Migration, Schooling Aspirations, and the Role of Sending Community Context

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Abstract

Family members often engage in migration to improve the well-being of children. Most findings suggest positive returns of parental migration for children's educational attainment. In this paper, we argue that how migration is related to children's educational outcomes depends on the community context of the sending area. There is clear evidence that community context plays a strong role in determining migration behaviors. Yet, few studies have examined how characteristics of the sending community constrain or enable children to benefit from a family member's migration. Using data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study, we find a positive association between family migration experiences and parents' aspirations for children's schooling. Furthermore, we find that this association is moderated by local community context: when there are few employment opportunities nearby, this positive association weakens. This suggests that parents may condition schooling aspirations for children on the economic realities of their communities.

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Introduction and Background

The motivations for migration are varied, but one common belief is that family members often engage in migration to improve the well-being of children. If migration is successful, families can invest in children in many ways. These investments can take different forms. They include better nutrition, a better home environment (such as a better quality home or safe neighborhood), or investments in human capital through schooling. Schooling is especially important because many parents recognize it as the most important way to improve children's well-being, and parents nearly universally value increasing their children's education.

The literature has shown some mixed results on the relationships between family migration and children's educational outcomes. Most findings suggest positive returns of parental migration for children's educational attainment in a variety of communities around the globe (Auriol & Demonsant, 2012; Batista et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2009; Edwards & Ureta, 2003; Piotrowski & Paat, 2012). Children of migrant fathers in Mexico receive economic support that is positively associated with educational outcomes (Nobles, 2011) while sons of migrant fathers receive more formal schooling in Senegal than sons whose fathers did not migrate (Auriol & Demonsant, 2012) and the economic status of female headed households in Mexico is comparable to households headed by men due in part to the remittances sent by their international migrant partners (Parrado 2004; Villarreal & Shin, 2008). Many studies find positive impacts of both internal and international migration on children's entrance, progress and persistence in school in places as diverse as El Salvador, Mexico and Indonesia (Cox Edwards & Ureta, 2003; Deb & Seck, 2009). But not all research finds a positive role of migration for children left behind (Robles & Oropesa, 2011) and not all labor migrants are able to send economic remittances (DeVletter, 2007; Goldring, 2004). It is important to consider not only whether a household

has sent labor migrants but also the extent to which households are able to benefit from these migrants (Agadjanian, et al., 2011; Goldring, 2004).

In this paper, we argue that how migration is related to children's educational outcomes depends on the community context of the sending area. Of course, community context has long been recognized in shaping motivations for migration. Poor economic conditions and lack of labor opportunities often act as powerful push factors that make migration from a community more attractive. In addition, the existing flows of migration from a community serve as local information resources that can facilitate migration: households in the community with prior migration experience act as a form of social capital that decreases barriers to migration. There is clear evidence that community context plays a strong role in determining migration behaviors. Yet, few studies have examined how characteristics of the sending community constrain or enable children to benefit from a family member's migration. In other words, given that migration has occurred, how do sending community characteristics strengthen or weaken benefits for children's education?

Using data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study, we test how labor migration is related to parent's aspirations for their children's schooling, and how this relationship depends on the community context in the sending area. Our study has two innovations. First, we conceptualize family migration in multiple ways; we go beyond a simple migrant/non-migrant dichotomy and use life history calendars to measure the cumulative extent to which household members are involved in migration. Second, we use neighborhood history calendars that provide detailed measurement of the local economic context in which households must make decisions. In agreement with most of the existing literature, we find a positive association between family migration experiences and parents' aspirations for children's schooling. Furthermore, we find that this association is moderated by local community context: when there are few employment opportunities nearby, this positive association weakens. This suggests that parents may condition schooling aspirations for children on the economic realities of their communities.

Family members often use migration as a way to escape constraints of economically depressed sending areas, but these conditions may persist in constraining choices and aspirations, even when migration may be successful.

Theory and Hypotheses

There are several reasons why family migration experiences, specifically labor migration of a family member, may be related to increased aspirations for the schooling of children who remain in the sending area. First, successful labor migration can provide families with the economic resources to invest in children. Some parents may only hold aspirations for their children when the parents can reasonably provide the means for children to achieve them. Thus, labor migration is a facilitating factor in aspirations because the benefits accrued from migration can be used to realize higher aspirations.

