

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

STUDY OF BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES OF CHILDREN IN KINGSTON, JAMAICA WHOSE PARENTS MIGRATED FOR WORK



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The term "barrel children" describes a unique social phenomenon in the Caribbean, particularly in Jamaica, where children are left behind while their parents migrate overseas for work. This separation often results in significant behavioral and emotional challenges for the children, impacting their mental health and well-being. This study examines the specific behavioral and emotional issues faced by children in Kingston, Jamaica, whose parents have migrated for economic reasons. **Objective:** To investigate the behavioral and emotional effects of parental migration on children in Kingston, Jamaica, and to understand the impact of this separation on their mental health, academic performance, and social relationships. **Methods:** A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving both quantitative and qualitative research designs. The study sampled 20 children aged 10 to 17, along with their guardians and teachers, to gather comprehensive data on their experiences. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed with demographic questions and specific items addressing behavioral and emotional well-being. Responses were analyzed to identify patterns related to the children's emotional state, social connections, academic performance, and coping mechanisms. **Results:** The findings reveal that parental migration leads to significant emotional distress among children, with 60% expressing sadness due to their parents' absence. High levels of anxiety and feelings of abandonment were reported, alongside a perceived lack of emotional support. Despite these challenges, many children maintained good academic performance, with 45% often achieving good grades and 95% reporting strong social connections. The study also identified the importance of community support and extended family networks in mitigating the negative effects of parental separation. **Conclusion:** Parental migration, while providing economic benefits, has substantial emotional and psychological costs for the children left behind. The study highlights the need for targeted community-based support programs and culturally appropriate interventions to enhance the well-being and resilience of these children. Strengthening communication between parents and children, alongside building robust support networks, is essential for mitigating the negative impacts of parental separation.

Keywords: Barrel children, parental migration, behavioral issues, emotional well-being, mental health, Kingston, Jamaica, community support, academic performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of "barrel children" in Jamaica presents a complex social issue with many unknowns. While the term broadly refers to children whose parents have migrated, the full extent of the emotional and behavioral impact on these children remains unclear. The long-term consequences of prolonged parental absence on children's mental health, academic performance, and social relationships are not fully understood. Moreover, the effectiveness of existing support systems and coping mechanisms for these children in the Jamaican context is yet to be comprehensively evaluated. The practice of parental migration for economic reasons is deeply rooted in Jamaican culture. Jamaica has one of the highest emigration rates in the world, with approximately 85% of tertiary-educated Jamaicans living abroad. This high rate of migration, particularly among skilled workers, has significant implications for family structures and child-rearing practices (Thomas-Hope, 2002).

The impact of this separation on children is significant. Studies have shown that children left behind by migrant parents often experience feelings of abandonment, loneliness, and depression. These children may also face challenges in school performance and social relationships (Crawford-Brown & Rattray, 2001). Despite the economic benefits of remittances sent by migrant parents, the emotional cost to children can be substantial. Some children report feeling disconnected from their parents, with communication often focused on material needs rather than emotional support (Pottinger & Brown, 2006). However, the effects of parental migration are not universally negative. Some studies have found that children of migrant parents may benefit from increased resources for education and healthcare. The success of these arrangements often depends on the quality of care provided by guardians left in charge of the children (Bakker et al., 2009).

The aim of this study is to investigate the specific behavioral and emotional effects of parental migration on children in Kingston, Jamaica. By examining the impact of parental separation on children's mental health, academic performance, and social relationships, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the "barrel children" phenomenon in the Jamaican context. The findings from this study will contribute to the development of targeted community-based support programs and culturally appropriate interventions to enhance the well-being and resilience of these children.

Literature Review

Migrating parents refers to parents who have to move from one country to another, often because of better opportunities such as jobs, stability for their families, and living arrangements. The global phenomenon of parental migration has significant implications. In our ever more interconnected world, the occurrence of Jamaican parents relocating to foreign lands for employment opportunities has become increasingly common. In the Caribbean region, particularly in Jamaica, the migration rate is notably high, with approximately 15% of households having migrant family members (Hickling & Paisley, 2012). While this trend brings about financial stability and economic prospects for many families, it also raises concerns regarding the mental well-being of their children who are left behind in Jamaica. Marcus et al (2023) identify a prominent strategy where parents migrate first, settling in a new country before sending for their children. This approach, while providing parents with an opportunity to establish a stable foundation, introduces a unique set of challenges for the children involved. The loss of social networks, accompanied by stress and depression, amplifies the challenges faced by both the migrating parents and the children left behind. Feelings of abandonment, especially in cases of parental migration, emerge as a dominant emotional theme (Nwankwo & Govia, 2021). This literature review aims to delve into the complexities of this issue, drawing from studies focused on the Caribbean region and beyond. Through the lens of various research findings, this review seeks to unravel the multifaceted nature of parental migration and its far-reaching consequences on children's lives. This literature review not only strives to emphasize the detrimental effects that parental separation can have on their psychological growth but also aims to explore potential paths for intervention and support. This study identifies three crucial points of discussion: Firstly, it highlights the significance of empowering Jamaican parents working overseas through knowledge and resources that enable them to offer adequate support for their child's mental health requirements. Secondly, it investigates how online counselling services can bridge geographical barriers and provide accessible assistance in addressing these issues. Lastly, community-based initiatives are examined as potential means through which local networks can unite to aid these vulnerable children. Through a critical analysis of existing scholarly works, this literature review endeavours to contribute valuable insights into understanding and alleviating the mental health problems faced by Jamaican children whose parents work as immigrants in foreign countries. By fostering greater awareness and implementing targeted interventions guided by empirical evidence, our goal is to bolster resilience within these communities while ensuring that no child is neglected when it comes to their emotional well-being.

