Acculturation: Strategies to Overcome Stress by Migrant Families

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Abstract

Migration contributes to cultural change which involves acculturation, enculturation and resilience. Locational choice, cultural differences, coping mechanisms and learning specific skills help to sustain socio-economic life patterns. Seven domains are linked at the primary level (language, religion, cultural events, entertainment, food, and shopping habits); three at the secondary level (cognitive styles, behavioural patterns, and attitudes). On a temporal scale - acculturation reflects in cultural change of migrants' psychological character and cultural-economic safety. Acculturation strategies involve processes like integration, separation, assimilation and marginalization based on individual and group identities. The paper will attempt to identify the underlying factors that shape the psychology of a person who decides to migrate. Migrants, when leaving their native place, create two layers of psychological problems and thus different coping strategies adopted by everyone related to migration. The psychological stress of immigrants shall also be explored in this paper and will also focus on the types and impact of migration due to COVID -19 on family, the relationship between work and migration and coping mechanisms. Responsibility should be attached with multiple dimensions centering on personal, familial as well as community levels. In the COVID era, the issue of responsibility becomes the most coveted notion for existence especially in the context of migration.

Introduction

In the era of globalization, migration should be taken as the mark of the rhythmic existence and dynamicity of contemporary modernity. People are habituated with ongoing movements and mobility as daily events and existing norms cutting across micro, meso and macro-level locational choice. Migration contributes to cultural change in both the origin and destination involving several mechanisms through

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the intergroup exchange of values and norms. In the post-migration phase when an individual encounters a new culture at a new place, acculturation begins and takes a new form accordingly. It conceptualizes locational choice (Epstein & Gang, 2010), cultural changes, coping mechanisms to a stressful situation (Yu & Wang, 2011), learning specific cultural skills to thrive and survive in a given cultural context (Berry et al., 1987). Seven domains are linked with acculturation at the primary level, including language, religion, cultural events, entertainment, food, and shopping habits, and at the secondary level, cognitive styles, behavioural patterns, and attitudes. On a temporal scale - before acculturation and during acculturation reflect the cultural change in migrants' psychological character (Berry, 2001), anxiety level, degree of life satisfaction, and cultural-economic safety (Gurieva et al, 2020). Differentiation between structural identification and behavioural assimilation, individual and group identities may well respond in different ways at different levels in terms of rejection and deculturation.

This paper will attempt to identify the factors behind the mindset of migrants. People leave their family members at their place of origin and it creates two layers of psychological problems for them. The coping strategies adopted by them and by the rest of the family members who stayed back at the native place become pertinent and ought to be studied. Similarly, the psychological stress and strain a migrant confront while migrating and after reaching a place of migration shall also be explored in this paper. In addition, the present article will also focus on the types and impact of migration due to COVID -19 on family, the relationship between work and migration, and coping mechanisms.

The research is based on the Case Study method involving thirty participants. Primary data are collected by the in-depth interview of the respondents.

Purposive sampling

The method is applied here for the selection of the required respondents. The respondents are educated urbanites with the age group 25- 50. The information regarding the mental state as well as necessary coping strategies adopted by the family members of the migrants is collected from those in-depth interviews. The secondary data are used for substantiating the analytical content. The research question revolves around the issue – how can the migrants adjust to the emergent situations after migrating to a new place? There are two-fold objectives of the present study. Firstly, to identify the underlying factors that shape the psychology of a person who decides to migrate. Secondly, to determine the necessary coping strategies adopted by the migrant along with the rest of the family members.