Second, labor migration to different settings--especially international migration--exposes individuals to new ideas and parenting strategies. In other words, the consequences of migration are not only economic, but returning family members bring back new ideas for consumption, production, and the role of children as an asset to be invested in, rather than a source of labor. In this case, "social remittances" in the form of new views towards childhood and children provide motivations for parents to encourage children to study hard and stay in school (Levitt, 1998).

Third, there is some evidence that migration can be selective of individuals and household with pre-existing characteristics that predispose them to higher aspirations for children's schooling. In other words, while the first two reasons suggested a causal link between labor migration and schooling aspirations, the selection explanation argues that households who engage in migration already have high aspirations or unmeasured characteristics related to high aspirations. Positive selection of motivated and optimistic migrants may also be associated with higher aspirations among migrants' children. In this case, we might expect that children from migrant sending households will have higher

educational aspirations or greater willingness to work hard in school and connectedness to their schooling because migrants are also working hard to increase children's success.

The above explanations and prior literature suggest strong reasons to find links between household labor migration and parental aspirations for children's schooling. However, we argue that the strength of this relationship depends on the characteristics of the sending community context. In other words, there is an interaction between family migration experience and sending community context. There is evidence that educational aspirations are sensitive to community context (Ainsworth 2002; Crowder and South 2003). Thus any benefits of family migration for children's schooling might not always translate into higher aspirations because they are "canceled out" by community conditions in the sending context that serve to lower aspirations. Specifically, if the sending community has few opportunities for employment, then it may make little sense for parents to have high aspirations for their children's schooling: if their children were to obtain more education, there would be no return on these investments in terms of the labor market. In these cases, parents might be better off substituting lower schooling aspirations with another life course behavior, such as family formation or even migration for the child himself/herself.

In addition to this moderating relationship between family labor migration and community context on schooling aspirations, we also expect that a more detailed measurement of family labor migration will be associated with schooling aspirations. Rather than a simple migrant versus non-migrant household dichotomy, many studies have found that measuring the extent of labor migration, such as its duration or the number of family members involved, offers a more precise assessment of how migration is associated with household decisions (Yabiku et al. 2010). There are potentially large differences between a household that has sent a member away in labor migration for less than a year, versus one that has had a long-term migrant for 5 or more years. With respect to parental aspirations for children's schooling, we would expect that the duration of a household's current migration spell

would be associated with stronger consequences for aspirations. That is, longer durations spells could mean more remittances and other economic benefits, or they could mean more opportunities for ideational change in the values of schooling and childhood.

Based on the existing literature and the above reasoning, we have the following hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that labor migration of a family member will be associated with higher aspirations for children's schooling. Second, we hypothesize that this positive association will be moderated by the sending community context: if there are few opportunity for non-farm, non-family employment, then the positive association between migration and aspirations will be weakened. Third, we expect that not only will a simple migrant versus non-migrant household indicator be associated with aspirations, but that a measure that considers the duration of migration experiences will also be linked to parental aspirations for children's schooling.

Data and Methods

To test our hypotheses, we use data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS). The CVFS is a panel study of households, neighborhoods, and environment in the western portion of Chitwan District, Nepal. First started in 1996 with an individual survey of over 5,200 individuals in 171 neighborhoods, households have been continually monitored over time with a registry system that tracks vital events and household structure. In 2008, the sample was reinterviewed as well as freshened with individuals who had moved into the original sample neighborhoods. The interviews featured detailed life history calendars of family, schooling, and migration behaviors. In addition to these individual interviews, the CVFS has detailed neighborhood histories that describe each neighborhood's relation to important nonfamily organizations and services, such as schools, health clinics, bus stops, markets, and employers (the most recent neighborhood histories cover time up to 2005, and stretch back to the 1950s).

For the purpose of studying migration, the 2008 individual interview and 2005 neighborhood histories are important because they capture the time period in the late 1990s and early 2000s in which labor migration dramatically increased in Chitwan. While Chitwan has long-established traditions of sending labor migrants to nearby India, the late 1990s saw the emergence of new destinations in the Gulf States of the Middle East, as well as East Asia. The availability of these new migration streams has transformed Chitwan into an area that is strongly affected by migration, and now most household have some current or prior exposure to migration.

In our research design, we use the 2008 individual interview sample of mothers who answered questions on children's schooling aspirations. Although fathers were also interviewed, we choose the mother's response in our current analyses to avoid issues of mismatch and averaging parents. Also, if a mother was interviewed but the father was not (currently living away, mostly likely due to migration), we do not include that case in the analyses. Thus analysis sample, therefore, can be considered as a sample of current Chitwan households, excluding those who have a father currently away in labor migration. Thus this sample includes households that have never sent a labor migrant father, as well as those who have sent a migrant father but who has returned by 2008.

