



## **DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AND SCHOOL OUTCOMES AMONG CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND BY MIGRANT FATHERS IN KOSOVO - DO PARENTAL STYLES OF CARETAKERS BACK AT HOME MEDIATE THE OUTCOMES?**

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### *Abstract*

*Study explores mental health and school outcomes of CHLB (children left behind) by migrant parents by comparing them with peers from non-migrant families in Kosovo. The study attempts to explore the mitigation of various ecological proxies in outcome variables. The study aims to expand the knowledge on impact of the relationship with the immediate caretakers of CHLB impact on their mental health and school outcomes. University students were used as informants and found CHLB by migrant parent and control subjects. The sample had equal number of children with migrant and non-migrant parent (n=412). Data analysis compared the findings between the groups and analyzed the impact of independent variables on outcome variables for both groups using linear regression analysis. Results demonstrate that CHLB do not show differences in depression scores but show lower school success and school-related problems as a result of parental migration. Results indicate that depression scores among CHLB were predicted by remittance-sending regularity and that school success from frequency of communication with the migrant parent. Migration within the country was found to predict depression and school outcomes for both groups of adolescents. Study lacks random selection procedures and has limited generalizability. Proxies measured in the study have no objective cross-checks. Findings could be useful for school psychologists,*

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*health/social workers and teachers that work with these children. Regularity of remittance sending and frequent communication with migrant parent appear to act as protective factor in mental health and school outcomes of CHLB. Study tries to fulfil a gap in the literature by exploring the impact of parenting styles of the primary caretakers in mental health and school outcomes of CHLB.*

Keywords: children left behind (CHLB); migration; parenting styles; depression; school success

## **Introduction**

There is a general agreement in the scientific community that the social and mental health costs of migration have been neglected over its financial benefits (Toyota, Yeoh, & Ngyen, 2007). This is especially valid for children left behind (CHLB) who remain back home while one or two parents migrate, searching for better economic opportunities, often to more developed countries or from rural to urban areas within their country. Most studies of children left behind have focused on the economic impact of migration in the country of origin, mainly on education and health expenditures. The impact of separation, from at least one parent, on the psychological development and mental health of children left behind is a novel field of study, developed after the 1990's. This study will focus on the depression symptoms and school-related outcomes of CHLB in Kosovo by comparing them with peers who have non-migrant parents. The study also aims to explore the impact on targeted outcomes of various socio-economic variables, and parenting styles of the caretaker at home.

Over the past century Kosovo has experienced multiple different waves of migration (UNDP, 2014). Pre-1989 unskilled men with little education emigrated to Germany and Switzerland as guest workers. From 1989-1997 when Kosovo autonomy was abolished, skilled and educated young man migrated from rural and urban areas to European countries. From 1998-1999, 800,000 people escaped or were forced from their homes as result of war. Lastly, post 1999 there was a constant small-scale migration to EU countries mainly for economic and family reunion purposes. However, there was a major shift in the migration flow in 2014 when a large number (estimated at 50,000) of Kosovars using illegal corridors headed to EU countries (predominantly Germany) in the quest for better economic and social conditions.

There are no exact statistics of CHLB in Kosovo but it is estimated that the proportion of CHLB is relatively high, as 25% of households in Kosovo have at least one migrant member (UNDP, 2012) and 21.4% of its population live outside of Kosovo (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2014).

Remittances are an important source of income for Kosovo, as they account for 11% of the total GDP (UNDP, 2012). Although migration from Kosovo decreased after the war in 1999, Kosovo is still one of the highest migrant-sending countries in Europe (Eurostat, 2014). Thus far, studies on migration in Kosovo have only focused on the economic impact of migration and no study has focused on the mental health and social consequences of parental migration on those left behind. There is no official figure of children living in Kosovo whose parents work in other countries. The issues related to the wellbeing of CHLB appear to be relevant fields of study, since CHLB comprise a large portion of the population in countries with a high percentage of immigrants. For example, CHLB make up a total of 21.7% of children in China (Demuger & Xu, 2013), 27% of children in the Philippines (Parrenas, 2005), and up to 80% of children in rural Mali (Whitehead & Hashim, 2005).

