



Disentangling fathers' absences from household remittances in international migration: The case of educational attainment in Guatemala



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ABSTRACT

Estimating the effects of international migration on left-behind children's educational attainment is complicated by the potential offsetting effects of fathers' absences and household remittances. Most research has not separated these aspects of international migration on children's human capital outcomes. We address this deficiency by using instrumental variables to isolate the effects of fathers' international migration absences from international household remittances on student enrollment and grade progression in Guatemala. Results indicate that fathers' absences and household international remittances are negatively related to enrollment, providing evidence for a culture of migration effect. For students who remain in school, household international remittances neutralize the harmful influence of fathers' absences on grade progression.

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1. Introduction

A lively debate has ensued in the literature over the last three decades concerning the value of international migration and remittance transfers to emergent nation development (e.g., Durand et al., 1996; Reichert, 1981). One aspect of this debate addresses the influence of economic migration on left-behind children's education outcomes. Much of this research shows beneficial associations between remittance income and school attendance, enrollment, performance, graduation rates, and reduced dropout (Acosta, 2011; Adams and Cuecuecha, 2010; Antman, 2012; Calero et al., 2009; Edwards and Ureta, 2003; Intemann and Katz, 2014; Kandel and Kao, 2001; Lu and Treiman, 2007; Yang, 2008). In contrast, a growing body of literature (Antman, 2011; Creighton et al., 2009; Halpern-Manners, 2011; Lara, 2015; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2011; Moran-Taylor, 2008b; Schmalzbauer, 2008; Smith, 2005), addresses the more harmful aspects of parental absences due to migration on education metrics (e.g., lack of motivation and/or aspiration to progress in school). While much research has considered migration and remittances separately, few studies have considered how they jointly influence

children's education outcomes (Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo, 2010 is an exception). The separation of remittance effects from migration effects is important because the often-beneficial aspects of remittance transfers may be negatively countered by the long-term absences of household members. Using data from the 2000 Guatemala Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS), this investigation aims to address these research needs by simultaneously measuring the independent effects of a father's international migration and the receipt of household remittances on child education outcomes.

A comparative analysis of remittances and migration effects is not without problems. The most serious methodological issue is that of selection, that is, migrants and their left-behind family members are inherently different either in natural ability or in their collection of tangible and intangible assets from those who do not migrate. Contemporary research has only just started to tackle the issue of migrant selectivity bias. In order to minimize this bias investigators have relied on more sophisticated econometric techniques such as natural experiments, difference-in-differences models, instrumental variables (IVs) and regression discontinuity (Alcaraz et al., 2012; Antman, 2011; Antman, 2012; Carletto et al., 2011; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2011; Nobles, 2011; Nobles, 2007; Robles and Oropesa, 2011). However, only a few investigations have simultaneously accounted for the differential influences of family member absences and remittances on research outcomes. We address this concern by using a simultaneous equation

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modelling framework to measure the independent effects of a father's migration and household remittances on school enrollment and grade progression. The identification of this model is based on the use of IVs. We use measures of historic community migration networks as our migration instrument and US receiving community wage rates as our remittance instrument.

Previous studies that have used IVs to separate remittance effects from migration effects are largely concentrated in the agricultural change literature (Damon, 2010; Quisumbing and McNiven, 2010; Taylor et al., 2003; Vasco, 2011). The one exception in the educational attainment literature used migrant destination employment rates and average real earning as IVs for remittances but did not instrument for migration (Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo, 2010). The authors found a beneficial income effect on school attendance with children residing in remittance-receiving households in the Dominican Republic (DR). However, the positive income effect on school attendance dissipated when children from migrant-sending households were added to all remittance-receiving households. Our investigation expands upon the DR study's methodology by (1) employing IVs to address the independent effects of both fathers' migration and household remittances, (2) looking at multiple indicators of educational attainment (enrollment and grade progression) rather than only school attendance, and (3) using nationally representative Guatemala LSMS rather than the migration-focused Latin American Migration Project DR survey data.

