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Emerging findings from STUDY ON WORK IN FREEDOM TRANSNATIONAL (SWiFT) Evaluation

Gender and internal labour migration from Odisha, India

This research brief presents initial findings on the gender dimensions of internal migration within India. The findings, based on research in Odisha, are part of a larger study, which aims to inform interventions to reduce the risks of migration-related exploitation and abuse. Findings will be of interest to policy makers and practitioners working in the fields of gender, labour migration, and forced labour.

BACKGROUND

Odisha is a state with relatively high, and growing, rates of labour migration. Both seasonal and longer-term female and male migration rates are amongst the highest in India.[i] Pressures to migrate, for at least part of the year, are created by a largely agrarian economy, high rates of poverty and inequality, infringements of customary land rights, frequent natural hazards, and ongoing political violence.[ii]

This study contributes to emerging research focusing on women's labour migration and the gender dimensions of labour migration more broadly versus the historically narrow view of women's mobility as primarily for marriage and family reunification.[iii]

HOUSEHOLD CENSUS

As a sampling frame, a census of 4,671 households in 20 probabilistically sampled villages identified households with migrant women in two blocks of Ganjam District, Odisha in May and June 2016. Census questions covered household composition, demographics, economics and current, past, and planned labour migration episodes. The census was conducted face-to-face, in Odiya language. The response rate was over 99%.

This brief presents the results of descriptive and inferential statistical analysis exploring the associations of village and household characteristics on labour migration outcomes

Summary findings

- 45% of census households have at least one member who has migrated for work

- 12.5% of households have one or more household members who intend to migrate for work within 12 months.

- Labour migration is a highly gendered activity. 44% of households have male migrants and 7% female

- Migrant worker households are geographically clustered and widely dispersed

- The majority of migration is short-term, usually seasonal or cyclical, and lasting less than 10 months

- 'Intention to migrate' is much higher for households with current or prior experience of migration

- Dalit households have the highest proportions of both male and female labour migration

- Labour migration is less prevalent among the poorest and the wealthiest household quartiles

- For both women and men, migration is inversely associated with the number of dependent children and is positively associated with household size

### How prevalent is labour migration in Ganjam district, Odisha?

Migrating for work is a disproportionately male activity in our study setting (as it is throughout India). While 44% of households reported male household members had migrated for work, the corresponding figure for women was 7%. This latter figure is not inconsequential. It should be understood within the context of caste and class-based sanctions on female mobility,[v] declines in female participation in the Indian labour market more widely,[vi] and the restrictive definition of 'labour migration' we employ, in keeping with the study aims.

Duration of migration

Among the 45% of households with former male or female current migrant workers:

- **63%** reported **medium-term temporary migration** of more than 10 months
- **33%** reported **short-term migration** of less than 10 months, indicative of cyclical and seasonal migration
- **5%** reported **permanent migration**, in which household members formally settled at the destination
- **2.7%** reported **migration episodes of varying duration**.

FIGURE 1: Duration of migration

- short-term migration
- medium-term migration
- permanent migration
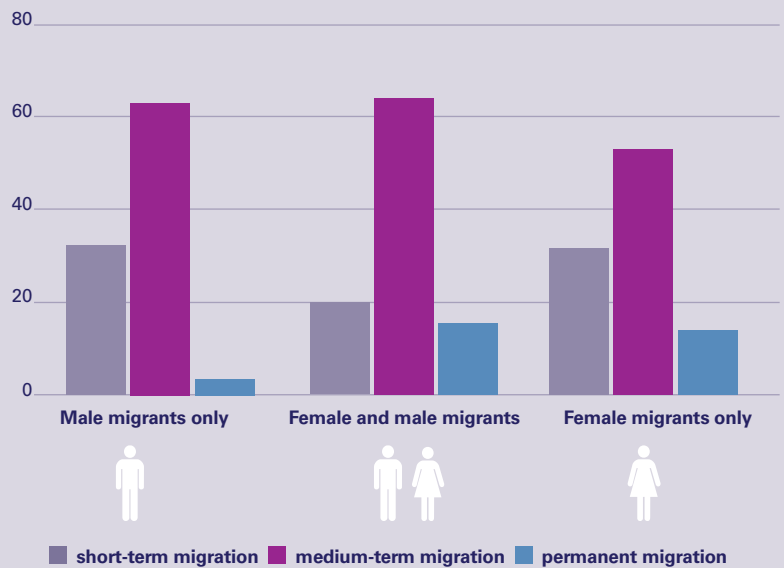
Who is most likely to migrate?