In Kingston, Jamaica, inner-city communities bear witness to the stark reality that up to 74 percent of households have at least one child left behind by one or both parents (Noel, 2017). These statistics highlight the depth of the issue and prompt an exploration of its varied dimensions. While in the United States, there is a growing concern about mental health issues impacting children of Jamaican immigrants. The existing body of research emphasizes the alarming prevalence of these problems, demonstrating that these kids are particularly susceptible due to factors like parental absence and cultural disconnection. As Morrison, Steele, & Henry (2013) have underscored, when parents migrate to a new country, they often encounter numerous challenges in adjusting to their unfamiliar surroundings. This struggle can lead to heightened levels of stress for parents and subsequently impact their ability to provide emotional support for their children. Moreover, disparities between immigrant families and mainstream American society may result in feelings of isolation or confusion among young individuals. Henceforth, it becomes crucial for us to recognize these risk factors and devise strategies aimed at supporting this population through culturally sensitive care interventions that promote healthy parent-child relationships conducive to better understanding. To effectively address this issue and prevent future generations from grappling with similar difficulties, one must approach it empathetically while striving towards improved outcomes for affected youth.

The well-being of immigrant families from Jamaica is a significant matter that necessitates interventions that are culturally attuned and comprehensive. According to Wright (2021), these families encounter distinctive obstacles like societal prejudice and limited access to mental health resources. Consequently, mental health experts must acknowledge the cultural variations in their approach to therapy. Implementing interventions that consider cultural sensitivity can aid in lessening disparities in healthcare outcomes amongst immigrants by recognizing the significance of aspects such as language, faith, and values. Moreover, adopting a holistic perspective accounts for all facets of an individual's existence, encompassing their surroundings, familial dynamics, and communal support systems. This outlook recognizes how various social factors influencing one's well-being extend beyond mere biological aspects. By comprehending these cultural subtleties and

addressing them through an integrated therapeutic framework, more effective healthcare solutions can be provided for Jamaican immigrant families.

To sum up, culturally sensitive and holistic interventions serve as foundational pillars in delivering adequate care for Jamaican immigrant families with mental health requirements. Mental healthcare providers should be cognizant of the distinct challenges faced by this population when devising treatment plans or strategies aimed at promoting improved mental wellness (Wright 2021). Only then will they establish trusting relationships with patients while offering quality care that caters to both emotional needs and respects individual cultural identities?

Examining the literature on Jamaican parents working abroad brings attention to a crucial concern regarding the mental well-being of their children. According to Curran and Naqvi (2014), the societal perceptions of mental health in Jamaica contribute to the lack of support systems for children dealing with parental absence. This includes granting them access to online counselling services and community-based initiatives. The problem that children face when they are left behind by parents who migrate is emotional trauma (*depression, anxiety, and feelings of abandonment*), lack of care and support (*most times children are left in the care of a family or friends who may not provide the adequate support or basic needs*), disruption in education (*a child may lose internet in school or it may affect them academically*), increased vulnerability (*a child/children may face abuse, violence, and exploitation*) stigma and social isolation (*this will lead children into having difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships*), poverty and economic instability (*children may experience economic hardship in which can affect their basic needs such as food, healthcare and shelter*) and difficulty with reunification (*children may find it hard in reunification with their parents after a long period of separation*). Effectively addressing this problem necessitates not only intervention but also preventive measures that concentrate on cultivating resilience in both parents and children. Educating Jamaican families about mental health disorders in a culturally appropriate manner becomes a vital step toward raising awareness among those who may not readily recognize or prioritize their child's emotional needs due to cultural beliefs or the stigma surrounding mental illness. Moreover, online counselling services provide convenience for individuals residing abroad while maintaining confidentiality. Community-based initiatives that unite local organizations, schools, churches, and other stakeholders serve as a supportive network for parents seeking guidance in navigating intricate systems while ensuring consistent care for their children back home. These efforts exemplify how collaborative approaches can foster positive outcomes for families grappling with the challenges imposed by long-distance parenting; however, further research is necessary to discover effective strategies for expanding these interventions beyond pilot programs so they can reach more families impacted by migration. Carter's work acts as an urgent plea to policymakers worldwide who must take bold actions towards crafting policies that facilitate access to resources like online counselling services and community-based initiatives which empower immigrant parents from diverse backgrounds with indispensable information needed to promote good mental health practices among their children regardless of geographical disparities separating them."