Review of literature

Ward, Okura, Kennedy and Kojima (1998) studied psychological and sociological challenges that an

individual face when confronted with a new environment and new culture. Adjustment problems are greater in the beginning and decrease over time. Societies of high cultural diversity reflect high importance in acculturation strategies and accept a multi-cultural trend emphasizing an individual's developmental trajectories. Developmental research on acculturation has been of particular interest in explaining how well immigrants adjust to the new context, and in identifying the factors that shape positive and negative developmental pathways particularly in young people (Weichold, 2010), when carrying their knowledge and expressions of distress with them in the course of migration. In a new place, their cultural identity is likely to change and that encourages a degree of belonging; they also attempt to settle down by either assimilation or biculturalism (Bhugra, 2004). People opt for collective identity, emotional inter-dependence, group solidarity, sharing, duties and obligations, the need for stable and predetermined friendships, group decisions and particularism in post-migration phase at a collective level; while at the interpersonal level, the individuals are seen as discreet, autonomous, self-sufficient and respectful to the rights of others (Bhugra, 2004). The two most common research findings at the individual level are that how people acculturate and in how well they adapt to this process. Variations in acculturation strategies are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. (Sam & Berry, 2013). Psychological well-being and Sociocultural competence are two variations faced during individual's acculturation.

Those engaged in both their heritage culture and in the larger society are better adapted than those who acculturate by orienting themselves to one or the other culture mainly by way of assimilation or separation or to neither culture, i.e., marginalization (Sam & Berry, 2013).

To Collier (2013, p. 67), "Migrants bring not only the human capital generated in their own societies; they also bring the moral codes of their own societies. Stress can generate through disagreement with several migration-related issues (Valtonen, 2012; Wroe et al., 2019). Several are certain issues of concern like lack of acknowledgement of their prior erudition or educational qualifications, the subsequent problem of unemployment (Schweitzer et al., 2006) or taking up jobs that are lower than the positions in the native soil (Hack- Polay, 2019). As a consequence of meeting with a dominant different culture, acculturative stress can appear with psychosocial anxiety and incapability of migrants to perform normal social roles (Berry, 1970). Due to cultural clash sometimes, migrants confine themselves to the ethnic enclave to stay within their own culture and identity (Consoli et al., 2018; Hack-Polay, 2019; Mazumdar et al., 2000).

Baker and Baker (2016) highlighted some coping strategies of using a variety of communication channels like language support (Individual), local community support and social and emotional support (family), knowledge exchange and learning from other countries' experience and working with migrants to improve the national brand image (national). On the basis of the study, Thomas (2010) pointed out that

discrimination, unfulfilled expectations, daily stressors, lack of control and mental health are recognized sources of vulnerability of the migrants. Love and self-confidence, solidarity and self-esteem and rights and self-respect are the prescribed coping strategies for him.

Acculturation: theoretical background

Young Kim (1982) defined acculturation as "an interactive and continuous process that evolves in and through the communication of an immigrant with the new socio-cultural environment. The degree of immigrants' acculturation is governed by their acquired communication competence (Kim, 1982). Thus, the communication skill of migrants plays a vital role in acculturation. In the cultural adaptation model, Young Kim (1998, 2001) emphasized a stress- adaptation-growth dynamic model that features cyclic tension of constantly moving forward and drawing back in the adaptation process. The concept of deculturation, acculturation and assimilation- are explained in the model (Lakey, 2003). Complete assimilation is rare due to low changes in core values. Assimilation is the "state of the highest degree of acculturation into host milieu and deculturation of original cultural habits" (Kim, 1988, 2001).

Migration offers a transformative experience for the migrants, involving levels of macro, meso and micro. Macro factors like political turmoil, conflict and environmental changes cause forced migration that adds large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers to the population. Meso factors include the influence of communication technology or social media that attract people and also the diasporic links. On the other hand, micro-factors (i.e., education, marital status, religion and personal willingness) are the key drivers for migrants who leave their origin in search of better opportunities (Choy et.al., 2021). Migrants return some of their experiences to their native place in terms of social and economic remittances.