Previous history of household migration

Future migration plans are most prevalent among households with prior experience of labour migration. One-quarter (24.8%) of households with current or former migrants reported that a household member was actively planning to migrate for work in the next 12 months, while the corresponding figure for households with no prior experience was 2.6%.[1]

Caste, religion and socio-economic status

Caste and socioeconomic status are both implicated in household labour migration profiles. Of the four broad caste groups, Dalit households were most likely to report that one or more member had migrated for work (52.9%), followed by 'other backwards' (OBC) classified households (41.6%), Adivasi households (36.6%) and 'General' caste households (30%). The same pattern is observed for household history of male migration: Dalit households (51.5%), OBC households (41.6%) Adivasi (35.7%), and General castes (29.5%).

The statistical association between caste and female migration was not statistically significant (see table one for regression results). It is likely that religion is doing the explanatory work of caste, since both Hindu religion and 'high' caste status can result in restrictions on women's mobility.[vii]

Non-Hindu households are more likely than Hindu households to have a history of migration overall (54% compared with 43%), male labour migration (49.8% vs. 43.2%) and female labour migration (13.4% vs. 4.9%). Female labour migration is 2.5 times greater among non-Hindu (Christian) households than among Hindu households. This is consistent with the operation of greater (religious-based) sanctions on Hindu women's mobility.[viii]

Land ownership and wealth

Similar proportions of landless (43.6) and land-holding (45.8%) households reported that a household member had migrated for work. Landholdings did not predict male migration, but were a significant predictor of women's migration. The more land a household owns, the less likely it is that women in the household have migrated for work. This is in keeping with prevalent social norms discouraging women's labour market participation where a household's economic circumstances permit.[ix]

Labour migration is lowest among both the poorest and wealthiest household quartiles. Less than one-third of the poorest and wealthiest households have a history of labour migration, compared with about half of poor (49.9%) and mid-level households (44%). This is consistent with broader findings in India and elsewhere that, under normal conditions, migration is rarely undertaken by those with no, or extremely meagre, resources.[x] The very poorest households and individuals do not tend to migrate unless compelled by natural disasters, forced evictions, or a similarly strong impetus.

Household size and composition

Household size and composition are significantly associated with household migration. With each additional household member, odds of migration (whether male or female) increased 1.3 fold.
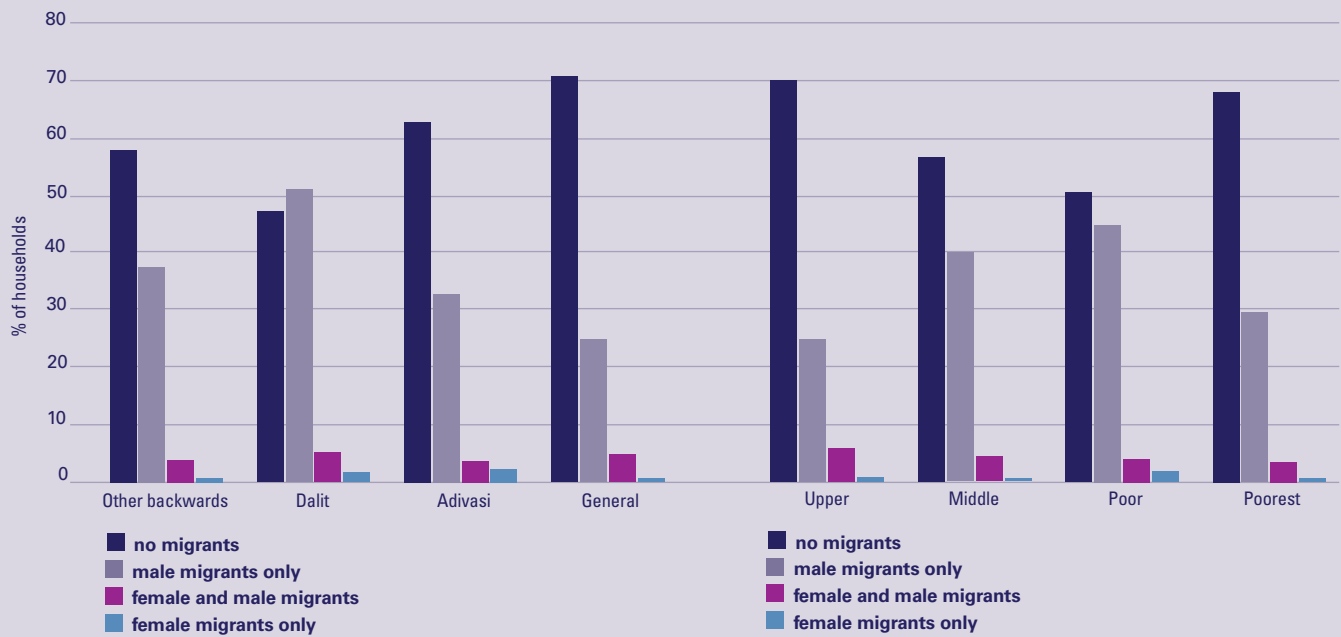
The number of children in the household also influenced the probability of household members migrating. For every additional child (aged 14 and under) in the household, the odds of migration decreased.