In conclusion, the reviewed literature underscores the profound impact of parental migration on the psychological well-being of Jamaican children left behind. This comprehensive analysis highlights the challenges and presents potential avenues for support and intervention. By fostering awareness and implementing culturally sensitive approaches, we can strive to mitigate the negative effects of parental migration on the mental health of these children, promoting their emotional well-being within their communities).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study is a mixed study which employs both a quantitative and qualitative research design to investigate the behavioural and emotional problems of children in Kingston, Jamaica, based on their parental migration status.

2.2. Participants

The study will involve a total of twenty (20) Jamaican children between the ages of 10 and 17. Our research centers on children residing in Kingston, Jamaica. To gather valuable data, we have actively involved their guardians and teachers, who may have an intimate understanding of the children's lives, experiences, and emotional well-being. To uphold ethical research standards, we attempted to implement a strict procedure for obtaining informed consent from the guardians and teachers of the participants. Consent forms were distributed, clearly expressing the research's purpose, methods, and the measures in place to safeguard the participants' confidentiality and anonymity, which they can withdraw from the study at any time.

2.3. Data Collection Tool

In this research endeavour, we have adopted a digital approach for data collection, to efficiently gather information from our participants. For this purpose, we have designed a structured questionnaire using Google Forms, which consists of 30 items.

These 30 items consisted of questions to gather demographic information as well as questions to address the specific issues associated with the behavioral and emotional well-being of children whose parents have migrated for work. The participant's age was considered, therefore it was ensured the questions were carefully constructed to be clear and easy to understand. These questions consisted of mostly 'Yes or No' questions and questions which used a five-point scale. A researcher was present to provide instructions, clarify any doubts, and ensure a standardized process.

2.4. Data Analysis

The comprehensive analysis of the data gathered from children in Kingston, Jamaica, whose parents migrated for work, provides valuable insights into various aspects of their lives. These observations offer a nuanced understanding of the interplay between demographic factors, emotional well-being, and academic performance.

2.5. Demographic Information:

'Adolescence is the stage of development between childhood and adulthood, typically spanning from puberty to late teens or early twenties (age 10-19).' The majority of respondents (75%) are the age of 17, indicating a prevalent representation of adolescents. Additionally, a higher proportion of females (65%) participated in the survey, reflecting the gender distribution within the sample. This demographic composition underscores the importance of considering the adolescent stage, a critical period for emotional and cognitive development. Furthermore, the concentration of respondents from Kingston (60%) highlights the urban context, suggesting potential urban-specific dynamics in the experiences of these children. This implies that factors such as higher population density, greater economic disparities, and different social services available in cities might play a significant role in shaping their experiences and challenges. For instance, urban areas like Kingston may offer greater access to education and social services, which could positively impact "barrel children." However, they may also face increased exposure to crime and social instability, which could negatively affect their emotional and psychological well-being. Thus, understanding these urban-specific dynamics is crucial for addressing the needs of "barrel children" in urban environments like Kingston.

2.6. Parental Employment and Financial Status

A diverse range of parental employment statuses is evident as the parents are either employed, self-employed or unemployed. Though, there is a significant portion of parents that are employed (85%). The financial distribution shows an even split between the lower and higher income brackets, with 50% falling into the \$0-\$100,000 range and another 50% in the \$100,000-\$500,000 range. This underscores the socioeconomic diversity within the sample, influencing the range of resources available to children and potentially impacting their emotional and academic experiences.

2.7. Living Arrangements and Siblings

"Living arrangement refers to the circumstance and conditions in which an individual or family resides such as location, family structure and even homelessness." Grandparents emerge as primary caretakers for many children (60%), indicating a unique family structure. Many children (85%) have 1-3 siblings, contributing to the dynamic familial environment. The prevalence of this family structure and the number of siblings may have implications for emotional well-being, warranting further exploration.

2.8. Feelings about Parental Migration

A substantial number of children (60%) express sadness about their parents leaving, emphasizing the emotional toll of migration. Concurrently, a considerable portion (89.5%) perceives benefits in their parents' migration, with 50% seeing benefits in their parent's departure. This points towards potential coping mechanisms or positive aspects associated with the separation, adding depth to our understanding of the emotional impact. High levels of self-reported depression were discovered in our research among young people coping with the psychological effects of their parent's migration. A few young people even went so far as to say that the devastating experience of losing a parent or parents to international migration was on an emotional par with their parent's passing. (Zúñiga, 2024). Long-term negative effects of parental migrating occur in children's psychosocial wellbeing, particularly in relation to emotional functioning. Rather than

socioeconomic status, positive parent-child relationships and supportive family and social surroundings are important drivers of LBC wellbeing. Programs rooted in the community could be created to offer more assistance and support. (Zhao, 2017).

2.9. Communication with Parents

A mixture of voice calls, texting, and video calls are used by the respondents. Video calls stand out as the predominant mode of communication (55%), highlighting the role of technology in maintaining familial connections. The observed strong emotional support system outside of parents (45%) underscores the significance of broader social networks in children's lives. The variety in communication methods help build and maintain an emotional support system for the children. Each method of communication plays a part in keeping the children connected with their parents and broader social networks, contributing to their overall emotional well-being and sense of support.