Migrants often face a host of challenges like acculturation stress, discrimination and socio-economic-cultural disadvantages. Berry (1997) proposed four types of acculturation strategies- integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Integration is the strategy, where someone from different culture adopts the cultural norm of the new country, while retaining their own culture. Integration is the most preferred (Berry et al, 2006) during acculturation for immigrants, while marginalization is the worst result in migrant's acculturation and adaptation. Thus, the differences in the use of strategies, while considered at individual or group level of migrant's life patterns are mainly based on locational choices as a condition prior to acculturation, cultural similarity and dissimilarity, previous perception about new culture, cultural identity of migrants including age, gender, language, education level etc. However, the acculturation process is a dynamic one. Assimilation refers to the strategy, where an individual adopts new cultural attributes while rejecting own cultural norm. Separation is when someone retains their own cultural norms and rejecting the new one while marginalization refers to the rejection of both the new and their own cultural norms (Choy et al, 2021). Assimilation is the strategy when there is little interest

in cultural maintenance in accordance with the mentality of interaction with larger society. Social indicators of psychological health sometimes indicate good adaptation character of immigrants and thus there is a need for integration and less marginalization. The changes in the degree of adaptation strategies contribute to different types of acculturation architecture and cultural landscape at individual and collective scale. For example, when both cultures value individualism, it is very difficult to start quick acculturation. If two introvert and passive cultures like Chinese (do not praise openness & self- expressing) and German (ethnocentric in nature) meet, both are in a difficult situation to initiate communication as they can hardly achieve a close relationship. Thus, the more differences between two cultures, the more acculturation problems arise (Yu & Wang, 2011).

Acculturation: problems and strategies

The psychology of intercultural adaptation was first discussed by Plato and argued that, acculturation could cause social disorder thus acculturation policies are needed to implement (Yu & Wang, 2011). This study revolves around acculturation strategies investigated in terms of assimilation, integration, separation, marginalization and conglomeration.

Seven domains linked at the primary level are language, religion, cultural events, entertainment, food and shopping habits; while three at the secondary level- cognitive styles, behavioural patterns and attitudes. These culture-specific behavioural skills (Bochner, 1972) are necessary to learn by an individual who has migrated to a new place. Generation wise differentiation in accepting new cultural elements is also common as in most of cases, first-generation migrants face difficulties in coping with new cultures. Second and further generations are more capable to accept new cultural attributes and various verbal and non-verbal components of culture help in accelerating the acculturation process. Another type of acculturation is noticed among various migrants based on cultural traits. Some migrants accept some particular traits easily keeping aside other traits while some migrants imbibe some other set of culture traits unaccepting the traits accepted by the first group of migrants.

In today's mobile world, individuals have internalized more than one culture (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005) and often described as bicultural or multicultural. People live in some place other than their place of origin develop a sense of community around national, cultural, ethnic, linguistic membership produce a meaningful concept of cultural integration through cultural mixing, cultural clash and cultural integration. Migrants generally deal with two types of issues relating to acculturation- a) How they are motivated to retain their own cultural attributes and
(b) the extent to which they are motivated to accept and adopt new dominant culture. The negotiations of these two cultural issues often result in four types of acculturation positions- Assimilation, Integration, Separation and Marginalization (Berry, 1990; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Cultural identity of an

individual, where the person is exposed to two or more cultures, the acculturation and adoption process take a new dimension. Such a situation develops as there is the blending of more cultural attributes- some dominate and some remain passive. Lower blondeness is linked to personality and performance-related challenges as blended or fused identity representation is common in bicultural personalities (Huynh et. al., 2011).

Psychological stress due to varieties of factors sometimes at an individual's workplace or in relation to family-related worries creates internal discrepancies which result in cultural conflict and make the migrant uncomfortable to adapt to new cultural circumstances. On the other hand, identity construct and cultural characteristics separate migrants' own culture and the new culture that also creating psychological stress and resulting in a delay in the acculturation process of the individual. Linguistic stress is one important factor, which develops cultural distance in society.

