Women and migration: The social consequences of gender in migration

Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on the role of women in migration, labor market, and development of the home land as well as the host society. My aim of doing this literature review is to provide the necessary linkage of micro and macro level of analysis by considering gender and family in this process. I am also going to look into the relationship between gender and decision to migrate and its consequences on migration flows. The gender, class, and ethnicity will be considered to answer the following questions through this study. What are the patterns of labor market incorporation of women immigrants? What accounts for immigrants’ occupational concentration and their participation in the labor market? What is the impact of migration on immigrants? How gender act in remittances and what is the role of female immigrant on development?

Key words: Gender, Migration, Skilled women, remittance, labor market

Introduction

Even though the percentage of the world population migrating has remained fairly constant over the last four decades, total numbers of international migration have been doubled. In recent decades, some of the major paradigms in the field of migration studies came into attention of researchers. Unlike what several researches have suggested in the past, recent data
shows that legal immigration has been dominated by women for the last half century. “There are now 175 million international migrants worldwide or approximately 3.5 per cent of the global population and about half of whom are women” (Jolly & Reeves, 2005; 1). While women have a considerable presence in migration flows, and outnumbered male migrants, the role of women in migration had been underestimated and sometimes overlooked in migration studies until recently (Pedraza, S; 1991; Jolly & Reeves, 2005; IOM).

In addition, most of the recent researchers put emphasis on un-skilled and less-skilled women, and their problems during migration. However, the role and potential of skilled immigrant women has been ignored. Thus, a general stereotype has been shaped that immigrant women are mainly uneducated, coming from rural backgrounds and have migrated as dependent family members. But the reality is that immigrant women are from a diverse background and women are increasingly migrating to improve the economic situation on their own. International community approaches women migration from different angles due to the considerable increase in the number of immigrant women around the world that has been labeled as “feminization of migration”. These immigrant women are as willing as their male counterparts to contribute to the development of the community.

“In the 1960s and early 1970s the phrase "migrants and their families" was a code for male migrants and their wives and children" (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; 1). The women’s movement brought the invisibility of women as migrants into the surface of migration process and scholars began to include women in their studies of migration in the late 1970s. Additionally, they recognized that women are as likely as men to migrate to the United States. Since then, gender
and migration became a special topic for study and research. Researchers studied women migration process in their sending countries to the new destination and their adaptation process receiving country (Curran, et al., 2006).

However, it was not a dramatic shift in considering the women’s role in migration and its consequences. Instead, the researchers noticed differences between men and women in migration process as different sex roles. For instance, Migration was seen as the outcome of individual decision in the neoclassical economic models and the push-pull demographic models (1970s and 1980s). They also argue that women are both dependent family members and independent economic migrants in the migration process (Boyd, 1984; Fernandez-Kelly, 1983; Findley and Williams, 1991; Donato, 1993). However, some studies focused on women migrants and their experiences as a special case (Lawson, 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999).

By the late 1980s, new theoretical formulations of migration and gender have emerged, and the household economy became a critical issue in the new analysis of the relationship between women and migration (Hugo, 1993; Zlotnik, 1993).

Recently, scholars have started analyzing the relationship between gender and remittances, and mentioned that it is crucial to fully understand the economic role of immigrant women in discussion about remittances and development (Orozco, M, et al., 2006, IOM). Due to the fact that all immigrants send money back to their origin countries, they all participate in the development of their home countries. However, the amount of remittances is different based on the sex of immigrants. Scholars argue that women have different effects on development based on their roles in the labor market, the motivation of migration, and the legal status (Min &
Bozorgmehr, 2000). These gender-related issues clearly have impact on the pattern of their incorporation in the labor market, on the immigrant women occupational concentration, and their public roles in labor market versus their private roles in family. Migration and related policies, and the role of immigrant women in economic development need to take into account both the impact of these gender-related issues on female immigrants, and the role of immigrant women in migration, labor market, and development.

