

Family Migration Context and Adolescent Family Formation Expectations

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9/17/18

Extended abstract prepared for submission to the 2019 Population Association of America
Annual Meetings

Short abstract: Migration has consequences for non-migrating household members as well as migrants themselves. In addition to the widely-studied impact of remittances, a few studies have posited that migration can alter the goals and values of household members. This paper studies this phenomenon, focusing on how migration by household members shapes adolescent expectations for their future. We use survey data from the Chitwan Valley of Nepal, a context of rapid social change with newly emerging migration patterns to the Gulf States. Analyses will examine desires for marriage and family formation, school, and migration among adolescents age 11-17. We will use latent class analysis to identify clusters of correlated goals and assess how migration of household members is associated with the distribution of adolescents across clusters. We will draw on rich measures of household migration, structure, and relationships to evaluate possible mechanisms connecting migration and adolescent aspirations, and will explore possible gender differences.

Acknowledgements: This research was supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development of the National Institutes of Health under award number P01 HD080659 (Glick, PD) as well as through Ohio State University's Institute for Population Research (P2C HD058484), Pennsylvania State University's Population Research Institute (P2C HD041025), and the University of Wisconsin's Center for Demography and Ecology (P2C HD047873). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the NIH. We thank the Institute for Social and Environmental Research-Nepal and its staff for their contributions to data collection.

Migration within and across international boundaries is a growing demographic phenomenon. In many cases, migration is undertaken at least in part as a strategy for increasing and diversifying household resources – often explicitly in order to provide for children (Stark, 1991). Thus, studies of the impact of migration have considered outcomes for the children of migrants as well as for the migrants themselves. Existing research has primarily focused on how migration affects young children, with limited research on how migration may alter life course transitions in adolescence. Still, a few studies have posited that family migration can alter the expectations and plans adolescents make for their own transitions into labor migration (e.g. Azaola, 2012; Kandel & Kao, 2000, 2001; Thorsen, 2010), and some research has examined the connection between migration and other transitions to adulthood among adolescents who migrate themselves (cf. Juarez et al., 2013). In this paper, we extend this research by studying the relationship between international migration of household members and goals for family formation among adolescents who stay behind, drawing on newly available survey data from the Chitwan Valley of Nepal.

Family migration context and adolescent family formation aspirations

Aspirations for marriage and family formation both reflect individuals' perceptions of their identity and circumstances and predict eventual behavior (e.g., Allendorf, 2013; Bachrach & Morgan, 2013; Clark et al., 2009; Crissey, 2005; Fatusi & Blum, 2008; Hayford & Morgan, 2008; Milbrath et al., 2009). For adolescents, desired family formation behaviors capture their "imagined futures" (Frye, 2012) – their goals for themselves and their understanding of how their own lives are likely to unfold. These ideations and schematic structures can shape individual behaviors in a variety of realms, both directly through family formation behaviors and indirectly in related domains including work and schooling.

Migration by a family member may alter young people's ideals and values related to their own family formation. For migrants, migration carries with it the idea of entering a new social context and participating more directly in a global economic system. These changes in turn are symbolically linked with ideals about new family forms, including changing power dynamics between men and women, parents and children, and individuals and families (e.g., Cordell et al., 1996; Hertrich & Lesclingand, 2012, 2013; Levitt, 1998; Williams et al., 2014). Migrants develop new goals and values around marriage, marriage timing, sexual behavior, and gender roles as they spend time away from their place of origin (Holland & de Valk, 2013; Parrado & Flippen, 2010; Williams et al., 2014). These changes are partly a result of exposure to new norms and social structures in the receiving context, but also stem from separation from family relationships and systems in the sending context that emphasize commitment to a family group over individual autonomy and achievement.

Changing norms and values among migrants may be shared with family members, either through communication between the sending household and the migrant or after the migrant's return. For example, in some contexts, women married to migrants exhibit greater autonomy and independence after their spouse's migration, even if they themselves do not migrate (Yabiku et al., 2010). Building on these findings, we hypothesize that children in migrant sending households may hold distinctive orientations toward family formation when compared to children in households without migrants, adopting goals that value individual autonomy over conformity to family systems, including preferences for non-marital romantic relationships, later union formation, and choice marriage rather than arranged marriage. We further hypothesize that differences in family formation expectations will be larger for girls, for whom "traditional" family systems are more constraining, than for boys.

