Labor Migration and Children's School Quality

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Abstract

Many prior studies find that when families in a sending region have a labor migrant as part of the household, children are more likely to be enrolled in school or have higher educational attainment. While enrollment and attainment are important outcomes, they have several drawbacks as a way to conceptualize the impact of labor migration on children. In many settings, schooling is nearly universal, especially in primary and middle school. Thus, school enrollment and attainment may lack sufficient variation. As an alternative indicator of children's schooling outcomes, we propose characteristics of school quality. Using data from the Family Migration and Early Life Outcomes (FAMELO) Project in Chitwan, Nepal, we find that children from households with labor migrants attend schools with higher quality as defined by two dimensions: private schools (as opposed to public) and schools that require additional fees.

Labor Migration and Children's School Quality

Introduction

Families engage in labor migration for a variety of motivations, but one common reason is that they want better educational opportunities for their children (Chae and Glick, 2018; Nobles, 2011; Vogel and Korinek, 2012). Many prior studies find that when families in a sending region have a migrant as part of the household (either a past or current migrant), children are more likely to be enrolled in school or parents have higher educational aspirations for their children (Amuedo-Dorantes, Georges, and Pozo, 2010; Edwards and Ureta, 2003; Nobles, 2011). The relationship between migration and children's schooling, however, is not straightforward. Selection clouds the degree to which labor migration leads to children's schooling. Furthermore, some studies find that labor migration may actually be associated with lower educational outcomes for children (Giannelli and Mangiavacchi, 2010; Hu, 2012; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2011; Zhao et al., 2014).

This diversity of research findings suggests multiple pathways linking migration to children's schooling. One set of pathways involve labor migration providing resources returned to the sending household, in the form of remittances, that are used towards children's schooling (Bredl, 2011; Koska et al., 2013; Lu and Treiman, 2011). Another set of pathways implicate mechanisms such as role modeling in which successful labor migration orients children to aspire to be labor migrants themselves, a choice that may not require extensive education; this may lead to children acquiring less education than similar children in non-migrant households (Acosta, 2011; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2011).

Prior research has examined this question by creating diverse measures of labor migration and comparing them to multiple measures of schooling activities. For example, the history of labor migration can be conceptualized as current or former or ever, relevant migrants can be parents only or any household member, and the labor migration can be described as domestic or international, or the

amount of remittances sent back (Amuedo-Dorantes, Georges, and Pozo, 2010; Cebotari and Mazzucato, 2016; Robles and Oropesa, 2011; Sarma and Parinduri, 2016).

Children's schooling activities have typically been measured with schooling enrollment or attainment (Bredle, 2011; Chae and Glick, 2018; Giannelli and Mangiavacchi, 2010; Robles and Oropesa, 2011). While enrollment and attainment are important outcomes that have direct relevance to children's well-being, measures of enrollment or attainment have several drawbacks as a way to conceptualize the impact of labor migration on children's schooling activities. Enrollment is a binary indicator that may have little variation. Even in many developing countries around the world, schooling is accessible, normative, and widespread, especially at younger ages. In the primary schooling years, most children will be in school; it is very rare to not enroll children by age 5 or 6, or for children to discontinue schooling before primary or middle school. Thus, households that have experienced different impacts and consequences of labor migration may show similar levels of enrollment for young and early adolescent children. Only at older ages, when school dropout is more common, does enrollment have variation. Schooling attainment has potentially more variation than enrollment because attainment is a continuous variable. But, similar to enrollment, in many settings there is not much variation in attainment until older ages when children drop out of school. In sum, school enrollment and attainment may lack sufficient variation to test how labor migration is associated with the schooling experiences of children.

As an alternative indicator of children's schooling outcomes, we propose characteristics of school quality. If labor migration has beneficial relationships with children's schooling, then one pathway through which this could operate is better quality schools. For example, better quality schools are those with lower student teacher ratios, better teacher qualifications, more classrooms, and more comprehensive curriculums (Lee and Barro, 2001; Heyneman and Loxley, 1983; Oakes, 1989). Enrolling children in higher quality schools is an indicator that parents value education and want their children to

orient their futures to occupations that require more education. Specifically, if labor migration allows parents to purchase higher quality education and/or raises parents' aspirations for their children's education, then children in households with labor migration experience will have higher quality schools than peers coming from households with no migration experiences. On the other hand, if labor migration orients parents and children to imagining futures in which children are migrants themselves, there should be no difference in school quality across labor migrant and non-labor migrant households. The benefit of using school quality measures is that we may be able to observe differences at very young school ages—when (in most settings) enrollment is universal and attainment for age varies little.