The Decision to migrate

In studies of migration, it has been assumed that male is the primary actor in this process in which they left their origin places in order to make some money and return to their origin country, or they move to a new destination and bring their wife and children with themselves in a search of a better life. Thus, the primary assumption is that migration is a male dominated process and male is the one who makes decision to migrate and female is the follower. Women migration is seen as a secondary movement that follows the young males’ migration in which “Women generally migrate to create or reunite a family” (Houstoun, et al., 1984; 919).

In “push” and “pull” theory of migration, Everett Lee (1966:51) argues about this issue and believes that all immigrants themselves do not make the decision to migrate, but they follow the decision makers such as children who are carried along by their parents, and wives who accompany their husbands (Pedraza, 1991; 306). The push and pull theorists emphasize on the role of women as wives and mothers and men as breadwinners to explain migration decisions and their part in migration process and labor force of the host society. They argue that women
have less effect than men on migration process and on labor force of the host society due to their different responsibilities in family and society (Boyd & Grieco, 2003).

Network theories also emphasize the networks of men in their discussion about importance of networks to stimulate and sustain migration from one specific area to another (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; 2). While women used to migrate to join their men, this cannot explain women’s migration in recent century in which about half of the primary immigrants are men and the rest are women (Houstoun, et al., 1984). “More recent research shows that women have their own networks with other women and utilize them both to migrate and to settle in a new country” (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; 2).

Feminist theories which developed over time focused on gender and migration through 1980s and 1990s. They considered gender in the migration process as a “core organizing principle” in which it underlies migration and its consequent processes, such as labor force participation, and adjustment process to the host society (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; 3).

The costs and benefits of the move are one of the influential factors in migration decision making and people may decide to move if the net present value is positive (Bowles, 1970). Education is another important factor in determining the decision making of migration, but the effect of education on migration is complex. Mildred, et al. study (1974) indicates that the educated members of the labor force are more likely to be mobile than uneducated labors. However, educated and uneducated migrants respond significantly different to variables that reflect the costs and benefits of migration. Educated people are more mobile because they have
better access to information and more chances to find job opportunities in more popular regions with large and diverse labor market probability (Mildred, et al., 1974).

Age also plays an essential role in determining the net present value of a move for an individual in which “age increases the cost of moving and decreases the length of the accrual period for benefits thus inhibiting geographical mobility” (Goss & Paul, 1986; 397). Gallaway (1969) and Schwartz (1976) have substantiated the negative relationship between the probability of migration and an individual’s age. It is mentioned that those who are older have fewer chances to receive the monetary returns of migration because they have passed some years of their work life. They also face higher risk after migration because they have to give up their present employment.

However, two types of skills are identified that can be acquired by the worker through on-the-job training by Becker (1964 & 1975). He identified transferable (general) and non-transferable (specific) skills. The first increases the marginal productivity of the worker in the training firm in which they provide a higher value to that firm than to other potential employers. Nontransferable (specific) skills, however, have a negative relationship with employee turnover and the acquisition of job specific skills (Goss & Paul, 1986; 397).

Quinn and Rubb (2005) presented and tested a model that incorporates education-occupation matching in order to find a plausible explanation for the mixed findings on the relationship between educational attainment and migration in the literature. The literature on this issue shows that there is a relationship between the way how earning and education match. Accordingly, individuals with higher level of education than required by their occupation are
more incentive to migrate than those with less schooling than required by their occupations in which the increase in earning can occur after migration with a new education-occupation match.

**Remittances**

Out-migration caused economic growth at origin in terms of contributions to household wellbeing (Lucas, 2005). Women remit is higher than male in most societies (Chant 1992; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003, Curran, 1995; Osaki, 2002), both overall and as a percentage of their income (Richter and Havanon, 1995; Phongpaichit, 1993). Thus, remittances between individual migrants and their families is a considerable issue in migration studies in which through remittances enormous money and goods are transferring between countries (Adams, 1998; Taylor, 1999). Remittances from developed countries to developing countries create the potential for investment and rapid economic growth (Taylor, 1999; Durand, et al., 1996).

