

Linking Migration, Reproduction and Wellbeing: Exploring the Reproductive Strategies of Low-Income Rural-Urban Migrants in Vietnam

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Research Focus:

Rural-urban migration is a core livelihood strategy for many poor people in the developing world and in post-socialist economies, like Vietnam, its significance is growing rapidly. Wider reproductive concerns, such as the impact of migration on marriage, child-bearing and child-rearing strategies are significant for maternal and child health, for parenting and child development, and will profoundly shape the gendered outcomes around new economic opportunities. Understanding the way that migrants manage their reproductive lives needs to be integral rather than peripheral to thinking about what new opportunities for economic migration mean for poor people's wellbeing.

In Vietnam, the social and economic changes associated with reform have dramatically accelerated new forms of migration. Until recently, the Vietnamese state has been extremely concerned about 'uncontrolled' migration leading to an escalation of 'social evils' and bigger family sizes. As a result, migrants have faced widespread prejudice as well as a number of institutional barriers that discourage migration, settlement and dependents. However, the Vietnamese state is now increasingly concerned to understand and better address migrant needs. The common pattern where married male migrants leaving their wives and children behind in rural areas has been a response to these pressures. However, there is growing evidence that an increasing proportion of female migrants are married and that there exists a range of alternative and shifting marital and migration strategies amongst low-income migrants.

Therefore, this study will focus on the reproductive strategies of low-income rural-urban migrants and implications for wellbeing. It will ask:

- How do the reproductive aspirations of poor male and female migrants fit into their migratory strategies for building a life?
- What are the strategies that poor male and female migrants use for managing their reproductive lives?
- How do institutional conditions enable and constrain the gendered strategies of poor male and female migrants for managing reproductive life?
- How do these choices and contexts play into the wellbeing experiences of poor male and female migrants, their spouses and their children over time?

Primary Research Methodology

The study will centre on up to 80 life histories with low-income rural-urban migrants in contrasting institutional settings in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. In Ho Chi Minh City, migrants come from all over the country often travelling very long distances and institutional barriers are generally higher and more strictly enforced. In Hanoi, the communist experience has fostered a history of relatively more egalitarian gender relations, most migrants come from the nearby Red River Delta, and institutional barriers for migrants are generally lower and more relaxed.

The life histories will focus on those who are experiencing their peak child-bearing and early child-rearing years and will include male and female migrants whose spouse is 'left-behind', migrants whose spouse is co-resident, migrants whose spouse is migrating elsewhere and those who are separated, single or widowed. The migrants will be selected through snowballing from wards with high concentrations of migrants. Contextual information will also be gathered from secondary literature and key informants about the institutional setting and our qualitative findings will be 'nested' within the more quantitative results from the 2004 Migration Survey.

The life histories will explore the reproductive strategies, migratory and work experiences, and wellbeing over time of rural-urban migrant men and women. The study seeks to understand economic migrants and the gendered problems they face not just as mobile workers but as husbands or wives and fathers or mothers too. We will explore how our informants' own experiences related to their reports of their spouse's strategies and experience. However we will not interview husband and wife dyads. We will maintain the highest ethical standards in line with the requirements of both the UEA and the Vietnamese Academy. Details of ethical procedures are available on request from the Principal Investigator.

Project Outputs:

Written outputs, presentations and discussion will be used to disseminate our findings with academics, policy-makers, and relevant NGOs in Vietnam, the UK, and internationally making use of existing fora and networks. Three research reports (dealing with contextual information, research findings for Hanoi, and research findings for Ho Chi Minh respectively) and two briefing papers in English and Vietnamese for policy-makers will be freely available for download on the project website and indexed with the Eldis Gateway to Development Information in the UK. At least two articles will be published in scholarly journals. The anonymised dataset will be archived in the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) of the UK.