



WHEN WIVES MIGRATE

Emotional impacts and coping strategies of left-behind husbands in the Wa West District, Ghana

WHY THIS MATTERS

Women's internal migration can strengthen household livelihoods, but prolonged spousal separation can also carry emotional and marital costs for families left behind. In Wa West District, where north-south migration is closely linked to limited local livelihood opportunities, this study shows that the consequences of migration extend beyond income to companionship, intimacy and emotional well-being (Yendaw *et al.*, 2025).

KEY MESSAGES

- Destination choices were shaped by wives' professions, social capital and the presence of relatives who could provide accommodation or support. (Yendaw *et al.*, 2025)
- Most husbands described unhappiness, loneliness and nostalgia, including the loss of everyday companionship and face-to-face emotional reassurance.
- Spousal separation also constrained sexual intimacy and created marital strain for some participants.
- Common coping strategies included frequent and lengthy phone calls, reciprocal visits, support from relatives and friends, self-control and recreational activities.

12

left-behind husbands interviewed

STUDY AT A GLANCE

Design: Qualitative, descriptive cross-sectional

Approach: Phenomenological; interpretivist

Sites: Meteu, Buli, Oloteng and Bulingin

Participants: 12 married men whose wives had migrated

Data: Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Analysis: Thematic analysis

Fieldwork: First half of 2022

SCOPE NOTE

This is an in-depth qualitative study of 12 men. The authors caution against generalising the findings to all left-behind husbands in Wa West District or Ghana.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

Why wives moved where they did	Profession, social capital and relatives at destination shaped where women migrated; relatives could provide accommodation, safety and links to work.
Emotional consequences	Participants commonly reported loneliness, unhappiness and nostalgia, alongside the loss of companionship, conversation and the comfort of physical presence. (Yendaw <i>et al.</i> , 2025)
Intimacy and marital strain	Several husbands described sexual frustration and the challenge of maintaining intimacy during prolonged separation.
How husbands coped	Phone calls and reciprocal visits were central. Extended family, friends, self-control and recreational activities also helped manage loneliness and emotional strain. (Yendaw <i>et al.</i> , 2025)

Policy brief | UBIDS 6th Research & Development Conference 2026

FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

POLICY IMPLICATION

The study suggests that migration policy and district development planning should consider the family costs of prolonged spousal separation alongside its livelihood benefits. Where women migrate because local livelihood

options are weak, support for family reunion, counselling and viable livelihood opportunities at origin can help address the emotional pressures experienced by left-behind spouses (Yendaw et al., 2025).

PRIORITY POLICY ACTIONS

- 1

Promote family reunion for affected spouses. The Wa West District Assembly and the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development should develop practical family-support interventions that encourage reunion where feasible and help couples manage prolonged separation. (Yendaw et al., 2025)
- 2

Provide professional counselling for left-behind husbands. The study specifically recommends counselling support to help husbands address loneliness, emotional strain and the pressures associated with prolonged spousal absence. (Yendaw et al., 2025)
- 3

Expand livelihood and skills options for married women locally. Offer skills training to married women in the district so they can strengthen household livelihoods and have more viable livelihood options within or closer to their communities.
- 4

Strengthen irrigation farming and women’s access to irrigable land. The District Assembly should enhance irrigation opportunities and make irrigable land more accessible to female farmers as a response to livelihood pressures that contribute to recurring out-migration. (Yendaw et al., 2025)
- 5

Build a stronger evidence base before scaling interventions. Commission larger studies in Wa West District and nationwide, including research on the psychological effects of spousal separation, because the present qualitative findings are not statistically generalisable.

WHO SHOULD ACT

Wa West District Assembly Coordinate family-support measures, local skills development, irrigation expansion and access to irrigable land for women.	Department of Social Welfare and Community Development Support family reunion efforts and facilitate professional counselling and psychosocial support for affected spouses.
--	--

CALL TO ACTION

Treat the emotional consequences of spousal migration as a family and development issue: support reunion and counselling while expanding realistic livelihood options for women in Wa West District.

EVIDENCE NOTE

This brief translates the published study without adding new empirical findings. The study used a small qualitative sample and explicitly cautions against extrapolating its results to all left-behind husbands. The policy actions above are recommended or directly supported by the paper.

Authors: Elijah Yendaw, Ada Adoley Allotey & Bismark Nantomah | Conference: 23-25 September 2026, UBIDS, Bamahu, Wa