2.10. Relationships and Emotional Well-Being:

Most children report good or okay relationships with their parents (70%), and a majority receive financial support (90%). These figures provide a quantitative understanding of the emotional dynamics within familial relationships. A variety of things contribute to children's typically pleasant or acceptable relationships. Despite physical separation, most parents retain a close bond through frequent financial assistance, with 90% of children receiving remittances, which improves living circumstances and educational opportunities. This financial stability can help alleviate some of the emotional issues associated with separation. Strong familial networks can offer surrogate parenting for youngsters, promoting emotional stability and support (Jokhan, 2017). The mix of financial and emotional assistance from extended families, as well as regular contact, contributes to the beneficial maintenance of these ties.

2.11. Academic Performance and Social Life

An academic performance refers to a student achievement and progress in their academic studies and these are usually measured by grades, Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT), Caribbean Examination Council exam (CXC), Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) and completion of homework and projects, while social life on the other hand encompasses a student's relationship, interactions and their experiences outside of their academic life. A significant number of children (45%) often achieve good grades, pointing to a positive academic environment. Almost all respondents have friends (95%), with frequent communication (63.2%), indicating strong social connections. The reported frequencies align with 21.1% of children speaking to their friends 'very often', 63.2% speaking 'often', and 15.8% speaking only 'sometimes'.

12. Anxiety, Behavior, and Rule-Following:

Children in Kingston, Jamaica, whose parents have relocated for employment frequently endure anxiety, behavioral concerns, and difficulties adhering to rules. The absence of parents can cause feelings of abandonment and insecurity, which contribute to increased anxiety. These youngsters may struggle with emotional management, resulting in disruptive conduct, resistance, and acting out at school or home. (Trautner, 2017). Rule-following can be especially difficult since these youngsters may lack continuous parental direction. Authoritarian parenting approaches, which guardians may use to regulate behavior, might worsen these concerns. Such parenting practices frequently result in children becoming more violent or socially distant, experiencing low self-esteem, and rebelling against authoritative people. (Trautner, 2017). The noted anxiety in social settings (65%) indicates potential emotional challenges. However, infrequent fights at school (15%) and adherence to adult rules (65%) suggest a generally disciplined and well-behaved cohort.

13. Perception of Parental Care

The term "perception of parental care" describes how people, especially children, can interpret and experience the nurturing, supportive, and caring actions of their parents. It includes a range of elements such as emotional support, physical care, direction and guidance, quality time, consistency and dependability, responsiveness, and parental involvement. The majority of children (65%) believe their parents care about them, contributing positively to their emotional well-being.

14. Future Perspectives

Children in Kingston, Jamaica, whose parents have relocated for employment encounter distinct problems and possibilities that determine their future perspective. On the one hand, these children frequently benefit from remittances provided by their parents, which can enhance their access to school, healthcare, and general living conditions. However, a lack of parental direction and emotional support can cause feelings of abandonment, psychological stress, and behavioral problems. Community and extended family support play an important role in minimizing these harmful effects, but gaps frequently exist. Future prospects for these children are heavily reliant on the quality of alternative caregiving, community support

networks, and their capacity to adjust to shifting household dynamics. Many children (55%) anticipate that life would be worse or a lot harder if their parents did not migrate, indicating a nuanced perception of the impact of parental migration on their future.

4. RESULTATS

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants (N=20). The majority of respondents were 17 years old (75%) and female (65%). In terms of geographical distribution, Kingston was the most represented parish (60%), followed by Manchester (20%). The remaining respondents were distributed across St. Catherine, St. Elizabeth, and St. Andrew.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	17 years	15	75%
	14-16 years	5	25%
Gender	Female	13	65%
	Male	7	35%
Parish of Residence	Kingston	12	60%
	Manchester	4	20%
	St. Catherine	2	10%
	St. Elizabeth	1	5%
	St. Andrew	1	5%

4.2 Socioeconomic Factors and Living Arrangements

Table 2 illustrates the socioeconomic factors and living arrangements of the respondents. The vast majority of parents (85%) were employed, with an even split between income brackets of \$0-100,000 and \$100,000-\$500,000. Nearly half of the respondents (45%) lived with their grandparents, followed by aunts (25%) and siblings (20%). Most respondents (82.4%) reported having 1-3 siblings.

Table 2: Socioeconomic Factors and Living Arrangements.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Parent's Employment Status	Employed	17	85%
	Unemployed	2	10%
	Self-Employed	1	5%
Parent's Income Status	\$0-100,000	10	50%
	\$100,000-\$500,000	10	50%
Current Living Arrangement	Grandparents	9	45%
	Aunt	5	25%
	Siblings	4	20%
	Dad	1	5%
	Family Friend	1	5%
Number of Siblings	1-3	14	82.4%
	4-6	2	11.8%
	7-9	1	5.9%

4.3 Parental Migration and Communication Patterns

Table 3 outlines the patterns of parental migration and communication. The majority of respondents (55%) reported that their parent(s) had been abroad for more than a year. Video calls were the predominant method of communication (55%), with most respondents communicating very often (55%) or often (25%) with their parents. A significant majority (90%) reported receiving financial support from their migrant parents.