As the field lacks a clear and structured theoretical framework for studying factors that mitigate the mental health of CHLB, studies in this field often refer to experiences of CHLB as similar to those of children who experienced parental divorce (Liu, Li, & Ge, 2009) or to children with attachment-related issues (Graham & Jordan, 2011). However, a logical question arises whether this parallel is the right one. Studies focusing on transnational families indicate that children are left behind by their fathers, mothers, or both parents (Yeoh & Lam, 2007), which might end up with different outcomes for CHLB, especially depending on who takes care of them. A common dynamic, between children raised by divorced parents and children who have a migrant parent or parents, is that children face internal family structural changes that eventually affect their social and emotional development. Nevertheless there are qualitative differences between these types of separations, as in families with migrant members who have a sense of family continuance (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012), who maintain regular contact and visit with the ultimate aim of reunion, either in the country of destination or of origin. Assuming that the majority of migrant parents in Kosovo are fathers (UNDP, 2014) and most of the mothers remain with the children, it would be important to explore how maternal parenting styles interact with mental health and school-related variables.

Previous studies have not focused specifically on the quality of interaction between left-behind children and their main caretaker. The literature indicated that adolescents that are raised in authoritative households and other parenting styles predict academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment (Newman, Harrison, Dashiff, & Davies, 2008), depression (Lipps, Lowe, Gibson, Halliday, Morrison, Clarke, & Wilson 2012; King, Vidourek, & Merianos, 2016). Specifically the mentioned studies indicate that permissive and authoritarian parenting predicts higher depression symptoms and lower school achievement, whereas authoritative parenting acts as protective factor. Little is known on maternal parenting styles in context of a nonresidential biological father (Karre & Mounts, 2012), especially on migrant fathers, as related to school related behavior (Fletcher, Steinberg, & Sellers, 1999) and other mental health outcomes. It is assumed that having a migrant husband has a profound implication for family organization and for individual family members (Desai & Banerji, 2008). This might mean more responsibility in terms of taking care and disciplining of children for mothers who remain in country of origin with children (Ikuomola, 2015). Parenting styles of the of the mothers of children left behind might be a meaningful construct to study in explaining children mental health and school related outcomes.

Studies from other countries with a high percentage of CHLB indicate higher mental health problems among CHLB compared to other children, such as depression (Gao, Li, Kim, Congdon, Lou, & Griffiths, 2010; Camacho & Hernández, 2007; He, Fan, Liu, Li, Wang, Williams, & Wong, 2012), social problems (Graham & Jordan, 2011; Fan, Su, Gill, & Birmaher, 2010; Gavriiliuc, Platon, & Afteni 2006) and school-related problems (Giannelli & Mangiavacchi, 2010; Toth, Toth, Voicu, & Stefanescu, 2007). Similarly, other studies have found that CHLB have higher anxiety, somatization, aggressive behavior (Zárate, Yedra, Rivera Vargas, González Flores, & León Córdoba, 2013), and emotional problems (Lahaie, Hayes, Piper, & Heymann, 2009) when compared to children with non-migrant parents.

On the other side of the spectrum Zentgraf and Chinchilla (2012), do not agree that child-parent separation is always traumatic and with long lasting negative effects. Suarez-Orozco, Todorova & Louie (2002) argue that migrants from non-western cultures might have extended families that provide a wide supportive network to children left behind and that parents do maintain control over children through transnational family practices. For example, a study with

CHLB in four Southeast Asian countries found that CHLB in the Philippines were less likely to have conduct disorders and less likely to have emotional problems than children with non-migrant parents (Graham & Jordan 2011). One explanation for this is that, in the Philippines, due to a long tradition of migration, a normalization of transnational families might have occurred even when the mother is absent (Asis, 2006). Others suggest that impacts of parental migration might differ with gender of the child left behind (Albin, Qin, & Hong, 2013) and found that emotional problems were observed more in left-behind girls and conduct problems found more in left-behind boys. The literature review from a country with high numbers of children left behind, China, indicates that factors such as economic situation, age of child left behind, time since separation and support from society can affect the problems of left-behind children. The aim of this study is to explore mental health and school outcomes of CHLB by migrant parents in Kosovo, through the measurement of depression symptoms, school success and behavior as dependent variables and comparing them with peers from non-migrant families. The study attempts to explore the mitigation of various ecological proxies in depressive symptoms and school outcomes as reported by adolescents: migrant status of the parent, maternal parenting styles, socio-economic indicators (family), social support, and violence (school and community).

