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Effect of labour migration on the years of schooling of left-behind children in Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh in India

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Abstract

Labour migration is one of the biggest socio-political issues for India for it plays an important role in the process of economic development and social transformation. This study tried to shed light on the effect of labour migration on the education of the children left-behind. Overall, this study shows positive effect of migration on the education of the left-behind children. Age is found to be the main determinant of years of schooling validating the fact that legal framework is mainly responsible for the years of schooling in the age group 6-14 years. The study also indicates that children in migrant households are expected to get more education because of their stronger financial support but children in larger household-size are expected to get fewer years of schooling because they need to support more children with their limited income. Moreover, children who enjoy learning and get the help of a tutor are expected to get more years of schooling. On the contrary, children, who are forced economically or socially to do paid work, generally get the chance of fewer years of schooling as compared to the children who don't need to do paid work.

Key words: Labour migration, migration and children, education of left-behind children

Introduction

The phenomenon of children left behind by the labour migrants has become of growing importance all over the world for the number of people migrating has been increasing dramatically and it is very relevant in India where migration has represented the only viable way to cope with increasing poverty. Given the continuing poverty, the expensive living conditions in the destinations and the lack of information, etc., many people who decide to migrate are forced to leave their children behind. As a result, many countries find themselves with a considerable number of children left behind, with consequences that should be carefully considered. As more people decide to migrate, special attention is to be drawn to the effect of migration on the education of the children left-behind.

India recognized the Right to Education as a fundamental right in 2005. The country is also striving to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), of which the second goal is to achieve Universal Elementary Education (UEE) through the more ambitious Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programme. India is also a signatory of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children (1989). Amidst this positive scenario, there is little attention to the plight of the children of migrant labour, although year after year their ranks are swelling. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the state education departments do not have even the data with respect to this category of children, let alone a strategic plan in place to address the related concerns (Smitha, 2008)[19]. Children left behind by one or both migrating parents are placed in a vulnerable position and increased responsibilities at home, lack of affordability, motivation and parental support can greatly affect the child's educational functioning (UNICEF, 2009)[21]. Therefore, urgent steps are needed for the education and development of the left-behind children.

The broad aim of this study is to contribute to the understandings on the status of left-behind children of 6-17 years for migrating parents in Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh. Specifically, this study has tried to examine the effects of migration on the education of the children left-behind, to find out whether migration affects children in different age-groups differently, to examine whether the effect of labour migration is the same for male and female children. This study is expected to contribute to the limited understanding of the effects of labour migration on the children left-behind.

Literature Review

There are several documents that collect and summarise existing studies on the effect of migration (Lu and Treiman, 2007[16]; de la Garza, 2010[9] and Bryant, 2005[5]). Although the evidence on the effect of parents' migration on children's education is

often mixed, the general hypothesis is that remittances increase education opportunities. McKenzie and Rapoport (2006)[18] argue that migration influences educational decisions through three distinct channels: the income effect brought about by remittances; the direct effect of adult migration on the demand for child work; and the effect of the prospect to migrate upon the incentives to invest in education (the 'spillover' or 'demonstration' effect). Consequently, while remittances are expected to increase the resources available for education, parental absence could result in poorer educational performance, an increase in school drop-out rates, and lack of interest in learning due to the demonstration effect.

Analysing the effect of migration on the education of children left behind is further complicated by the fact that this effect may depend on various factors such as child's age at the moment of parent's migration, child's sex, educational level of migrating parents and level of urbanisation of the migrant's community (UNICEF Tajikistan, 2011)[22].

On the one hand, many studies indicate that remittances have a positive influence on educational choices, attendance and performance of migrant children in comparison to children of non-migrants (Hanson and Woodruff, 2003[11] and Lu, 2005[15]). Typically, this is related to the provision of remittances (Borraz, 2005[4]). De la Garza (2010)[9] notes that, remittances have a positive effect on human capital formation, controlling for other factors.