Two theoretical approaches dominate the literature on migrants’ remittances. One theoretical approach emphasizes the altruistic act of migrants who send money and other forms of support to family members in order to increase the welfare of the family. Remittances increase the standard of living of the migrants’ family of origin, but decrease the standard of living of the sender. Messy and Basem (1992) found that migrants remit less as the land owned by the origin household increases since remittances are the response to migrants’ origin household. Alternatively, migrants may enter into a contractual agreement with non-migrant members of the families. The remittances may be used for the migrants’ education debt or the bequest of
land based in the previous contract between senders and their household (Liard and Willis, 1997; Lucas and Stark, 1985, Hoddinott, 1994). There is a negative relationship between migrant-to-household remittances and the origin household income, while a positive relationship exist between these variables in contractual remittances (Stark 1999). The contractual remittances have a positive relationship to the migrants’ education, occupation, and the income of the origin household. Therefore, migrants with higher education and nonagricultural occupation remit at higher rate to their origin families.

However, we need to have to have a more complex view and consider the role of gender in altruistic or contractual theories of remittance behavior. Researchers show that altruistic remittances is higher between women, while men are more involved in contractual remittances. This pattern is consistent with theoretical explanations that indicate the norms that required women to support their families in order to acquire religious merit (Vanwey, 2004). Curran (1995) argues that families do not want their daughters to migrate, because they will lose cheap day-to-day household assistant, and also want to protect the daughter from dangerous modern lifestyle. Thus, female migrants remit to their parents until they are married. Vanwey’s (2004) results present that women remit less than men when they marry and they are no longer under their parents’ control.

**Labor market**

Immigrant groups in the United States and Europe started small business activities in the last two decades. Several studies show the consequences of migration on intra-household allocation among people left behind, but they paid extremely less attention to the role of the
gender and its various effects on the opportunity of men and women in origin household labor market. Theoretical analysis suggests that male migration causes household income through remittances and may increase female bargaining empowerment in the control of the resources allocation at origin due to imperfect monitoring. This condition eventually leads to gender differentials in labor supply behavior (Chen, 2006; Lundberg and Pollak, 1993; Haddad et al., 1997).

In contrast, some studies indicate that family migration has a negative effect on labor-force participation, employment and income of origin country (Boyle et al, 2000; Cooke and Bailey, 1999; Shumway and Cooke, 1998; Spitze, 1984). Gender scholars have considered the way in which social structural arrangements within households, workplaces, and natural policies affect women’s experiences of migration. They focus on women’s disadvantages as structural conditions in individual’s decision making for migration (Hondaganeu-Sotelo, 1994, Kofman & Sales, 1998).

Besides structural conditions, economic and political interest of nation-states are reflected in Immigration laws as other sources. Immigration laws define who is highly skilled. These laws enhance gender distinctions through valorizing the particular types of “high skills” (Purkayastha, 2003). Many developed Euro-American countries seek international migrants with high human capital in order to shift towards post-industrial economies. As a result, skills in medicine, upper level management, engineering, information technology, and physical science research are defined as “highly skilled” for immigration purposes (Purkayastha, 2003). Individuals with these skills are more likely to be men than women, given the continuing female disparities
in education. “Therefore, among couples with high level of education, who migrate as a “highly skilled worker” and who migrate as “the wife” is predetermined by structural requirements irrespective of the women’s skills, training, and inclination” (Purkayastha, 2003;182). Several studies also indicate that women have more difficult time to access job after migration than men, because of labor market segregation and their delegation to lower level jobs (Sassen, 1996).

Women’s marital status is an important factor in determining the women’s participation in labor force. Family migration has a small, short-lived impact on the employment of married women without children, while family migration has a significant and negative effect on married women with children in both labor force participation and employment that last for many years (Cooke, 2000).