In addition to these ideational pathways, the migration of a family member may shape adolescent family formation expectations by changing the desired or actual timing of other transitions to adult roles. For example, if migration remittances are used to support children's schooling, family migration may be linked to increased educational attainment and later school-leaving. Because there are strong normative beliefs related to the sequencing of marriage and school-leaving, increased education would also be associated with a later desired age at marriage, all other things being equal. Furthermore, the children of migrants are more likely to expect to migrate themselves (Giorguli & Lopez, 2009; Kandel & Kao, 2000). These migration expectations may in turn be linked to changing plans for the timing of marriage and family formation. Our analyses incorporate these linked outcomes in the analysis of family formation expectations in order to better understand adolescent aspirations for future trajectories.

Setting

We analyze these relationships using data collected in the Chitwan Valley of Nepal. Chitwan District is an appropriate and exciting setting to study migration and adolescent family formation expectations. The area has transitioned rapidly from one dominated by subsistence agriculture and limited infrastructure to a growing and urbanizing setting with sufficient resources and labor to sustain international migration. There is a fairly long history of migration from Nepal to India along with a handful of other Asian countries (Shrestha, 2004; Wagle, 2012). But migration has increased recently to a more diverse set of destinations including a large stream of labor migrants to the Gulf States of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Bohra & Massey, 2009). Much of this international migration is dominated by men who are recruited by local brokers who facilitate travel and employment in the Gulf States. This study will focus on the adolescent family members left behind in Chitwan by these migrants.

Marriage systems in Chitwan are patrilocal (women move into their husband's home on marriage), and wives are considered subordinate to their husbands and in-laws. Wives have primary responsibility for housework and childcare. Women's decision-making autonomy has historically been low (Acharya et al., 2010). However, Nepal is also a context of rapid economic development and rapid changes in family and demographic behavior, including marriage and childbearing. Educational attainment has been increasing dramatically, especially for girls. These higher levels of education and enrollment in school are associated with delays in marriage, again particularly for girls (Acharya et al., 2010; Yabiku, 2004; Ji, 2013). Although arranged marriages are still common, it has become more prevalent and acceptable for young people to choose their own spouses, and the increase in "love marriage" is also associated with changing values around family and greater independence of children from parents (Ghimire, et al., 2006).

Data and methods

Data

We draw on data from a new survey, the Family Migration and Early Life Outcomes (FAMELO) project. FAMELO is comprised of three comparable surveys conducted in three distinctive migrant sending contexts: Jalisco, Mexico; Gaza, Mozambique; and Chitwan, Nepal. These three contexts all share high levels of out-migration, especially labor migration by men. However, they differ in the level of economic development, institutional supports for adolescents and young adults (notably the availability and quality of schooling), and family beliefs and behaviors. In this paper, we will draw on data from Nepal.

The FAMELO survey design is a household-based sample. In each site, approximately 2000 households containing at least one child age 5-17 were selected. In half of these households, a single child was selected for interviews; in the other half, a sibling pair of children was selected. Children age 14-17 were oversampled. Both the focal child(ren) and the caregiver primarily responsible for the child(ren) were interviewed about parenting practices, the child's educational attainment and future goals, and the child's health and well-being. Children age 11-17 were asked about expectations for future goals, including marriage as well as education and migration. In addition, the caregiver completed a detailed household roster providing information about the resident members of the household and past and present migration by household residents. Our analytic sample consists of all adolescents who answered questions about family formation expectations. This extended abstract includes preliminary results from a sample of 1576 adolescents age 11-17. The completed paper will add an additional 309 adolescents from the 14-17 year old oversample.

The primary outcome variables for this analysis are a set of questions about the child's expectations and aspirations for future family formation and future education and migration. Children age 11 and older were asked their desired age at marriage; whether they expected their spouse to be chosen by their parents, themselves, or both together; the desired educational attainment of their spouse; whether they would prefer to live with family members or independently after marriage; whether they would prefer to marry a spouse who worked locally or a spouse who worked in a foreign country; their desired educational attainment; whether they themselves would like to work abroad before marriage; whether they would like to leave their community of origin in adulthood; and whether they expect to leave their community of origin. In this extended abstract, we present preliminary results based on a subset of these measures of expectations and aspirations. The completed paper will examine the relationships among the full set of measures in more detail.

The primary predictor variables are measures of the migration experiences of household members. Based on data from the household roster, we will categorize households according to several dimensions of migration, including whether there is currently a migrant absent from the household, whether a household member has ever migrated, the relationship of the past or current migrant to the child (parent, sibling, or other), and the destination of the past or current migrant (Gulf States, India, or other). The present analysis will be limited to international migrants. We will also account for more complex combinations of migration experience (e.g., multiple migration spells to multiple destinations, migration of multiple household members) based on initial descriptive analyses. Preliminary results use only measures of current household migration.