## **Methods**

### *Study population and procedures*

The sample included CHLB by migrant parents, and children of non-migrant parents, from Kosovo. The sampling of children was done using snowball sampling. Snowballing in this case was a non-probability sampling method in which university students were used as informants to find through their personal or social networks respondents that met specific criteria. As stated earlier, researchers had no estimation of CHLB in Kosovo. Snowball sampling was used as a convenient and cost-effective method, recommended for these situations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Second and third year students in the Department of Psychology at the University of Prishtina in Kosovo, in two specific courses, were asked to administer the questionnaires to maximum of two adolescents who had at least one migrant parent working out of Kosovo, and to maximum of two adolescents who had non-migrant parents. Students interested

(n=130) in the study had a 45-minute session with two research assistants (co-authors in this study) in reviewing the questionnaire and receiving guidance on sampling and questionnaire administration. Students were given written instruction on the inclusion criteria for CHLB and children with non-migrant parents; these included: 1. those who had at least one parent working outside of Kosovo for more than one year; 2. age group 12-16; 3. university students shouldn't be in family relation with selected participants; 4. children with non-migrant parents should be selected from the same school as the CHLB; 5. maternal parental consent needed to be signed before administering the questionnaire. Students were advised to collect data in person, but with the provision of privacy to respondents, and to answer only when respondents asked for clarifications. Students were not informed on the overall aim of the study, in order to reduce eventual bias as questionnaire administrators. Each questionnaire asked a phone number of a parent for verification whether the questionnaires were filled in by their children. In our verification process of calling 35 numbers at random, all parents confirmed that their children had filled in a questionnaire.

#### *Measurements*

*Demographic characteristics.* Participants were asked to provide information on their gender, age, parental education and employment status of parents and family composition, whether they lived in a nuclear or extended family including grandparents and/or uncles, and whether they had migrated within Kosovo during the last 4 years (0 No and 1 Yes). Family economic status was assessed by asking respondents perception on whether their families: has less income compared to other families (1), has similar income as other families (2), has more income compared to other families (3). Also each individual was asked to answer whether any of their parent worked abroad currently with (0 No and 1 Yes). Participants were also asked if they have friends whose father work abroad (0 No and 1 Yes).

*Children left behind characteristics.* Children left behind were asked to provide information on when their parent went abroad to work (0 No and 1 Yes), frequency of communication with the migrant parent was measured with: every day (1), every second or third day (2), once a week (3), every second week (4), once a month (5), we communicate rarely (6) and we don't communicate (7). , and Remittance sending was measured with: don't know, doesn't send regularly and sends regularly. For further analysis we coded with 0 don't know and doesn't

send) and with 1 sends regularly. The information was gathered only from adolescent respondents and was not confirmed with other sources. There is evidence from the literatures that there is agreement between adolescents' and parents report the SES measures (Pu, Hang, Chou, 2011);

*Parenting styles.* Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) developed by John R. Buri (1991). The PAQ consists of 30 items with three subscales, based on parental authority prototypes (Levin, 2011) divided into permissive where parents are very involved with children and have very few demand or control on children (Cronbach alpha .62), authoritarian is punitive parenting, asking to follow direction with little or no explanation or feedback (Cronbach alpha .64), and authoritative style is child centered and helps children to regulate their feelings (Cronbach alpha .61) and total scale with Cronbach alpha .78 (Arenliu, Hoxha, Berxulli, & Jemini-Gashi, 2014). Participants were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

*Violence related measurement.* In total, nine items measured whether in the last 6 months the adolescent experienced teasing, physically attack, or derogatory name-calling in school and neighborhood of residence. Three other items asked respondents if they teased, hit someone or used force to make others obey them, tentatively measuring proactive aggression. Respondents were asked to report the frequency of occurrence from 0 to more than 6 times. Six other items measured the frequency of victimization of the respondents within school of neighborhood of residence. The scores ranged from 0 to 36. Factorial analysis using principal component analysis was used to create a single factor score for the nine items, which was used in further analysis. The items of the questionnaire were from a study with Kosovar adolescents (Uka, 2011), the Cronbach alpha resulted with .78.