Analysis Based on Primary Sources

Census of India reveals some information regarding the reasons for migration. If we consider, data of two districts of West Bengal, Darjeeling in the north and Kolkata in the south of the state, shows some interesting facts. According to the level of urbanization as well as the availability of resources (natural and economic), these two districts are characterized by different types of factors for the migration of people. If we exclude the other factors, in Kolkata, most of the in-migration occurs for employment-related reasons. Same for the male migration. On the other hand, in the Darjeeling district, marriage is one of the important reasons behind the migration of womenfolk and it also projects in the total migration scenario of the district (Table 1).

Major troubles identified in the context of migrants includes issues like residential problems, cultural clashes, language problem at new place, lack of family proximity and support system and discriminatory behavioural traits. In this study, researchers have identified four important stressors (Socio-cultural, Psychological, Economic and External), which are formulated on the basis of responses from primary survey. Socio-cultural stressors include four types of responses- 1) Language, 2) Acceptance (Cultural Clash/ Unsystematic Lifestyle/ Social disparity/ Different behavior/ Interaction), 3) Food related stress and 4) Culture Shock (Time related issues, Dress & Ritual etc.). Psychological stressors are those problems faced by migrants which are affecting on psychological and mind set-up of respondents like Feeling lonely/ lack of connection with family/ Psychological stress in work place and at new residences/ Physical Fitness/ Gender issues and so on. Economic factors include transport, communication, availability of water and infrastructure, education of children, finding new residences, cost-differences between native place and new place.

Table 2 reveals that, majority of stresses are of socio-cultural category. It is true for all the respondents (Migrated due to job, study and as accompany persons). People who have migrated due to job factors, face more stress from socio-cultural issues in work place as well as in residential place. Other factors range between 12 to 17 percent of their responses. On the contrary, students' response reveals that, they face more economic problems than psychological and external; while accompanying persons feel more stress due to external than economic. These are self-explanatory. Due to huge cultural differentiations in work place and in new residential locations, migrants are marginalized because of higher level of threats in relation to adjustment which ultimately leads towards vulnerability. It also enlarges the cultural gaps between the natives and migrants as a result they become isolated and searching a new as well as comfortable platform.

Table. 3: Types of Coping Strategies adopted by respondants

Different Coping Strategies	Type of Respondants with responses in percentage		
	JOB	Students	Accompany
Cultural acceptability	52.94	52.63	59.09
Support system	38.24	42.11	27.27
Enhancing self adaptabilty	8.82	5.26	13.64

Source: Based on Primary Survey (Survey done during Sep- Nov 2021)

Unlike stresses, in the case of all types of respondents, coping strategies are more or less similar types. All of them have taken steps relating to cultural acceptability to overcome stress. Cultural acceptability includes learning the language of a new place, learning cultural traits & enhancing positive factors, and new food ventures. This category is followed by the social support system that includes Supportive social networks/ Family & Friends, Peer's help and Engagement in different activities like Cultural activities, listening to music, reading, Watching TV, Cooking etc.

From the migrant's responsibility point of view, there are two main aspects- reasons of migration and post migration phase. As a general rule of migration, an individual takes the decision of migration sometimes voluntarily and sometimes by force. Thus, all reasons behind migration may be categorized into two- Push and Pull. All the factors fall under these two factors. Here the present researchers can add the theme of the responsibility of migrants to move from one place to another. Any individual should have the responsibility as a person with own character, as a family member having some responsibilities to make the other members happy and as a citizen of the country with some responsibilities to make the country proud. When the individual found a lack of resources to fulfil the familial needs, the person decides to move

from the native place to a new place. In this study, responsibilities are of three types- employment to fulfil the familial needs, education as a means to upgrade the individual so as to help in fulfilling future needs of the family and as an accompanying person (here housewives to accompany husband in a new place) to help psychologically and physically in family activities. Thus, responsibility matters a lot in the migration behavior of people. In the post-migration phase, this responsibility helps the migrant to stay at the new place and to overcome all stresses faced there. That is why different migrants take different strategies to acculturate in a new place. These are- Adjustment with the new socio-cultural surroundings, incorporating some of the cultural traits of new place and above all live a life with Conglomeration of cultural traits mixed with their native and new cultural traits. Diagram 1 explains the responsibility factor in migrants' movement and acculturation behavior in a new place.

