

Parental Migration across the Life Course and Children's Schooling in Nepal

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Abstract

While the literature finds that labor migration of a parent has beneficial consequences for children's schooling in the sending context, there has been less research considering how these migration experiences vary across the parent's own life course. We apply a life course approach to the study of fathers' international migration experiences. The setting for our study is the Chitwan Valley of Nepal, a growing rural area with rapid social change characterized by large in- and out-migration. Using rich life history calendar data of parental migration and children's schooling, we examine how multiple conceptualizations of parental migration affect children's school leaving before 10 years (an important education credential point in Nepal). We find that pre-marital migration experience appears to have minimal impact on children's schooling, whereas post-marital experience significantly decreases children's school exit, compared to children of fathers who never migrated outside Nepal.

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Introduction

Migration has multiple consequences for individuals and families. These consequences, however, vary by the type of migration. Migration may be temporary, permanent, or cyclical. Duration in the receiving context may be short or extended. Migration may involve all or only a subset of family members. And, the family members' experience with migration is often staggered over time. These and many other highly variable factors make it challenging to assert broad statements that accurately describe how "migration" in all its diversity affects important well-being outcomes for individuals and their families.

In this paper, we examine how migration of family members affects the schooling of children who remain in the sending context in the Chitwan Valley in Nepal. In our approach, we "hold constant" some factors of the migration experience: we examine only migration in which family a member leaves while the child remains behind; thus we do not consider how children's schooling is impacted by the child's own migration experience. We examine variation in the migrating family member's migration timing and duration. The impacts of parental migration experiences are likely to vary depending on when in the family life course this migration occurs and for how long the migration event lasts. We are able to take advantage of unique life history data to identify when migration occurred: prior to family formation experiences, prior to the transition to parenthood or during the child's life. There may be very different associations between the timing of migration and its effect on children's persistence in school. Because migration is a transformative experience that has long-lasting impacts, conclusions are likely to be incomplete if research considers only a parent's current migration status, or only migration experiences in the recent past.

Our main contribution is to consider how migration experiences vary across the parental life course and to assess the impacts on children's schooling. To accomplish this, we use a rich dataset of detailed retrospective information about parents' migration histories across their lifetimes. We also consider how the consequences of a family member's migration vary by characteristics of the child and his or her family, including the child's gender and family economic well-being. Our primary outcome is schooling attrition before 10 years of schooling. We use data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study, a long-running study of social change, migration, and family behaviors in a rural yet rapidly changing area in south central Nepal.

Background and Hypotheses

Research on the effects of migration for those living in origin communities identifies both benefits and disadvantages for children of migrant parents. Migration from developing settings is often a purposive strategy designed to enhance occupational skills and accrue resources that can then be invested in production or assets in the origin community (Cobo et al., 2010; Lindstrom & Massey, 1994). If successful, migration may produce remittances that family in the community of origin can subsequently invest as they see fit. Families can then use this capital to increase their children's schooling. Remittances allow children who remain behind in the sending context to continue to pursue their schooling, rather than to exit schooling and devote their time to economic production (Yang, 2008). In addition to direct remittances during migration, return migrants may have accrued additional capital and occupational skills during migration that can enhance family well-being upon the migrant's return (Cobo et al., 2010). This may also increase children's opportunity to obtain additional schooling and enhance their own earning potential in rapidly developing economies.

Both routes to improved economic conditions, remittances during migration and enhanced capital among return migrants, may improve children's educational outcomes, including school

enrollment, attainment, and educational aspirations, in the sending communities when compared to children of nonmigrants. However, there may also be differential impacts of parental migration on children's schooling depending on whether the migrant has returned as well as the timing of migration in the life course of the parent and child (Antman, 2012). For example, some migrants will leave the sending community and return before they begin their own family formation. Others migrate after family formation has begun. In addition to the timing of the return in the life course, return migrants may be selective of those who are successful (i.e., those who accrue more resources) or from those who are less economically successful during migration and return without acquiring significantly improved occupational skills or capital (Antman, 2012; Lindstrom & Massey, 1994; Thomas, 2012; Van Hook & Zhang, 2011). If returnees are less successful than non-returnees, children of current migrants may have better school outcomes than children of migrants who have already returned. Yet few studies can consider the full range of migration including the timing, duration and return.