*Depression.* Kutcher Depression Scale (KDS) (LeBlanc, Almudevar, Brooks, & Kutcher 2002) has 11 items measuring depression symptoms among adolescents. The measure was translated and back-translated and used with Kosovar adolescents. KDS had satisfactory Cronbach alpha .74 and test retest correlation between two weeks .70 in a study with Kosovar adolescents (Kosumi, 2011). Items measured presence or no presence of specific depressive symptoms, for example: "*Feeling decreased interest in: hanging out with friends; being with your best friend; being with your boyfriend/girlfriend; going out of the house; doing schoolwork or work; doing hobbies, sports or recreation.*" On a scale of

0, 'hardly ever'; 1, 'much of the time'; 2, 'most of the time'; and 3 'all the time'. The scores of the scale range from 0 to 33, with high scores indicating higher symptoms of depression.

*School related outcomes.* The school related outcomes were measured with three items. First one asked the school success in the previous semester. The overall success in Kosovar education system is measured from 1 being very poor, 2 poor, 3 satisfactory, 4 very good and 5 being excellent. Second question asked whether students were received any disciplinary measure due to misconduct of other behavior that was considered against school regulation (0 No and 1 Yes). The third item asked whether their parent was called in last semester in school due to disciplinary issues of student in school (0 No and 1 Yes). It is very common in school that parent are invited to school if child is engaged in any behavior that was not in accordance with school regulations.

*Social Support.* Social support was measured with four items two items measured their relation with the teachers. One asked whether teacher try to help them out when they need help and whether they share personal problems with teachers. Two other items asked same questions on friends. The answers were from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree.

#### *Statistical analysis*

In order to assess differences between children with migrant parent and children with no migrant parents in demographic terms (gender, age, parental education, migration within Kosovo, working status of mother, income and type of family they live in), averages of parenting style, depression, school success and violence-related scores were determined using the chi-square test for categorical variables and independent t-test for continuous variables. We also explored factors related to dependent variables separately for depression and school success for both groups by using multiple linear regression analysis. Independent variables were: gender, income, living in extended or nuclear families, migration in the last few years within Kosovo and parental migrant status. Lastly, we used a stepwise linear regression relation of specific independent variables for children with migrant parents (gender, income, violence scores, migration within Kosovo, social support scores, and parenting styles) and in the second step we explored the model by adding remittance-sending regularity and frequency of contact with migrant parent to outcome variables of depression and school success. Statistical analyses were performed

with Statistical Package for Social Sciences 20 (SPSS). Tests were two-tailed and performed at the significance level.

*Socio-demographic characteristics*

The sample consisted of an equal number of adolescents who had at least one parent working abroad (n=206) and parents not working abroad (n=206). Children with parent working abroad reported significant lower levels of employment for mothers (22.1%) compared to children with no migrant parent (29.9%). Children left behind by migrant parent reported higher income and a higher percentage lived with their grandparents and uncles or extended families, compared to children with no migrant parents. Table 1 summarizes the differences for demographic variables between two groups.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample children with migrant parent and children with no migrant parent: gender, age, parental education, urban or rural residence, working status of mother, income and type of family they live in)

	Non- migrant parent (n=206) M (SD) %	CHLB (n=206) M (SD) %	p-value ( $\chi^2$ , t-test)
Gender			<. 372
Male	45.7%	45.3%	
Female	51.7%	53.8%	
Missing	2.6 %	.9 %	
Age ; Mean (SD)	14.4 (1.2)	14.3 (1.67)	<. 708
Fathers' education			<. 041
No formal schooling	2.9%	2%	
Primary school	9.7%	11.4%	
Didn't complete high school	2.5%	3.5%	
High school	38.2%	50.7%	
Started university; didn't complete	13.7%	12.9%	
University degree	32.8%	19.4%	
Missing	1%	2.4%	
Mothers' education			<.528
No formal schooling	4.9%	4.5%	
Primary school	27.3%	24.3%	
Didn't complete high school	7.8%	11.9%	
High school	31.7%	33.7%	
Started university; didn't complete	11.2%	13.4%	
University degree	17.1%	12.4%	
Missing	.5%	1.9%	