Guatemalan migration to the United States makes for a compelling addition to the heavy Mexico/US migration literature for numerous reasons including (1) Guatemalan migrants are much poorer than their Mexican counterparts; (2) the costs/risks in terms of time, money and safety for undocumented Guatemalan migrants to successfully navigate their way to the United States are much higher than for Mexicans; and (3) Guatemalan migration to the United States has been rare until recently. During Guatemala's thirty-six year civil war that ended in 1996, numerous refugees fled the country to take up residence in neighboring Mexico while very few continued on to the United States (Moran-Taylor, 2008; Morrison, 1993). Guatemalans are now primarily using international migration as a means to alleviate poverty, to enhance social status, and to provide better opportunities for themselves and their children (Adams and Page, 2005; Taylor et al., 2006). To more generally put Guatemalan emigration into perspective, approximately 1.4 million (11%) Guatemalans were living abroad in 2008–97% in the United States and over 70% male (IOM, 2011). This contrasts with just under 500,000 living outside their native country in 1996—the year the peace accords were signed. Remittance transfers have also made nearly a seven-fold jump from US\$ 596 million to US\$ 4 billion between 2000 and 2009—representing 10.8% of Guatemala's GDP for that year. Furthermore, compared with Mexicans, the average Guatemalan earns less than a third of gross national income based on purchasing power parity (4990 versus 16,440 current international dollars in 2012) (World Bank, 2013).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we outline the various theoretical perspectives that motivate our research questions and hypotheses. In Sections 3 and 4, we describe the data and empirical strategy. The results are presented in Section 5. Section 6 provides a discussion, and Section 7 summarizes the broad contributions of this study and outlines directions for future work.

2. Research questions and theoretical framework

How do fathers' absences due to international migration and the receipt of household remittances influence the school enrollment and grade progression of left-behind children in

Guatemala? We hypothesize that a father's absence due to migration will lead to a lower probability of school enrollment and slower grade progression while the receipt of household remittances will have an offsetting beneficial effect on both measures. Corresponding theories that bolster the research hypotheses – separating the disruptive effects associated with fathers' absences from the income effects of remittances – are described below.

2.1. Disruption effects

The disruption hypothesis argues that during the act of migration and the intervening time required to settle in a new location, the normal functioning of the household is disrupted (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1983; Stephen and Bean, 1992). This disruption can negatively affect the educational well-being of left-behind children in a number of ways. First, it is important to consider that migration success is neither immediate nor guaranteed. In the case of undocumented migrants, they must safely and successfully cross two international borders (Guatemala/Mexico and Mexico/United States), avoid migrant predators including dishonest law enforcement officers and criminal organizations while travelling through Mexico and crossing these borders, and find a place to establish themselves in the United States. After settling in the United States, migrants face a new set of obstacles, including obtaining gainful employment and repaying accrued debt that was used to finance the migration journey (*i.e.*, hiring a human smuggler). Furthermore, migration must be considered in respect to the opportunity costs of wages or other benefits of work that could have been made if the migrant remained in the local workforce. Thus, the difficult and lengthy process of reaching the United States and finding steady employment will likely reduce the remittance-related benefits of migration, at least in the short-term.

Second, the absence of a household breadwinner might force children to seek wage labor or to assist with household maintenance and subsistence agricultural activities – likely hampering a child's ability to progress in school (Frank and Wildsmith, 2005). The migration of a father also removes an authority figure that can compel and assist children to excel in school. For example, Creighton et al. (2009) found a higher risk of secondary school dropout in Mexican households with absent fathers compared with two-parent households.

Lastly, and most compellingly, the migration of a father represents a livelihood strategy for left-behind children. If they plan to follow in their fathers' footsteps as future migrants, left-behind children may discount the value of a local education, potentially leading to school absence and non-enrollment. This livelihood strategy is further reinforced at the community level if children reside in areas with a high prevalence of international migration. Within these communities, a "culture of migration" develops such that young people are expected to migrate in order to attain socioeconomic mobility (Kandel and Massey 2002). Halpern-Manners (2011) and McKenzie and Rapoport (2011) have shown evidence of this dynamic in Mexico.

2.2. Income effects

Whether through altruistic motives or enlightened self-interest, migrants who seek wage labor abroad do so with the intention of elevating overall household income (Lucas and Stark, 1985; Stark and Lucas, 1988; Vanwey, 2004). As argued by Becker and others, when household income rises parents tend to invest more in the human capital of their children through education and health expenditures (Becker and Lewis, 1974; Becker and Tomes, 1976; Hildebrandt et al., 2005). Therefore, a rise in household income

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