

# **The Impact of International Migration on the Labour Market Behaviour of Women left-behind:**

## **Evidence from Senegal**

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### **Introduction**

This paper examines the impact of male international migration on the labour market behaviour of women left-behind. The economic and social effects of migration on origin households and communities, in particular through the remittance channel, are high on the policy-agenda and have been extensively researched over the past decades. However, the role of migration for the economic behaviour of left-behind is less well documented, and evidence taking into account the gender-specific responses of non-migrant household members is scarce, in particular in the context of international migration from Africa.

The economic theoretical literature suggests several channels through which migration can affect the labour market behaviour of left-behind non-migrants. Remittance flows are expected to increase reservation wages and the demand for leisure, and lower labour market participation (Lokshin and Glinskaya, 2009). At the same time, there may be a “lost labour effect” after the departure of the migrant, and tasks previously carried out by the migrant may be reallocated among non-migrants. Depending on whether male and female work is a complement or a substitute, women and men in the household may be affected differently by this reallocation (Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo, 2006). Moreover, remittance transfers may help lifting liquidity constraints if credit markets at the origin are imperfect and enable non-migrant household members to start an entrepreneurial activity, thus increasing household labour supply (Lokshin and Glinskaya, 2009). The sociological literature highlights another channel through which female labour market behaviour may change in response to male migration. The absence of males may lead to a shift in bargaining power in the origin household by enhancing women’s independence. As a consequence, women may take over tasks previously performed by men, a process which challenges the traditional division of labour and granting them an increased decision-making power (De Haan, 2000).

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This is indeed what several recent studies have found, in contexts as diverse as Jordan (Khaled, 1995), Mozambique (Yabiku et al, 2009), Mexico (Kaniaupuni, 1998), or Bangladesh (Hadi, 2000). However, there is also ample evidence of the reverse effect of male migration: Binzel and Assaad (2009) have found that in Egypt the remittances sent by migrants discourage their wives from continuing their income-generating activities. Studies by Sadiqi and Ennaji (2004) on Morocco, Cabegin (2006) on the Philippines, or Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) on Nepal come to similar results. Evidence from an anthropological study from rural Senegal by Fiéloux (1985) also suggests that migration reinforces women's dependence towards men as the status of a migrant's wife is viewed as "incompatible" with an economic role.

### **Objectives**

This study aims to add to the existing empirical literature by making several conceptual and methodological contributions. While previous studies rely largely on cross-section data, this analysis takes advantage of a new longitudinal data set on international migration, based on the collection of retrospective histories. In this way, labour market transitions over the woman's lifetime can be related to migration spells of males in the household. Second, while there is some limited qualitative evidence, quantitative analysis on the Sub-Saharan African context is lacking. Given that gender-specific labour market segmentation and values vary across geographical contexts, insights from Senegal, a country highly affected by international migration, should be a valuable addition. Moreover, the existing empirical literature generally assumes that the position of the woman in the household and the household composition does not change over the duration of the migration. However, whether men's migration affects wives' economic participation may be strongly influenced by where the woman lives. If, as in Fiéloux's (1985) research context, virilocality is the dominant practice - the wife lives with her husbands' extended family - another male figure (the husbands' father or brother) may replace the authority of the absent husband, thus limiting the woman's potential gains in autonomy. Labour market behaviour should thus be studied in relation to the residential history. Focusing on the case of wives left-behind, the objectives of this study are thus:

1. To explore whether the international migration of the husband stimulates or, on the contrary, reduces labour market participation of the spouses staying behind in Senegal.
2. To examine, for the spouses who are economically active, whether they have experienced occupational mobility, and if so, into what sectors.
3. A final objective is to assess whether the impact of men's migration on women's economic participation is mediated by the residential location of the women.

## **Data and Methods**

A major shortcoming of most previous research lies in the fact that it uses cross-sectional data. The assessment of causality relies largely on the use of appropriate econometric methods, in particular instrumental variable and control function methods. This paper uses a new set of biographic survey data collected in 2008 in the framework of the MAFE-Senegal project (Migration between Africa and Europe). The survey design rests on two principles:

(1) *Longitudinal data*, which is obtained through the collection of retrospective life histories covering the life of the respondents from their birth till the time of the survey. Life spheres covered include, for instance, employment, family formation and housing histories, as well as the migrations of members of the respondent's social network. The survey allows thus to identify and date all labour market transitions, partnership statuses as well as all migration spells of the husband (and other family members and close friends).

(2) A *transnational sample*, collecting information on non-migrants and return migrants at origin, and on current migrants at destination.

In a first stage, a household-level survey was carried out with approximately 1,200 households. Subsequently, life histories were collected in the biographic survey with 1,200 individuals, who were sampled within the households. Respondents include 200 spouses of current migrants. In addition, 600 migrants were interviewed in the main Senegalese destinations in Europe (Spain, Italy, and France).

## **Methods**

Both descriptive and multivariate methods will be used in the analysis. An initial descriptive analysis provides a "cross-section perspective" by comparing the labour market situation of married women with and without partners abroad based on household data. Furthermore, this time using individual biographic data, sequence analysis will be used to describe labour market trajectories of women whose partner was abroad at one point during their married life and those whose partner never migrated from a longitudinal perspective.

In a second step, we employ discrete-time event-history models with labour market trajectories presented in a repeated events framework to examine whether the husband's migration triggers a change in the wife's economic status, taking account of the nesting of labour market episodes within the same individual. By interacting the husband's migrant status with the baseline hazard, effects related to the migration duration can be explored. Individual, family and contextual-level covariates influencing labour market behaviour will be included as time-varying variables. Furthermore, we will study whether the woman's residential location and household composition influences the

relationship between male migration and labour market transitions, modelling employment and residential histories simultaneously in a multi-process model.

The findings of this study should contribute to a better understanding of the role of male international migration from Sub-Saharan Africa for labour market outcomes of women at origin. From a policy perspective, such effects may be far-reaching. Changes in women's decision-making power and access to earnings are considered to play an important developmental role, as higher female labour force participation is generally found to reduce poverty and enhance investments in living conditions and human capital of children (Duflo, 2004).

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