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample children with migrant parent and children with no migrant parent: gender, age, parental education, urban or rural residence, working status of mother, income and type of family they live in) – *continued*

	Non- migrant parent (n=206) M (SD) %	CHLB (n=206) M (SD) %	p-value (c2, , t-test)
Living			<.311
Urban	54.4%	51.5%	
Rural	45.5%	48.5%	
Migrated within Kosovo in last 4 years			<.297
Yes	15%	17.5%	
No	85%	82.5%	
Mother working			<.045
Yes	29.9%	22.1%	
No	70.1%	77.9%	
Income			<.001
Has much less income compared to other Families	12.5%	2.9%	
Has similar income compared to other families	62.5%	56.9%	
Has more income compared to other families	25%	40.2%	
In our family we live:			<.001
Nuclear	66.7%	46.3%	
Together with grandparents or uncles	32.6%	53.6%	
Missing	1.2%	0%	
Do you have a friend whose parent lives abroad?			<.910
Yes	46.3%	45.1%	
Social Support	14.1 (2.72)	14.0 (2.4)	<.501

Children with migrant parent were asked a set of specific questions. The vast majority of the adolescents who were interviewed reported that their father was working abroad, 98.5% (n=203), and only 1.5% (n=3) reported that their mother was working abroad. The respondents were asked about frequency of contact with their migrant parent; they reported that they communicated on a daily basis, 64.6% (n=133); two to three times per week, 20.9% (n=43); once per week, 6.3% (n=13); every two weeks, 1.5% (n=3); once per month, 1.5% (n=3); rarely communicate, 2.4% (n=5); and don't communicate at all 2.4% (n=5); one

respondent didn't respond to the question. For further analysis the variables were grouped in three groups: those that communicated on a daily basis, two to three times per week, and others more rarely or not at all. 22.9% (n=47) of the children did not know if their migrant parent sent remittances on a regular basis or did not send remittances; 73.8% (n=152) reported that their parents sent remittances on a regular basis, and 3.4% (n=7) didn't respond to this item.

In terms of visit frequency, with migrant parent within a year, 18.9% (n=39) stated 5 or more times; 6.8% (n=14) 4 times; 23.3% (n=48) three times; 33% (n=68) two times; 12.1% (n=25) once; 2.4% (n=5) didn't visit at all and 3.4% (n=7) didn't respond to this item.

## Results

In terms of average scores for the Kutcher Adolescent Depression Scale there was no significant difference between children with migrant parent and children with no migrant parent, as presented and analyzed by the independent sample test in Table 2. In three measures related to school behavior, children left behind by migrant parent reported significantly lower school success (measured from 1, poor to 5, excellent), reported in higher percentages that they were issued disciplinary measures in school, 14.4% compared to 7.3% for children with no migrant parents, and reported that their parents were more often invited to school for disciplinary issues, 24.6% compared to 13.2% for children with no migrant parents.

Table 2. Depression and school- related outcomes; comparison between groups

	Non- migrant parent (n=206) M (SD) %	CHLB (n=206) M (SD) %	p-value (c <sup>2</sup> , t-test)
Depression, Mean (SD)	6.09, (5.3)	5.59, (4.83)	<.318
School success, Mean (SD)	4.46, (.79)	4.19, (.90)	<.003
Disciplinary measures in school			<.015
Yes	7.3%	14.4%	
No	92.7%	85.6%	
Parent invited to school for disciplinary issues			<.010
Yes	13.2%	24.6%	
No	86.9%	75.4%	

Mean comparison using independent t-test analysis between adolescents with migrant parent and those with non-migrant parents on scores of maternal parenting styles didn't reveal any significant mean differences as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Parenting style of mothers as reported by adolescents from both groups

