

Recent childbearing and the search for employment:

How do migrants differ?

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Abstract

Although the relationship between childbearing and female employment has been extensively examined, few studies have investigated whether the impact of childbearing on female labor force outcomes varies by migration status. Such studies are needed because migrants have unique child bearing patterns and, unlike non-migrants, have limited access to kin-based child care options. This study focuses on recent mothers who are unemployed and examines how the likelihood of seeking employment during the year following child-birth varies by migration status. Our preliminary results show that while migrant women had a lower likelihood of seeking employment than non-migrants, immigrant women who were 'never married' were least likely to do so. Furthermore, some household demographic characteristics have a differential impact on the likelihood of seeking employment that is conditional on migration status. The results also suggest that disparities in the likelihood of seeking employment are associated with child care options and socioeconomic status.

Introduction

Very little debate now exists about nature of the relationship between child bearing and female employment. The predominant view found in the social science literature is that childbearing disrupts female labor participation although female labor force participation can also affect childbearing patterns (Nakamura and Nakamura 1994, Brewster and Rindfuss 2000). Few studies have examined the nature of this relationship among female migrants even though a growing number of women are now involved in various forms of labor migration (Tacoli 1999, Donato 1993, Torro-Morn 1995, Cerruti and Massey 2001). Understanding how migrant mothers respond to labor force outcomes is important for several reasons. First, studies have shown that female migrants have unique childbearing patterns that are affected by the migration process itself and their duration of residence (McElroy and Albuquerque 1990, Stephen and Bean 1992, Goldstein and Goldstein 1997). Few studies, however, have examined the association between migrants' childbearing patterns and their labor force outcomes e.g. wages, employment and the incidence of unemployment. In addition, understanding how female migrants negotiate childbearing and labor force participation will increase our general understanding of migrants' welfare in their destination areas.

In this study, we examine whether childbearing has a differential impact on labor force participation that is conditional on migration status. The study focuses on women who gave birth in the previous year and are currently unemployed. It investigates how migration status affects the probability of 'looking for work' among recent mothers who are unemployed. Unlike many previous studies, this study focuses on the labor force

outcomes of three groups of migrant women i.e. immigrants, returning native-born emigrants and native-born internal migrants. In identifying how migration status affects the relationship between child bearing and ‘looking for work’, we compare our three groups of migrant women with non-migrants in the study.

The analyses would be conducted using census data from South Africa. This is important for several reasons. South Africa has a long history of labor migration that can be traced far back to the late 19th century (Crush 2000). In recent years, international and internal migration patterns have continued play a significant role in affecting the dynamics of the South African labor market (Zuberi and Sibanda 2004). Furthermore, although labor migration in the country has traditionally been dominated by males available evidence indicates that the migration of females to and within South Africa is on the increase (Dodson 1998, Posel 2003). This increased feminization of migration is the consequences of two factors. First, with the end of state restrictions on the urbanization of the African population, it is now easier for South African labor migrants, the majority of whom are Blacks, to be joined by their spouses in their places of employment (Posel 2003). Second, female immigrants are now migrating to South Africa from neighboring countries in response to better economic opportunities available in the South African economy (Dodson 1998).

Data and Methods

This study uses data from the 10 percent sample of the 1996 South African population census. We focus our attention to women in the child bearing ages (15 to 49 years) who had a live-birth in the twelve month period preceding the census. No information is available about the month of child birth and there is also no evidence in

our data to suggest that the timing of birth in the previous year varied by migration status. The 1996 census data contained information on respondents' demographic characteristics, e.g. their age, marital status, educational characteristics, their birth outcomes, e.g. the total number of live births, and their place of residence. The dataset also contains migration related information, such as information on respondents' place of birth, place of previous residence and their duration of residence, measured in years. For purposes of this study, immigrants are identified as the foreign-born population of South Africa, while all persons who had ever changed their magisterial district of residence are considered internal migrants. Also included in this analysis are returning emigrant women who are identified as native-born females whose place of previous residence was in another country. For all women in our sample, our dataset contains household information, such as their household size, number of employed females, the ratio of adults to children, the total number of children in the household etc.

Labor force information is also available in the 1996 census data. This information is used to identify respondents' current employment status. For the unemployed, the 1996 census data further distinguishes between those who were currently looking for work and those who were not. For all unemployed respondents, data is also available on whether they had a previous industry of employment. This information is used to control for previous work experience in the examination of employment seeking behavior among unemployed mothers. To reduce the level of bias associated with estimating the probability of 'looking for work' the final sample excluded women who were not currently engaged in economic activity because they were either

enrolled in educational institutions, and women who reported that they were disabled or retired.

The study analyzes the probability of seeking employment among recent mothers using probit regression models that estimate the probability of looking for work (seeking employment = 1 if yes but 0 if no) controlling for individual and household level factors. Our empirical investigation hypothesizes that the decision to look for work among recent mothers is a function of their migration status, their individual level characteristics (e.g. age, age at first birth, children ever born, marital status, education) and household level characteristics (e.g. household size, number of female adults, ratio of adults to children etc).

Several studies however note that comparisons of the labor force outcomes of migrants and non-migrants are generally affected by selectivity biases involved in deciding who migrates (Heckman 1979, Quinn and Rubb 2005). A few methodological refinements have been suggested for correcting such biases. In this study, we use the approach used in Lee and Rosman (1999) i.e. Inverse Mills Ratios, to adjust the estimates from our probit models for such biases. The analysis is conducted in three stages. First, it starts with an examination of the broad differences in the probability of seeking work by migration status. Second, it examines the differences between migrants and non-migrants by marital status and levels of schooling. Third, it constructs separate models for immigrants, internal migrants and non-migrants in order to examine how the association between the decision to look for work and individual and household level characteristics varies by migration status.

Preliminary Results

Initial results show that among recent mothers who are unemployed, all migrants (i.e. immigrants, returning emigrants and internal migrants) were less likely to be looking for work than non-migrants. Immigrant women were the least likely to be looking for work, and the disparity in probability of seeking employment was least between native-born internal migrants and native-born non-migrants. Our results also indicate that migrant-non-migrant differences in the likelihood of seeking employment strongly interact with marital status and levels of schooling. Disparities in the probability of seeking employment, by migration status, were lower among married women. On the other hand, the results showed that among women who were ‘never-married’ the disparities were higher, with immigrant ‘never-married’ women being the most reluctant to seek employment after a recent childbirth. In terms of schooling, the preliminary results indicate that among women with higher levels of schooling, migrants are less likely than non-migrants to seek employment while the reverse was observed among women at the lower levels of schooling. The results also show that the association between seeking employment and individual level factors (e.g. previous work experience, place of residence, children ever born etc) and household level factors (e.g. proportion of adults employed and number of adult females in the household) varied by migration status.

In conclusion, we argue that these preliminary findings appear to reflect differences in the availability of childcare and the effects of socioeconomic factors. The foreign-born status of immigrant women may preclude their access to childcare options available within the extended family and this in turn may make them less likely to seek employment after childbirth. While limited childcare options also affects the ability of

other migrant women to return to the labor force after childbirth, the childcare burden is particularly larger for immigrant women particularly those who are “never-married”. On the other hand, the study also suggests that within migrant status groups, migrant women with post-secondary schooling were least likely to look for work. The reverse was observed among non-migrants. Higher levels schooling are associated with better job security and access to more socioeconomic resources. This finding thus suggests that migrant women with more resources cope better with a temporary absence from the labor force while they attend to the childcare needs of their children. The implications of these findings for migrants’ welfare in their various destination areas are further discussed in this study.

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