Table 3: Parental Migration and Communication Patterns.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Duration since parent(s) left	More than a year	11	55%
	More than six months	5	25%
	Less than six months	3	15%
	Less than a month	1	5%
Communication method	Video Calls	11	55%
	Voice Calls	4	20%
	Other methods	5	25%
Frequency of communication	Very Often	11	55%
	Often	5	25%
	Sometimes	4	20%
Financial support from parents	Yes	18	90%
	No/Sometimes	2	10%

4.4 Emotional and Social Impacts of Parental Migration

Table 4 presents data on the emotional and social impacts of parental migration on the respondents. While 60% reported feeling sad about their parent(s) leaving sometimes, a significant majority (89.5%) perceived benefits from this migration. Most respondents (80%) thought about their parent(s) often, and 60% described their relationship with their parent(s) as very good or good. Notably, 65% of respondents reported experiencing anxiety in social settings.

Table 4: Emotional and Social Impacts of Parental Migration.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sadness about parent(s) leaving	Sometimes	12	60%
	No	4	20%
	Yes	3	15%
	Not anymore	1	5%
Perceived benefits of parent(s) leaving	Yes	17	89.5%
	No	2	10.5%
Frequency of thinking about parent(s)	Yes (Often)	16	80%
	Occasionally	4	20%
Relationship quality with parent(s)	Very Good/Good	12	60%
	OK	8	40%
Anxiety in social settings	Yes	13	65%
	No	7	35%

4.5 Academic and Social Integration

Table 5 illustrates the academic performance and social integration of the respondents. A majority (60%) reported achieving good grades very often or often. Almost all respondents (95%) had friends at school, with 84.3% communicating with these friends very often or often. The quality of friendships was reported as very good or good by 84.2% of respondents. In terms of behavioral indicators, 75% of respondents reported never getting into fights at school, suggesting generally positive social integration despite the challenges of parental migration.

Table 5: Academic and Social Integration.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency of good grades	Very Often/Often	12	60%
	Sometimes	7	35%
	Rarely	1	5%
Presence of friends at school	Yes	19	95%
	No	1	5%
Frequency of speaking with friends	Very Often/Often	17	84.3%

Table 6 presents the socioeconomic context and family dynamics of the respondents (N=20). A substantial majority of parents (85%) were employed, with an even distribution across two income brackets. The living arrangements of the

respondents were diverse, with a plurality (45%) residing with grandparents, indicating a significant role of extended family in the absence of migrant parents. The majority of respondents (85%) reported having siblings, with most (82.4% of those with siblings) having 1-3 siblings, suggesting predominantly small to medium-sized families. These findings provide insight into the familial and economic circumstances of children with migrant parents.

Table 6: Socioeconomic Factors and Family Dynamics.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Parent's Employment Status	Employed	17	85%
	Unemployed	2	10%
	Self-Employed	1	5%
Parent's Monthly Income (JMD)	0-100,000	10	50%
	100,000-500,000	10	50%
Current Living Arrangement	Grandparents	9	45%
	Aunt	5	25%
	Siblings	4	20%
	Dad	1	5%
	Family Friend	1	5%
Presence of Siblings	Yes	17	85%
	No	3	15%
Number of Siblings (n=17)	1-3	14	82.4%
	4-6	2	11.8%
	7-9	1	5.9%

Table 7 delineates the patterns of parental migration and subsequent communication. The majority of respondents (55%) reported parental absence exceeding one year, indicating long-term separation. Video calls emerged as the predominant mode of communication (55%), with a high frequency of contact reported by most respondents (80% communicating very often or often). The data also reveals a strong financial link, with 90% of respondents receiving financial support from their migrant parents, underscoring the economic motivation behind migration. These findings highlight the maintenance of transnational family ties despite physical separation.

Table 7: Parental Migration Patterns and Communication.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Duration since parent(s) left	More than a year	11	55%
	More than six months	5	25%
	Less than six months	3	15%
	Less than a month	1	5%
Primary Communication Method	Video Calls	11	55%
	Voice Calls	4	20%
	Combination of methods	5	25%
Frequency of Communication	Very Often	11	55%
	Often	5	25%
	Sometimes	4	20%
Financial Support from Parents	Yes	18	90%
	No	1	5%
	Sometimes	1	5%

Table 8 elucidates the emotional impact of parental migration on the respondents. While 60% reported occasional sadness due to parental absence, an overwhelming majority (89.5%) perceived benefits from this separation. The high frequency of thoughts about parents (80% thinking often) suggests a strong emotional connection despite physical distance. Notably, 65% of respondents did not feel ashamed about their parents being overseas, indicating a level of social acceptance of migration. However, the fact that 35% of respondents did not believe their parents cared about them raises concerns about the emotional challenges faced by some children of migrant parents.