On the other hand, several studies find negative effects on school attendance and performance (Battistella and Conaco, 1998[3]; Kandel and Kao, 2001[14]; Acosta, 2006[1]; and McKenzie and Rapoport, 2006[18]). In general, negative consequences result from greater demand for labour in the absence of a parent, from a lack of supervision, and from the demonstration effect of migration (in that children seek to work rather than attend school).

The international literature on the demonstration effect of migration is relatively compelling (even though often offset by the positive effect of remittances). For example, Kandel (2003)[13] argues that Mexican adolescents who aim to migrate place less emphasis on school, knowing that their prospects in the migrant labour market are not clearly improved by school. As a result, children of migrants are more likely to miss or drop out of school. This demonstration effect counteracts the positive effect of remittances (Kandel and Kao, 2001[14]; Chiquiar and Hanson, 2005[6]). Since boys in Mexico have a higher chance of migrating, the negative demonstration effect is stronger on them (McKenzie and Rapoport, 2006)[18].

Again, unsurprisingly, the international evidence on the effect of migration on attendance is mixed. Cox-Edwards and Ureta (2003)[8] found that remittances contributed positively to school attendance, but that children with both parents absent miss school more often than children with one or both parents at home. Mansuri (2006)[17] found that, although migration had a positive effect overall on enrolment in Pakistan, boys whose fathers migrated attended school less, probably because they did more work outside the household.

The negative effect of migration on the education of children left behind seems stronger when a large percentage of the population depend on remittances for economic survival. Usually, this is followed by a greater dependency on additional remittances, a reduced labour force and changes in consumption patterns (Coronel and Unterriner, 2005[7]). As has been demonstrated in other studies, there is a direct link between schooling and work, and more work involves less schooling. The final result could also be time sensitive. Mansuri (2006)[17] found that the age of the child before migration significantly influences school attendance and the years at school. Adolescents in particular may be encouraged to become the main caregivers where parents are absent (de la Garza 2010)[9].

Giannelli and Mangiavacchi (2010)[10] applied multiple-choice models to evaluate the school progression of older children and adolescents from Albanian migrant households, after which they analysed these children's school participation using discrete and continuous time models. Their results show that past parental migration has a negative effect on school attendance in the long term, with higher levels of school drop-outs for children left behind, particularly boys. They also find that, when the head of the family is female, there is a positive effect in the long term on children's success at school, suggesting that with men's migration women's decision-making power increases and women decide to invest more in children's education.

In line with the literature on intra-household allocations, where an increase in female bargaining power coinciding with a simultaneous increase in household resources results in better outcomes for girls and not boys, Antmany (2010)[2] establishes a positive relationship between parental migration and the education of girls in Mexico. Since fathers' migration also coincides with a shift in household structure, it may be that women are left as the primary decision-makers in the household when a father migrates and these women invest their marginal dollars in the education of girls. To the contrary, where mothers travel, all children are less likely to attend school (de la Garza, 2010)[9].

Research Methodology

The methodology preferred for this study was the triangulation of data from different sources, adopting and integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. The advantage of this 'mixed methods' approach is that it allowed the researcher to quantify the effect of parents' migration on a set of key outcome indicators while, at the same time, untangling the causal dynamics through which those outcomes come to be. Quantitative and qualitative methods were integrated throughout the research process, including at the design stage, when developing research instruments and at the analysis stage. The quantitative method included 160 households survey which aimed at measuring, aggregating, modelling and predicting behaviour and relations. It allowed researchers to interview a larger number of respondents and assessed overall trends. Qualitative method included 12 in-depth interviews and 4 focus group discussions to explore issues in depth. It relates to people's understandings, interpretations, values, beliefs, preferences, aversions and priorities, allowing us to understand the why and how and therefore untangling causality.

Database of the study

The study used mainly cross-sectional data obtained from the survey in the selected villages from the selected households. A review of literatures, research studies, reports, papers on issues of migration constituted the secondary information. For drawing conclusions from the data, descriptive analysis was supported with more rigorous econometric analysis.

The main tool used for the quantitative research was a household questionnaire. The design of this instrument was based on the literature review and extensive testing during the pilot phase of the survey. The key objective was to identify differences between migrant and non-migrant households and draw meaningful evidence regarding the effect of migration on the education of the children left-behind. For the quantitative survey, a total of 40 household questionnaires were administered in each village. They have been administered to 32 migrant households and 8 non-migrant households. The final number of questionnaires administered was 160, giving enough representation to different socio-economic groups.

