odds ratio	95% Confidence interval
<b>Age</b>		
20 – 29	Ref	Ref
30 – 39	1.13	0.46 – 2.77
40 – 49	1.33	0.48 – 3.70
50 – 59	1.58	0.52 – 4.75
60+	2.68*	0.85 – 8.49
<b>Education</b>		
None	Ref	Ref
Primary	1.41	0.80 – 2.46
Middle/ JSS	1.82**	1.02 – 3.27
Secondary	5.74**	1.62 – 20.3
Higher	2.03	0.49 – 8.40
<b>Children alive</b>		
1 – 3	Ref	Ref
4 – 6	0.95	0.49 – 1.82
7 – 9	0.24**	0.10 – 0.57
None	0.7	0.24 – 2.01

Ref = reference category \*p<0.10 \*\* p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.001 Source: Fieldwork, 2021.

### ***Coping strategies of left-behind husbands***

Based on the gender division of labour in patriarchal societies, husbands are bound to experience some challenges in both household chores and farming activities that are prescribed for females. Consequently, left-behind husbands have to adopt some coping strategies to be able to carry out those activities. The APA Dictionary of Psychology has defined coping strategy as an action, a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one’s reaction to such a situation). Social support from extended family or community members is one type of coping strategy that could reduce the challenges some left-behind husbands face in carrying out household chores and farming in the absence of their wives. In Africa, the extended family system serves as a safety net in the event of any challenges or crisis (Renzaho et al., 2011; Mokomane, 2013).

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In Ghana, other relatives and non-relatives are considered part of the extended family system (See study area). In most cases, the extended family members are often willing to support others whenever the need arises, at times without being invited officially to offer such supports. From Table 4, a higher proportion of those aged between 30 and 49 years reported that they received some support in both household chores and farming activities, particularly from biological mothers followed by mothers-in-law compared with those aged 50 years and above. The less support received by the older husbands could be due to the fact that they had adult children who supported them directly or indirectly in farming or they might no longer engage in active farming compared to the former group (30-49 years). Those who have between one and three children received some support in both household chores and farming mostly from biological mothers compared with those with between four and six children who received higher proportions of support mostly from sisters-in-law.

*Most at times, my mother assists me in carrying out some of the house chores e.g cooking for the children and drawing water for domestic uses as well as in some farming activities (Farmer, 37 years). I also rely on my sisters-in-laws during the farming season and also in some household chores (Farmer, 40 years).*

The results further showed that those with no formal education generally received higher proportions of support mostly from sisters-in-law in both household chores and farming activities compared with their counterparts with higher education. The latter group might earn some income which they used to hire farm labourers for their farming activities.

*I usually depend on hired labourers, especially the women's groups, to help in the sowing/planting and weeding (Farmer, 45 years).*

Others also reported that they carried out both household chores and farming activities by themselves in the absence of their wives as one narrated his experience:

*My mother used to assist me in caring for the children and the farming activities any time my wife migrates to Kumasi. Unfortunately, she (Mother) passed on last two years and since then, any time my wife travels, I do everything by myself which is quite tedious for me (Farmer, 48 years).*

The various assistance that left-behind husbands in the Nandom Municipality received from close relations in household chores, farming and care-giving services is consistent with Hochschild's (2000) concept of global care chain that through personal ties or linkages between people, series of paid or unpaid care services are provided to others which could be based on gender division of labour, class or ethnicity. From the findings, female relatives (mostly biological mothers, mothers and sisters-in-laws) fill the gap in the absence of wives to provide the needed support in household chores and some farming activities. This implies that the gender norms and gender division of labour practice in the Nandom communities would remain unchanged for some time once other women (mostly close relations) are always prepared to fill in the demand for those household chores and farming activities for left-behind husbands, thereby maintaining the patriarchal structures in the local community. In addition, the assistance that some left-behind husbands received from close relations in the absence of their spouses is consistent with the tenets of the extended family system in Ghana.

