The Lasting Impact of Migration: Parental Return Migration and the Educational Trajectories of Children and Youth Left Behind

Qian Song and Jennifer Glick

Arizona State University

Abstract

There has been a great deal of attention to the import of migration for children's well-being in origin communities. Much of this work is focused on the comparison of children of non-migrants with children of current migrants. But, based on the varying timing of migration in the adult life course, it is unclear if there is a cumulative contribution of migration to children's schooling once migration has been completed. This paper relies on longitudinal data from three waves of the MxFLS study to assess the importance of migration timing and parental return for children's schooling. Our preliminary results show that the children of returned migrant fathers are more likely to be enrolled in school than children whose fathers did not have migration experiences. However, the longer the fathers had returned, the less likely their children to be enrolled in school; as children progress with age, they are also increasingly more likely to discontinue school, compared to their counterparts whose fathers had returned more recently.

Introduction

Much of the recent work on the impacts of migration on children in origin or sending communities has focused on children of current migrants. The 'left behind' children are compared to children of non-migrants in their communities. Theoretically, there are two expectations for these children's educational trajectories. First, the New Economics of Labor Migration perspective views labor migration as a household-level strategy for diversifying risk and improving the economic conditions of the origin household (Stark, 1991). In this case, the expectation is that children's well-being is improved by access to the remittances sent by current migrants. Second, the developmental or family life course perspectives used to understand the impact of migration on children also focus on the children of current migrants. Here, however, it is not clear what to expect for children's outcomes. Some scholarship suggests the psychological strain associated with parental absence will lead to negative outcomes. Additional work suggests the migration of a parent creates competing demands on youth that discourages continued education. Regardless of the perspective, most of the research evaluating the import of parental migration for children's educational outcomes has focused on the children of current migrants with the comparison to children of non-migrants.

In the case of return migration, it is very important to consider the timing of the migration itself. For many international labor migrants, particularly those who intend to return to their communities of origin, migration predates their own family formation (i.e. prior to marriage and child rearing) or occurs very early in the family formation process. The median age of recent Mexican immigrants to the United States, for example, is x. In

the case of return migration, is there any reason to expect a continued association between parental migration and children's well-being? This paper takes advantage of longitudinal data on families and children in Mexico to consider this. The preliminary analyses comparing school enrollment among children living in two parent households with returned migrant fathers to the school enrollment among children living in two parent households with non-migrant fathers. We will expand upon these initial analyses by turning to other outcomes and additional consideration of selection into migration itself.

Background

Previous research from several contexts has found some support for the NELM expectation that economic resources generated by a migrating household member (most often a parent) are used in ways that enhance children's access, persistence, and success in formal school settings. In El Salvador, for example, remittances have a positive effect on children's entrance to school and persistence in school (Cox Edwards & Ureta, 2003). And, in Mexico and Indonesia, children from households of internal migrants are more likely to be in their appropriate grade for age than their peers from non-migrant households (Deb & Seck, 2009). The positive returns are found in non-Latin American settings as well (Chen et al, 2009; Piotrowski & Paat, 2012).

The second set of perspectives focused on the impact of migration look beyond remittances. For example, the cumulative causation perspective on migration posits that the migration of one family member or social tie influences the propensity for migration by others (Massey, xxxx). Having a successful migrant parent could reduce incentives for furthering education and encourage young adults to become labor migrants themselves

(Fox et al., 2012; Kandel & Kao, 2004). In this case, migration and education are not complementary but competitive routes to social mobility.

Additionally, from a household life course perspective, it is likely that the ongoing migration of a family member places strains on the household and require children's labor as substitutes for the missing migrants (Deb & Seck, 2009; Meyerhoefer & Chen, 2011; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). The role of parental migration on school attrition is likely to vary by gender and age. Older girls from migrant families, for example, are particularly likely to reduce their schooling when compared to those in non-migrant families in Mexico (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2006). Removing adults from the home via migration may also have the effect of reducing adult supervision, thereby reducing children's educational engagement and success (Robles & Oropesa, 2011). And, parental migration could lead to psychological distress for children separated from their parents. However, previous research suggests that absence due to migration is less of a disadvantage than other forms of paternal absence in Mexico (Nobles, 2011). Unfortunately, few of these studies have been able to consider the timing of parental migration and subsequent return.