Sampling strategy

Multi-stage stratified random sampling method was used in the present study. District Bijnor has been selected purposively because of the high number of migrants in the district based on the personal observation of the study area. From district Bijnor, two blocks and four villages with a high incidence of migration were identified from secondary data as well as in discussion with local government officials, community leaders and social workers. After identifying the blocks and villages, households with migration were listed by the investigators. Discussion with knowledgeable persons of the village like teachers, panchayat members, etc. helped in identifying households which have children from our selected age group. After preparing the list of migrating and non-migrating households who have children of 6-17 years of age, a fixed percentage of households was selected for the study using simple random sampling method. In identifying the required number of migrant households, adequate representation of different socio-economic and demographic aspects like gender, caste, occupation, education status etc. was ensured while sampling.

Both the quantitative and qualitative components of this study considered two types of households, each of which is influenced in a different way by migration: migrant households and non-migrant households. While the first provided a picture of households' varying exposure to the risks of migration, non-migrant households were used as a control group to untangle whether migration alone was the trigger of positive/negative effects within the household. We have not considered abandoned households because this phenomenon is very rare in district Bijnor. The working definitions for the two types of households are provided below to provide maximum clarity for fieldworkers and avoid overlap of household types:

Migrant household is a household containing at least one child (in the age-group 6-17 years) who has at least one parent away for work at least for three months during last one year. This parent should have been in contact with the household at least once during the past three months and should be remitting any money over the last year. In referring to migrants, we refer to the parents who were away of their family at the time of the survey. For the purposes of this study, up to three months defines seasonal migration. Three months or more but not exceeding a year defines temporary migration, while exceeding a year defines long-term migration provided that return is expected. Permanent migration prolongs a year with uncertainty of return (Smith, 2004[20]; Jones et al. 2004[12]).

A *non-migrant household* is a household containing at least one child (in the age-group 6-17 years), both of whose parents have not migrated during the last ten years. The household may contain other family members, such as uncles or brothers,

who migrate. By children, we refer to the people in the age group 6-17 years as used in ILO definition, though the Right to Education (RTE) Act provides free and compulsory education to children in the age group 6-14 years only.

Households were ranked into three groups of households using an *'asset index'* that gives an overview of their relative wealth status compared to other households in the sample. The assets that were used for its construction presented high fluctuations across household types. It included the following 12 items: refrigerator, washing machine, television, LPG stove, electric fan, kitchen, covered bathroom, clean toilet, access to safe drinking water, availability of inverter, livestock in the households and the agricultural land holdings (at least one acre), giving equal weight to each item. These items either make the life comfortable or generate income and have an influence on the life of the children. Asset index (split into tertiles) were subsequently used as a proxy for wealth in the study. They were chosen over tertiles of monthly expenditure because expenditure data is notoriously difficult to collect and no consumption module was administered. It was thus deemed more reliable to use the index based on ownership of twelve assets rather than to use questionable expenditure data. A tertile divides the data into three equal parts. In this study, tertile 1 contains the households with an asset- index less than or equal to four, tertile 2 contains the households with an asset- index between five to eight and tertile 3 contains the households with an asset- index between nine to twelve.

Econometric framework used in the study

We have used linear regression to analyse the effect of migration on the years of schooling of the children left-behind by the migrant parents. The linear regression model can be specified as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta M + \gamma X + u \qquad \text{Eq. (1)}$$

Here Y denotes the years of schooling of the child. M denotes migration status of the household. M = 1, if any of the parents in the household has migrated and M= 0 if none of the parents has migrated. β is the coefficient for migration which we are interested in, and measures the marginal effect of parental migration on the status of the children. X is a vector of characteristics variables of the child, household and community which comprises age, gender, both parents education and household wealth, etc, and γ is the related coefficient vector. α is the intercept; and u is a random error following a normal distribution.