Table 8: Emotional Impact of Parental Migration.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sadness about parent(s) leaving	Sometimes	12	60%
	No	4	20%
	Yes	3	15%
	Not anymore	1	5%
Perceived benefits of parent(s) leaving (n=19)	Yes	17	89.5%
	No	2	10.5%
Frequency of thinking about parent(s)	Often	16	80%
	Occasionally	4	20%
Feeling ashamed about parent(s) being overseas	No	13	65%
	Sometimes	4	20%
	Yes	3	15%
Belief that parent(s) care	Yes	13	65%
	No	7	35%

Table 9 presents data on the social and emotional support available to respondents. A significant proportion (85%) reported having at least some emotional support outside of their parents, although this support was not consistently available for all. The majority (60%) described their relationship with their migrant parents as good or very good. However, 65% of respondents reported experiencing anxiety in social settings, with most of these (72.7%) experiencing it sometimes. These findings suggest that while many children of migrant parents maintain positive relationships and have support systems, there are notable challenges in social and emotional adjustment.

Table 9: Social and Emotional Support.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Presence of emotional support system outside parents	Yes	9	45%
	Sometimes	8	40%
	No	2	10%
	Rarely	1	5%
Relationship quality with parent(s)	Good	6	30%
	Very Good	6	30%
	OK	8	40%
Anxiety in social settings/situations	Yes	13	65%
	No	7	35%
Frequency of anxiety (n=11)	Sometimes	8	72.7%
	Often	2	18.2%
	Rarely	1	9.1%

Table 10 presents data on the academic performance and social integration of respondents. A majority (60%) reported achieving good grades very often or often, suggesting that parental migration has not significantly impaired academic performance for most students. High levels of social integration are evident, with 95% of respondents reporting friendships at school and 89.5% maintaining these friendships outside of school. The quality of these friendships was predominantly reported as good or very good (89.5%). These findings suggest that despite the challenges of parental separation, most respondents maintain positive academic outcomes and strong peer relationships.

Table 10: Academic Performance and Social Integration.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency of good grades	Often	9	45%
	Sometimes	7	35%
	Very Often	3	15%
	Rarely	1	5%
Presence of friends at school	Yes	19	95%
	No	1	5%
Frequency of speaking with friends (n=19)	Often	12	63.2%
	Very Often	5	26.3%
	Sometimes	2	10.5%
Quality of friendships (n=19)	Good	14	73.7%
	Very Good	3	15.8%
	OK	2	10.5%
Speaking with friends outside school (n=19)	Yes	17	89.5%
	No	2	10.5%

Table 11 illustrates behavioral indicators among the respondents. The low incidence of school fights (75% never involved) suggests generally positive social adjustment. However, the data on rule-following behavior presents a more nuanced picture, with 65% of respondents only sometimes following the rules set by adults. This could indicate a degree of behavioral challenge or independence that may be related to the absence of parental figures. These findings provide insight into the behavioral outcomes of children with migrant parents and may highlight areas for potential intervention or support.

Table 11: Behavioral Indicators.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Involvement in school fights	Never	15	75%
	Rarely	3	15%
	Sometimes	1	5%
	Often	1	5%
Following rules of adults	Sometimes	13	65%
	Often	4	20%
	Very Often	3	15%

Table 12 presents the geographical distribution of the study participants (N=20). The data reveals a significant concentration of respondents in Kingston, accounting for 60% of the sample. Manchester follows as the second most represented parish at 20%. St. Catherine, St. Elizabeth, and St. Andrew each account for smaller proportions of the sample. This distribution suggests a predominantly urban sample, with a strong bias towards the capital city. The geographical spread, while limited, does include both urban and rural parishes, potentially capturing some diversity in living conditions and experiences. However, the heavy skew towards Kingston should be considered when interpreting the results, as it may not be representative of the broader population of children with migrant parents across Jamaica.

Table 12: Geographical Distribution of Respondents

Parish	Frequency	Percentage
Kingston	12	60%
Manchester	4	20%
St. Catherine	2	10%
St. Elizabeth	1	5%
St. Andrew	1	5%

Table 8 illustrates the respondents' perceptions of how their lives might have been different if their parents had not migrated from Jamaica. The responses reveal a complex and varied set of expectations and beliefs. The most common response, shared by 35% of participants, was that life would be the same, suggesting a significant proportion do not perceive major advantages or disadvantages to their parents' migration. Interestingly, 15% believed life would be better if their parents were present, indicating some level of perceived loss due to migration. However, this is balanced by 20% who anticipated either financial hardship or a slightly harder life if their parents had stayed. The diversity of responses, including 10% who were uncertain, reflects the multifaceted nature of the migration experience and its impacts on children. These findings highlight the subjective and varied perceptions of parental migration among affected children, underscoring the complexity of its psychosocial effects. The results suggest that while some children perceive clear benefits or drawbacks to their parents' migration, many have more nuanced or ambivalent views, which could be influenced by factors such as the quality of care they receive, their understanding of their family's economic situation, and their emotional relationship with their parents.