Another way that in that school quality measures may be more sensitive to examining the impacts of labor migration is with gender. School quality measures may be better able to detect gender differences in how labor migration affects schooling. In all but the most resource-poor settings, parents would rarely enroll a male child in school and keep a female child at home. Parents might, however, enroll a male child at a higher quality school and enroll a female child at a school of lesser quality. Thus, measures of school quality may reveal gender differences in how parents treat their children's schooling in situations where a measure of enrollment would not show disparities.

Setting

The setting for our study is the western Chitwan Valley of Nepal. Chitwan is in the Terai region of Nepal, which is in the southern part of the country and shares a border with India. Chitwan, like the rest of the Terai, is primarily low elevation and has a tropical climate. Up until the 1950s, the Chitwan area was sparsely population and covered with thick forests; malaria was endemic. In the 1950s, the Nepali government with assistance from USAID began a malaria eradication program as well as a land development plan that deforested large areas of the region. What was once jungle became prime farmland, and settlers from across Nepal migrated to Chitwan. Roads, school, health clinics, and

employers spread across the area to serve the growing population. The pace of change has been rapid. For example, in 1950, there were no schools in the western Chitwan study area. By the 1990s, there were over 100 schools (Axinn and Yabiku, 2001)

Due to its close location to India, there has always been labor migration of Chitwan residents to job opportunities across the border. This was facilitated by the arrangement that Nepalis can cross into India without a visa, and they can work in India without any additional permits. Beginning in the 1990s, however, labor migration streams to other regions started to grow due to global demands for labor. In the present day, Nepalis frequently work in the Gulf states (Malla and Rosenbaum, 2017), as well as in East and Southeast Asia. It is in this setting of widespread labor migration that we test hypotheses on the relationship between migration and children's school quality.

Hypotheses

Our primary hypothesis is that, in the Chitwan setting, labor migration benefits children's school quality for children who remain behind. Although it is possible that labor migration might lead to lower aspirations for education, what we know about Chitwan is that parents have high aspirations for their children, both in terms of education and occupations. Furthermore, Chitwan has growing, modestly urban development in the Bharatpur-Narayanghat area, and there are non-agricultural occupational opportunities that would provide returns to education. Thus we hypothesize that labor migration will lead to more income for the sending household, in the form of remittances, that parents will use to increase the quality of their children's schooling.

Our secondary hypothesis is that the relationship between labor migration and school quality is gendered. In the Nepali context, daily life is still characterized by a strong degree of gender stratification, and women’s roles are more constrained to family and home (Furuta and Salway, 2006; Lundgren et al., 2013; Stash and Hannum, 2001). This has changed in recent decades as fertility has

fallen and women's education has increased, but data from our Chitwan setting still show that men have much more work experience outside the home (Yabiku, 2005). Thus, the returns to schooling are much higher for men than women. If the returns to schooling is a factor in labor migrant families' decisions over their children's schooling, then we would expect the association between labor migration and children's school quality to be weaker for female children than male children.

Finally, we have exploratory hypotheses regarding which conceptualizations of labor migration captures these relationships. We use three approaches to conceptualize if a child's household is characterized by labor migration

1) Current migrant household: if the household currently has any members who are away from the household for work reasons.
2) Past migrant household: if the household had any members away for work reasons but have returned, and there are no members away for work right now.
3) Ever migrant household: if the household has current or past migrants.

It is unclear which of these conceptualizations will have the strongest association with school quality. Current labor migrant households are those which may be actively receiving remittances and the fruits of labor migration, and thus there is good reason to expect these households to have the most ability to invest in children's schooling. On the other hand, the benefits of migration can be an accumulative process, and labor migrants may return home once they have acquired sufficient wealth from their trips. In this case, being a past migrant may indicate the most resources for investing in school quality. Finally, it may be that both exposures to labor migration (current and past) result in benefits for children's school quality.