	Non- migrant parent (n=206) M (SD) %	CHLB (n=206) M (SD) %	p-value (c <sup>2</sup> , t-test) M (SD) %
Permissive parenting style, Mean (SD)	28.78, (5.05)	28.79 (5.36)	<.997
Authoritarian parenting style, Mean (SD)	30.54, (5.65)	31.25, (5.70)	<.209
Authoritative parenting style, Mean (SD)	36.92, (5.62)	36, 96 (5.37)	<.951

Table 4 presents the regression analysis of a set of independent variables for depression scores and school success for the whole sample. Depression scores were predicted from migration within Kosovo ( $\beta=.13$ ,  $p<.05$ ), violence scores ( $\beta=.13$ ,  $p<.05$ ), permissive ( $\beta=.16$ ,  $p<.01$ ), authoritarian ( $\beta=.26$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and authoritative parenting ( $\beta=-.20$ ,  $p<.05$ ) style scores, and finally with reported financial status ( $\beta=-.11$ ,  $p<.05$ ). All these variables accounted for 20% variance of *depression* scores among adolescents. The migration status of the parent didn't seem to predict the depression scores.

Table 4. Linear regression model for depression scores and school success as dependent variables for the total sample

	Depression total			School Success		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Migrated within Kosovo	1.77	.64	.13**	-.48	.11	-.21*
Violence scores	.68	.24	.13**	-.15	.04	-.17*
Permissive parenting	.16	.05	.16*	-.02	.01	-.10**
Authoritarian parenting	.24	.04	.26*	-.02	.01	-.01
Authoritative parenting	-.19	.04	-.20*	.02	.01	.15**
Parent migrant status	-.43	.48	-.04	-.30	.08	-.17*
Financial status	-.96	.42	-.11**	.19	.07	.12**
R <sup>2</sup> , F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	.20, 15.4*			.15, 11.3*		

Note: \* $p < .01$ ; \*\* $p < .05$

Table 4 the second model presents the regression analysis for school success, for the whole sample. School success scores were predicted from migration within Kosovo ( $\beta=-.21, p<.001$ ), violence scores ( $\beta=-.17, p<.001$ ), permissive parenting styles scores ( $\beta=-.10, p<.05$ ), authoritative parenting styles scores ( $\beta=.15, p<.05$ ) reported financial status ( $\beta=.12, p<.05$ ) and migrant status of the parent ( $\beta=-.17, p<.001$ ). All these variables accounted for 15% variance of reported school success among adolescents.

Table 5 presents the results of the stepwise regression analysis for depression scores and school success scores as dependent variables, only for the children with migrant parents. The first model with independent variables resulted with 22% of variance of depression scores with significant predictors of violence scores ( $\beta=.19, p<.05$ ), permissive parenting ( $\beta=.23, p<.01$ ), authoritarian parenting ( $\beta=.15, p<.01$ ) and migrating within Kosovo ( $\beta=-.17, p<.01$ ). The second model, by adding the two variables, changed from 22% to 24% of variance change for depression scores where remittance-sending regularity resulted in prediction of depression scores ( $\beta=-.21, p<.01$ ) and not frequency of communication with the parent. The school success results were explained in the first model solely by whether the respondents migrated in the last four years ( $\beta=-.18, p<.05$ ); in the second model the school success scores were explained with an increase in the variance percentage to 17%, with the frequency of communication with migrant parent. The results indicate interaction between remittance-sending regularity and depression, and frequency of communication with school success. Factor that interacts with both dependent outcomes was migration within Kosovo in the last 4 years.

Table 5. Stepwise linear regression model for depression scores and school success as dependent variable for children left behind sample only

Independent variables	Depression		School success	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender	-.11 (.36) -.021	-.13 (.36) -.02	-.23 (.12) -.13	-.217 (.12) -.12
Financial status	-.466 (.33) -.09	-.52 (.33) -.10	.16 (.11) .10	.15 (.11) .09
Violence score	.511 (.188) .19**	.48 (.19) .18 **	-.09 (.06) -.10	-.08 (.06) -.10
Social support	-.24 (.21) -.08	-.20 (.21) -.07	.07 (.07) .07	.07 (.07) .08

Table 5. Stepwise linear regression model for depression scores and school success as dependent variable for children left behind sample only - *continued*

