

The Impact of Migration on The Left-Behind Children in Indonesia

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Abstract:

According to New Economics of Labor Migration, migration is understood as a household decision rather than an individual decision, and households decide to send one of its member to migrate based on the cost-benefit analysis. Migration may affect condition of household in the origin through economic and non-economic pathways. It is perceived as an investment strategy to diversify household risk and as a way to enhance livelihood through receipt of remittances. At the same time, there are additional non-material consequences of migration which are often less easy to capture but are considered important indicators for childhood development. Existing literature on the impact of migration on children are heavily focused on material consequences through receipt of remittance. On the other hand, internal migration within Indonesia has experienced an increase in the past decade. Internal migration in Indonesia has changed significantly and becomes more complex, larger in size and more advanced. About 5.5 million people were migrating inter-province during 2005-2010. The number is increasing about 39 percent from the previous period (BPS, 2011). Nevertheless, existing studies pay little attention on internal migration. Through this study, our objective is to fill the lacuna by providing preliminary assessment on the impact of migration on children in Indonesia by focusing on internal migration and well-being of children left-behind by migrants. As migration rate is high and remittance flow is growing in an increasing pace in Indonesia, collection of empirical evidence becomes more important nowadays. We decide to focus on the left-behind children rather than on overall population of migrants' children because we believe that the left-behind children are the most vulnerable ones within the population of migrants' children, as they are more likely to be negatively affected by the absence of their primary caretakers.

Numbers of empirical evidence have documented mixed evidence on the impact of migration on the well-being of left-behind children. Study by Antman (2010) in Mexico supports the view that following father's migration, younger boys face trade-off between schooling and participation in labor market since they have to compensate for the drop in household income caused by departure of the main breadwinner. This trade-off is intensified during first years of father's migration as fathers may not immediately settle and find a job in the U.S during the first years. Liu et al. (2009) finds that children whose parents migrated when they were very young (less than 7 years old) experience more symptoms of depression and anxiety. This relationship is more pronounced for children who live separately from their mother or both parents. McKenzie and Rapoport (2005) argue that migration affects educational attainment of children age 16-18 years old in Mexico negatively, and the negative effect is more pronounced for children from households with highly educated mothers. However, the negative effect is not observed for younger group of children (age 12-15 years old). Study by Deb and Seck (2009) in Mexico and Indonesia emphasize the trade-offs related to migration by showing that migration improves income and consumption of migrant households but it deprives health and emotional well-being of the families remaining in the origin.

The difficulty in assessing the impact of migration is caused by the fact that migration and decision to carry their children during migration are not randomly dispersed across



households. Wealthier households are more able to afford migration cost, causing migration to select relatively wealthier households to send migrants. Households with relatively younger children tend to migrate without their children especially if these households receive care support from their extended family. This self-selection among migrants poses a severe challenge to ascertain the impact of migration. Consequently, this study should take the potential selection bias into account in order to come up with unbiased result. This study provides preliminary assessment on the impact of migration on condition of migrants' children in Indonesia. There is very limited number of studies in migration and remittance that deals with potential selection bias properly. Number of studies tried to correct for selection bias using instrumental variable, whereas it is apparently very difficult to find a good and convincing instrumental variable that satisfies the exclusion restriction. This study innovates by using propensity score matching (PSM) to create a balanced sample consists of comparable households on a set of observable characteristics. The idea of using PSM is to replicate the experimental approach, where characteristics are assumed to be randomly distributed among treated and control units; thus, differences in outcomes between two groups can be associated as impact of treatment. Using data from IFLS 2007, this study applies PSM method that allows us to identify separately the true causal relationship between migration and various aspect of children's well-being covering health, nutrition, education, participation in child labor, and emotional well-being.

Main finding from this study supports the result obtained by Deb and Seck (2009) where migration affects well-being of left-behind children negatively. The impact of migration varies according to who migrates within the family and also age group and gender of children. One of our findings shows that absence of fathers result in an increase in number of hours devoted to do house chores, and adolescents experience pressure to join labor market as part of their transition to adulthood. When we look deeper into different group of age and gender of the left-behind children, we find that older boys (age 15-18) are most disadvantaged by migration compared to younger boys or girls. The finding from our study suggests that policy and program intervention should aim at reducing the negative effects of migration on children and families left behind.