Sometimes the issue of migration can be perceived with the consideration of integrative power, the strength of unification and the determination to have the recognition with honor . All kinds of interactivity should be discussed in connection to the matter of responsibility from the part of migrants. For Successful integration, migrants and the host community have to participate in a two-way process involving mutual adaptation as well as parity and reciprocity of rights and obligations. It entails a sense of responsibility and respect for a core set of values – like the presence of rule of law. The very concept of responsibility is the bridge by which the link is established between migrants and their host communities for a common goal.

Conclusion

Assimilation as a process cannot be possible in reality because in most cases, respondents are maintaining their own cultural traits with simultaneous occurrence of accepting and incorporating the new arena of culture. Integration takes place in some cases as a consequence of convenience cohabitation. Unique cross-cultural traits of a globalized universe invariably invite cultural mixing and contact aiming towards the complexity of coexistence. Thus, harmonization happens to be persisted as parallel to a multicultural representation of cultural trends for the migrants.

Resilience can be interpreted as a positive cross-cultural adaptation as a consequence of continuous as well as persistent efforts of coping done by the migrants in facing the stressors within the periphery of the new environment. Resilience trajectory is another mode of the stipulation of adaptability through which migrants are passing through in their host society. Thus, coping strategies are perceived as the most focused vocabulary of psycho-social adaptability. Acculturation and psychological adaptation among migrants can be discussed in accordance with specific coping strategies for having a synergic view of theoretical and empirical considerations becomes necessary for the focused conceptualizations of

acculturative adjustments. In the context of migration, responsibility should be attached with multiple dimensions centering on personal, familial as well as community levels. In the COVID era, the issue of responsibility becomes the most coveted notion for existence especially in the context of migration. Migrants live with the responsibility of immediate family and the family in the native place simultaneously; the source of economic anxiety is coupled with psychological crises that emerge in the COVID era as a pertinent problem of contemporary society. The only solution can be achieved under the broad umbrella of cultural conglomeration with an emphasis on acculturative association.

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Appendix

Table 1: Reasons for Migration: Based on Secondary Sources (Census, 2011)

| Reasons for migration	TOTAL MIGRANTS (% of migrants in different categories to total migrants)		MALE MIGRANTS (% of male migrants in different categories to male migrants)		FEMALE MIGRANTS (% of female migrants in different categories to female migrants)	
	in Darjiling	in Kolkata	in Darjiling	in Kolkata	in Darjiling	in Kolkata
Work/employment	9.71	20.97	20.15	35.77	2.27	4.57
Business	2.31	3.38	4.93	5.79	0.43	0.70
Education	1.45	1.92	1.90	2.76	1.13	1.00
Marriage	30.81	17.83	2.16	0.91	51.21	36.60
Moved after birth	3.84	2.72	5.27	3.21	2.81	2.18
Moved with household	22.06	22.28	26.10	20.31	19.19	24.47
Others	29.83	30.89	39.49	31.25	22.94	30.48
Total Migrants	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Census of India, 2011

Table. 2: Types of Stresses faced by respondants

| Type of Stressors	Type of Respondants with responses in percentage		
	Job	Student	Accompany
Socio-cultural	57.14	69.23	63.33
Psychological	16.33	7.69	13.33
Economic	14.29	15.38	6.67
External	12.24	7.69	16.67

Source: Based on Primary Survey (Survey done during Sep- Nov 2021)