Data and Methods

We use two data sources for testing our hypotheses. Data on households, schooling, and labor migration experiences come from the Family Migration and Early Life Outcomes (FAMELO) Project. FAMELO studies the relationships between migration and three themes of children's outcomes—social development, education, and transitions to adulthood—in three countries: Mexico, Mozambique, and Nepal. FAMELO is a longitudinal study with a baseline interview in 2017/2018 of approximately 2000 adult caregivers and 3000 children in each country. The 3000 children were nested within the 2000 caregivers; about half of the adult caregivers reported on 2 children, and half reported on a single child. Eligible children were between the ages of 5 and 17. FAMELO surveys were face-to-face interviews with separate interviews with adult caregivers and children. Our analysis in this paper uses FAMELO data only from the Nepal site because we have detailed school quality data only in Chitwan, Nepal.

The school quality data come from school history calendar data collected as part of the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS). In 1996, CVFS enumerated all schools that currently existed in Chitwan, as well as all schools that ever existed but had since merged or closed. Using school records and interviews with current and former administrators and teachers, CVFS collected yearly information the characteristics of all schools. These characteristics included information such as numbers of students, numbers of teachers, number of teachers with bachelor's degrees, type of curriculum, the medium of instruction (Nepali or English), the number of rooms in the school, highest and lowest grades offered, and the tuition and fees. These data were updated in 2006 and 2015. In FAMELO, caregivers provided the name of the school their child attended, and thus it is possible to link CVFS school history data to the FAMELO child (this linking is in progress).

For this preliminary paper, our substantive focus is two sets of variables available in the FAMELO data: 1) multiple measures of labor migration at the household level and 2) basic measures of school quality. In the adult FAMELO questionnaire, responses from several questions were used to classify households by type of migration. Current migrant households have a member of the household who is

currently away for work reasons. Past migrant households have no current migrants, but they have a member who went away specifically for work reasons for their most recent trip and has since returned. A third variable was additionally created to identify "ever migrant" households, which is comprised of households who have past or current migrants. Therefore, three binary variables (current migrant household, past migrant household, ever migrant household) are constructed to differentiate migrant households.

The full CVFS school quality data from 2015 have not yet been linked to the children in the FAMLEO study, but that is ongoing. For now, we use basic school quality measures that caregivers reported in FAMELO. School quality is partially measured from the adult's response to what type of school the focal child attends (public, religious private, or non-religious private). In our setting of Chitwan, private schools are typically higher quality than public schools (but our full CVFS school history data will later allow us to quantify this). Because of the small sample size of children who are reported to attend religious private schools (only 1.91% of the sample), that category was dropped. School type is therefore a binary variable (0 = public school, 1 = non-religious private school). School quality is also measured by the adult's response to whether there are fees or tuition for the school that focal child attends. It is also a binary variable (0 = no school fees/tuition, 1 = school fees/tuition).

Additional variables included are control variables that are likely to be related to labor migration and children's school quality. These include the child's sex, the child's age, mother's and father's education, household size, and caste. Child's sex is coded 1 if female, 0 if male. Age is continuous, as are the parental education and household size variables.

Caste is a series of dummy variables to measures the main groups in our study site: High caste Hindu, Low caste Hindu, Hill Tibetoburmese, Terai Tibetoburmese, and Newar. Historically in the Chitwan setting, High caste Hindu and Newars have been the most advantaged groups with regard to education and wealth. For the work presented at PAA, we will add additional controls, including

households assets and wealth, the household's mode of productions (agricultural, non-agricultural, or a mix of both), and measures of other school-age siblings in the household.

Our preliminary school quality outcomes are binary: whether the child attends a private school or not, and whether the child's school has fees or not. Given these binary outcomes, we use logistic regression to model the log odds of each of these outcomes.

