PUSH FACTORS RESULTING IN THE DECISION FOR WOMEN TO MIGRATE

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In the absence of catastrophic events, the movements of people from one area to another are primarily the direct result of inadequate economic and social opportunities in the area of emigration and superior opportunities in the area of immigration. Other factors however, such as war, political coercion and natural calamities, have been responsible for some of the greatest displacements of population in human history.[1]

The context for migration decisions: poverty and gender inequality

Written almost 45 years ago, these migration-inducing factors are still true today. The traditional list of push factors for out-migration includes economic impoverishment, human insecurity, and demographic pressures, fuelled by high birth rates, particularly in less developed areas. However, the list is too general, and incomplete: if poverty, natural disasters including famine, and political instability or war provide a broad context for exit, so too does gender inequality. Who migrates – and who is encouraged and allowed to migrate – also reflect the status of women, both in sending and receiving countries, and their expected roles.

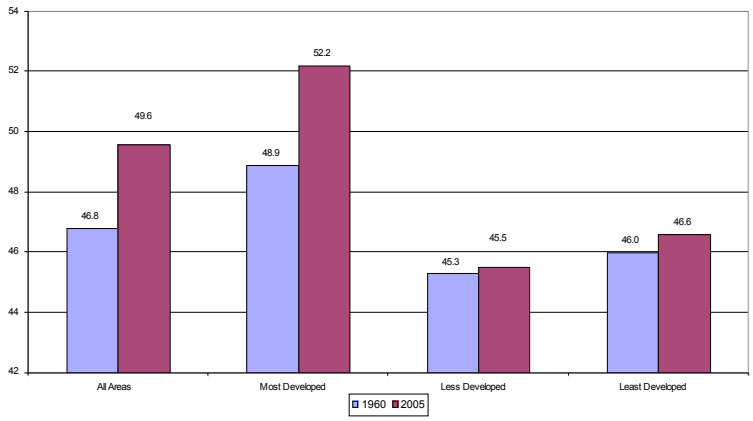
Succinctly put, poverty, political chaos, war, and natural disasters *and* gender inequalities in the countries of origin are responsible for the decisions that lead to the migration of women. The influence of all these factors may be seen in the increasing presence of women in international migration flows; why women migrate (and why they do not), and – as other papers for this expert group meeting observe – in the consequences for women.

Worldwide, females and males now participate equally in international migration. The growing number of women in migration varies however according to the development levels of destination areas. Today, females represent over half of international migrants in the more developed areas, and slightly less than half in the less developed and least developed areas of the world (Chart 1). These variations reflect differentials among countries in labour demands, wages and standards of living, and sites of refuge that help determine where migrants go.

The feminisation of migration shown in Chart 1 parallels two other transformations that affect women: the feminisation of poverty and the feminisation of work. Economic development can include structural change, including the transformation of the agriculture industry; the demise of small locally owned industries and the introduction of new industries by multinational corporations; rising male unemployment because of the

loss of traditional sites of employment; and increasing international debt load accompanied by government need to generate foreign currency. Women's labour force participation is thus deployed to provide alternative sources of income. But the forces that have marginalized the employment of men also may weaken the employment and income-generating capacities of women. International migration is a response to these conditions, for it often generates hard currency in the form of remittances to states while providing income to households and family members in the countries of origin.[2]

Chart 1: Percentage Female, International Migrants by Region, 1960 & 2005



Source: United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division. World Migrant Stock: the 2005 Revision Population Database. Web address: http://esa.un.org/migration

Although poverty and related incapacities to make a living are the important factors underlying the international migration of women, the actual migration decision is influenced by state- and community-specific factors and by family and individual situations. But these are also sites of gender inequalities, and the degree and type of these inequalities also influence female migration. For example, if females do not have the same access as males to education or receive the same quality of education, women may be less in demand as migrants, and less able to obtain the financial resources and information necessary for migration. In fact, it can be argued that gender inequalities set the conditions for whether or not poverty produces female migration, the life cycle stages when migration occurs, and the form of migration.

