

# **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, granting them an increased decision-making power (De Haan, 2000).

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

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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 cultural 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. Women's labour market behaviour should thus be studied in relation to their 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**

Most previous research on the topic has two major shortcomings: on the one hand, it uses cross-sectional data, which prevents a more accurate assessment of causality through the use of appropriate econometric methods such as instrumental variable and control function methods. Furthermore, it is based on data collected only at origin, excluding from the analysis those women who might have subsequently become migrants themselves. 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 1,067 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 is applied to describe labour market trajectories of women whose partner was abroad at one point during their married life and those whose partner never migrated.

In a second step, we construct an unbalanced panel data set and use **random effects logistic panel regression** to examine the role of the husband’s migration in women’s labour market participation. The models also control for age (women enter the risk set when 15 years old) and time period (before 1990s, 1990s, 2000s), individual socio-economic characteristics (level of education completed, religion, indicators for children under 6 and living in the capital region), and an indicator for living with the extended family. Variables are time-varying except for religion. We further plan to study whether the woman’s residential location and household composition influence the relationship between male migration and labour market transitions, modeling employment and residential histories simultaneously in a multi-process model. The analysis sample is of 17,791 annual spells of 843 women.

### Preliminary findings

A first descriptive comparison of women with and without migrant husband at the time of the survey suggests that husband’s migration plays no significant role for spouses’ labour market behaviour. The difference in participation is not statistically significant, and women experience equal numbers of transitions over time. Women differ, however, with respect to other characteristics, as those with migrant husbands are at the average younger, more educated, and have fewer young children, characteristics which are generally positively related to labor market participation.

**Figure 1 Characteristics of women with and without migrant husband**

Variable	Categories	Migrant husband	No migrant husband	Sign.
Labour market participation	No work=0	67.0%	57.7%	n.s.
	Work=1	33.0%	42.3%	
Mean number transitions over 10 yrs	Participation	0.4	0.5	n.s.
	Any status	0.6	0.6	n.s.
Age	Mean age	35.3	39.2	**
Education	Mean years of education	6.2	4.6	**
Children	Mean number of children <6 yrs	0.42	0.94	***
Total (N Senegal=369 <sup>a</sup> )		273	96	

Legend: <sup>a</sup>Are considered here only women who were married and had never migrated in 2009

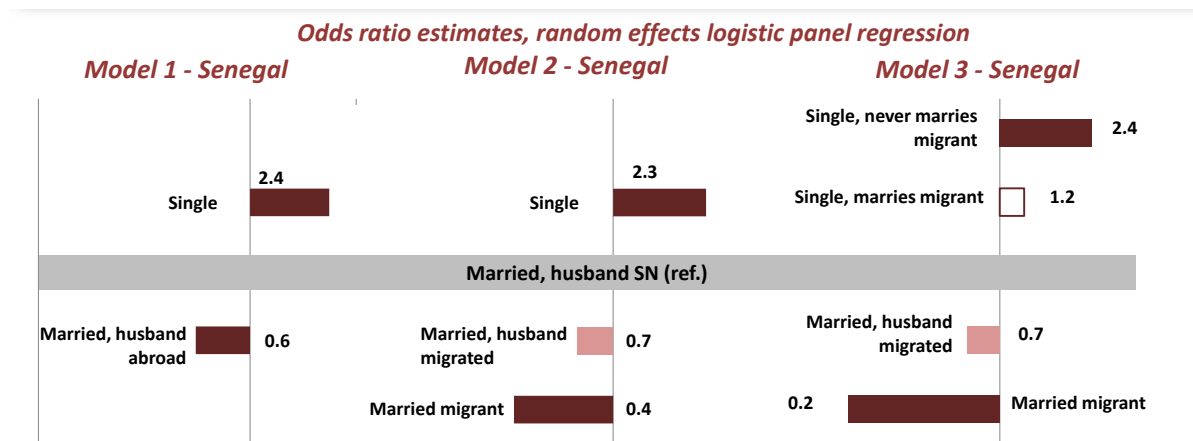
### *Marital status, husband’s migration and work*

**Model 1:** We distinguish between years when women were single, married with husband in Senegal, and married with husband abroad. Women who are single are more likely to work, while the international migration of the husband has the opposite effect.

**Model 2:** We split the husband abroad category into spells for women whose husband migrated after marriage, and women who married a migrant. The negative effect of migration in labour market participation is predominantly present for women who married an international migrant.

**Model 3:** Finally, we “look into the future” to identify women who are going to marry a migrant in the future, to see whether they are different from other single women from the start. Indeed, the positive effect of being single on the chances to work disappears for those women.

**Figure 2 Women’s likelihood to work, odds ratio estimates**



The other control variables have the expected effect. Women’s probability of working follows an inverse-U shaped relationship with age, increasing first and flattening out over time. Moreover, female labour market participation has continuously increased over time. Women with some secondary education or higher are more likely work. As expected, having young children reduces the propensity of participating in the labour market. Christian women are more likely to work than Muslim women. Living in the greater area of the capital city Dakar increases the chances of working compared to living elsewhere in Senegal.

Finally, living with an extended family reduces women’s propensity to work. When introducing an interaction effect with the husband’s migrant status variable (which we did in Model 2), the main effect on category “married, husband migrated” turns positive and the interaction effect is negative, while the main effect for women who marry migrants remains negative, but the interaction with living with the extended family is positive.

**Preliminary conclusion and future steps**

This paper contributes to the literature on consequences of migration for women left-behind by bringing evidence from an understudied context – Sub-Saharan Africa - and by adopting a dynamic, longitudinal perspective. Unlike studies from other contexts, we do not find a positive effect of husbands’ migration on women’s labour market participation. On the contrary, we find evidence of lower activity rates for spouses of migrants. The finding seems mostly driven by women who marry a migrant, who have significantly less chances to be working than their counterparts whose husbands are in Senegal. However, we cannot say this effect is a consequence of their spouse’s migrant status, since they appear already less active before their marriage. 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. Similar conclusions are reached by a more recent qualitative research carried out in a Senegalese town by Mondain et al (2012).

Preliminary analysis of the MAFE-Congo data reveals a somewhat different picture for Congolese women. **Future steps** include exploring into more depth this comparison between two contexts marked by different migration histories as well as prevailing gender norms. Also, we plan to examine in more detail the role of women's household composition as well as to explore the role of the spouse's migration on different occupational outcomes, such as women's occupational status, or the socio-economic status and prestige of the occupation.

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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