Research questions

This paper continues the focus on the importance of international migration experience for families. The focus here expands beyond the currently "left-behind" family members to consider potential for migration to impact children's educational trajectories even when that migration has been completed. Returned migrants may be associated with positive outcomes if their migration enhanced household resources that continue to benefit children and adolescents. But beyond a net gain in assets, does this

household migration experience also shape the prospect of the children's educational outcome over the long run? We ask also whether the timing of migrant father's return has a role to play in their children's educational trajectories? A consideration of the timing of migration in the family life course will combine the timing of the migration, the timing of return and the age of the child/youth.

Data and methods

We employ the Mexican Family Life Survey (MxFLS) 2002 (MxFLS-1), 2005-2006 (MxFLS-2) and 2009-2012 (MxFLS-3) for the purpose of this study. MxFLS is a nationally representative ongoing longitudinal survey that covers comprehensive information on individuals, households and communities. A prominent feature of MxFLS is that it provides detailed information on the migration history of individuals, including destination, year of migration and duration of stay in the destination for each migration trip. Both MxFLS-2 and MxFLS-3 are able to re-interview over 90% of the individuals and households who were interviewed in the first survey.

We focus on the children who were between 5-14 years old in MxFLS-1 (2002) and follow them to the most recent wave (2009-2012), and children of the individuals interviewed in 2002 who entered this age span in later waves are also added accordingly. Therefore, up to MxFLS-3, our sample covers individuals between 5-24 years old, including both children and young adults. We restrict the analyses to those who lived in households where both of the parents are present at the moment. If a father leaves after one wave but returned before the next wave, his children will change status from "did not have a migrant father" to "had a returned migrant father" from one wave to the next. As a result, the sample yields 26,305 cases across the three waves.

School enrollment

School enrollment is a dichotomous measure of whether or not the child currently attends school at the time of survey (0 = not attending school, 1 = attending school). Since the sample also includes young adults up to 24 years old, overall, 74% of individuals in the sample attended school at the times of surveys, lower than looking only at children of normative school age (< 15).

Father's emigration history

Men represent most international migrants in this survey, and the majority of the returned migrants are fathers in the data, we thus focus on fathers' migration history. In the first survey, all adult respondents were interviewed on their migration history, including the year of migration and duration of stay for each migration trips; in the following waves, they are asked about whether they had engaged in migration trips after the previous survey, and the same information is collected for each migration trip. Depending on the duration of the migration, temporary and permanent migrants are differentiated in the survey. This study takes account of both types of migrations and focus on the time and duration of the last international migration trip to the U.S.. We then identify the year of returning for those migrants in the most recent migration trips, by which the period of return is calculated.

Individual and household characteristics

Other characteristics that are known to be associated with school enrollment are also included. Both age and the quadratic form of age are included to capture the non-linearity of the bivariate relationship between age and school enrollment for this group of

individuals. Mother's education is measured with four categories: no education, elementary school, middle school to some high school, and high school and higher. Number of siblings born to the same mother is included to capture the family size and additional needs on family resources. We include mother's marital status, which consists of three categories: married, cohabitated, and other (divorced, widowed, and single[1]). Finally, a household asset index is constructed using principle component analysis; this index is based on a series of items including housing materials and the ownership of a number of tangible household assets[2].

Analytical strategy

To take advantage of the three waves of data, we use hierarchical linear model (HLM) with a random effect intercept. This analytic approach allowed us to take into account that individuals start with different probabilities of school enrollment. In the first step, we compare the school enrollment of children whose fathers had any emigration experiences with those who did not; then, we investigate the role of the timing of return (the period returned) in their children's school enrollment status, and its interaction with children's age.

Preliminary Results

[1] Mother's singlehood may be separated from divorce or widowhood, but due to the small number of cases in this category, we incorporate this category into other.