The migration hump: implications for female migration

Poverty and gender inequality are powerful forces influencing female migration; however, levels of poverty and levels of gender inequality affect the magnitude of migration. Experts argue that extreme impoverishment makes international migration unlikely, simply because people have few resources for migration, and transportation and communication infrastructures are poor. Instead, it is in the intermediate stages of economic development that international migration is most likely to occur. In particular, rising educational levels stimulate aspirations for suitable employment, increase knowledge about the world, and

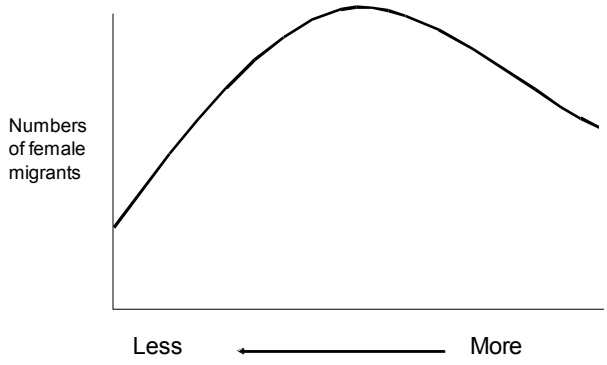
increase capacity for action. The economic restructuring that accompanies economic development also provides motivations for migration.[3]

It is reasonable to expect the same relationships between migration and levels of gender inequality. When conditions are such that women are married as children or as young adolescents; receive little and poor-quality education; bear many children at young ages; are denied access to credit and banking; and have few rights that are not linked to male family members, they will lack both the decision-making capacity and the resources to migrate.

As women's status improves, their potential for empowerment is enhanced. At least two other factors begin to operate during development: first, states may realize that women as well as men generate income as migrants, and may set up agencies to facilitate emigration; second, evolving linkages between sending and receiving areas of migration may stimulate further migration though a variety of mechanisms such as increased communication, the growth in recruiting agencies, and the use of informal social networks by migrants.

Because improvements in the status of women are more likely during the process of economic development than under conditions of extreme impoverishment, the two processes – women's improved status and economic development – are linked. The result is a migration hump where the migration of women is most likely during the intermediate stages of economic development and improvements in the status of women. When development is advanced and gender equality is high, migration is likely to decline because the basic conditions that motivated migration – the search for a better livelihood and for a better life – are gone (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Migration Hump as Determined by Levels of Economic Development and Gender Equality



Migration over the life cycle

Although migration decisions and the act of migration result from poverty and gender inequality, they are also affected by women's life-cycle stages. This is because the migration decisions and migration experiences of women as well as men are governed by expectations, gender roles, and social institutions that vary with age. Degrees of assumed dependency and autonomy also vary with age, as does the capacity to make migration decisions. This variation is illustrated in demographic vocabulary: young children and mothers who migrate alongside male heads of households are called "tied movers" as opposed to "autonomous" migrants who are assumed to have greater agency in the decision to move.

Migration to more developed regions frequently includes the migration of girl children and women as family members. Most adult women who migrate as family members are relatively young, usually between 20 and 40. Depending on the status of women in the country of origin, and their status within families, such women may or may not have inputs into the migration decision process. And not all daughters, wives and mothers migrate. In many instances where men migrate for labour purposes and temporarily, women of all ages and young children including daughters remain in the origin country or area of residence.

Women also migrate without family members. Studies suggest that women may migrate because they seek personal benefits and greater autonomy, and wish to remove themselves from patriarchal settings, including settings in which violence is prevalent.[4] Women also migrate for purposes of marriage and to earn livelihoods. For some, the decision to migrate rests on improvements in gender equality that allow women to access the finances necessary for moving, and give them the freedom and education necessary to obtain information about migration prospects.