“Women are often socialized to place family first and personal goals second when it comes to critical household matters” (Shihadeh, 1991; 433). Women are whom to be asked to sacrifice their well-paying jobs in a traditional gender-role beliefs (Bielby and Bielby, 1992). “Thus, it appears as if economic rationality in family migration decision making occurs only on the margins: families will consider the wife’s career development in making migration decisions only if she has a very high-status job relative to her husband or if the husband is unemployed and the family has no other economic resources” (cooke, 2000; 421). However, even in these cases, the husband's human capital characteristics play more important role than the wife's human capital characteristics when deciding to migrate. Otherwise, family migration is to improve the career prospects of the husband, but with little regard for the wife’s career prospects (cooke, 2000).
One of the determinant of female migration is discriminatory social institutions in both origin and destination countries. According to the level of gender inequality at destination, migration may imply to change discrimination against women. Specifically, gender equality would be promoted through migration to the countries with lower level of discrimination, while migration to the countries with higher level of discrimination has the reverse effect (Ferrant & Tuccio, 2015). “Discriminatory social institutions, defined as formal and informal laws, social norms, and practices that shape or restrict decisions, choices, and behavior of women, have gained prominence as a useful analytical framework to understand gender gaps” (Ferrant & Tuccio, 2015; 240). Besides the economic and political factors, discriminatory social institutions affect migration decisions through defining the acceptable behaviors for each gender and restricting women access to power and necessary resources to migrate (Mayda, 2010; Ferrant & Tuccio, 2015). Studies show that discriminatory social institutions such as job security in the workplace and freedom from sexual harassment affect women’s decision to migrate and the choice of destination (Naghsh Nejad, 2013; Naghsh Nejad & Young, 2014).

However, the reorganization of work under the current phase of globalization has led to the increasing feminization of occupations. Women are allowed to come as skilled laborers and may have temporary works with lower pay, little stability and few benefits that lead to few social and political rights in developed countries (Purkayastha, 2003).

The story of unskilled immigrant women is different. Most of the immigrant women from less developed countries to developed countries are working under poor conditions with the low wages. For instance, Hondagneu (2007) mentions that the condition of domestic work is not
pleasant. Domestic work is described as a hard work in which thousands of immigrant women are employed as the prospective start of their American dream, while it is not considered as a real work and identified as something other than employment. Most of these domestic workers are immigrants from Mexico, Central America, Guatemala, and El Salvador who are the mothers of kids in their home countries. They are known as “transnational” mothers who take care of their employers’ children while their own kids are still back at home. They work to send their hard working money to their families in their origin countries. Domestic laborers are divided into three categories: Live-in Nanny/ Housekeeper, Live-Out Nanny/ Housekeeper, and Housecleaners. Live-in nanny/ housekeeper is the worse one in which they are working 24 hours and are call on duty, while is the lowest paid job. Women who work as Live-out nannies/housekeepers work less hours and have a little bit more freedom and a place of their own to stay after work hour. Housecleaners are the most fortunate as they move from a house to house of the employers. They are paid better and have freedom after their work and can afford a normal life with their families.

On the one hand, searching a job is hard. Experienced Latino women who spend some time in the United States are most likely to find a job as housecleaners, while new comers who are not good enough in English and have no work experience in the U.S. should rely on agencies to find them a job and have to accept any opening offered. These women should work hard with low wages and agencies care less about these workers’ well-being. On the other hand, people in need of domestic workers come in contact with one another and rely on their friends, coworkers, neighbors, and relative to find a domestic worker instead of agencies, because agencies are described as expensive, slow, and unreliable. This process provides an unequal social and
economic relationship and the foundation of an income exploitation in which workers experience a lonely life and unfair treatment.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this review I have highlighted the consequences of migration for women based on the previous studies in this realm. As we have shown, gender plays a central role in the decision to migrate, labor market, remittances, and the composition of migration flows. The experience of migration holds different benefits for women and men. Migration has negative impact on labor force participation, occupational concentration, public and private lives of women. A review of the empirical evidence on the consequences of women migration leads to the conclusion that the experience of migration was almost positive for skilled women who migrate from less developed countries to developed countries, while unskilled women have completely different story and migration has negative effect on their life. Moreover, the consequences of migration for married women with children is different than those who migrate without children. Migration affects labor force participation of men and women differently in which women are more likely to sacrifice their occupation success. They also send more altruistic remittances to their origin family than men.

After all, it can be said that although several studies have indicated the various roles of women in migration process, we need more comprehensive studies about women and migration to determine all aspects of women’s experiences of migration and the consequences of migration for women.
References

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