Findings

Analysing the effect of migration on the education of children left behind is ambiguous and further complicated by the fact that this effect may depend on various factors, such as the sex and age of the child, number of siblings and family structure, educational level of migrating parent and parent left behind, as well as level of urbanisation of the migrant's community. This means that the results of empirical research can be highly specific to the region, country, and particular circumstances under study, making it difficult to generalise such results and draw conclusions about the relationship between migration and the education of children left behind (UNICEF Tajikistan, 2011)[22]. The main effect areas concerning education have been explained in the following sections.

Drop-out age and years of schooling

Drop-out age and years of schooling are influenced by a household's economic circumstances and attitudes to education. These circumstances and attitudes are affected by and affect the migration experience, so certain types of migration can have an effect on drop-out rates. There is sometimes a negative demonstration effect, but sometimes this can be positive, depending on the individual characteristics. Where poverty is not a barrier to school and where attitudes are conducive, remittances can have a positive effect on years of schooling. Qualitative findings present some evidence for the demonstration effect.While enrolment, particularly up to the age of 14, does not appear to be strongly affected by migration, drop-out rates – and therefore the number of years of completed schooling – may be affected. There are several possible explanations for this. First, migration can generate a demonstration effect, causing children, in particular boys, to drop out of school to follow their migrant parents as soon as they complete the mandatory school programme (usually at the age of 14). In our conceptual framework, this pertains to an influence of migration on the attitudes of household members towards education, and to societal norms towards the education of boys and girls. The scale of migration in India and the limited employment opportunities at home could generate demonstration effect. Table 1 (see appendix) clearly shows that many

household members do not get education beyond the compulsory education of grade 8. The proportion of those who gets education beyond grade 12 is very low.

Second, gender norms are strong in India, especially in rural areas. Qualitative research shows that spending priorities result in gender socialisation of girls to marry and raise children, thus bringing about a low participation of girls in education.

Third, children from non-migrant households are expected to complete even fewer years of schooling, due to the reduced income available for school fees and the increased demand for child work. In our conceptual framework, this refers to the effect of migration on household labour capacity and incomes, and through this to the ability to pay for school.

The relative importance of these effects depends on both the nature of the migration experience (including the amount of remittances from migration) and the particular mediating factors in each household, including family structure, and the relation (perceived and actual) between the job market and schooling (UNICEF Tajikistan, 2011)[22].

Linear regression results

Ordinary Least Square (OLS) results of the years of schooling in the 6-14 years of children of the selected households in the selected villages of district Bijnor are presented in Table 2 (see appendix). The model has been selected based on the information criterion which is quite low at 292. The OLS results presented here are the robust results. The mean of variance inflation factors (VIF) and the tolerance figures (not given in the table) indicate that the degree of multicollinearity is very low and it does not affect the estimated coefficients. The R^2 (the measure of goodness of fit) for the equation is quite high and explains the 77.3 percent variation in the model, along with high significance level of F-statistics. Overall, the model has a good fit.The estimated results suggest that the age of the child is statistically significant at 1 percent level. Its importance in the model is 92.2 percent (the importance of each variable used in the model can be seen using the automatic linear modelling command in the 20th version of SPSS) which shows that age is the main determinant of years of school in the age group 6-17 years validating the fact that legal framework (by which education of the age 6-14 years is free and compulsory) is mainly responsible for the years of schooling in the age group 6-14 years. The coefficient of age is significant economically also (with positive sign as expected) and absolute value of the coefficients is 0.845 which means that if the age of the child goes up by 1 year, the classes passed by him will go up by 0.845. It raises the question why the class does not go up by one with age going up by one year, even though there is no provision of failing the students up to grade eight. The reason is stagnation in the class due to various reasons. Some students leave the class in middle of the session and rejoining again in the same class next year.

The coefficient of the type of household (migrant or non-migrant) is positive and statistically significant at 1 percent level (as expected) indicating that children in migrant households are expected to get more years of schooling, perhaps because they can support more years of schooling because of their stronger financial support. The coefficient of the household size is negative (as expected) and statistically significant only at 10 percent level indicating that children in larger household-size are expected to get fewer years of schooling, perhaps because they need to support more children with their limited income.