Chitwan is also a setting of substantial in-migration: many households move to Chitwan to take advantage of the services (schools, roads) that are relatively high-quality compared to other rural areas of Nepal. To avoid confounding recent in-migrants to Chitwan with households that have sent out-migrants, we restrict our analyses to respondents who were living in Chitwan at least 5 years previously. It is possible that these respondents may have been in-migrants themselves, but the 5 year requirement assures that this in-migration is not a recent factor for these households.

Mother's Aspirations for Children's Schooling (Dependent Variable). In 2008, mothers were asked about each child who was at least 12 years old AND unmarried AND still in school (if the child was not in school, the mothers were still asked the question if they thought the child would return to school

someday). For our analysis, we limit the sample to children who are 25 years and younger. The question asked, "What is the lowest grade of school or year of college that you would consider it acceptable for (this child) to complete?" Mothers responded with the years of schooling on a continuous scale. Although asking for the "lowest acceptable" schooling seems an unusual approach, this was done to maximize variation. Schooling is held in such high regard that asking for aspirations in this setting yields very high schooling aspirations with little variation. Note that we currently use a randomly selected child in our analyses, rather than all children of which the question was asked, in order to avoid independence issues. Revisions of our models for PAA will include all children.

Family Migration Context. Both mother and father (if father was interviewed) provided full life history calendars of migration that listed, for each year, where they lived. Because we are interested in responses to the 2008 aspirations question, we limit our measures or migration context to migration that occurred in the last 5 years (2004 through 2008). Also recall that we limit our sample to households in which the mother or father were living in Chitwan 5 years ago. Given this approach, we have two measure of migration. The first measure (dichotomous) is whether or not the mother or father reported in the life history calendar living somewhere other than Chitwan district between 2004 and 2008. A year is considered living elsewhere if the individual lived at least 6 months of that year outside of Chitwan. The second measure (continuous) is the number of years between 2005 and 2008 the mother or father reported living somewhere else other than Chitwan district; this measure varies from 0 to 5.

Employment Opportunities in the Sending Context. The neighborhood history calendars have information on how far away, in minutes' walk, is the nearest employer. Because the mother's response in 2008 is likely to be most affected by current community context, we use the most recent measure of distance to employers, which comes from 2005. Although this is not as ideal as a 2008 measure, this is not likely to induce substantial bias. Accessibility to employers in 2008 is likely to be similar to what it

was in 2005. Our prior work examining neighborhood change in Chitwan found that the largest changes in neighborhood context happened in the 1950s through 1980s.

Control variables. We control for several factors that may select households into migration or be related to aspirations. We control for the mother's education, fertility history, age, and caste. Education is a continuous measure of the years schooling she has completed. Fertility history is the woman's children ever born. Caste is an ethnic-religious category, which is coded in several groups: High Caste Hindu, Low Caste Hindu, Newar, Terai Tibetoburmese, and Hill Tibetoburmese (see Yabiku 2004 for a more detailed description of caste groups and this rationale of coding). At the child level, we control for the child's age, gender, and years of schooling the child has already completed. Recall that all the children the mother is asked about are at least 12 years old, and thus they have all achieved some level of schooling (schooling enrollment is virtually universal in Chitwan). By this time, mothers have a fair amount of information about their children's academic achievement, and the accuracy of this information is likely greater for older children who the mothers have had a longer time to observe in school. At the very minimum, schooling aspirations for a child have a lower bound, which is the number of years the child has already completed. Including child age and schooling already completed are important controls in the model because they represent the pre-existing knowledge mothers have about their children's academic potential, which parents take into consideration when answering questions about aspirations for their children.

Our modeling strategy is to first predict mother's schooling aspirations using our two measures of family migration context (the dichotomous migration indicator and the years of migration in the prior 5 years). We then add a measure of accessibility to non-family employment and interact this with family migration context.

Results

(Table 1)

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics. On average, this sample of mother has very high educational aspirations for children: an average of 14.5 years. Family migration experience in the prior 5 years characterized almost a quarter of all mothers (23%), and average years of migration experience across all households was .74 years (this number is low because it includes households with no migration experience). In 2005, accessibility to employers averaged about a 12 minute walk, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 35. The remaining control variables are also presented in Table 1, although we do not discuss them in detail here.