[2] We choose nine items associated with the household's economic status, following previous research on Mexican families (Azevedo, Lopez-Calva, and Perova 2012).These items include solid material roof, non-dirt floors, access to water, fuel other than firewood for cooking, presence of a flush toilet, household ownership of a washing machine, car, phone, and any other home appliances. We ran principal component analysis with these nine items and used scoring factors to weight them and formulated an asset index.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the 26,305 cases of children and young adults in our sample, including all of the three waves. Among those who had both parents present at each survey, approximately 3% of them had fathers who had been to the U.S.. The mean period of return for the latest migration trip is approximately 7 years suggesting at least some of the fathers migrated prior to their own family formation experiences. Regarding the children and young adults' individual characteristics, approximately half of them are male, with an average age of 12.3 years old. Over half of their mothers received no education or just finished elementary school (10%+47%=57%). Regarding their mothers' marital status, 73% of them were married, another 16% were cohabitated, and the rest of the 11% were not in union.

Table 2 compares the individual and household characteristics of children and young adults whose fathers had never been to the U.S. and those whose fathers had been to the U.S. and returned. This gives us an insight into the selectivity of migration\return migration. In general, children of return migrant fathers are slightly older, and are more likely to enroll in school than their counterparts whose fathers do not have migration experiences. Most of their differences lie in the household characteristics: the mothers in the emigrant households are in general less educated, but more likely to be in union, and their household asset is larger than those that did not have migration experiences. This suggests that emigration benefits the household by bringing wealth to the household.

Table 3 shows the results of HLM model to investigate the role of emigration experience among all fathers who were present in their households in Mexico. Results show that having emigration experiences to the U.S. is associated with increased school enrollment of their children. The children and young adults who had fathers returned

from the U.S. are 2.78 ($e^{0.78} = 2.78$) times more likely to be enrolled in school than those whose fathers never emigrated.

Table 4 examines the role of timing for father's return migration and how that role may change along the life course of the children and young adults. Results in model 1 show that the timing of father's return migration matters. For an additional year of return, children and young adults are 8% ($e^{-0.08} = 0.92$) less likely to enroll in school. Considering that the average years of return are 7 years, children or young adults whose father had returned at this average time period are 56% more likely to discontinue schooling. This educational disadvantage in the early returners' children is further increased as children progress with age, according to Model 2. Compared to that of the late returners (those who have returned more recently), the children of the early returners are increasingly more likely to discontinue schooling as they grow up.

Future analytical plan

These preliminary results suggest that migration is indeed associated with children's educational outcomes even when that migration has ended. However, there are additional steps needed in order to support these conclusions. In the next step of analysis, we will incorporate children of ongoing emigrants and further explore selectivity of migration and return migration. We will also cross check the results with growth curve models which allow age slope to vary (i.e. random effects).

Our other goal is to expand the focus beyond school enrollment. There are many important indicators of youth's educational engagement and their attachment to educational attainment as a mechanism for upward mobility. Unfortunately, we are

limited in the questions that were asked of youth of all ages. For example, educational aspirations were asked for children over age 11 through age 14. However, we can look at the other activities that may replace schooling. For further analyses, we will apply the same approach used here for school enrollment to the outcome of children and young adults' idleness – that is the probability that they are not in school nor engaged in paid labor - which will give us a fuller picture of how emigration experiences of fathers may shape the current activities and future prospect of their children.

References:

Azevedo, J. P., Lopez-Calva, L. & Perova, E. (2012). Is the baby to blame? An inquiry into the consequences of early childbearing. *An Inquiry into the Consequences of Early Childbearing (May 1, 2012). World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 6074.

Deb, P., & Seck, P. (2009). Internal migration, selection bias and human development: Evidence from Indonesia and Mexico. Human Development Research Paper, 2009/31. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme. http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/19214/

Feliciano, C. (2005). Does selective migration matter? Explaining ethnic disparities in educational attainment among immigrants' children. *International Migration Review,* 39: 841-71.

Halpern-Manners, A. (2011). The effect of family member migration on education and work among nonmigrant youth in Mexico. *Demography,* 48: 73-99.

Kandel, W. & Kao, G. (2000). Shifting orientations: How US labor migration affects children's aspirations in Mexican migrant communities. *Social Science Research,* 81: 16-32.

Kaestner, R. & Malamud, O. (2014). Self-selection and international migration: New evidence from Mexico. *Review of Economics and Statistics,* 96: 78-91.

McKenzie, D., & Rapoport, H. (2011). Can migration reduce educational attainment? Evidence from Mexico. *Journal of Population Economics*, *24*, 1331-1358.

