

# Review of: "Impact of Men's Labour Migration on Non-migrating Spouses' Health: A Systematic Review"

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Thanks for the opportunity to review this article.

This is a systematic review of the articles that have been published since 2005 on academic journals on the effects of marital migration on the health of the wives left behind.

The Authors did an important work in order to identify the relevant articles and this is admirable. It is always useful to find in a single document all the relevant information on a specific topic.

I hope that the points below will help the Authors to improve the review.

Authors do not provide a critical assessment of the quality of the studies, that are all considered at the same level. Thus, the reader is unable to understand which findings are based on good quality studies, and which ones are not. This is questionable because the migration literature has shown that it is not easy to estimate the causal effect of migration on individuals left-behind. Three main identification problems arise: (i) selection biases: migrants are not randomly selected among the individuals in the population and left behind members are not randomly selected among the family members; (ii) endogenous household composition: migration often determines important changes in the composition of the household and (iii) reverse causality: some outcomes of interest can be a cause, not only a consequence, of migration decision (e.g. an individual can decide to migrate because his spouse is ill and he wants to earn money for healthcare expenditures).

Specific statistical tools need to be used in order to find an appropriate counterfactual group to which the group of male migrants can be compared.

It would be important to indicate which studies have addressed these identification issues and with which methodologies. I thus strongly recommend the Authors add in the article a section that discusses the methodology used in the papers.

Presently, Table 1 only presents the study design and the study population. The methodology and the source of data could be added to the table.

Adding this section, and thus a more critical regard to the articles, would naturally lead the authors to change the conclusions of their paper. At present, the concluding remarks are based on the hypothesis that all the papers cited in the article are good quality ones and thus that their findings are equally meaningful. I am not sure that it is the case and I suspect that the authors agree on this point because in the 'future research' section, they mention the need for 'strong

methods' to build 'a stronger evidence base'. It is strange to read this in the concluding section when no relevant remark on the weaknesses of the methods has been done in the previous part of the paper.

An important strand of the economic literature is missing in the review. It is the literature on the female headship, that naturally includes women left behind by migrants because an important part of women who are head of the household are spouses of migrants (among others Klasen et al. 2011; Milazzo and van de Walle, 2017). Several papers studied the poverty and nutritional status of those women (see for example Djuikom and van de Walle 2022). I strongly suggest the authors to look at that literature and to integrate the relevant articles in their review.

The Authors could also consider including literature on the health and nutritional effect of parents' migration on the children left behind (see for example: Démurger, 2015; Fellmeth et al., 2018)

The conclusion on the necessity for the government to provide employment opportunities to the population "so that migration as an unavoidable livelihood strategy can be avoided" seems naïve. It is not because of the possible negative effect of male migration on the spouse's health that government needs to provide employment opportunities to their population. What if the studies had found a positive effect? Should governments disregard employment creation and encourage emigration? I strongly encourage authors to refocus their concluding remarks on health policies that particularly focus on women left behind.

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