(Table 2)

Table 2 presents the multivariate analyses. In model 1, we conceptualize family migration context as a dichotomous indicator of whether or not the mother or father lived any year during the previous 5 years outside of Chitwan. Model 1 shows a significant positive association between having mother or father migration experience and schooling aspirations. Specifically, compared to mothers without household migration experience, mothers with household migration experience had .62 more years of schooling aspirations for their children.

Several control variables were also significant in model 1, including mother's education, caste, mother's children ever born, and the child's current years schooling completed. The direction of these results is consistent with prior literature. Mothers with more education have significantly higher schooling aspirations for their children, and all caste groups (except Newars) have significantly lower aspirations than Upper Caste Hindus (the reference group), the most well-off and privileged group in Chitwan. Mothers with more children ever born have lower aspirations. And as expected, mothers have higher aspirations for children who have more schooling completed. In model 2, we replicate model 1 but substitute a continuous measures of family migration context: how many years of the previous 5 has the mother or father been in migration outside of Chitwan. The results are largely similar to model 1.

Years of migration experience are positively associated with schooling aspirations, although at a weakened level of significance. The coefficients for control variables remain similar to model 1.

In models 3 and 4, we replicate models 1 and 2 but include a measure of community context in the sending area: how far away, in minutes walking, from the mother's neighborhood is the nearest employer. In both models, the coefficient for distance to the nearest employer is not significant. Coefficients for all other variables in the models remain similar to what they were in models 1 and 2, which suggests little associations between these mother, child, and household characteristics and the employer community context measure.

In models 5 and 6, we add the interaction between family migration experience and distance to the nearest employer. Recall that we hypothesized a negative coefficient for this interaction: the farther away the mother's neighborhood is from employers, the more diminished is the association between migration and parental schooling aspirations. For both models (the dichotomous and the continuous measure of parental migration experience), the interaction between family migration and distance to the nearest employer is significant and negative, as hypothesized. In model 5, for example, the dichotomous indicator of family migration is significant and positive, suggesting that mothers with family migration experience have higher schooling aspirations. This positive coefficient, however, is diminished for each minute away is the nearest employer. As an example, consider some typical values observed in the data. The mean minutes' walk to the nearest employer is about 12 minutes. One standard deviation below is 3 minutes, and one standard deviation above is 21 minutes. For a mother with family migration experience and 3 minutes from the nearest employer, her aspirations are 1.22 years greater than a mother without any family migration experience (1.43 -.07 * 3 = 1.22). For a mother with family migration experience and 21 minutes from the nearest employer, her aspirations are essentially the same (only about .04 years lower; 1.43 - .07 * 21 = -.04) as a mother with no family migration experience. In short, the local community context (a lack of nearby employment

opportunities) has eliminated the higher schooling aspirations associated with family migration experience.

Discussion and Future Steps

Several studies have found positive relationships between family migration and educational outcomes for children. Consistent with this prior work, we find that when a mother or father has been involved in migration in the prior 5 years, the mother reports significantly higher schooling aspirations for her child. Although we are unable to identify the mechanisms of this association (ideational change, economic benefits, or selection), the results agree with earlier work finding positive outcomes for children's education when family member engage in labor migration.

Going beyond prior work, we then tested if local community context moderated the association between family migration experience and parental aspirations for children's schooling. Supporting our hypothesis, we found that when mothers were in neighborhoods that were farther away from employment opportunities, the positive association between migration experience and schooling aspirations were diminished. This suggests that parents may condition schooling aspirations for children on the economic realities of their communities. Family members often use migration as a way to escape constraints of economically depressed sending areas, but these conditions may persist in constraining choices and aspirations, even with migration may be successful.

We plan several improvements for our analysis as we develop this paper for presentation at PAA. First, we will re-estimate our models with random effects in order to properly account for the clustered sampling design. Respondents were sampled in neighborhoods, and thus respondents in the same neighborhoods may not be independent. Second, we also plan to include mothers' responses for more than one child. The current analysis uses the mother's assessment of aspirations for one child, in order to avoid violations of independence (more than one child per mother). Moving to random effects