Diagram 1: Flow Chart showing responsibility of migrants to acculturate
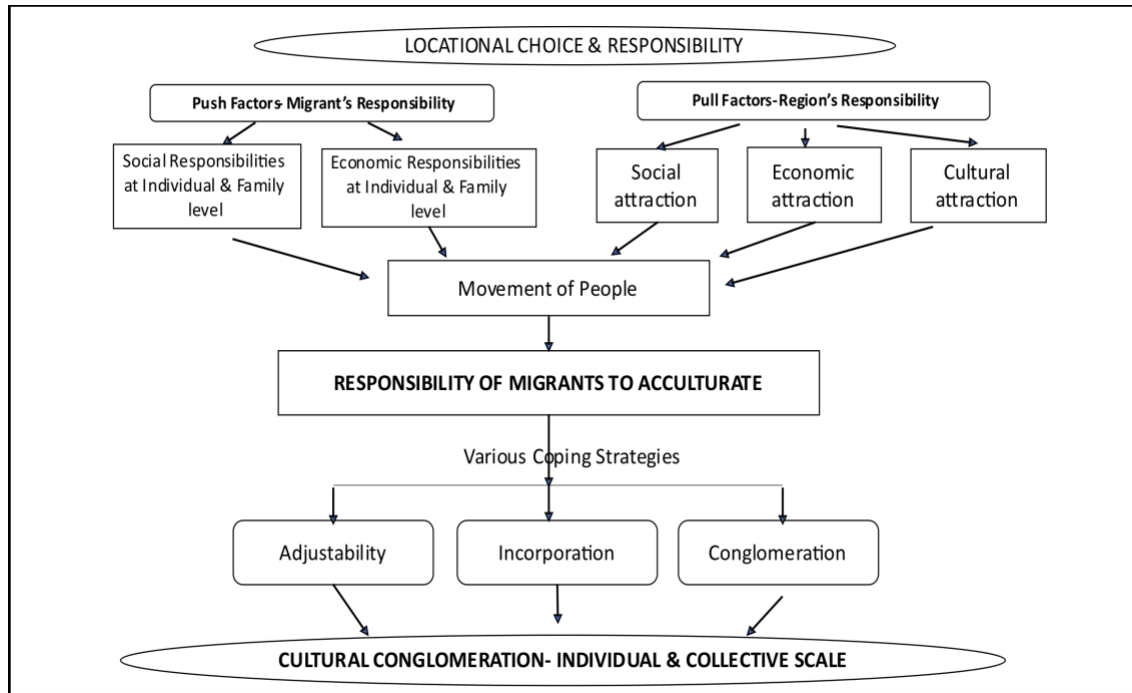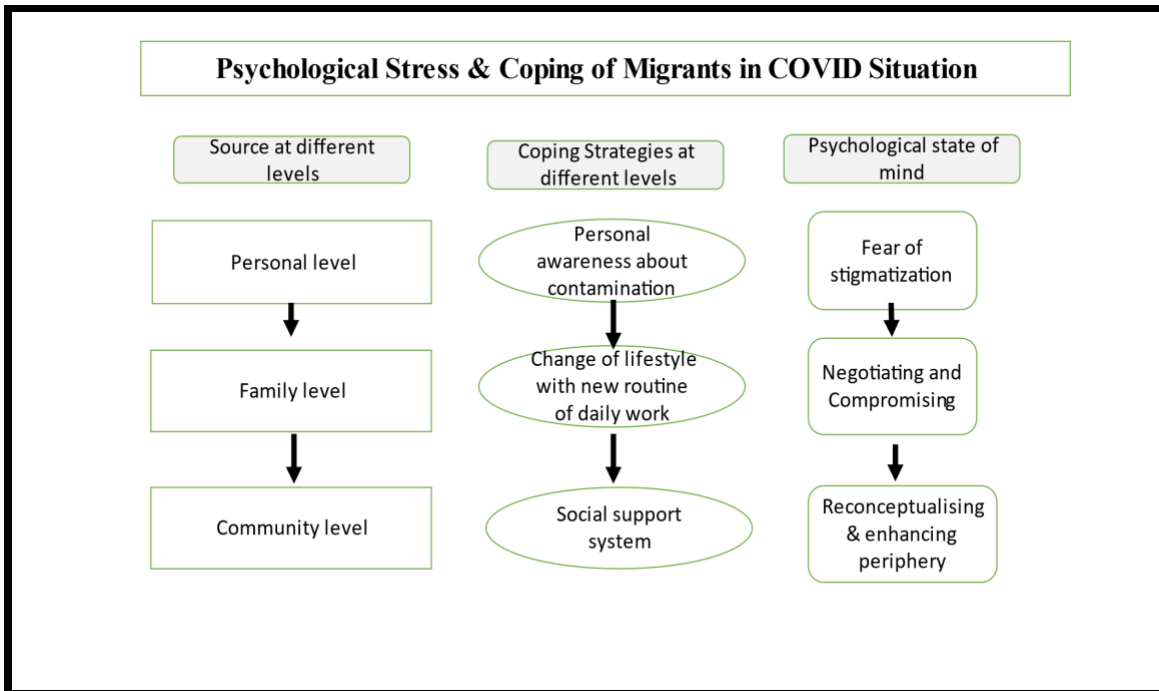

