

An Analysis upon Opportunities of Men and Women Migrant Workers

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Abstract – Our analysis is unique because it examines how key determinants of migration—including education, employment, marital status, and childbearing—differ by sex for these four types of migration. We find that women are significantly less mobile than men overall, but that more educated women are more likely to move (particularly to urban areas) than their male counterparts. Moreover, employment in the prior year is less of a deterrent to migration among women. While childbearing has a negative effect on migration, this impact is surprisingly stronger for men than for women, perhaps because women’s search for assistance in childcare promotes migration. Meanwhile, being married or in union appears to have little effect on migration probabilities for either men or women.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, out of the 179 million people who are outside of their countries of birth, an estimated 50 million are in Asia. Of the many forms of international migration in the region, the movement of labor across borders has been most significant. Contrary to the intent of governments to keep migration temporary, it has been sustained in the past 30 years. Asia, thus, like other regions before it (North America, Northwestern Europe, the oil-rich Gulf countries), did not escape the need to import labor to sustain development processes. The growing participation of women migrants in the 1980s expanded the discussion of migration to include protection and rights-related issues. These issues already surfaced in the Middle Eastbound migration, but they assumed greater urgency with regards to female migration because of the concentration of migrant women in domestic work and entertainment. On the one hand, there are concerns derived from the invisibility of these sectors which render women vulnerable to potential abuses and exploitation, including gender-based violence. On the other hand, the migration of women, traditionally the caregivers in the family, was seen as undermining the welfare of the family. Although family concerns also came up in the large-scale male migration, the departure of men to provide for their families was still part of the repertoire of gender roles – it was not ideal, but it was expected of men to go the distance to provide for the family while the women kept house.

The study of sex differences in migration has emerged as a topic of growing interest among researchers over the past two decades. Yet few of these studies have

focused on migration within national boundaries, and fewer still have examined moves by both men and women, across the life course, and among a variety of destinations and origins. In addition, female migrants, particularly those who are married and/or have children, are sometimes assumed to have much different reasons for moving compared to their male counterparts. Typically, women are seen as moving for “family” reasons, rather than education- or work-related reasons. Conversely, men’s marital status and childbearing behavior are rarely studied in direct relation to their mobility.

Additionally, the study explores how the determinants of different types of migration flows (rural-urban, rural-rural, urban-rural, and urban-urban) vary for both men and women. Few existing studies of migration in low-income countries examine these various flows, particularly with the additional dimension of sex. Although our sample represents a sub-national geographical area, our results suggest that migration researchers should particularly focus on male/female differences in migration and expand their models to include migration flows between different locations. Our approach also illustrates the value of the LHC format for surveying men and women of all ages, thereby improving our knowledge of mobility patterns.

COMPARING THE IMPACTS OF MALE AND FEMALE MIGRATION

There is much literature documenting the difficulties and problems encountered by migrants from pre-departure, to their migration, work and stay abroad,

and to their return to their home countries. Migrant NGOs have been active not only in documenting these problems but also in responding to these problems through various programs and services and advocacy. Over the years, the problems migrant workers face have not changed much – illegal recruitment, illegal exaction of fees, or confinement prior to deployment; on-site, migrants have encountered contract substitution, breach of contract, withholding of passport, reduced/delayed/nonpayment of salaries, long working hours, limited/no days, limited food, bad living conditions, work-related injuries, no access to health care, or illegal termination of contract. In the case of migrant domestic workers or entertainers, sexual harassment and gender-based violence have been reported as well. Returning to the countries of origin can be fraught with problems as well.

Much of the problems of migrants originate from structural constraints, particularly the role of state policy and practices. The stress on controlling migration has affected migrants' conditions. Aside from the restrictive terms of the work contract, some receiving countries impose a bond to ensure that migrants stay with the same employer and that they leave the country at the end of the contract. One of the insightful analyses on how state policies affect male and female migrants is the comparison of male construction workers (MCWs) and female domestic workers (FDWs); these are the largest groups of migrant workers (Huang and Yeoh, 2003). Concerns about the impacts of migration on the families left behind are a major concern in the countries of origin; the alarm level rose with the migration of women.