This paper builds upon previous research on migration and well-being in sending or origin communities by incorporating attention to the timing and duration of parental migration across the family life course. The life course approach is a broad framework whose key contribution is to force research to consider the timing of when events occur in individuals' lives—and what the consequences are for variations in this timing. Here we consider the timing of migration during the life course of parents vis-à-vis their own family formation experiences.

In addition to the important role of parental migration (duration and timing) on investments in children's schooling, we also attend to the importance of variations in the economic context of the origin community. There may be significant variation in the extent to which parental migration can enhance children's schooling based on the opportunities for schooling in the origin community. The economic landscape of the sending context is likely to impact how the benefits of migration are transmitted to children. In sending context without opportunities for employment outside the home or

farm—or without opportunities that require higher levels of education—it makes little economic sense to invest extra capital in children’s education. In these settings, a more appropriate strategy is to either invest in home-based production (agriculture) or migration for the children’s generation (i.e., use that capital to allow children, upon maturity, to become migrants themselves). The latter process has been suggested by Kandel and Kao (2001) in Mexico, in which migration of family member to the US may reduce children’s education aspirations because migration is an alternative to higher schooling.

Another important moderating factor in the role of migration on children’s schooling may be gender (Acosta, 2011; Antman, 2012). In many contexts, girls’ access to schooling will be lower than boys. If there is a strong gender division of labor whereby girls are not expected or allowed to work outside the home, higher levels of schooling do not produce any additional gains behind a base level of literacy that would be normative. In these cases, parents would favor boys’ schooling investments over girls. Interestingly, the extant literature on parental migration and children’s schooling finds that when there are gender differences, girls appear to benefit (Mansuri 2006; Lu 2012). The reasoning is that families under economic constraints invest in boys over girls, given girls’ lower returns to schooling; girl’s schooling is a lower priority. Migration, however, provides additional capital for families to invest in girls schooling. In this case, we may expect parental migration, to be more important for improving girls’ schooling attachment than boys. The additional resources available through migration allow girls to stay in school and out of economic production. However, other studies suggest that girls’ labor may be redirected to unpaid household work during parental absence suggesting there may be differential returns to parental migration among girls whose fathers are absent versus those whose migrant fathers have returned (Meyerhoefer & Chen, 2012).

Overall, these prior findings in the literature suggest that, when examining the relationships between parental migration and children’s schooling, it is important to account for gender of the children and the local economic context in which child educational investments might be made.

Consistent with the prior literature, we expect that parental migration will have an overall net benefit the schooling outcomes of children who remain in the sending context. By taking a life course approach to parental migration, however, we propose additional hypotheses. First, our approach considers not only current migration status, but also duration—how many years of migration the parent been a migrant away from the home. The benefits of migration may accumulate over time as a migrant builds up labor market experience in the receiving context, and the accumulated benefits may persist with the migrant even after he or she returns home. Thus, two children in two different families both with currently non-migrant fathers may have very different outcomes if the first child’s father had previously been away as a labor migrant for the prior 8 years, and the second child’s father has never been a migrant. Consideration of only current migration status would equate these potentially very different circumstances. Thus we hypothesize that cumulative migration experience, rather than current migration status, will have stronger associations with children’s schooling.