However, it cannot be said that migration for marriage or for income-generating work always results from women's autonomous decisions or represents situations of empowerment. For example, where the status of women is low and filial acquiescence is expected, young girls may expect to be employed in domestic work from an early age, with no opportunity to be part of decision-making. In describing the trafficking of young Asian women as sex workers, Skeldon notes: "Lack of alternative opportunities in village economies, and the responsibility of daughters to sacrifice themselves to support their families, undermines the whole freedom of choice in poor societies. In cases where a family may have been abandoned by the male head of household … the adolescent daughter may represent the only realistic hope of earning money to support the family."[5]

Types of migration

Together with poverty, gender inequalities influence the type of migration that women undertake. This is particularly evident in the decisions that surround three forms of migration: a) female labour migration; b) trafficking in women and c) flight.

***Labour migration*:** Women now migrate as domestic workers; as entertainers; as skilled workers, particularly in health care fields, and as workers for the export industries of other countries. However, women's decisions to migrate for such work and their capacity to do so may be diminished by proscriptive gender norms; by reduced or no access to monetary funds; by discriminatory laws and practices, and by the absence of networks that provide information about migration and employment.

More concretely, laws or practices that do not allow women to inherit or own property, and limit or prohibit their use of banks, may also raise barriers against women's access to the financial resources necessary for migration. Gender norms also may prohibit – or impose costs on – the autonomous labour migration of women. A study of Bangladeshi men and women in Malaysia finds that family members considered female members going abroad a danger to the status of the family because it implied inappropriate behaviour; Bangladeshi men in Malaysia avoided these women migrants, arguing that they behaved improperly. This perception that migrant women violated norms of female-appropriate behaviour meant that Bangladeshi migrant women were cheated in economic transactions associated with migration while they were in Bangladesh, and when they were abroad were denied access to support systems and information networks dominated by Bangladeshi men. Violations of gender scripts also had implications upon their return. One father expressed the view that his migrant daughter probably would not find a husband when she came back.[6]

Conditions associated with gender inequalities may motivate rather than inhibit migration. The experience of personal violence, forced or unhappy marriages, lack of employment or income earning opportunities in their own countries may also induce women to move, although they will still need the information and resources necessary for migration. Family members may actually encourage women to migrate as workers, most often when women have acquired skills; where a strong labour demand exists for these skills, and where families see women as dutiful wives and daughters who will be diligent in sending money home.[7]

Returning women migrants who create networks of information and financial assistance enhance migration decisions and increase the likelihood of their implementation.[8] Other factors include the existence of liaison and recruitment agencies. The gendered nature of worldwide demand for women's labour is also important. In the most developed countries, women's rising participation in the labour force generates demand for service sector workers including domestics, to undertake care-work and tasks previously performed by women working unpaid in the home. In some countries the presence of a domestic worker may enhance the employer's status, stimulating and perpetuating the international migration of domestics.[9]

***Trafficking*:** Poverty, the need to make a living, and gender inequalities are associated with women's vulnerability to trafficking. Worldwide, estimates place the annual number of women and children trafficked at more than one million.[10] Poor or non-existent opportunities for employment and low incomes encourage the trafficking of women, primarily as sex workers; although the voluntary migration of mail order or web-based

brides can produce conditions similar to trafficking.[11] At least in Asia, highly restricted legal migration and women's demand for overseas employment to match their rising educational levels are also lay them open to trafficking.[12] Vulnerability to trafficking also reflects family circumstances and personal goals. Although the most compelling reason unquestionably is economic, studies report that some trafficked women report wanting to see the world, to have multicultural experiences, and to experience autonomy as reasons for seeking migration.[13]

Although economic factors motivate migration decisions, gender inequality permeates the trafficking of women. In some societies, the low status of women – the fact that they are less valued then men – and filial obligations make women rather than men vulnerable to trafficking. In both sending and receiving countries, women may gain little assistance from authorities and find themselves criminalized, both because of their low status, and because low-salaried law officers accept bribes from traffickers.