Table 4: Support husbands received in household chores and farming from close relatives by background characteristics

Variables	Household chores			Farming activities		
	Mother %	in-law %	Sister in-law %	Mother %	Mother in-law %	Sister in-law %
<i>Age</i>						
20 – 29	14.3	7.5	2.8	12.8	9.8	3.7
30 – 39	46.4	25.4	11.1	42.3	26.2	18.5
40 – 49	20.2	26.9	33.3	19.2	31.1	33.3
50 – 59	8.3	26.9	38.9	11.5	19.7	29.6
60+	10.7	13.4	13.9	14.1	13.1	13.1
<i>Occupation</i>						
Farmer	89.3	94.0	80.6	89.7	93.4	81.5
Mason	2.4	1.5	0.0	2.6	1.6	0.0
Carpenter	2.4	1.5	0.0	3.8	0.0	3.7
Retired	1.2	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.6	0.0
Others	4.8	4.5	16.7	2.6	3.3	14.8
<i>Childrenalive</i>						
1 – 3	46.3	24.2	13.9	43.6	25.9	11.1
4 – 6	37.8	42.4	50.0	42.3	41.4	51.9
7 – 9	8.5	27.3	27.8	6.4	25.9	29.6
10+	0.0	1.5	8.3	1.3	3.4	7.4
<i>Education</i>						
None	29.3	56.1	58.3	30.3	52.5	61.5
Primary	22.0	21.2	8.3	23.7	20.3	11.5
Middle/JHS	32.9	15.2	27.8	30.3	18.6	23.1
Secondary	12.2	4.5	2.8	11.8	5.1	3.8
Higher	3.7	3.0	2.8	3.9	3.4	0.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

## Conclusions

This paper focused on out-migration of married women from the Nandom Municipality and the experiences of husbands left behind in carrying out gender differentiated household chores and farming activities in the absence of their wives. The left-behind husbands were mostly young, about half of them were illiterates, who were mostly subsistence farmers. The decision to migrate, which often originates from their wives in most cases, was approved by majority of their husbands, although in some cases, these approvals were given reluctantly. The need for a husband to approve a wife's



decision to migrate shows the gender imbalance in power relations between males and females in patriarchal societies. In a few cases, however, some married women migrated without obtaining permission from their husbands, which poses a threat to the patriarchal system.

Some left-behind husbands, particularly those who were younger, had secondary education and fewer children had to carry out some household chores and farming activities in the absence of their spouses. This means that out-migration of married women transforms gender roles of the left-behind husbands, which contradict the gender and patriarchy perspectives espoused in radical feminism. Another challenge noted was that some left-behind husbands no longer have enough time to participate in social and communal activities such as funerals, weddings, hang out with friends or fully participate in communal work due to their engagement in activities, which hitherto were carried out by their wives. This could negatively affect their social networks and by extension their social capital.

It was also observed that the main coping strategy of left-behind husbands was reliance on close relatives and other extended family members, especially biological mothers and mothers and sisters-in-law. This was particularly common among left-behind husbands who were relatively young (30-49 years). The support given is the local version of the concept of global care chain postulated by Hochschild, 2000, and it also implies that out-migration of married women makes the role of close and extended family members in household chores and farming activities more crucial than before. It also means that gender norms and gender division of labour as practiced in the communities in the Nandom Municipality would remain unchanged for some time once other women (close relatives) are available and prepared to support left-behind husbands in those activities in the absence of their spouses.

In conclusion, the influence of capitalism and patriarchy are evident as some married women move from unpaid domestic work to paid jobs in urban areas leaving behind their husbands who have to engage in household chores and some farming activities which they are not conversant with. Out-migration of married women from the Nandom Municipality therefore, poses some challenges for the

existing power dynamics in the patriarchal system as some women migrated without the permission or approval from their husbands. There is therefore, the need to provide both male and female children in patriarchal societies with the same socialization or informal training to curb gender division of labour. In addition, it is important that the Ministries of Education, Gender, Women and Children Protection, the Nandom Municipal Assembly and the Traditional Leaders adopt a more proactive ways to promote female education and skill training in the Nandom Municipality to reduce the negative effects of capitalism and patriarchy on them so that they could become self-reliant or less-reliant on out-migration to the southern parts of the country for greener pastures. Further studies could focus on the married women themselves regarding their perceptions, experiences and benefits of out-migration for them and their household members in the Nandom Municipality. Furthermore, it will be relevant to assess whether or not benefits that the left-behind husbands receive from their spouses who migrate has enhanced female participation in decision-making in the household.

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