models will allow us to account for this clustering. Third, our current design includes only households in which both the mother and father have been interviewed in 2008. Households currently engaging in migration and where the father is absent (and not interviewed) are excluded from the analyses, because we cannot ascertain the father's migration history in a life history calendar. An additional way of assessing migration history is through a monthly household registry in which each household's members are tracked. Our revised analysis will obtain five year prior migration data on these non-interviewed fathers using the registry data (rather than the life history calendars), which will allow us to include households currently sending a migrant outside Chitwan. This is likely to both increase statistical power via a larger sample and provide more representative results. Fourth, the current analysis does not separate international versus domestic migration. International migration often has higher barriers yet may offer higher rewards, and thus the strength of relationships may differ according to the type of migration. The life history calendars and the household registry allow us to classify international and internal movements, and we plan to incorporate this into our revised analyses. Finally, sending community context is broader than simply employment opportunities. The neighborhood history calendars include a variety of organizations and services, and while not all are strongly linked, theoretically, to our models, others are. Especially relevant are schools: it may be that if schooling supply is limited in the sending context, it may also serve to depress the positive relationship between family migration and schooling aspirations. Our revision will allow this broader exploration of the moderating role of sending community context.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Parental Schooling Aspirations, in years	14.45	2.57	6	18
Migration Experience from 2004 through 2008				
Any by Mother or Father	0.23	0.42	0	1
Years by Mother or Father	0.74	1.53	0	5
Minutes walk, nearest employer in 2005	11.63	8.92	0	35
Mother's Education	3.13	3.99	0	14
Caste				
High Caste Hindu	0.45	0.50	0	1
Low Caste Hindu	0.10	0.30	0	1
Hill Tibetoburmese	0.16	0.37	0	1
Newar	0.06	0.25	0	1
Terai Tibetoburmese	0.22	0.41	0	1
Mother's Age	37.49	4.83	28	57
Mother's Children Ever Born	1.60	1.25	0	7
Child Age	17.92	3.85	11	25
Child Female	0.53	0.50	0	1
Child Years Completed Schooling	11.78	4.54	0	22

N=420

Table 2: Family Migration, Employment Context of Sending Area, and Mother's Schooling Aspirations

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Migration Experience from 2004 through 2008						
Any by Mother or Father	0.62*		0.62*		1.43***	
	(2.44)		(2.44)		(3.57)	
Years by Mother or Father		0.14+		0.14+		0.39***
		(1.94)		(1.94)		(3.53)
Minutes walk, nearest employer in 2005			-0.00	-0.00	0.02	0.02
			(-0.03)	(-0.08)	(1.17)	(1.16)
Any migration experience * nearest employer					-0.07**	
					(-2.60)	
Years migration experience * nearest employer						-0.02**
						(-2.95)
Controls						
Mother's Education	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.19***
	(6.04)	(5.91)	(6.03)	(5.90)	(6.15)	(5.93)
Caste (ref = High Caste Hindu)						
Low Caste Hindu	-1.56***	-1.57***	-1.56***	-1.57***	-1.54***	-1.57***
	(-4.08)	(-4.10)	(-4.07)	(-4.09)	(-4.05)	(-4.13)
Hill Tibetoburmese	-1.12***	-1.12***	-1.12***	-1.12***	-1.21***	-1.20***
	(-3.56)	(-3.53)	(-3.55)	(-3.53)	(-3.82)	(-3.82)
Newar	-0.61	-0.61	-0.61	-0.61	-0.55	-0.53
	(-1.40)	(-1.40)	(-1.39)	(-1.40)	(-1.28)	(-1.21)
Terai Tibetoburmese	-1.50***	-1.55***	-1.50***	-1.54***	-1.49***	-1.55***
	(-4.65)	(-4.81)	(-4.48)	(-4.61)	(-4.49)	(-4.70)
Mother's Age	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04
	(1.18)	(1.08)	(1.18)	(1.07)	(1.33)	(1.22)
Mother's Children Ever Born	-0.20+	-0.19+	-0.20+	-0.19+	-0.20*	-0.20*
	(-1.95)	(-1.92)	(-1.95)	(-1.92)	(-2.02)	(-1.98)
Child Age	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02
	(-0.12)	(-0.18)	(-0.12)	(-0.17)	(-0.21)	(-0.33)
Child Female	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.06
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.19)	(0.26)
Child Years Completed Schooling	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.10***
	(3.60)	(3.58)	(3.59)	(3.57)	(3.62)	(3.70)
Intercept	12.17***	12.42***	12.17***	12.43***	11.85***	12.14***
	(12.32)	(12.71)	(12.25)	(12.66)	(11.92)	(12.42)
N	420	420	420	420	420	420

+p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, two-tailed tests