

Mexican Migrants to the US: What Do Unrealized Migration Intentions Tell Us About Gender Inequalities?

ISABELLE CHORT*

PSL, Université Paris-Dauphine, LEDa, Paris, France

Summary. — This paper exploits unrealized intentions to migrate to highlight mobility constraints. I analyze the discrepancies between Mexicans' intention to migrate and their subsequent migration behavior using the two waves of the Mexican Family Life Survey panel (2002 and 2005–06). I first provide evidence that intentions contain behavioral information. Controlling for various shocks likely to affect the migration decision, I find that women's probability to carry out their migration plans is systematically lower than men's. Different interpretations are investigated, but empirical evidence suggests that women's unrealized migration plans are due to female-specific costs and constraints.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Key words — migration, gender inequalities, intentions, shocks, Mexico

1. INTRODUCTION

The third Millennium Development Goal claims the importance of gender equality and women empowerment for development and poverty reduction. Particular emphasis is being placed on eliminating gender disparities in access to education, which are found to have a detrimental impact on growth (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004), and on the labor market. Although less investigated, the question of an equal access of men and women to migration opportunities, is particularly relevant.

Indeed, although the feminization of migration flows has been acknowledged by scholars and institutions in the last decades, women's mobility is still more constrained than men's in many developing countries. In the context of Mexico, empirical evidence tends to show that women's access to international migration is still partly subordinate on men's (Donato, 1993; Kanaiaupuni, 2000; Curran & Rivero-Fuentes, 2003). Existing studies, however, are based on observed migration flows. This paper pushes the analysis of gender-specific constraints on women's migration one step further by exploiting data on both intentions to migrate and actual migrations. The comparison between intentions and actual moves shows that women have both lower intention to migrate and a lower propensity to realize their migration plans than men. This paper thus uncovers gender-specific constraints affecting the realization of women's migration plans that would have remained invisible without data on migration intentions.

Constraints on women's mobility may have numerous implications. Indeed, although this issue remains largely under-explored, gender inequalities in access to migration, either internal or international, may affect development through different channels, including in particular access to labor market, health, education and fertility decisions, or political participation. Among these many channels, the following three can be singled out. First, women's constraints on geographical mobility are coupled with a limited access to job opportunities (as shown for example by Assaad & Arntz (2005) in the context of Egypt). By improving the economic prospects of women, migration is likely to affect the balance of power within the household through an increase in the share of household resources controlled by women. Women's migration may then

affect the allocation of household resources and the nature of investments, even though Parrado and Flippin (2005) show in the Mexican context that migration does not mechanically result in women empowerment. Second, unfulfilled migration intentions may negatively affect mental health: in an experimental framework, comparing successful to unsuccessful Tongan applicants to a random ballot offering migration opportunities to New-Zealand, Stillman, McKenzie, and Gibson (2009) indeed show that migration improves mental health, especially for women. Third, constraints to women's emigration may dampen the impact of migration, through transfers of norms, on education and fertility (Beine, Docquier, & Schiff, 2009) or female political empowerment (Lodigiani & Salomone, 2012).

This paper relies on intention data which have seldom been used by economists since Manski (1990). Applied here to migration, the analysis of unrealized intentions provides a unique opportunity to identify constraints to individuals' mobility.

Consistent with the best-case hypothesis that individuals' intentions are based on rational expectations (Manski, 1990), the non-realization of their migration plans could be explained by two types of factors. First, unexpected shocks may affect individuals between the moment when they state their intention and the moment when their behavior is determined, leading them to reconsider their decision given their new environment.¹ This paper investigates the impact of different types

* I am grateful to Sylvie Lambert for numerous discussions on earlier versions of this paper, and to François Bourguignon, Eve Caroli, Philippe De Vreyer, Christelle Dumas, Alice Mesnard, Elisabeth Sadoulet, Akiko Suwa-Eisenmann, as well as to two anonymous referees for their helpful comments and suggestions. I also wish to thank the participants at the 2012 ESPE Conference (Bern), the 2012 4th Development Conference of the GRETHA/GRES (Bordeaux), the 2011 AFSE Conference (Nanterre), the 2011 NORFACE and CReAM interdisciplinary conference on migration (UCL, London), the 2010 Third AFD-World Bank International Conference on "Migration and Development" (Paris School of Economics) and at seminars in Grenoble (GAEL), Le Mans (GAINS), Nanterre (Economix), Nice, Paris (Paris School of Economics) and Pau for their comments. Final revision accepted: January 19, 2014.

of shocks that may affect several dimensions of households' capital. Some shock variables used in the paper, such as death or illness of a household member, are measured at the household level while others reflect changes in the environment such as the evolution of violence and crime, and climatic and natural shocks (rainfall, hurricanes, and earthquakes). The emphasis put on climatic shocks, and in particular rainfall, is justified by their expected impact on households' economic outcomes, directly through agricultural yields in rural areas, and through prices in urban environments. The impact of rainfall on migration has been documented in the case of Mexico in particular by [Munshi \(2003\)](#), [Pugatch and Yang \(2011\)](#) or [Feng, Krueger, and Oppenheimer \(2010\)](#). [Halliday \(2006\)](#), on the other hand, studies the emigration of Salvadorans in response to earthquakes. Note in addition that catastrophic natural events such as hurricanes and earthquakes are not uncommon in Mexico, as recently illustrated by the massive flood caused by Hurricane Ingrid in September 2013. More generally a vast literature has developed on the issue of climate-driven migrations, in particular in anticipation of climate change ([Barrios, Bertinelli, & Strobl, 2006](#); [McLeman & Smit, 2006](#); [Tacoli, 2009](#)).