Second, we will examine the points within parental lives these migration experiences occur and cumulate. We ask whether migration and return prior to marriage and parenthood has an impact on children’s schooling or whether the effect of migration on children’s schooling is confined to migration events that occur after family formation has occurred in the origin community. While we expect cumulative migration experience throughout the parental life course to have positive associations with child schooling outcomes, these benefits are likely to vary by time. Our preliminary analyses presented here consider two periods within the parental life course: pre-marriage and post marriage (note: in the Nepali context, which is the setting for our study, the frequency of non-marital childbearing is extremely rare and too infrequent to study). When individuals are not yet married, we predict that the benefits of migration experience will be aimed at finding a spouse and securing marriage. It is in later stages—married or married with children—that we expect that the benefits of migration will be more closely tied to children’s schooling. Thus we hypothesize that the association between cumulative migration

experience and children's schooling will vary by parental stage in the life course. Our expectations are less straight forward when considering the role of duration of migration experience for return migrants. On the one hand, we might expect migrants who are away for longer periods of time will be able to provide remittances for longer periods of time and raise children's schooling persistence. On the other hand, prolonged parental absence may also have negative consequences for children, particularly girls, if children must make up for the domestic labor of the absent parent. In this case, we would expect children of migrant parents whose parents are absent for longer periods of time will have lower persistence in school. We first examine these somewhat competing sets of expectations in the preliminary analyses presented here. Our next steps will include testing for differential outcomes associated with the life course timing of parental migration and duration of migration events by the gender of the child, as well as by the economic opportunities available in the local community context in the sending area.

Setting, Data, and Methods

The setting for our hypothesis tests is the Chitwan Valley of Nepal, a rural area about 100 miles south-west of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Data for our analyses is provided by the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS), which beginning in 1996 has extensively measured social change and family behaviors in the western Chitwan Valley of Nepal. Our analyses up to this point make use of the 2008 wave of this study, in which detailed migration history and child schooling information was collected.

Chitwan is located in the Terai, a region of low-lying plains along the southern borders of the country. Up to the end of the 1950s the area was largely uncultivated jungle. Then the Nepalese government, with assistance from the United States Agency for International Development, introduced the Rapti Valley Land Development Project to eradicate malaria and deforest the land (Ghimire 1992; Shivakoti et al. 1999; Axinn and Yabiku 2001). By the end of the 1960s, what had been jungle became

prime farmland, and migration to the area increased dramatically (KC and Suwal 1993; Guneratne 1996; Axinn and Yabiku 2001). The Chitwan Valley soon became a major farming region, and services and infrastructure expanded across the area (Axinn and Yabiku 2001). Non-family organizations and services across the valley include schools and health clinics, employers, markets, banks, and movie theaters. While the Chitwan Valley as a whole is still largely rural and agricultural, there is a growing urban center in the Narayanghat area at the intersection of two major highways, with an estimated population over 100,000 residents.

This rapid growth in population and non-family organizations from the 1950s to the present was accompanied by an equally steep rise in education. Data from the CVFS shows that average educational attainment for adults in the 1950 was less than one year, but by the 1990s was 7.3 years for women and 9.3 years for men. Average education specifically among young adults today is higher and typically eclipses that of their parents, given the rapid spread of education even within a generation's time. In contemporary Nepal, a School Leaving Certificate (SLC) is given upon successful completion of an exam given in 10th grade (Chauhan, 2008). Further study in grades 11 and 12, as well as university education is possible beyond that, but the 10th grade SLC represents an important credential in educational achievement. The preliminary analyses we present here take advantage of these rich data to illustrate variation in schooling by the timing of parental migration over the family life course. We present these preliminary results here and anticipate the next steps necessary to provide a robust test of all of our hypotheses.

Dependent variable: Children's schooling attrition before 10 years of education. Given the importance of 10 years of schooling, we examine the hazard of attrition before the SLC grade. Data on children's schooling comes from the 2008 individual interview with mothers, who reported on the retrospective schooling histories of all their children. Children who attended school for 10 years and

children still in school are censored at the time of the survey. Children who are reported to leave school before 10 years experience schooling attrition.