As noted above, we will explicitly test for differences between boys and girls. We will also test for possible differences in association for older (14-17) and younger (11-13) adolescents. Multivariate analyses will control for caste, family structure (sibship size, extended family coresidence), family socioeconomic status (measured using an index of household possession of durable goods), education of parents and other household members, and other potential confounders.

Methods

Expectations for future family formation (marriage timing, spousal characteristics, parental involvement in marriage choice), education, and migration, are closely linked conceptually and

strongly correlated empirically. Therefore, rather than analyzing these measures of expectations as separate outcomes, we use latent class analysis to describe clusters of related expectations (Collins and Lanza 2010; McCutcheon 1987). Latent class analysis (LCA) is a method for describing patterns of correlations between variables based on the assumption that observed correlations between measures are explained by the presence of discrete groups (classes) within the population. That is, LCA assumes the presence of distinct “types” of people characterized by different combinations of life values and goals. It is thus well-suited for studying the associations between expectations and desires for linked goals.

When conducting LCA, the analyst specifies a number of classes (or types). Given that number of classes, software is used to estimate the distribution of respondents across classes with the highest likelihood of having produced the observed distribution of variables. The outputs of the model are the proportion of the sample in each class, the distribution of each of the variables in each class, and the overall model fit, that is, how well the derived solution fits the observed data. Typically, models are estimated for a range of numbers of classes, and the analyst selects the model with the best combination of statistical fit and substantive plausibility. The number of classes in this final model is also considered an output of a latent class analysis.

After determining the best-fitting latent class model, we will formally test whether the composition and distribution of classes are different for boys and girls and for older and younger adolescents. If the best fitting model is not the same for different subgroups, we will analyze subgroups separately. All models are estimated using the LCA plugin for Stata (LCA Stata Plugin (Version 1.2). 2015).

We will use descriptive statistics to compare characteristics of the adolescents classified in each group in terms of family migration context as well as controls listed above. We will then estimate multivariate models predicting latent class membership as a product of family migration context and socioeconomic controls. In a series of nested models, we will assess the role of educational expectations and desires and migration expectations in explaining any association between family migration and adolescent family formation goals.

Preliminary results

The preliminary latent class analysis indicates that a two-class model is the best fitting. Alternate models with up to eight classes were tested, but there was minimal improvement in fit beyond the initial two-class model. Based on an examination of the indicators, Class 1 is identified as less family focused and more mobile, with higher values for indicators oriented toward autonomy, and Class 2 is identified as more family focused and less mobile, with lower values for indicators oriented toward autonomy (see Table 1). Although expectations and aspirations for future goals differ by gender, clustering within classes and differences between classes are largely similar for boys and girls.

Table 2 presents the distribution of descriptive statistics by the two classes. Preliminary analyses indicate several significant differences in the characteristics of the two classes. Respondents in Class 1 were slightly older than respondents in Class 2, were more likely to be high caste Hindu, and had higher mean household possessions. Although respondents in Class 1 reported greater orientation toward future mobility than respondents in Class 2, fewer respondents in Class 1 than Class 2 lived in households containing a current migrant (37.2 and 42.2 percent, respectively). Preliminary multivariate analyses (not shown) suggest that this association is attenuated by controlling for household socioeconomic status.

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Table 1. Latent class analysis, class composition

Indicators	Boys		Girls	
	Class 1	Class 2	Class 1	Class 2
Very important to get married	0.13	0.17	0.09	0.09
Very important to care for parents	0.80	0.76	0.77	0.75
Expect family to choose spouse	0.41	0.62	0.29	0.39
Expect young marriage	0.44	0.60	0.44	0.56
Want to work abroad	0.67	0.68	0.66	0.50
Want to live in this community	0.29	0.88	0.12	0.51
Expect to leave this community	0.68	0.12	0.80	0.02
N	324	484	314	454

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, by class (boys and girls combined)

	Class 1 Less family focused, more mobile	Class 2 More family focused, less mobile
N	638	938
% current migrant in household*	37.2	42.2
% returned migrant in household	20.7	19.8
% female	49.2	48.4
Mean age*	14.0	13.8
% high caste Hindu***	54.8	41.8
Mean household possessions scale***	0.11	-0.11

*: $p < .05$; ***: $p < .001$. Significance based on t-tests (for comparison of means) or chi-square tests (for comparisons of proportions).