Second, some characteristics of individuals and their household may act as constraints on their mobility or induce higher migration costs. Although most of these characteristics are known when intentions are stated (for example gender or age), they may prevent, foster or delay the realization of migration plans.

The rationale behind the distinction between those two types of factors is to separately examine the impact of exogenous unexpected factors (shocks), and (mostly) endogenous characteristics, known at the intention stage, on the realization of migration plans. A parallel can be made with the livelihoods literature ([Chambers & Conway, 1992](#); [Rakodi, 2002](#)) that makes a difference between household capabilities and assets (captured here by individual and household characteristics), and stresses and shocks that households have to cope with.

I focus in this article on unrealized intentions to migrate of Mexican adults. I exploit the panel structure of the Mexican Family Life Survey (MxFLS) to compare intentions to migrate to subsequent moves. I use data on migration intentions collected in the first wave of the survey (2002) and information on migration behaviors between the two survey waves, available in the second wave (2005–06). I first provide empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that migration intentions contain behavioral information.

I then investigate the role of exogenous shocks and individual and household characteristics in explaining observed discrepancies between stated intentions and actual migration. I estimate bivariate probit models for migration intentions and mobility behaviors. I construct different sets of shock variables, using in particular long time series of rainfall data. Climatic shocks are found to affect migration but they appear to be only part of the story: the largest shift in selection between intentions and migration is related to gender. Conditional on initial intentions, women are found to be much less likely to migrate than men, in particular when they have children or no family network abroad. This finding is consistent with the existence of female-specific constraints to migration, but alternative interpretations are plausible. I discuss and test the two main competing hypotheses of different time preferences of men and women, and joint migration decisions at the household level. Empirical findings do not support these last two interpretations and rather suggest that social and family constraints explain why women migrate less than men conditional on their intention.

This paper contributes to the literature in several ways.

First, thanks to the use of intention data, I am able to highlight an undocumented aspect of gender inequalities in access to international migration. I add to the empirical literature on migration and gender in the context of Mexico ([Donato, 1993](#); [Kanaiaupuni, 2000](#); [Curran & Rivero-Fuentes, 2003](#)) by studying the role of gender in explaining the non-realization of migration plans. Among the different interpretations of the gender effect discussed in this paper, the most plausible points to the existence of specific constraints to women's international migration. This paper brings empirical evidence that women's migration, and in particular international migration, is more constrained than men's, and emphasizes the role of family constraints and networks in explaining such a gender selectivity, consistent with earlier findings in the empirical literature (and in particular in [Donato \(1993\)](#), [Kanaiaupuni \(2000\)](#) and [Curran & Rivero-Fuentes \(2003\)](#)), while an extensive review is provided by [Chant & Craske \(2003\)](#)). While this feature has implications on the skill composition of the female emigrant population ([Docquier, Marfouk, Salomone, & Sekkat, 2012](#)), it also raises the crucial issue of gender inequality. In one of the first papers specifically addressing the issue of Mexican women's migration, [Donato \(1993\)](#) tests the assumption that migration, as a family strategy, results in sending male members to work in the United States while women, assigned to their traditional role of spouses and mothers, would stay behind. She indeed finds evidence of family migration, women's migration being conditioned by the prior successful migration of either their husband or father. In a more recent study, [Kanaiaupuni \(2000\)](#) finds that women's lower probability to migrate may be due to the traditional roles devoted to women in the family organization. The predominant family reunification motive for female migration tends to make women "associational" migrants ([Kanaiaupuni \(2000\)](#), quoting a term coined by [Balan \(1981\)](#)). Building on this empirical literature, [Curran and Rivero-Fuentes \(2003\)](#) investigate the dynamics of the gender dimension of Mexican migration flows by exploring the potentially different impact of migrant networks depending on their gender composition on male and female migration. Their findings confirm the existence of higher barriers to female than to male international migration. While the gender selectivity of actual international migration flows is not necessarily problematic, as truly noted by [Chant and Craske \(2003\)](#), it may be more so once it is established that part of it is due to women being prevented from realizing their migration plans. In this regard, by focusing on the comparison between migration intentions and actual moves, this paper unveils a novel dimension of gender inequalities related to migration.

Second, this paper is one of the first to exploit divergences between intentions and behaviors after they had been analyzed by [Manski \(1990\)](#). [Manski \(1990\)](#) rightly argues that even in the "best-case" hypothesis of rational expectations, discrepancies between intentions and observed actions must be interpreted cautiously. Indeed, intentions are stated by individuals depending on their known characteristics but also on unknown realizations of future events. Using panel data containing retrospective information merged to additional data on climatic events and crime statistics, I am able to account for a large range of shocks that are likely to affect the realization of migration intentions. This set includes health shocks, death of a household member, economic shocks, rainfall, natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes), and crime. This paper explores the determinants of unrealized migration intentions, once various sets of potential shocks are accounted for. More specifically, this paper is one of the first economic

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7395211>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7395211>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)