	Depression		School success	
Permissive parenting	.12 (.035) .23*	.11 (.03) .224*	-.02 (.01) -.13	-.02 (.01) -.12
Authoritarian parenting	.07 (.03) .152**	.07 (.03) .145**	-.01 (.01) -.04	-.01 (.01) -.06
Authoritative parenting	-.03 (.04) -.06	-.02 (.04) -.05	.02 (.01) .14	-.02 (.01) -.12
Migrated within Kosovo	1.2 (.50) .166**	1.03 (.50) .144**	-.41 (.17) -.18**	-.40 (.17) -.17**
Remittance-sending regularity		-.94 (.44) -.14**		-.14 (.15) -.07
Frequency of communication with migrant parent		-.16 (.26) -.04		.19 (.09) .16**
$R^2$ , $F$ for change in $R^2$	.22, 6.33*	.24, 5.70*	.14, 3.79*	.17, 3.62*

Note: \* $p < .01$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ .

### Conclusions

This is the first study to explore the mental health and school outcomes of children left behind in Kosovo by migrant parents. In general the results demonstrate that children left behind by migrant parents do not show differences in depression scores but show significant lower school success and school-related problems as a result of parental migration, when compared with children of non-migrant parents. In a separate analysis including only participants with migrant parents, it was found that the depression scores were predicted by remittance-sending regularity and that school success was predicted by frequency of communication with the migrant parent. Another important finding in this study is that migration within the country during the last four years was found to predict depression and school outcomes for both groups of adolescents.

The findings show the complexity in understanding the mental health outcomes of children left behind by migrant parents, and that explanation of the findings might be in the cultural context where the phenomena are studied, rather than generalized from findings in other countries. The lack of difference in mental health outcomes between children with migrant parents and those without

migrant parents in this study are similar to findings in the Philippines (Asis, 2006). In Kosovo, migration is a norm rather than an exception and families do tend to provide support for children and parents left behind; as observed in this study, children left behind reported living with extended family more than the control group. Another explanation might be that, in communities where migration is a common phenomenon, child fostering is less stigmatized than in other communities, especially when the experience is shared by neighboring children and where technological advancements play an important role in the “virtual presence” of a migrant parent (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Yeoh and Lam (2007) suggested that communication with migrant parents helped to decrease the negative effect of migration. Descriptive data from this study indicate that almost half of interviewed children have in their circle a friend who is a child of a migrant working abroad, although the sample is not a representative sample this gives an indication that having a migrant parent is a common phenomenon in Kosovo. 65% of the children with migrant parents working abroad communicate with them on a daily basis. Internet penetration in Kosovo is high and migrants communicate even with the most distant rural areas of Kosovo (Leutloff-Grandits, 2012). These two and other contextual factors might play an important role in mediating mental health outcomes, which should be explored in more depth in future research. Another significant variable predicting depression scores was the remittance-sending regularity, where children who had no information on the regularity or had no remittance at all were at higher risk for depression than those who reported regular remittances. This finding suggests that parental absence, combined with lack of regularity in sending remittances, bears a risk for mental health problems of the children left behind. Absence seems acceptable, as long as the migrant parent maintains a social and economic presence in the home country (Valtolina & Colombo, 2012).

The present study provides some insight for the first time on the impact of maternal parenting styles on children left behind by a migrant father. The findings might be especially relevant for the countries where male migration is common. It is evident that family dynamics shift with the migration of one parent. In the case of a migrant father, it removes him from daily interactions and reaffirms further the traditional division of roles where father is the breadwinner and mother is the homemaker (Parrenas, 2008) who raises the children. Additionally, the fathers in Kosovo and other patriarchal societies are seen to play an important role in the children’s discipline. Absence of father suggests it’s

the mother who takes this role. Analysis from the first model for both groups of children showed that maternal parenting styles predicted depression scores in expected directions. Authoritative maternal parenting styles decreased the risk for depression, whereas permissive and authoritarian maternal parenting styles increased the risk for depression in both groups. More specifically, the separate model for children with migrant parents suggests that permissive and authoritarian maternal parenting styles increase the risk of depression among children with migrant parent. These two types of parenting are very different; permissiveness is characterized by love, warmth and neglectfulness or lack of control; authoritarian parenting is characterized by a lack of love and warmth, and excessive control (Baumrind, 1991). Permissive parenting by mothers was found detrimental to children's wellbeing and associated with depression (Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007) and other mental health problems (Wolfradt, Hempel, & Miles, 2003).