Primary independent variable: Parental international migration experience. Note that our present analyses examine only fathers' migration experiences, but we plan to include mothers' experiences in our full paper. We use data from the 2008 survey interviews that used a life history calendar approach to record where individuals were living for each year of their lives (Axinn, Pearce, and Ghimire 1999). Although there is internal labor migration in Nepal, our analyses thus far are considering the impact of international migration. A year of residence outside Nepal is conceptualized as exposure to international migration. Because we want to limit our measure of migration to adult exposures (so as not to conflate those who are dependents at the time of their own parents' migration), we only consider time spent outside Nepal at age 12 and after. We create multiple measures of parental international migration experience, all of which are time-varying: 1) a dichotomous measure of whether or not the parent is outside Nepal, 2) a cumulative count of years spent outside Nepal, 3) a cumulative count of years spent outside Nepal before marriage, and 4) a cumulative count of years spent outside Nepal during the year of marriage and after.

Controls: Any study that attempt to examine the association between migration and an outcome needs to consider the selectivity of migration. Migration decisions usually are driven by economic or other factors that are also likely to be associated with family outcomes, such as children's schooling. A properly specified model needs to control for this potential spuriousness. We control for education and caste/ethnicity—two important markers of status, wealth, and privilege in Chitwan. Education is simply mother's years of reported education. Caste is measures with a series of dummy variables representing 5 categories: Upper caste Hindu, Lower caste Hindu, Newar, Hill Tibetoburmese, and Terai Tibetoburmese. Caste and ethnicity in Chitwan is complex and cannot be richly described here, but in brief, Upper caste Hindus tend to be most well-off economically, although Newars are often a

close second. Lower caste Hindu, Hill Tibetoburmese, and Terai Tibetoburmese are the most disadvantaged. As an additional control that is specific to the circumstances surrounding the child's birth, we also control for whether or not the child was born in a hospital. Finally, we control for the child's gender.

Our analytic method is discrete-time event history. As is standard in this approach, we create a child-year file in which there is a separate observation for each year of life in which the child is at risk of schooling attrition before grade 10. Risk begins when the child enters school, and the dependent variable is coded 0 in every year, except the year of attrition, in which case it is coded 1. The baseline hazard in a discrete-time analysis must be specified, unlike a Cox model. We parameterize the baseline hazard with a quadratic function of time since child's enrollment in school. We estimate the model using logistic regression.

One complication to our analysis is missing data for parents who are away in migration. Chitwan is characterized by substantial labor migration. At the time of survey, approximately 30% of spouses were away and were not interviewed. The consequence is that although the child schooling and mother's background characteristics are measured, the father's migration experience are not. Rather than omit these cases, which could lead to substantial biases, we instead use categorical measures for father's migration experiences, leaving one category as missing.

A second issue is that we examine time period of risks only in 1996 and later. 1996 is a key date because it is the first wave of this panel survey, and we plan to use additional control measures from the 1996 survey. Therefore, for proper time ordering, we do not examine risk before 1996. Although this is only a 12 year period (1996-2008), it includes a diverse set of children who can be born and enter school before 1996. For example, a child who entered school in 1990 does not enter our analysis until 1996, and then remains at risk until he or she leaves school, or achieves 10 years of schooling in 2000.

Preliminary Results

The means are presented in Table 1. Recall that this is an event history analysis and thus there is a person year file with varying numbers of observations per child. To present the means such that they are not weighted towards children with longer durations until event or censoring, we present the means with all variables evaluated at their final observed year for each of the 5,850 children in the analysis. We briefly describe a few key descriptive statistics. First, about 11% of children leave schooling before the SLC grade. There were 34% of fathers were not able to be interviewed (many of whom were away), but among those who were interviewed, they had spent an average of 3.25 years outside Nepal since age 12. Broken down by life course stage, 1.08 of those years were previous to marriage, and 2.17 were during the year of marriage and after. These durations spent outside Nepal are broken down into time categories, which are also shown in Table 1. Of fathers who were interviewed, 4% had been outside Nepal in the year prior to the child's school leaving or censoring.