In contexts where women do not have as much mobility, male migration breaks down women's isolation, as their added responsibilities (repayment of loans, investing money, etc.) bring them outside the orbit of the home. In the absence of their men, women broke ground by taking on tasks (and did them well) that traditionally men have excluded them from. The migration of women is in itself a powerful statement. Even in societies which provide a leeway for female mobility, the ideal is a stay-at-home wife and mother if economic circumstances would only allow it. Out of necessity, families and households have learned to adjust to on-the-move wives and mothers.

WOMEN AND MEN MIGRANT WORKERS

Women and men moving from one country to another in search of decent work opportunities and a better life - has occurred throughout history. Yet migration has become one of the defining global issues at the dawn of the twenty-first century, rising to the top of the policy agenda at national, regional and international levels.

Nearly all countries today are affected by migration, as origin, transit or destination countries, and often a combination of the three. The driving forces of migration in today's globalized world are disparities in incomes and wealth, decent work opportunities,

human security, demographic trends, and social networks. In countries of origin, migration for employment can contribute to development through remittances, return migration, and engagement of transnational communities (diaspora). Return migrants bring back human capital,³ financial capital (savings) and social capital⁴ (contacts and access to networks). Return migrants and the diaspora facilitate the development of new markets, creation of commercial ties (between countries of origin and destination), the transfer of technology, and economic and political reforms in countries of origin. Women migrants play an important role in all these areas as remitters, return migrants, and transnational entrepreneurs, among others.

The huge growth of monetary remittances serves to highlight the positive contribution of labour migration to reduce poverty and promote economic and social development. According to the World Bank, formal remittances sent home by migrants more than double the level in 2002.⁵ The actual size of remittances, including unrecorded flows through formal and informal channels, would be even larger. Remittances were more than double the level of official development assistance (ODA) flows to developing countries in 2007. In many poor countries, they are the largest source of external financing. While there is no global data, women are believed to be better remitters and savers due to their close affiliation to the family and their stronger concern for the welfare of their children. According to the World Bank, a 10 per cent increase in the share of remittances will lead to about a 2.0 per cent decline in the depth and/or severity of poverty in the developing world.

In countries of destination, immigrants- of all skill levels- are making substantial contributions to productivity and growth. Highly-skilled workers meet the demand in high technology industries, and keep economies globally competitive. At the same time, low-skilled workers fill in jobs in high demand that national workers often shun but which represent essential work in sectors such as agriculture, construction, hospitality industries, among others. They render economically viable many traditional sectors and enterprises and contribute to non-inflationary economic expansion. Immigration also rejuvenates workforces and largely contributes to maintaining social security and welfare schemes in a context of population decline and ageing. Women migrants are essential to the health and care economy of many countries, carrying out household chores and caring for dependent children, the infirm and disabled and the growing numbers of the elderly – freeing national women to take up higher status, better paying jobs.

There is a dichotomy, however, between the increasing and often unacknowledged demand for foreign labour - fuelled by the demographic decline and labour market demands in destination countries -

and the barriers being erected against the admission of potential men and women migrants, especially low skilled workers, from developing countries. The unrecognized demand for migrant workers to meet labour market shortages in various sectors in countries of destination often leads to growth of irregular migration and trafficking of women and men, leading to serious abuse and exploitation in destination countries. Women migrant workers often find themselves in domestic work and care giving, “invisible” sectors, where they are often not protected by the destination country's labour legislation. This can lead to high levels of exploitation and abuse. At the same time, immigration can also be empowering for women who gain additional portable skills, higher self-esteem and increased economic independence.

Today's migrants, men and women alike, face profound challenges including poor conditions of work and harsh working environments, racism, sexism and labour market discrimination. In addition, women and men migrants frequently sacrifice decent living conditions, health care, nutrition and education. Women migrant workers' concentration in private homes and other unregulated venues rather than public workplaces can represent more vulnerability in terms of discrimination on gender, racial, ethnic, occupational and nationality grounds. They may also find themselves victims of exploitation, hazardous work conditions and psychological, physical and sexual abuse. In occupations such as domestic work, women migrant workers often find themselves excluded from the right to family reunification. Large numbers of them can also often find themselves excluded from legal employment when arriving as spouses of temporary workers.