International migration of a parent can have both positive and negative effects on the education of children left behind (Antman, 2013; Bryant, 2005). The first findings from Kosovo indicate that parental absence as a result of migration makes a negative impact on overall school success, more frequent invitation of parents for disciplinary issues in school, compared to children with no migrant parent. Findings from this study are in line with research conducted in Albania with children of migrant parents (Giannelli & Mangiavacchi, 2010), where they found that parental migration negatively impacts the school-related outcomes. The study in Kosovo showed that, besides lower school success, children left behind by migrant parents reported more disciplinary problems in school than the control group. Maternal parenting styles didn't seem to predict the school success of children left behind; however, migration within Kosovo and frequency of communication with migrant parent resulted in affecting the school success of children left behind. Regularity of communication might indicate parental involvement, and lack of it abandonment. It appears that regular parent-child communication might be the only protective factor to compensate parent-child separation (Graham, Jordan, Yeoh, Lam, & Asis, 2012), as proved in this study. Similar findings were found with migrant children in China, where frequency of migrant parent/child-left-behind communication predicted academic satisfaction and happiness (Su, Li, Lin, Xu, & Zhu, 2013). Future studies should focus more on the patterns of communication between the migrant parent and child-left-behind, and its impact on children's mental health and other

relevant wellbeing outcomes.

Another important finding of the present study is that within-country migration in the last four years was related to depression and school-success outcomes for children with migrant parents. This might indicate that change of habitat is followed by breaking established social and support structures; tentatively putting adolescents in a stressful situation with the need to create new friends and grow accustomed to a new setting affects their mental health and school outcome. Other studies have found that changing habitat and school might be associated with wide array of negative and educational outcomes (Gaspar, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2012). Urban schools in Kosovo since the end of the war in 1999 have experienced increase in number of students especially by migrations of families from rural areas. The schools have no special programs for adaptation or accommodation of students that change schools.

In summary, findings from this study suggest that there might not be a linear relation between mental health outcomes and being a child-left-behind by a migrant parent. Group analysis of CHLB suggests that violence-related behaviors, permissive and authoritarian parenting styles of the remaining caretaker, and within-country migration, act as risk factors for depression; whereas receiving remittances regularly acts as a protective factor against depression among children left behind. On the other hand, the study shows that school success of children left behind is negatively influenced by migration within country and low frequency of communication with the migrant parent. A novelty in this field is the impact of maternal parenting styles that predict reported depression symptoms by adolescents. Our findings help to better understand the mental health and school outcomes of children left behind in Kosovo. Findings could be useful for school psychologists and teachers who work with these children, especially in developing individual or group programs for this population. Schools in Kosovo in recently have increased engagement of school psychologist. This helping professions could use the findings in follow up of students with migrant parent and those that change school setting by working with remaining parents in specific types of parenting that might diminish the risks of depression and school problems. Parenting training programs such as Triple P - Positive Parenting Programs could be an alternative to consider (Sanders, Markie-Dadds, Tully, & Bor, 2000; Leung, Sanders, Leung, Mak, & Lau, 2003). These training programs aim training parents in positive parenting that aim to increase positive interaction and to reduce coercive and inconsistent parenting

practices and prove to be effective in decreasing behavioral problems and increasing school involvement. However piloting of these programs or similar ones should be followed with studies with more strict sampling selection of children left behind by migrant parents in Kosovo. Lastly field of study of children left behind and their wellbeing needs a more solid theoretical framework which contextualizes the transnational family dynamics and context where child resides.

#### *Limitations of the study*

The present study has several limitations: the sampling lacks random selection procedures, and measures used as proxy example for socio-economic variables might lack validity as they are based on participants' perception with no objective cross-check. Future studies should aim for representative samples on a national or regional level, which would allow generalization of the findings. Future studies could focus also more on externalizing behaviors. As other studies have found externalizing problems among children left behind by migrant parents (Robila, 2011).

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