

> Urban Migration of Adolescent Girls

By Mark R. Montgomery, Senior Associate, Population Council; Professor of Economics, Stony Brook University

Internal migration is one of the fundamental processes by which poor countries transform themselves, with a well-recognized role in propelling national economic growth (Lewis 1954; World Bank 2009). It is equally significant in the lives of individuals. For all who migrate—girls and women, boys and men—the move marks a transition from one environment that is relatively familiar to another about which much may be unknown. In making the passage from the known to unknown, each migrant is likely to confront a range of risks and social dislocations, doing so in the hope of securing better life-prospects for the long term.

Protection and safe passage are especially important for adolescent girls. The period from age 10 to 19 is fraught with risk yet also rich with opportunity, a time of multiple transitions when many girls leave their parents and natal homes for new surroundings. Many types of evidence are needed to illuminate girls' lives, but knowledge of the size of migration flows and their demographic composition is essential to understanding the scale of program resources required to reach girls in need, and to get a sense of where within a country and a city those resources would be best deployed.

The focus on urban destinations is justified in part by the remarkable demographic transformation that is underway world-wide. According to demographic forecasts, the countries of the developing world will grow by nearly 3 billion in total population by 2050, with nearly all of this growth taking place in their cities and towns (United Nations 2012). By 2030, the populations of rural areas are forecast to be on the decline. The more fundamental rationale, however, has less to do with demography than with governance. Cities are important settings in which to consider adolescent girls because of their potential to connect girls to the resources that could provide both protection and opportunity. Cities are places where all manner of resources—capital, institutions, government—are concentrated. A well-governed city provides even its poor and newly-arrived residents with ready access to

good schools, effective health care, and beneficial social services. But if a city's governance system bears little resemblance to this ideal, new migrants can find themselves socially excluded and unable to take advantage of resources that may be no more than a stone's throw away.

WHERE AND WITH WHOM DO MIGRANT GIRLS LIVE?

The literature is often read to suggest that urban migrants live, disproportionately, in slums. And yet in an analysis of demographic data from the Demographic and Health Surveys and census microsamples (Montgomery et al. 2015), colleagues and I have found that in-migrant urban girls are no more or less likely to live in homes with inadequate drinking water and sanitation than are urban non-migrant girls. No doubt many of these girls do live in slums of one kind or another—child domestic workers may be an exception—but these slums can differ greatly in ways that affect the access of migrant girls to transport, employment, health, and other services (UN-Habitat 2003). Slums can also vary in terms of the communal energies they can bring to sustain women's groups and associations of the poor, which provide poor city dwellers with a collective identity and give them voice in the halls of local government. After all, adolescent girls are unlikely by themselves to be able to influence local government programs and services; they could only hope to do so if local women's groups, groups of the poor, and local NGOs begin to speak on their behalf.

Whether or not they reside in slums, migrant urban girls often live in what would appear to be socially isolating circumstances: most such girls are unmarried at the time of their move and after arrival, they are much less likely to reside in households headed by a relative, and also less likely to live with a mother, father, or spouse. But so far as I am aware, no quantitative demographic survey has asked about relatives living nearby, for instance in the same city as a newly-arrived migrant

girl. In an insightful qualitative account of migrants in Indore, India, new migrants whose family members were already in Indore were found to be more fortunate than isolated migrants: they could call upon at least a small network of social resources to ease the process of adjustment. As Agarwal and Jones (2012) write,

Migrants living in these slums typically had family connections in the area, which were instrumental in the decision to migrate and certainly in the choice of migration destination. ...On arrival in the city, relatives provided considerable informational and practical support, such as arranging accommodation in their own or a rented home for the initial period. In this way, migrating to join family connections provided not only familiarity but also security for girls and their families.

For the migrant girls who had no option but to live with non-relatives and far from family, connections can nevertheless be maintained between the elder females of the migrant's city household and her parents in the village home (Temin et al. 2013).

With the aid of modern technologies, it is no longer obvious that to be accessible, personal and social resources must be nearby in the geographic sense. An emerging literature, mainly based on small qualitative and quantitative studies of China and countries in Southeast Asia, suggests that migrant girls in these regions are actively constructing their own geographically far-flung personal networks through the use of mobile phones and text messaging (Bunmak 2012; Lin and Tong 2008; Ngan and Ma 2008; Yang 2008). The phenomenon is especially marked among the migrant “factory girls” who work very long hours in tedious jobs, and who enjoy precious few opportunities to savor leisure time in the company of friends and family. For them, text messaging becomes a form of virtual social life that maintains connections with parents and family, and which sustains friendships and allows space for a bit of flirtation and experimentation with attractive identities (as through the adoption of “beautiful” on-line names and other communication tactics).