MIGRATION WORK FOR WOMEN AND MEN IN RURAL LABOUR MARKETS

Many poor rural households see migration to urban or other rural areas, or abroad, as a strategy to escape poverty or improve the quality of their lives. Migration patterns vary by continent and even countries within continents, and change over time. One of the most significant changes in the last half century is the increasing proportion of women migrating: today, they constitute half of the international migrant population, often migrating independently as the main economic providers for their families.¹ Driven by economic, social and political forces as well as new challenges (such as environmental degradation, natural disasters or climate change impacts), migration can bring, both benefits and costs to the migrants themselves, their families, and their communities of origin and destination, depending on the migrants' profile and gender, and on labour market specificities.

The impacts of rural migration on local labour markets, the gender division of labour, and agricultural

production and food security can be positive or negative, depending on:

- Who migrates (individuals or families and their characteristics: age, gender, education, skills and assets);
- The reasons to migrate (better living conditions, family reunification, to escape conflict or environmental problems);
- The duration (permanent, temporary, circular); and
- The destination (internal rural-rural or rural-urban, intra-regional, international).

RURAL MIGRATION CAN CHANGE GENDER BASED POWER –

Changes in gender roles and responsibilities triggered by the migration process can be positive or negative depending on who migrates. While these changes can lead to women's empowerment, they can also bring social and psychological problems. When a household can afford to hire labour with remittances but local labour is scarce, labourers from neighbouring areas or countries may come to fill the gap, with a specific gender profile responding to the new demands. In Senegal, for example, Malian migrants (mostly male) substitute for Senegalese workers who have migrated to Europe or the Gulf. In the Philippines, female international migration generates internal migration of women to help with domestic or child care work in the sending communities.

Migrant remittances do not always lead to agricultural growth and employment, as they are often spent on housing and consumer goods rather than on agriculture. But such expenditures can generate local non-farm employment opportunities, creating a pathway out of agriculture into urban or rural nonfarm activities.

MIGRANTS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN, ARE OFTEN VULNERABLE AND FACE DISCRIMINATION-

Women tend to migrate shorter distances, generally for informal, seasonal jobs, since it is usually harder for them to leave their children or, for cultural reasons, to live away from their families, but also because migration may be too costly (expenses for transportation, intermediaries, and resettlement). Migrants can be very vulnerable until they find a job, learn the local language, and become aware of their rights. If they cannot find a job, fall sick or receive very low wages, the risk of indebtedness and impoverishment is high, particularly if they bore

heavy expenses to migrate. In such situations, women under economic pressure might be vulnerable to prostitution or trafficking.

MAXIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF MIGRATION-

Support female migrant associations in promoting gender equality back home through projects that encourage female migrants, upon return, to become change agents in local communities. Create conditions for returnees, including women migrants who have gained independence, confidence, and skills working abroad, to obtain employment and/or start-up entrepreneurial activities. Provide information and incentives to optimize the use of remittances in rural areas of origin in ways that address gender-differentiated needs and ensure gender-equitable benefits.

CONCLUSION

In this study I explored, based on selected aspects, the question of how women's situations change during the temporal absence of their husbands and whether this leads to a transformation of gender relations. This case study is located in a more general discussion of migration. While I focused on the spatial mobility, other aspects such as cooperation and relations between women, access to work and income, different consequences for temporary and permanent female-headed households, decision-making negotiations between men and women, or the perspectives of men are worthy of further investigation. Long-term studies are necessary to further explore the relationship between migration, spatial mobility and the impact of social practices on cultural ideals and gender roles.

Origin and destination add another layer onto this story of male and female mobility. We know that not only do age and sex influence a person's mobility, but so do educational attainment and work status. Increasing education is most influential for moves to urban areas among both rural- and urban-origin women. Yet among urban men, education works in reinforcing ways; greater education decreases mobility to rural areas while increasing mobility to other urban areas.

Interestingly, we do not find that marriage is as important to the migration story as one might expect. Marriage is only influential for rural-rural moves among men, but not women. This suggests to us that the story of inter-regional migration may be less about marriage, and more about economic opportunity and human capital resources available to an individual than conventional wisdom may surmise.

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