Development initiatives, anti-trafficking actions and improvements in women's rights are critical to diminishing the trafficking of women. Trafficked women who return to their home communities may find the conditions that induced their migration fundamentally unaltered, even though there is still great need for re-integration and employment.

***Women in flight*:** Political instability and environmental catastrophes are millennium-old causes of migration. In addition, during the second half of the twentieth century, the dismantling of colonial empires, the break-up of the USSR, and warfare affected sizeable numbers of people. Here too, poverty plays a role: lack of resources may cause states to implode, leaving no government in control; no functioning justice system; no infrastructure; no schooling; no organized medical care; no viable internal or external economic markets, and malfunctioning or worthless banking and monetary systems.[14] Sustained environmental degradation and catastrophes enhance the potential for state implosion.

As of the beginning of 2005, the number of persons in refugee-like conditions stood at 19.5 million, increasing by 13 per cent from the previous year.[15] Women, children and the elderly are considered the most vulnerable, and represent an estimated 80 per cent of a "normal" refugee population.[16] In many societies, when states are unable or unwilling to protect them and where women have lower status than men, they are especially vulnerable to violence, including rape. Such vulnerability can act as a cause of migration for individual women: however, most refugee-like women have fled conditions of systemic violence with their children and other family members who may be the chief decision makers.

Voluntary repatriation to the area of origin is a preferred solution to massive population displacements. But successful repatriation – which is a form of migration – is accompanied by action to regain economic livelihoods and to protect women during the process of return. As Martin[17] and others have observed, development assistance is crucial during this period and it is essential that women be active and influential participants in the planning process for such returns. Refugee women need to be empowered to make their own decisions and to declare their desires to return or to opt out. Gender inequality means that women do not

always receive the full range of information; women need the same access as men to information on which to make decisions. Because infrastructure in the former areas of residence has often been destroyed, it is essential that assistance be provided in areas as diverse as educational training, health care, reclaiming property, and obtaining employment. If the areas of return are characterized by beliefs, practices and laws that handicap women and cause gender inequalities, then refugee women may face significant barriers in re-establishing themselves and their families.

Conclusion

Decisions to migrate occur within broad social and economic contexts. Impoverishment and the need to generate income provide women and men alike with strong reasons for migrating. However, whether poverty translates into decisions and capabilities for female migration depends on state and community settings and on family and individual circumstances. This paper argues that where gender inequality is high, women may have little input into migration decisions and may encounter difficulties in migration. Variations among women with respect to migration over the life cycle and in the type of migration undertaken are also influenced by gender inequalities that shape decisions.

Recommendations

Materials covered in this paper indicate the following areas for action:

- Economic development and improvements in the status of women are required to reduce the impoverished and unequal conditions that fuel the labour migration of women, and sustain the trafficking of women and migration for marriage as "mail- or web-order" brides.

- Countries should review laws and common practices to remove inequalities between women and men in access to education, in the right to inherit, in the right to own property, in the provision of bank loans and availability of bank services, and in the content and practice of the law. Such inequalities deny women the same opportunities as men to migrate.

- Gender equality practices such as increasing the access of women to quality education, and ensuring their access to loans and credit will improve the conditions under which women migrate.

- Female migrant workers who return to their countries of origin are a resource that provides information and assistance to other women seeking to migrate. Sending countries should harness these resources and encourage local organizations that build on the inputs of returning women migrants. Governments may wish to consider developing partnerships with NGOs to provide economic and informational support for women seeking to migrant.

- In addition to collaborative initiatives to further economic development, all governments should develop practices that prevent all forms of trafficking of women (as well as children and men). Anti-trafficking initiatives are essential, as are activities that reintegrate trafficked women who return to their countries and places of origin.

- Steps should be taken to ensure that women who are in flight receive the same information as men and are active and equal participants in making decisions about repatriation.

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