



“Migrant Youth and Children of Migrants in a Globalized World”
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Summary

Overview of Issue

1. Patterns of migration have changed in the past 40 years.
 - Numbers of people migrating have increased. In 1970, 82 million people lived in different countries than where they were born, compared to 214 million in 2010. In percentage terms, today approximately 3.1 percent of all people do not live in the country where they were born, compared to 2.2 percent in 1970.
 - The direction of migration has changed – many countries that were immigrant-sending (i.e. Spain, Italy, and Germany) are now immigrant-receiving countries.
 - The demographics of who is migrating have also changed – with the numbers of women and children and youth increasing. Of all migrants, 16% are less than 20 years old and of those, 1/3 is under age 10.
 - These changes are taking place against the background of an unprecedented demographic divide, with an aging industrial world and a youthful developing world. In 2005 nearly one-third of the developing world’s population was between ages 10 and 24, precisely the age range that has seen the steepest rise in migration rates.
2. Research has been done on the “feminization of migration” but not on the effects that the changing patterns have on children and youth; migration reports often focus on the labor market, and these often miss children and youth who are migrating but not working in the formal economy because of their ages.
3. Migrant youth face many challenges: new language, new social institutions. The difficulty of the challenges depends on age of migration, whether they migrated with family, the similarity of the country they moved to compared to the one they left, and whether the new country is generally accepting of foreigners. It is important to analyze these challenges in terms of child wellbeing.

Findings

Education

1. Scholastic achievement gaps are wider for migrant youth who arrive at later ages and for youth who do not speak the school language at home. These gaps widen based on a country's institutional arrangements such as the age at which compulsory education begins and the money spent on education. An analysis employing data from 34 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) destinations found that generally the younger children start school, the more benefit to migrant children – but this result is not universal.

Examining Spain and Italy – both relatively new immigrant destinations -- researchers found that largest academic gaps are between children of natives and non-natives. While natives have the best educational outcomes, interestingly children of mixed couples are not far behind, and are ahead of children of non-natives; indeed kids of mixed couples look more like those of natives than those of non-natives. Gaps result equally from socioeconomic background and (lack of) language skills. There are, however, some differences between the two countries, reinforcing the idea that institutional arrangements for migrant youth matter.

- For example, language spoken at home had a bigger impact on school performance in Italy than in Spain, while there is a larger math achievement gap in Spain than in Italy.
 - These differences are largely due to the countries that supply the immigrants and the skill levels that are developed in these home countries. For example, Italy has a preponderance of Eastern Europeans among foreign born youth, while 40 percent of Spain's immigrants come from South America.
 - Both Italy and Spain track students, but Italy does so at younger ages; tracking begins when compulsory schooling starts in Italy compared with after age 16 in Spain. Tracking usually accentuates test score gaps because the more advanced become even more so as they age and take harder classes while the lower performing groups lag. Tracking is, therefore, more strongly associated with test scores in Italy than in Spain.
2. The volume looks at a survey in Italy that assesses the educational aspirations of 8th graders. Family socioeconomic status and a student's friendship ties are associated with where he or she chooses to go to secondary-school (university-bound or vocationally oriented) and whether he or she aspires to go to college. Peer pressures counts -- those in middle schools where at least 1/3 of their native fellow students expect to attend high school are more likely to report that they too want to go to high school, compared to those with fewer highly motivated Italian children.

Social Consequences

1. Family separations often happen, and can be long when father migrates and the mother and children stay behind. Not surprisingly, reunification often depends on the type of family. For example, in a study looking at Senegalese migrants to Europe (Italy, Spain and France), those where the father left behind a polygamous family with many children are usually reunited when

the father returns to Senegal. In contrast, when mothers migrate, the ethnic group follows a maternal lineage, or the family structure is more Western, the family is more likely to follow the migrating parent and settle in Europe.

2. Age of migration matters.
 - a. The earlier children migrate, the better they integrate and do well in their adopted countries. A study looking at children migrating to the United States found that those arriving after age eight are less likely to graduate from high school, are less likely to speak English well if they migrated from a non-English speaking country, are less likely to marry an English speaking person, and are more likely to be married to someone from their original country. These gaps increase the older the child is when he or she arrives in the new country.
 - b. Based on data collected about children migrating to Canada, France, and the U.K., the older the child at arrival, the larger the fertility gap compared to that of natives – that is, immigrants have more children, though the country where the person migrates from also affects fertility.

Physical and Mental Health

1. The “immigrant advantage” is real – that is, immigrant women often engage in healthier behaviors, particularly during pregnancy, than do native born women. They smoke less during pregnancy and around their children, and are more likely to breastfeed than native born women. These behaviors are universal, transcending racial/ethnic and socioeconomic differences. These healthier behaviors persist during their children’s early years – an important finding since most of the previous research uses cross-sectional data and just focuses on the period around the child’s birth. The work in this volume employs longitudinal surveys and studies whether the advantage persists beyond infancy.
2. Minority and immigrant children are generally more at risk for being overweight. With respect to immigrant status, children of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S. have a higher risk of overweight than whites and the same risk as native-born Hispanics. In England children of foreign born black mothers have higher risks of overweight than native born whites and native born blacks.
3. The age the mother migrates does not significantly affect children’s risk of obesity. However, the mother’s obesity matters; for example, in the U.S., a mother’s obesity accounts for 20 to 30 percent of the higher obesity risk among black and Hispanic children born in this country, and for about 10 percent of the higher risk for those children born in the U.K. Moreover, the family’s socioeconomic status and an overweight mother affect the weight of school age children more than those factors affect the weight of toddlers.
4. Given the increase in multi-ethnic families, it is important to examine the social and economic well-being of children of mixed ethnicity. In a study from the U.K., researchers found that

children in parents with mixed parentage face a higher risk of living with parents where neither parents works as compared to children living with parents of the same ethnicity. But this finding depends on the ethnic combination of the couple. Moreover, having parents with different ethnic backgrounds was not associated with social or emotional difficulties at age 3 once risk factors such as maternal depression, education or lone parenthood are controlled for.

Conclusion

This volume looks at child migration through the lens of child development. With the backdrop of changing migration patterns, this volume seeks to identify policies and institutions that can ensure that children who migrate integrate and succeed in their new homes.

Some general takeaway messages:

- The differences in how institutions (such as school systems) are set up matter. For example, on the whole, early tracking of students increases disparities while making school compulsory for younger children decreases disparities. Both – as well as other institutional frameworks that affect child well-being -- are amenable to policy intervention.
- Children do better when they arrive in their adopted countries at younger ages. While policy makers cannot change people's ages, they can shape integration services ---especially language proficiency training---around this fact.