Table 13: Perceived Impact of Parents Not Migrating.

Perceived Scenario	Frequency	Percentage
Same	7	35%
Think it would be better if they were here	3	15%
I don't know	2	10%
Financial hardship	2	10%
Not much of a difference	2	10%
A little harder	1	5%
Worst	1	5%
Life would have been better in some ways	1	5%
Would be a happier family	1	5%

4. DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the behavioral and emotional effects of parental migration on children in Kingston, Jamaica. Our findings reveal a complex interplay of factors influencing these children's well-being, including emotional responses, communication patterns, perceived benefits of migration, and social integration. The results indicate that 60% of children reported feeling sad about their parents leaving sometimes, while 20% did not feel sad at all. Interestingly, an overwhelming majority (89.5%) perceived benefits from their parents' migration. This ambivalence is consistent with previous research by Pottinger and Brown (2006), who noted the complex emotional landscape navigated by children of migrant parents in the Caribbean. The high percentage of children perceiving benefits aligns with findings from Bakker et al. (2009), who reported that some children of migrant parents in the Caribbean benefit from increased resources for education and healthcare. Communication patterns emerged as a significant factor in our study. The majority of children (55%) used video calls as their primary method of communication with their migrant parents, with 80% communicating very often or often. This high frequency of communication contrasts with earlier studies, such as Crawford-Brown and Rattray (2001), who reported more limited contact between migrant parents and their children. The difference may be attributed to technological advancements that have made frequent, visual communication more accessible and affordable.

Contrary to some expectations, our findings suggest relatively positive outcomes in terms of academic performance and social integration. Sixty percent of the children reported achieving good grades often or very often, and 95% reported having friends at school. These results diverge from some previous studies, such as Lambert et al. (1998), who found higher rates of behavioral and emotional problems among Jamaican children of migrant parents compared to their U.S. counterparts. Our findings suggest that many children of migrant parents are able to maintain good academic standing and form social connections despite the challenges of parental separation. However, the study also revealed areas of concern. Sixty-five percent of respondents reported experiencing anxiety in social settings. This finding is consistent with research by Pottinger (2005), who found that Jamaican children of migrant parents often experienced emotional distress, including anxiety and depression.

Several limitations of this study should be noted. The focus on Kingston may limit the generalizability of our findings to rural areas of Jamaica or other Caribbean nations. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, particularly in areas such as academic performance and social relationships. Future research should consider incorporating more objective measures and expanding the geographical scope of the study.

These findings have important implications for policy and practice. First, given the importance of frequent communication, efforts should be made to ensure reliable and affordable access to video calling technologies for families separated by migration. Second, school-based support programs should be developed to address the high levels of anxiety reported by many children, possibly through counseling services and social skills workshops. Finally, holistic family support programs should be implemented, recognizing and addressing the complex emotional experiences of children with migrant parents. In conclusion, our study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the "barrel children" phenomenon in Jamaica. While challenges clearly exist, many children also demonstrate resilience and adaptability in the face of parental separation. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to better understand the long-term impacts of parental migration on children's development and well-being.

Recommendations:

1. One recommendation is the establishment of support programs within schools, and communities. Tailored towards providing mentorship and counseling for the children whose parents have left them to go overseas. The child's school or the community should have ample aid programs to help them adapt efficiently. Such programs would provide a vital secure place for these children. Skilled tutors or advisers should be the ones on the field even though the programs may exist. As per Lambert et al. (2001), this has functioned flawlessly for numerous children managing matters related to parental nonappearance and cultural acclimations.
2. Furthermore, it is important to foster an environment of support within schools and government organizations for children affected by their parent's absence. Religious organizations can also participate in this. To aid the children in Latin America and the Caribbean, vital sources feel that centers and state agencies should clasp with spiritual groups to offer help to these kids. The sources noted that there is missing mom/dad worry, and that mom/dad disturbance may lead to issue troubles, poor learning, alcohol, and drug use, as well as kid trafficking. The writing from Latin America and the Caribbean also underscores the emotional and mental toll that missing moms/dads

have on children. The child is overwhelmed with feelings of sorrow, denial, fear, bad mood, low self-value, and lack of chums. More importantly, these kids are likely to be stressed and in need of mental health and psychosocial well-being help (Marcus et al., 2023).