Preliminary Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the sample. Although it is not shown in the table, we also examined the enrollment of all children between the ages of 5 and 17. Enrollment in this age group is high: 98.4% of children were enrolled in school, and thus there was not enough variation to model the odds of enrollment. We restrict our analysis to the characteristics of schools the children attend, rather than examine enrollment as an outcome.

(Table 1)

Overall there is a high experience of labor migration in these Chitwan households. About 43% of households currently have a member away for work reasons, and 19% of households have had a member away for work in the past. Taken together, 62% of households are exposed in some way to labor migration currently or in the past. The basic school quality measures show that about two-thirds of children attend a private school, and nearly all (94%) children attend schools that require fees. In Chitwan, even public schools require fees to attend. The remaining control variables show that the sample of children was split about equally by sex (48% female, 52% male), and the average child age was 11 years. Mother's education averaged about 7 years, and father's about 8 and a half years. Household size averaged almost 4.5 people, and the distribution of caste mirrored the overall distribution of Chitwan, as found in prior studies.

In Table 2, we predict the log-odds that the child attends a private school, as opposed to a public school. In model 1, our indicator of labor migration experience is if the household is an "ever migrant" household, which is a household that currently or has ever had sent labor migrants. Compared to children in households who have never had a labor migrant, children in ever labor migrant households have significantly higher log odds of attending a private school. The log odds ratio of .35 translates to an odds ratio of 1.42, or a higher odds of attending private school of 42%. The control variables in model 1 show that female children are less likely to attend private schools, which is expected given the gender inequality in Chitwan. Older children are less likely to attend private schools, and children with more highly educated parents are more likely to attend private schools.

(Table 2)

In model 2, we differentiate ever migrant households into those who currently send labor migrations and those who have done so only in the past. Model 2 shows that it is only children in current labor migrant households that are more advantaged with regards to private school attendance. Children from past labor migrant households are no different from children in never migrant households. This suggests that current and past labor migrant households are distinct categories and should not be combined when examining the outcome of private school enrollment.

Model 3 tests our gender hypothesis that female children may not experience the benefits of labor migration as much as male children. To do this, we interacted the two labor migration indicators (current and past) with the child's gender. These interaction coefficients, however, were not significantly different from zero, suggesting that the association of labor migration and private school enrollment did not vary by gender.

(Table 3)

In Table 3, we repeat the above analysis, this time substituting the outcome of whether or not the child attends a school with required fees. Recall that there is not as much variation on this indicator

of school quality (94% of children attended schools with fees), but nonetheless there were associations with labor migration. In model 1, children from ever migrant households have significantly higher log odds of attending a school with fees. In model 2, the ever migrant category is separated into current and past migrants. Unlike in the model for private school attendance, the results here show that children from both current and past migrant households, compared to never migrant households, are significantly more likely to attend schools with fees. In model 3, we test if there are gender differences in these associations, but the association between labor migration and attending a school with fees does not vary by gender.

Future

While prior studies have investigated the links between labor migration and children's schooling outcomes, many times these outcomes have been limited to enrollment and years of schooling attained. In this paper, we argue that dimensions of children's schooling experience can also be taken from measures of school quality. A main advantage of school quality measures is that they likely have more variation than enrollment or attainment. Enrollment and attainment may show little differences among children from households with diverse labor migration experiences.

Our preliminary analyses are suggestive that two very basic measures of school quality—private school attendance and the presence of school fees—are associated with labor migration in expected ways. This is encouraging that we may be able to detect further differences when we link these children to our full array of school quality measures in the CVFS school history calendars. We hypothesized that the associations would vary by the gender of the child, but we did not observe significant differences. We may be constrained by the limited variation in these basic measures of school quality (binary indicators), and the school history calendars will likely offer more variation.

