

## Do Girls Gain from Migration-Induced Male Absence?

● Ghazala Mansuri

**Girls have bigger health and education gains than boys in households with migrant males—except in those headed by women**

Recent debates on “feasible globalization” have focused on the importance of opening up international labor markets to low-skilled guest workers from developing countries. Liberalizing labor markets in this way, it is argued, would lead to large gains in income and could help reduce inequalities of wealth and opportunity both within and across countries. Key to this is the expectation that remittances from migrants will fuel private investment in human capital in their communities of origin. Where gender gaps in human capital indicators are large, remittances are also expected to reduce gender inequalities.

Migration can affect household behavior through a number of competing channels, however, creating new constraints that could dampen this potential enhanced investment. Most significant are migration-induced changes in household structure. Children in migrant households often have less adult supervision and are required to spend more time on household production, the care of younger siblings, or other domestic chores.

Conversely, where migration is undertaken mainly by men, and there are important gender differences in preferences relating to child welfare, migration-induced “male absence” could change the balance of household preferences in a different direction. A substantial body of research has shown that investments in children tend to increase where mothers exercise greater control over the use of household resources. To

the extent that girls gain more from such a change in preferences, male migration could well amplify gender differences in the gains from migration.

In two recent papers Mansuri examines the extent to which the expected gains from migration are borne out in rural Pakistan, where migration for work is substantial—with more than one in four families reporting at least one migrant—and migration is largely temporary and legal. The papers focus on household investments in child health and schooling, arguably the two most important contributors to inequalities of opportunity.

Work migration is undertaken exclusively by men, and female headship is almost exclusively a result of temporary migration-induced male absence. This makes the context particularly useful for examining gender differences in human capital investment not only between households with and without migrants, but also between migrant households, by female headship.

The key empirical problem in assessing the impact of migration on household behavior is that household characteristics that influence the decision to migrate are also likely to affect other household outcomes, including child schooling, labor market activity, early childhood growth, and any observed gender disparities in all of these.

The papers use two strategies to deal with this potential endogeneity problem: instrumenting for migration, and comparing siblings within migrant households by exploiting the fact that many schooling and health decisions are time sensitive. Finally, the analysis obtains the impact of female headship by comparing female-headed migrant households with male-headed ones.

Using two measures of early child growth (weight-for-age and height-for-age z-scores), instrumental variable estimates show significantly better growth outcomes among children in migrant households. Moreover, the effects are much larger for girls. And estimation on samples disaggregated by age indicate that this advantage is sustained as girls age,

affirming the potential intergenerational benefits of averting nutritional and other health shocks in early childhood.

Migration also has a significant and positive effect on all schooling decisions and a strong dampening effect on child labor market activity. This suggests that the opportunity cost of time spent by children in school may be substantial, at least for some households.

Most important, migrant households make much larger investments in the schooling of girls, leading to a significant reduction in gender gaps in school enrollment, retention, and attainment. In contrast, there are no gender differences in labor market activity. Thus the smaller relative gains for boys do not appear to reflect higher labor demands.

A comparison of siblings corroborates these results.

Interestingly, though, while female headship has no impact on school enrollment for either boys or girls, adolescent girls in female-headed migrant households are much more likely to drop out of school and consequently have lower school attainment. The opposite is true for boys. They do significantly better in such households. Is this because female headship has a differential impact on the work burden of children? The data do not support this. While both boys and girls work substantially more in female-headed households, there are no gender differences in work burden. Nor does female headship have an impact on the woman's own labor supply.

This suggests that migration-induced female headship may create constraints that dampen at least some of the gains from migration. In particular, the evidence suggests greater restrictions on the mobility of adolescent girls, perhaps due to the greater social vulnerability of female-headed households.

Ghazala Mansuri. 2006. “Migration, School Attainment, and Child Labor: Evidence from Rural Pakistan.” *Policy Research Working Paper 3945*. World Bank, Washington, D.C.

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