(Table 1)

Multivariate results are shown in Table 2. Results are presented as odds ratios. Odds ratios greater than 1 represent a positive effect on the rate of school leaving that accelerates school exit; odds ratios less than one are negative effects on school leaving. In model 1, parental migration experience is operationalized as whether or not the father was outside Nepal in the prior year. This measure shows no association with school leaving before 10 years of schooling. Several of the control variables show expected coefficients: children of more educated moms have lower rates of school leaving. In reference to Upper caste Hindus, all the other ethnic and caste groups have significantly higher rates of leaving. The baseline hazard of school leaving shows a quadratic pattern in which it increases and then decreases over time. Also note that whether or not the father was interviewed shows no association with schooling leaving.

(Table 2)

In model 2, parental migration experience is allowed to accumulate over the parent's life course. These accumulations are coded in ordinal categories, to allow for the missing category of fathers who were not interviewed (because many of them were away). In model 2, the reference group is fathers with 0 years of cumulative migration experience outside Nepal. Compared to this reference group, children of non-interviewed fathers have significantly lower rates of schooling leaving, as do children of fathers who have experience outside Nepal for 5 or more years.

In models 3 and 4, cumulative migration experience outside Nepal is differentiated by life course stage: pre- and post-marriage. Model 3 considers pre-marriage migration experience outside Nepal. As before, the reference group is father with 0 years of migration experience outside Nepal before marriage. Compared with this group, there are no significant differences in rates of school leaving. Model 4 shifts to migration experience outside Nepal in the year of marriage and after. Compared to fathers with 0 years of migration experience outside Nepal after marriage, children of non-interviewed fathers and children of fathers with 1-2 years of international migration experience after marriage have significantly lower rates of school leaving.

Discussion/Future

While the literature generally finds that labor migration of a parent has beneficial consequences for children's schooling in the sending context, there has been less research considering how these migration experiences vary across the parent's own life course. Our preliminary analysis in this paper has applied a life course approach to the study of parental international migration experiences. We have done this through multiple conceptualizations of parental migration: a simple dichotomous indicator of parental migration, a cumulative measure of migration experience, and additional cumulative measures divided by pre- and post-marriage stage.

The results suggest that simple dichotomies of current migration status do not capture the benefits of international labor migration that might accrue over time. The additional models also suggest that the timing of these accruals within the parental life course matter. Pre-marital migration experience appears to have minimal impact on children's schooling, whereas post-marital experience significantly decreases children's school exit, compared to children of fathers who never migrated outside Nepal. Parental migration prior to marriage may have at one time enhanced the assets available in the household but these benefits are muted or accounted for by our control variables by the time children are leaving school. Parental (paternal) migration after family formation, however, may add resources above and beyond those measured by our control variables and enhance children's ability to remain in school.

We plan numerous enrichments to our analysis for our final presentations at PAA. First we have measures parental migration simply as father's migration in this analysis. We have complete migration information for the mothers, as well. And unlike the father's interviews in which there was significant non-participation, all of the mother's interviews are complete (because they are the source of the children's schooling). Thus we will construct parallel measures of international migration experience for women as well as men. Second, to address the selectivity of migration, we will include a more detailed set of control measures. Education, caste/ethnicity, and hospital birth are likely to capture much variation, but there is additional variation in wealth that we can incorporate from the 1996 surveys, including household materials goods, farming wealth, and community context and resources. Third, to address the clustering in the data, we will estimate random effects models that recognize the multi-level nature of these data. Multiple children are clustered in mothers, and mothers are clustered by neighborhood. A random effects model with a random intercept can guard against biased hypothesis tests that can occur when the structure of the data is ignored. With these more fully developed models,