Orrenius, P.M. & Zavodny, M. (2005). Self-selection among undocumented immigrants from Mexico. *Journal of Development Economics*, 78: 215-240.

Takenaka, A. & Pren, K.A. (2010). Determinants of emigration: Comparing migrants' selectivity from Peru and Mexico. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 630: 178-

Table 1. Sample Descriptive Statistics				
Variable	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Children and Young Adults				
School enrollment	0.74	0.44	0	1
Father's migration to the US				
Never been to the U.S.	0.96	0.19	0	1
Returned from the U.S. to Mexico	0.03	0.18	0	1
Years since back from last emigration trip	7.03	8.51	0	44
Male	0.50	0.50	0	1
Child's age	12.30	4.82	5	24
Mother's educational attainment				
No education	0.10	0.31	0	1
Elementary school	0.47	0.50	0	1
Middle school to some high school	0.28	0.45	0	1
High school graduation and higher	0.15	0.36	0	1
Parents' marital status				
Married	0.73	0.44	0	1
Cohabitated	0.16	0.37	0	1
Separated/divorced/widowed/Single	0.11	0.31	0	1
Number of siblings	1.23	1.37	0	11
Household asset index	2.11	0.70	0	3

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics by Father's Emigration Experiences

Variable	Father Never Migrated to the U.S. M	SD	Father Migrated to the U.S. and Returned M	SD	p
Children and Young Adults					
School enrollment	0.74	0.44	0.79	0.41	***
Male	0.50	0.50	0.48	0.50	
Child's age	12.27	4.83	12.98	4.46	***
Mother's educational attainment					
No education	0.10	0.31	0.09	0.29	
Elementary school	0.46	0.50	0.51	0.50	**
Middle school to some high school	0.28	0.45	0.30	0.46	
High school graduation and higher	0.15	0.35	0.10	0.30	***
Parents' marital status					
Married	0.73	0.45	0.85	0.36	***
Cohabitated	0.16	0.37	0.12	0.33	***
Separated/divorced/widowed/Single	0.11	0.31	0.03	0.17	***
Number of siblings	1.23	1.38	1.26	1.33	+
Household asset index	2.10	0.71	2.26	0.54	***
N	25,344		961		

Table 3. Random Effects Models Predicting School Enrollment (Father's Migration Experiences)

	School Enrollment		
Parameters	Coefficient		SE
Age	0.03	+	0.01
Age Squared	-0.01	***	0.00
Male	0.06		0.14
Mother's educational attainment (ref: no education)			
Elementary school	-0.11		0.23
Middle school to some high school	-0.28		0.26
High school graduation and higher	-0.40		0.29
Parents' marital status			
Cohabitated	-2.61	***	0.21
Separated/divorced/widowed/Single	-20.09	***	0.23
Number of siblings	0.19	***	0.05
Household asset index	-0.14		0.10
Father's migration to the US (ref: none)			
Returned to Mexico	0.78	*	0.36
Constant	10.44		0.30
Log likelihood	-7951.18		
N	26,305		

Table 4. Random Effects Models Predicting School Enrollment (Father's Duration of Stay in Mexico)

	Model 1			Model 2		
Parameters	Coefficient		SE	Coefficient		SE
Age center	0.03	*	0.01	0.03	*	0.01
Age center Squared	-0.01	***	0.00	-0.01	***	0.00
Male	0.06		0.14	0.06		0.14
Mother's educational attainment (ref: no education)						
Elementary school	-0.10		0.23	-0.10		0.23
Middle school to some high school	-0.28		0.26	-0.27		0.26
High school graduation and higher	-0.40		0.29	-0.39		0.29
Parents' marital status						
Cohabitated	-2.63	***	0.21	-2.62	***	0.21
Separated/divorced/widowed/Single	-20.06	***	0.23	-20.09	***	0.23
Number of siblings	0.19	***	0.05	0.19	***	0.05
Household asset index	-0.13		0.10	-0.14		0.10
Father's migration to the US (ref: none)						
Duration of stay at Mexico	-0.08	*	0.03	-0.02		0.04
Interactions						
Duration of stay*Age center				-0.02	*	0.01
Duration of stay*Age center squared				0.00		0.00
Constant	10.44	***	0.30	10.45		0.30
Log likelihood	-7950.87			-7948.51		
N	26,305			26,305		