DO MIGRANT GIRLS CONTINUE TO BUILD THEIR HUMAN CAPITAL?

As a group, young migrant girls have levels of education that exceed those of rural non-migrant girls, but which fall short of the education attained by non-migrant urban girls of the same age. Even so—a point that is very

often overlooked—a significant percentage of migrant girls are able to continue their schooling after arrival. The Indore, India study (Agarwal and Jones 2012) provides insight into what is entailed when a migrant girl attempts to enroll in school:

Enrollment was a challenge for some girls: on making contact with a school in the city, girls and their families were asked for a range of documents, including certificates of their school results, transfer certificates, and case certificates for accessing scholarships. [The] implications included having to return to the village to obtain the necessary documents, paying bribes, or even having to change the choice of school. ...Girls could be entered into a class behind their age peers if they had not attained the required educational standards. ...More serious implications...were that girls might not enroll for fear of being unable to cope with the [urban] education level, or enrolling to leave soon afterwards because they were unable to keep up with their peers.

These difficulties were especially apparent among girls who had not been to school in some time—the gap in their training made re-entry a challenge. This is an area in which specially-focused programs and interventions might make a significant difference.

MIGRANTS AND ASSOCIATIONS OF THE URBAN POOR

The literature has yet to explore the potential of one prominent form of urban social capital—urban women's groups and associations of the urban poor—to benefit newly-arrived migrants. These community-based associations figure hardly at all in most accounts of urban adolescents and migrant girls, but in much of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, they have proven to be vital intermediaries—a type of bridging social capital—that have served to link poor urban-dwellers to the larger structures of government and civil society where greater resources are held than in the poor communities themselves.

In the well-documented case of India, associations of slum-dwellers have provided the poor with effective “voice” in local bureaucratic and political circles (Appadurai 2001; Burra, Patel, and Kerr 2003; Wit 2002; Garau, Sclar, and Carolini 2005; D’Cruz and Satterthwaite 2005; Karanja 2010; Pervaiz, Rahman, and Hasan 2008). These groups have emerged over the past 25 years, beginning in Asia, and then spreading to

sub-Saharan Africa and to an extent also to Latin America. It is only recently that adolescent programming has begun to take advantage of these developments, and only recently that urban poor associations—which employ community mobilization as a means of securing adequate housing, sanitation, and water supply—have recognized migrants and adolescents as significant community sub-groups warranting attention. In their activities to date, the large slum-dweller associations have not taken the specific concerns of adolescent migrant girls into account, being more focused on securing housing and adequate drinking water and sanitation—but there is no reason to think that greater breadth cannot be achieved.

In Indore, Agarwal and Jones (2012) note the difficulties that migrants face in learning about and taking part in such local associations:

In regards to women and children's groups, although many girls were aware of the concept, they were unaware of the groups available within their own neighbourhoods. They also feared what would be expected of them or where they would have to go if they agreed to participate. Moreover, women's group members themselves expressed that people in the community tend not to invite recent migrants to social activities and groups until they are acquainted and unless they are certain that the migrants intend to stay on a more permanent basis. Yet, many adolescent girls have little opportunity initially to become acquainted with others.

These barriers are especially formidable for temporary migrants. In Indore as in many Indian cities, an Anganwadi center is an important source of nutritional supplementation and basic health care for community members, including adolescent girls. But center staff are often reluctant to enroll temporary migrants, whom they suspect will soon leave and create havoc in record-keeping, thus exposing staff to criticism from higher-ups. Agarwal and Jones (2012) conclude that frontline workers and NGO staff may need to be sensitized to the situations of migrant girls, and be sufficiently flexible to allow even temporary migrants to participate in programs as appropriate. Clearly, creative program and outreach efforts will be needed if migrant girls are to be welcomed and fully incorporated in urban community groups, which are present in many cities and in principle could assist new migrants to settle in.

Women's groups and associations of the urban poor would therefore seem to have much to contribute to easing migrant's integration into the community. Married adolescent girls could be encouraged to become members of women's groups, and encouraging full group membership for mothers of girls from migrant families could work to the benefit of these younger migrants and perhaps raise the overall profile of migrants in the group's concerns. Women's groups should be sufficiently flexible to allow for girls' circumstances: for example, a girl whose length of residence is uncertain could delay joining the savings and loans activities until she feels more rooted in the community, but meanwhile could take part in other group activities.

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