1. The statistical significance level for all reported analysis was set at 5% (p = <0.05).

FIGURE 2: Caste, religion, and socio-economic status

Figure 2a: Caste and household migration status

Figure 2b: Wealth and household migration status

Legend (Figure 2a):
- no migrants
- male migrants only
- female and male migrants
- female migrants only

Legend (Figure 2b):
- no migrants
- male migrants only
- female and male migrants
- female migrants only

Variation by village

Migration in the study setting is highly geographically clustered at the village unit. Female migration rates range from zero in some villages to 13.6% in others (almost double the average), while male migration rates range from 23.4% to 76.5%. The presence of geographical 'clustering' of out-migration is recognised in the literature, and is typically attributed to peer-emulation and/or the operation of localised recruitment networks.[xi]

Clustering indicates that household migration propensities are similar, or coalesce, within villages, such that households in the same village share a similar migration propensity. Multi-level regression analysis demonstrates, however, that differences between villages per se accounts for little of the variation in household's labour migration propensity, compared with differences between households. In the case of female labour migration propensity, the analysis demonstrates that a household is no more 'alike' other households in the same village than households in different villages. In the case of male labour migration, there is evidence of a small 'village effect', with 11% of variance attributable to differences between villages. Village level clustering has important implications for programme-targeting, especially in circumstances where the intended target area is large, or villages are spread out or difficult to reach. In the absence of evidence for generalised village-level drivers of migration, (coupled with the absence of secondary data on village-level migration rates), identifying 'target' villages can be time-consuming and expensive.

TABLE 1: Regression results for household migration

	Model I: Female migration		Model II: Male migration	
	Odds ratio (Std. Err)	P value	Odds ratio (Std. Err)	P value
Household landholding (log)	0.981 (0.009)	0.038	0.991 (0.005)	0.057
Non-Hindu religion (reference category is Hindu)	2.344 (0.536)	0.000	1.166 (0.179)	0.317
Dalit caste (reference category is OBC)	1.317 (0.214)	0.090	1.554 (0.126)	0.000
Adivasi (reference category is OBC)	1.429 (0.359)	0.156	0.623 (0.090)	0.001
General caste (reference category is OBC)	1.144 (0.305)	0.613	0.597 (0.084)	0.000
Household size	1.263 (0.037)	0.000	1.320 (0.026)	0.000
Number of children resident in household	0.833 (0.046)	0.001	0.825 (0.026)	0.000
Constant	0.014 (0.003)	0.000	0.297 (0.052)	0.000

n = 4,671 households. Statistical significance level set to 0.05

RECOMMENDATIONS

Programmes aiming to promote safe migration and/or prevent trafficking in this setting would benefit from:

- **Tools to aid rapid identification of villages with high concentrations of labour migration:**

   Identifying where best to concentrate programme funds presents a major challenge in contexts where there is limited data on labour migration rates prior to intervention roll-out. Traditional rapid appraisal techniques may not be suitable in contexts where there is stigma around women's labour migration. New tools and approaches are needed to respond to this challenge.

- **Rolling, continuous, or 'peak-time' programme presence in high migration areas:**

   The timing of programmes is essential for effective outreach. Different migrant populations are present at different times, and presence may not mean availability. For seasonal and cyclical migrants, returning 'home' generally coincides with the busy agricultural season. Among medium and long-term migrants, return visits generally coincide with important festivals, when project staff may be unavailable. The creation of locally staffed migrant advice services is one possible response to these fluxuations.

- **Measures to specifically target households with current or prior migrants:**

   Members of such households are much more likely to migrate and re-migrate. Programmes should consider how the needs of experienced and novice migrant workers may vary.

- **Measures to develop and strengthen local migrant networks for peer-to-peer information interventions:**

   Creating and maintaining local peer-to-peer networks for information sharing and support may help ensure programme sustainability, while integrating the experience and knowledge of migrant workers themselves. Care should be taken to ensure participation in such networks does not further isolate or stigmatise women migrant workers.

- **Content sensitive to the effects of caste and religion based restrictions on women's mobility and labour market participation on migration opportunities, risks, and strategies:**

   Programmes should consider how the social acceptability of women's migration varies with life-stage, caste, religion and class, and the implications this has for outreach.

ENDNOTES

i. NSSO (2010) *Migration in India 2007–2008*, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO): New Delhi.

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viii. Jose, S. (2007). *Women, Paid Work and Empowerment in India: A Review of Evidence and Issues*. New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies.

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xi. Iversen, V., Sen, K., Verschoor, A., and Dubey, A. (2009) Job Recruitment Networks and Migration to Cities in India, *The Journal of Development Studies*, 45:4, 522–543, DOI: 10.1080/00220380902725688.