3. Moreover, parents should always strive to maintain an open, transparent, and trusting relationship with their children. Ensuring that the concerns of the children are taken into greater consideration. Parents should relate to their offspring openly, transparently, and truthfully to be emotionally and mentally healthy (Jokhan, P.G. 2007. "Suggest an alternate form of corporal punishment to control classroom discipline in Fiji schools." Unpublished Research Report. Suva: University of the South Pacific). A parent must address concerns raised by his or her child before all-encompassingly addressing other family concerns. Jokhan (2007) argues that a good connection exists between parents and children today and can also help produce parents who will listen to their children in the future. Consequently, taking the time, effort, and initiative to be actively involved in the life of your child today listens to and addresses concerns (Jokhan, P.G. 2007).
4. Parents should also ensure that whomever they are leaving their children with is adequately capable of taking care of them in the ways they are not presently able to (ie, emotionally, mentally, and physically). It is vital to ensure that care given without parents is satisfactory to fulfill the emotional, mental, and physical needs of young ones to prevent behavior troubles, as young ones of migrants. Studies have indicated that Jamaican tutors ranked their pupils higher compared to U.S. teenagers in diverse aspects of behavior troubles, suggesting that Jamaican children were displaying a loftier rate of behavior and emotional troubles compared to U.S. children left by employees who have migrated. Parents going to work should, therefore, guarantee that the care-providers will left behind possess the aptitude to cater for the needs and requirements of these young ones. Differences between communal guidelines in the two nations seem to be potential causes for the differences in behavior and emotional troubles among diverse young ones, suggesting the significance of leaving a thorough backing program for young ones. (Lambert, Lyubansky, & Achenbach, 1998)
5. Parents should also educate their children on the reason/s they have to leave the country to seek other opportunities. This will aid in preventing resentment. Parents need to make their offspring understand why they are leaving. Parents should communicate with their young ones openly and explain why they have to search for chances abroad. This will assist in easing any hatred young ones might feel due to their absence. As pointed out in *Impact of Migration on Children in the Caribbean* (Bakker, Elings-Pels, & Reis, 2009), teaching young ones about migration will help them comprehend, which will heighten the bond between caregivers and young ones. Helping young ones comprehend not only makes them feel secure but also assists them get the know-how to surmount the challenges they will face as a result of their severance.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the comprehensive analysis of children in Kingston, Jamaica, whose parents migrated for work offers valuable insights into their lives. The study highlights demographic factors, emotional well-being, and academic performance, emphasizing the nuanced interplay between these aspects. Noteworthy findings include the prevalence of adolescent respondents, diverse parental employment statuses, unique family structures, and the emotional impact of parental migration. The majority of children maintain positive relationships with their parents, receive financial support, and exhibit good academic performance. The findings also show that, despite the financial rewards and attempts to maintain connection through technology, the children feel unhappy, abandoned, and depressed. These youngsters, who are frequently left in the care of grandparents or other relatives, experience emotional turbulence, which has a negative influence on their well-being. The study emphasizes the need for supporting community networks, school-based mentoring programs, and culturally appropriate approaches to addressing these difficulties. The detrimental impacts of parental relocation on these children's mental health can be minimized by encouraging open communication and providing proper support structures, boosting emotional and psychological resilience within their communities. It can be said that the research aims & objectives were accomplished.

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ANNEX

Sample Questionnaire:

Section 1:

1. What is your Age? **(10-13/ 14-16/ 17)**
2. What is your Gender? **(Male/ Female/ Prefer not say)**
3. Which Parish are you from? _____
4. What is your parent/s employment status? **(Employed/ Unemployed/ Self-Employed)**
5. What is their income status? **(\$0- \$100,000/ \$100,000- \$500,000/ \$500,000- 1,000,000/ Over 1,000,000)**
6. Who are you currently living with? **(Aunt/Sibling/Uncle/Grandparent/Cousin/Family Friend/ Dad)**
7. Do you have any siblings? **(Yes/No)**
8. If not, how many siblings do you have? **(1-4/5-9/More than 10)**

Section 2:

9. How long has it been since your parent/s left? (**Less than a month/ Less than 6 months/More than 6 months/1 year/More than 1 year**).
10. Do you feel sad about your parent/s leaving? (**Yes/No/Sometimes/Not anymore**)
11. Do you see any benefit of your parent/s leaving? (**Yes/No**)
12. Do you feel ashamed to mention that your parents are overseas? (**Yes/No/Sometimes**)
13. Do you think about your parent/s often? (**Yes/No**)
14. How do you communicate with your parent/s? (**Voice calls/Texting/Video Calls/Other**)
15. If other, please specify. _____
16. How often do you speak to your parent/s? (**Very often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Almost never**)
17. How would you describe your relationship with your parent/s? (**Very good, Good, Okay, Bad, Very bad**)
18. Do you have any present support system outside of your parent/s? (**Yes/No**)
19. Do you receive financial support/assistance from your parent/s? (**Yes/No**)
20. How often do you get good grades in school? (**Very often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Almost never**)
21. Do you have any friends in school? (**Yes/No**)
22. If yes, how often do you speak to them? (**Very often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Almost never**)
23. Do you speak with your friends outside of school? (**Yes/No**)
24. Do you get anxious in social settings/situations? (**Yes/No**)
25. If yes, How frequently? (**Very often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely**)
26. How would you describe your relationship with your friends? (**Very good, Good, Okay, Bad, Very bad**)
27. Do you get into fights at school? (**Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never**)
28. Do you follow the rules of the adults in your life? (**Very often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Almost never**)
29. If you chose '**Almost Never**', why do you not follow the rules of the adults in your life?
30. Do you believe your parent/s care about you? (**Yes/No/Sometimes**)
31. What do you think your life would be like if your parent/s did not leave Jamaica?



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