Title

Migration and Gender in Indian Slums: Findings from a Large Household Survey in Three Indian Cities

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Abstract

By 2050, the global urban population is projected to increase by 60%, with most of this increase expected in resource-poor cities in the Global South. As Asia and Africa become majority-urban, virtually all of the population increase is expected to accrue to slums. The population increase has two main sources: growing families of current slum residents, and migration. Drawing on a new 10,000 household survey in 300 slums in three Indian cities, we examine current slum demographics along two dimensions: migrant status and gender. We find significant variation along these two dimensions, corresponding to differences in economic and health outcomes. Notably, we find substantial differences compared to official government statistics.

Extended abstract

Motivation

Through the middle of this century, global policymakers will contend with a growing urban population, altering local and national economies while demanding different and expanded social services. By 2050, the global urban population is projected to increase by 60%, with most of this increase expected in resource-poor cities in the Global South (Beard, Mahendra, and Westphal 2016). Africa and Asia are projected to see the greatest increase in urban population, and will likely become majority-urban by midcentury (United Nations 2014). In resource-poor cities within these regions, virtually all of the urban population growth is expected to accrue to their least-well-resourced areas – slums (Marx, Stoker, and Suri 2013; Starbird, Norton, and Marcus 2016; Ezeh et al. 2017). A sizeable portion of this population growth is natural – e.g. derived from current residents having children in slums – and another substantial portion comes from rural-to-urban migration (Beard, Mahendra, and Westphal 2016). This paper contributes to an understanding of today's migrants – their origins, reasons for migrating, needs, and networks – in an effort to inform tomorrow's policy.

Much of the literature on slums in India analyzes outcomes merging gender and migration status. Some literature focuses on men, and examines men who migrate to slums for economic reasons (Tumbe, forthcoming). This literature includes economic mobility, analyzed through father-son occupation differences (Krishna, Sriram, and Prakash 2014). Other literature focuses on women who live in slums, predominantly focused on maternal health, contraception, and natural population growth – implicitly downplaying the role of migrant women (Speizer et al. 2012; Starbird, Norton, and Marcus 2016; Matthews et al. 2010; Hazarika 2010; Khan et al. 2012). Yet this simultaneous bifurcation along gender and employment lines leaves open a gap: both official census data and

theory suggest that women may be migrating for economic reasons (Deshingkar and Akter 2009b; Rosenzweig and Stark 1989).

One reason why the gap in the migration and gender literature exists is that many previous datasets have not been representative or large enough to lend insight. Small-N studies, while useful in spotlighting specific cases, do not have a large enough sample to represent the general population. Official data sources, including the Census, often under-sample migrant and slum populations.

Research questions

This paper makes contributions toward both the data and content gaps described above, through two focus areas.

First, what differences exist between our survey and official statistics reflecting slum populations in India?

Second, how do population characteristics vary if we classify slum residents along two dimensions – migrant status (whether the resident was born in the slum or migrated to it), and gender? If we focus specifically on women who migrate to slums for marriage – an as-yet understudied group – how do upward economic mobility, fertility rates, and maternal outcomes differ for this group compared to those who were born in slums? How do these outcomes differ with variation in migration patterns and place of origin?

Data and research methods

As described above, sampling slums is difficult, and government data is unreliable. Scholars have made important advances through case studies and ethnographic work, but we lack large-N studies and generalizable findings because of deficiencies in the data. Most studies are sourced from two types of data sources: case studies or small N sources, which can shed light on specific phenomena but are not representative; or on official data, which is notoriously unreliable in this context as this population is underrepresented in the sample (Bhan and Jana 2013; Deshingkar and Akter 2009a).

Because the official data did not produce a complete sampling frame, we drew on novel methods to create a large database of slums representative of three Indian cities (Rains, Krishna, Wibbels, forthcoming). Rather than relying on incomplete lists, we drew on satellite data and ground expertise to build a novel sample of approximately 10,000 households across nearly 300 slums in Jaipur, Patna and Bangalore, India – three cities with very different levels and trajectories of development. Teams of surveyors conducted structured interviews with selected respondents on family, social connections, employment and income generating activities, expenditures, engagement with social services, and demographics. Because the dataset is both broad and deep, it is a unique contribution to our understanding of slum conditions.

Drawing on this dataset, we examine how variation in migrant and gender characteristics have statistically different outcomes. We compare these findings with data from the National Sample Survey, the Census of India 2011, and IPUMS-DHS.

Expected findings

Our initial findings provide answers to both research questions. We find large differences between our survey and official statistics: in our representative sample, 31% of slum resident women and 25% of slum resident men are migrants – findings not reflected in official surveys.

As we vary migrant status and gender, we see variation which corresponds to different policy needs, and social, economic and health outcomes which are obscured by the existing data. We find that male migrants are, on average, better educated but poorer than female migrants, and that migrants are generally poorer than non-migrant slum residents. Slum women are less likely to work outside the home than men, and female migrants are less likely than female non-migrants to find employment outside the home. Consistent with previous literature targeting family planning interventions toward women, female migrants spend a larger share of their total expenditures on health than male migrants, but non-migrants spend a larger share of total expenditures on health than migrants.

These findings confirm that examining the slum population along these two dimensions – gender and migrant status – reveals important variation in needs and outcomes. In our paper, we correlate the initial findings described here with indicators on education, fertility, and healthcare; as well as geospatial analysis on whether migrants from similar communities have similar needs once they have settled in distant slums.

Finally, our paper concludes with a section on policy implications. Understanding these migrants – their origins, needs, and connections – is a critical priority to properly serve changing communities.

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