Source: Compiled by authors based on primary survey done Sep- Nov 2021

Diagram 2: Flow Chart showing Components of Remittance as Consequence of Responsibility
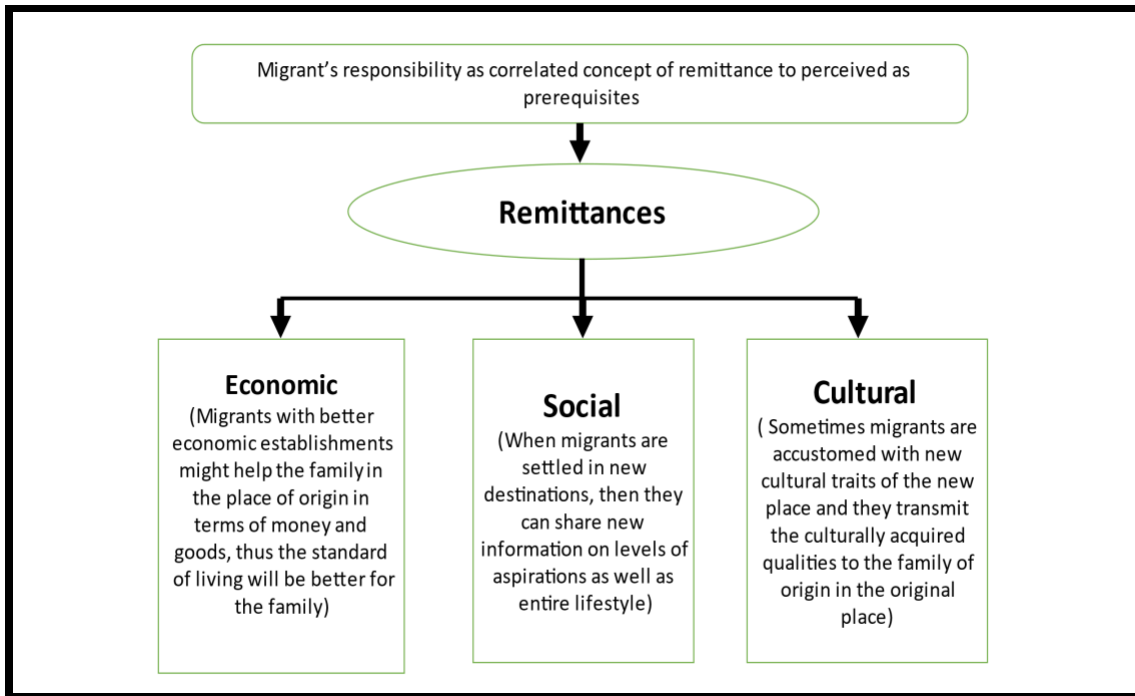
Source: Compiled by authors based on primary survey done Sep- Nov 2021

Diagram 3: Flow Chart showing Stress & Coping of Migrants in COVID era

Source: Compiled by authors based on primary survey done Sep- Nov 2021