we will test for our hypothesized gender interactions and interactions with economic opportunities available in the local community context of the sending area.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum
Child Left School before 10 years of schooling	.11	.31	0	1
Father outside Nepal in prior year	.04	.20	0	1
All Migration Experience				
Of interviewed fathers, mean years outside Nepal	3.25	6.45	0	43
Father 0 years outside Nepal	.39	.49	0	1
Father 1-2 years outside Nepal	.09	.28	0	1
Father 3-4 years outside Nepal	.05	.21	0	1
Father 5+ years outside Nepal	.14	.34	0	1
Father not interviewed	.34	.47	0	1
Migration Experience Before Marriage				
Of interviewed fathers, mean years outside Nepal	1.08	2.76	0	30
Father 0 years outside Nepal	.52	.50	0	1
Father 1-2 years outside Nepal	.05	.23	0	1
Father 3-4 years outside Nepal	.03	.16	0	1
Father 5+ years outside Nepal	.07	.25	0	1
Father not interviewed	.34	.47	0	1
Migration Experience After Marriage				
Of interviewed fathers, mean years outside Nepal	2.17	4.97	0	37
Father 0 years outside Nepal	.45	.50	0	1
Father 1-2 years outside Nepal	.08	.27	0	1
Father 3-4 years outside Nepal	.04	.20	0	1
Father 5+ years outside Nepal	.10	.29	0	1
Father not interviewed	.34	.47	0	1
Child female	.49	.50	0	1
Child born in hospital	.20	.40	0	1
Mom's years education	2.37	3.60	0	16
Caste and Ethnicity				
Upper caste Hindu	.46	.50	0	1
Lower caste Hindu	.11	.31	0	1
Hill Tibetoburmese	.16	.37	0	1
Newar	.06	.24	0	1
Terai Tibetoburmese	.21	.41	0	1

N=5850 children

Table 2: Parental Migration and Rate of Children's School Leaving Before Grade 10 (odds ratios)

	1	2	3	4
Father outside Nepal in prior year (ref=father in Nepal)	1.02			
	(0.05)			
Father not interviewed (ref=father in Nepal)	0.83			
	(-1.23)			
Father 1-2 years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)		0.21***		
		(-3.95)		
Father 3-4 years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)		0.78		
		(-0.83)		
Father 5+ years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)		0.66*		
		(-2.06)		
Father not interviewed (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)		0.66**		
		(-2.63)		
Migration Experience Before Marriage				
Father 1-2 years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)			0.58	
			(-1.63)	
Father 3-4 years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)			0.28	
			(-1.80)	
Father 5+ years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)			0.94	
			(-0.21)	
Father not interviewed (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)			0.78	
			(-1.69)	
Migration Experience After Marriage				0.30***
Father 1-2 years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)				(-3.47)
				0.76
Father 3-4 years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)				(-0.82)
				0.67
Father 5+ years outside Nepal (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)				(-1.79)
				0.69*
Father not interviewed (ref=father 0 years outside Nepal)				(-2.37)
Child female	0.96	0.96	0.97	0.96
	(-0.28)	(-0.28)	(-0.27)	(-0.30)
Child born in hospital	0.83	0.83	0.83	0.83
	(-0.87)	(-0.86)	(-0.85)	(-0.88)
Mom's years education	0.78***	0.78***	0.78***	0.78***
	(-5.86)	(-5.88)	(-5.87)	(-5.95)
Lower caste Hindu (ref=Upper caste Hindu)	4.62***	4.48***	4.56***	4.71***
	(7.83)	(7.65)	(7.64)	(7.91)
Hill Tibetoburmese (ref=Upper caste Hindu)	1.91**	1.99**	1.91**	1.96**
	(2.96)	(3.15)	(2.95)	(3.07)
Newar (ref=Upper caste Hindu)	2.12*	2.18*	2.21*	2.09*
	(2.45)	(2.53)	(2.56)	(2.39)
Terai Tibetoburmese (ref=Upper caste Hindu)	2.47***	2.22***	2.37***	2.27***
	(4.79)	(4.18)	(4.52)	(4.32)
Time since child's school enrollment	2.13***	2.13***	2.12***	2.13***
	(5.44)	(5.43)	(5.42)	(5.46)
Time since child's school enrollment, squared	0.95***	0.95***	0.95***	0.95***
	(-4.39)	(-4.39)	(-4.39)	(-4.41)
Intercept	0.00***	0.00***	0.00***	0.00***
	(-16.65)	(-15.96)	(-16.33)	(-16.17)
N (person years)	28247	28247	28247	28247

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