The coefficient of the type of school (government or private) is positive and statistically significant at 1 percent level (as expected) indicating that children in private schools are expected to get more years of schooling. Here attitude of the parent plays an important role. Those who thinks that their children should get more education, sends their children in the private schools. Positive attitude towards education supported with financial resources makes it possible for the child to get more years of schooling.

Whether the child enjoys teaching-learning process or not, and consequently hours spent in the study by him after school hours, are a key determinant in the years of schooling. As expected, the coefficients of these variables are positive and statistically significant at 1 percent levels showing that children who enjoy learning are expected to get more years of schooling.

The help of a tutor is crucial, especially in the younger age, in determining the contents of the curriculum. The coefficient of this variable is positive and statistically significant at 1 percent level showing that children who get the help of a tutor are expected to get more years of schooling.

The education of the parents is very important in determining the attitude towards their children's education as well as in helping the child in the school home-work. In this study, the coefficient the father's education is positive and statistically significant at 10 percent level. But surprisingly, the coefficient the mother's education is not statistically significant even at

10 percent level, perhaps because the level of mothers' education is very low in the rural areas of district Bijnor and they are unable to help their children in their academic life.

Whether the child does paid work or not, plays an important role in the years of schooling. The coefficient of this variable is negative and statistically significant at 1 percent level, showing that children who are forced (economically or socially) to do paid work, , generally get the chance of fewer years of schooling as compared to the children who don't need to do paid work.

Gender of the child, his caste, type of the family the child live in (nuclear or joint), depression in the child due to father's migration, the asset to which a child has access to, household's monthly income, communication of the absent parent with the household and mother's education are not found significant in this model which again validate the fact that legal framework responsible for the years of schooling in the age group 6-17 years.

Conclusions

This study shows that age is the main determinant of years of schooling validating the fact that legal framework is mainly responsible for the years of schooling in the age group 6-14 years. The study also indicates that children in migrant households are expected to get more years of schooling, perhaps because they can support more years of schooling because of their stronger financial support. Children in larger household-size are expected to get fewer years of schooling, perhaps because they need to support more children with their limited income. Moreover, children in private schools are expected to get more years of schooling because of positive attitude towards education supported with financial resources. Children who enjoy learning are expected to get more years of schooling. Children who get the help of a tutor are expected to get more years of schooling. The education of the parents is very important in determining the attitude towards their children's education as well as in helping the child in the school home-work. Children, who are forced (economically or socially) to do paid work, generally get the chance of fewer years of schooling as compared to the children who don't need to do paid work.

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Tables

Table 1: Educational level of 18-25 years old HH members by HH type (figures in percent)

Education level	Migrant HH	Non-migrant HH
Below class 9	85	92
Class 9-12	13	8
above Class 12	2	0

Source: Field work

Table 2: Regression result for the years of schooling of children (6-17 years)

Variables	Coefficients
Constant	- 4.589 (- 7.042)*
Age	0.845 (32.577)*
Sex (Male)	-0.018 (-0.776)
Type of family (Nuclear)	-0.001 (0.053)
Type of household (Migrant)	0.088 (3.289)*
Household size	- 0.044 (- 1.705)***
Caste (SC)	0.043 (1.645)
Type of school (Private)	0.128 (3.944)*
Enjoy learning	0.127 (3.622)*
Hours spent in study	0.138 (4.122)*
Tuition	0.073 (2.712)*
Depression	- 0.009 (- 0.354)
Asset in the household	0.045 (- 1.424)
Father's education	0.042 (1.718)**
Mother's education	0.10 (0.402)
Communication with HH	0.008 (0.340)
Income	0.021 (0.762)
Paid work	- 0.129 (- 5.165)*
Good Health	0.019 (0.875)
R^2	0.781
Adjusted R^2	0.773
F-Statistics	97.726*
Std. Error of the Estimate	1.302
N	511

Source: Data analysis

Note: The t-statistics are presented in parentheses and *, **, and *** implies the statistical level of significance at 1 percent, 5 percent and 10 percent, respectively.