For the PAA presentation, we will have the additional school quality measures, as well as additional controls in our models: household wealth and assets, and more measures of household structure, such as other siblings in the household that might compete for schooling resources. In addition, we will update our models to adjust for the clustering our data. Recall that the approximately 3000 children are nested in 2000 adult caregivers' households. Random effects models are an appropriate way to consider this clustering and adjust standard errors. Finally, we will explore other ways to characterize labor migration. Currently, we combine all forms of labor migration, whether it is domestic or international. FAMELO recorded the destination of the migrant (domestic or international). Because the barriers and rewards of migration vary by the destination, it may be that the association of labor migration and children's schooling quality outcomes may be different when the type of migration is considered.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Current Labor Migration Household	0.43	0.50	0	1
Past Labor Migration Household	0.19	0.39	0	1
Ever Labor Migration Household	0.62	0.49	0	1
Never Labor Migration Household	0.38	0.49	0	1
Child Attends Private School	0.67	0.47	0	1
Child Attends School with Fees	0.94	0.24	0	1
Child Female	0.48	0.50	0	1
Child's Age	11.41	3.69	5	17
Father's Years Education	8.61	4.07	0	16
Mother's Years Education	7.05	4.37	0	16
High Caste Hindu	0.48	0.50	0	1
Low Caste Hindu	0.11	0.31	0	1
Hill Tibetoburmese	0.24	0.43	0	1
Terai Tibetoburmese	0.12	0.33	0	1
Newar	0.04	0.21	0	1
Household Size	4.43	1.51	2	13

N=2,794 children

Table 2: Logistic Regression Predicting Children's Private School Attendance

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ever Labor Migration Household (ref is never)	0.350***		
	(0.104)		
Current Labor Migration Household (ref is never)		0.422***	0.398*
		(0.114)	(0.157)
Past Labor Migration Household (ref is never)		0.208	0.296
		(0.137)	(0.196)
Child Female * Current Migrant Household			0.046
			(0.219)
Child Female * Past Migrant Household			-0.171
			(0.272)
Child Female	-0.383***	-0.383***	-0.368*
	(0.098)	(0.098)	(0.161)
Child's Age	-0.153***	-0.152***	-0.152***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Father's Years Education	0.160***	0.160***	0.161***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Mother's Years Education	0.170***	0.172***	0.171***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Caste (reference is High Caste Hindu)			
Low Caste Hindu	-0.401*	-0.397*	-0.396*
	(0.165)	(0.165)	(0.165)
Hill Tibetoburmese	0.341*	0.341*	0.342**
	(0.133)	(0.133)	(0.133)
Terai Tibetoburmese	-0.424*	-0.408*	-0.408*
	(0.165)	(0.165)	(0.165)
Newar	0.559*	0.560*	0.557*
	(0.261)	(0.261)	(0.261)
Household Size	-0.011	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Constant	0.164	0.101	0.087
	(0.307)	(0.310)	(0.317)
Observations	2,794	2,794	2,794
Log Likelihood	-1,292.880	-1,291.625	-1,291.283

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
Coefficients are log odds ratios, t-statistics in parentheses

Table 3: Logistic Regression Predicting Children's School Fees

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ever Labor Migration Household (ref is never)	0.480**		
	(0.164)		
Current Labor Migration Household (ref is never)		0.418*	0.718**
		(0.179)	(0.261)
Past Labor Migration Household (ref is never)		0.622**	0.637+
		(0.241)	(0.342)
Child Female * Current Migrant Household			-0.560
			(0.350)
Child Female * Past Migrant Household			-0.040
			(0.477)
Child Female	-0.200	-0.201	0.026
	(0.160)	(0.160)	(0.237)
Child's Age	-0.058*	-0.059*	-0.059*
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Father's Years Education	0.056*	0.056*	0.057*
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Mother's Years Education	0.040	0.039	0.040
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Caste (ref is High Caste Hindu)			
Low Caste Hindu	-0.774**	-0.779**	-0.771**
	(0.255)	(0.255)	(0.255)
Hill Tibetoburmese	-0.383+	-0.383+	-0.386+
	(0.222)	(0.222)	(0.222)
Terai Tibetoburmese	-0.009	-0.021	-0.023
	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)
Newar	-0.226	-0.229	-0.231
	(0.398)	(0.398)	(0.397)
Household Size	-0.035	-0.043	-0.046
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.054)
Constant	2.931***	2.982***	2.874***
	(0.508)	(0.512)	(0.519)
Observations	2,794	2,794	2,794
Log Likelihood	-616.557	-616.205	-614.794

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
Coefficients are log odds ratios, t-statistics in parentheses