

# Youth education and learning in 21<sup>st</sup> century China: Disentangling the impacts of migration, residence and Hukou

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Child development is an important predictor of later life course achievements including academic and labour market success. It is well understood that ‘risk’ is cumulative over the early life course, and exposure to biological, environmental and psychosocial risks affects development through changes in brain structure and function and is also evident in behavioural changes in the present and others that become apparent overtime (Walker et al, 2007). Early deprivation can have long-lasting effects (e.g., malnutrition in early childhood can result in physical stunting and cognitive impairment), although changes (e.g., better nutrition, stimulating learning environment) can also mitigate some of the earlier negative influences (Liu, Sunb, Neiderhiser, Uchiyamad, & Okawad, 2001).

In recent years increasing attention has focused on the relationship between child development and life course trajectories in low and middle-income countries with significant implications for economic and social development ( Bornstein & Putnick, 2012; Grigorenko et al., 2007;; Walker et al, 2007). China is one such country, and the life course trajectory of Chinese youth population, a significant share of the world population, will have influences at local and global levels.

The historically uneven development across China has contributed to relatively entrenched differentials between the urban and rural populations, and although significant progress has been made towards elevating the standard of living nationally, inequalities across different levels of analysis (e.g., core-periphery, urban-rural) remain and continue to grow. Temporary and circular labour migration is a common strategy observed in developing countries that can contribute to decreasing these inequalities as remittances from the labour migrant provide opportunities for improved nutrition, educational activities, and health care (Adams & Page, 2005).

However, there remain debates about some of the trade-offs inherent in the labour migrant strategy that creates ‘stretched’ households across geographic distance within and across national borders (Jordan & Graham, 2012). Children of migrant parents in China, similar to many other places, often remain in origin residence -- in the care of left-behind spouse, or other relatives such as grandparents or older siblings (Xiang, 2007). Changes in family structure may result in deficits in caregiving, and the quality and quantity of caregiving during early childhood also provides important support for the developmental trajectory. For example, cognitive caregiving refers to the strategies parents employ in stimulating children to engage and understand their environment by describing and demonstrating and offering children opportunities to learn while ‘socio-emotional’ caregiving refers to activities that engage children in interpersonal interactions. Parents make their children feel valued, accepted, and approved of through openness, listening, and emotional closeness (Bornstein & Putnick, 2012). Later transitions including middle childhood and adolescence are also important windows of risk and opportunity where impacts of earlier deficits may become apparent, but also caregiving deficits experienced during early adolescence may impact schoolwork, if children lack support for assistance with schoolwork, and older children, girls in particular, are at risk of leaving school as the household experiences a substitution effect whereby the young adolescent’s contribution to the domestic chores takes on greater value in the absence of other working age adults.

Recent studies in China provide support for differentials in rural households based on household migration participation. One study using the 1995 China Living Standards Survey did find that parental migration was associated with 0.7 grade level lag in educational attainment among girls (Meyerhoefer & Chen, 2011). The authors attribute this finding to the reallocation of girl's time to home production in migrant households. Another study found differences between temporary and permanent migrant children and rural-urban status (Liang & Chen, 2007). Temporary migrant children were much less likely to be enrolled in school, whereas permanent migrant children were the most likely to be enrolled compared to all others. Rural temporary migrant children experienced a major disadvantage in terms of school enrolments compared to non-migrant children in rural origin. These findings, using the 1995 1% Population Census for Guangdong Province, indicate a hierarchy of privilege and disadvantaged based on a complex combination of residency, permanency and urbanicity. Other research using panel data from the China Health and Nutrition Survey (1997-2006) found that household migration increases time spent on farm and domestic work, especially for elderly women and *girls* (our emphasis) (Chang, Dong, & MacPhail, 2011). While not examining educational outcomes specifically, the research provides evidence of a substitution of female (young and elderly) into farm/domestic work which can be interpreted as an indirect educational effect for girls.

This study uses new data from the first wave of the Chinese Family Panel Study (CFPS) collected in 2010 to examine the relationship between parental labour migration, child residence and educational outcomes for youth. The CFPS is new panel study in China conducted by Peking University, Institute of Social Science Survey (ISSS) that examines a range of topics relevant to the current study including economic activities and outcomes, educational participation, outcomes and learning, family dynamics and relationships, migration, and health.. The sampling design is two-stage stratification based on county & community characteristics at stage 1, followed by mapping and selection of households at stage 2. All members over age 9 in a sampled household were interviewed. All current and future children of the CFPS are also considered core members. Five provinces were selected for initial oversampling (1600 families in each), other 20 provinces are chosen as a target population (8000 families) based on historical social and economic purpose. The study design is integrated for rural and urban China. In addition to community, household and adult household surveys, the CFPS has a self-report youth module for children in sample households aged 10-16 years of age at Wave1. Importantly for the current study, the CFPS includes detailed information about child development including early developmental milestones, learning, educational progression, and social and behavioural development. The total sample size of households within the CFPS is 14,960.

The primary aim of the current study is to investigate the contribution of parental labour migration to explaining variation in three different educational and learning outcomes, school pacing, math skill and language skill. A series of multivariate regression models are estimated to examine the contribution of individual, household and community characteristics to explaining variation in the outcomes measures highlight the relationships between migration, residence and Hukou. Sixty-one percent of all households (N=14,960) have children less than age 16 (n=8,990). The final sample size for this study is restricted to households with youth aged 10 to 16 who completed the self-report module (n=2,895).

Preliminary findings highlight the diverse impacts of parental labour migration and residential patterns for contemporary youth in China. The first step in the analysis examines the contribution of urban-rural differences for intact households, households without a migrant parent of index child across the three educational outcomes. The urban advantage is not universally observed, with the significant differences for language skill and school pacing. Math scores are less sensitive to residency after controlling for other factors, including early developmental markers. Household and family characteristics are less significant factors in explaining urban-rural differences in educational outcomes.

The next step in the analysis examines the impact of parental migration on youth outcomes among three groups, rural non-migrant households, rural household with parent migrant, and urban 'temporary' migrant households—those households with migrants that do not have registered urban Hukou. Among rural youth, parental labour migration is positively associated with higher math scores. There are no differences on the other measures. The observed migration effect for language skill is not replicated after taking into account household and family characteristics including socio-economic

status. Household characteristics are significant predictors of child outcomes, with family size negatively associated with all three measures, school progression, language and math skill. Family socioeconomic status is also important across all measures with children of agricultural workers the most disadvantaged.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for policy and practice in contemporary China and highlights the relevance of the findings for other global regions experiencing significant social and economic transformation.

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