

Redefining Migration: Gender and Temporary Labor Migration in South Africa*

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Abstract

We use data from the Agincourt Demographic and Health Surveillance System in rural South Africa to investigate sex differences in temporary labor migration from 1992-2006. Using a gendered lens we first redefine temporary labor migration to allow for sex differences in labor and residency pattern. Changing the definition of temporary labor migration increases the incidence of temporary labor migration and clarifies sex differences in the recent circular migration trends in South Africa. We then examine sex differences in migration transitions and find that adult women have a much higher transition rate than adult men. Finally, we conduct a survival analysis of temporary labor migrations that demonstrate a lower survival function and higher hazard function for women's temporary labor migrations. These findings suggest that women's temporary labor migrations are more tenuous than men's and that more research is needed to find out how men and women's labor migrations are differentially related to household livelihood strategies in rural South Africa.

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Introduction

Apartheid era's spatial and social structuring policies have led to a long and distinctive history of human migration in South Africa. One consequence of such social engineering policies was the creation of "inforced impermanence in the urbanization process of the South African black population" (Collinson et al 2006:194). As a result the country has seen delayed 'mobility transition.' More than a decade into democracy, urban growth patterns are still predominantly a result of migration process rather than a case of natural increase (Cross 2000). With the end of apartheid, it was expected that circular or oscillatory migration would come to a halt and more permanent patterns of settlement (i.e. gravity flows) would emerge. But South Africa has continued to defy these projections. One of the key reasons postulated for complexity and circularity in internal migration is that the labor absorption in the urban areas has remained low, but so have returns from agriculture. Livelihood uncertainty has invariably created a need for diverse livelihoods as well as 'complex non-wage strategies' (Cross 2000). In such circumstances, migration has become a key livelihood strategy, not only for individuals but for the whole household. However, the uncertainty of entry into the formal urban labor market and the ever growing competition within the informal sector (as South African cities become nodes of internal and international migration), creates an imperative for migrants to maintain significant linkages to rural homes. These act as buffers or safety nets in times of economic or health related crises.

Another reason for unexpected increase in circular migration since democratization is the addition of women to the temporary migration flows (Posel 2006). In addition to the delayed mobility transition, Influx Control Acts also created an unusual sex differential in the migration streams by facilitating massive migration of economically productive males from rural to urban areas, while restricting women's migration. Black Africans' migration to cities was allowed only in resonance with the need for their labor, particularly in the formal sector. Women were rarely employed in the formal sector and were thus redundant (Bozzoli, 1991). Although there did exist instances of migrant women workers during the apartheid years, it is only since the abolition of such mobility restriction laws that women have visibly entered mainstream labor force and joined the labor related migration streams. Along with this, the decline in the sources of patriarchal control (especially the authority of chiefs in rural areas) has also had increased women's freedom of mobility. In 1995, 38 percent of all females between the ages of 15 and 65 were either working or actively looking for work in South Africa, and by 1999, this had increased to 47 percent (Casale and Posel, 2002). This phenomenon, often termed as 'feminization of migration,' has led to a "significant gender reconfiguration of migration streams" (SAMP, 2004:1).

Although the nature and prevalence of migration patterns, especially the circularity of temporary labor migration, has been subject to much speculation in the past few years (Cross et al 1998, Bekker 2002, Collinson et al 2006, Ndegwa et al, (2004)), less attention has been given to the gendered transition in

temporary labor migration. The increase in women's labor migration during the 1990s has been demonstrated in national surveys to coincide with both increasing instability in the labor market and decreasing marital rates among women (Posel 2006: 228). Posel (2006) suggests that women may be being pushed into the labor market by income insecurity in rural households and/or gaining greater freedom from control by men. Data limitations, however, have prevented researchers from distinguishing between the effects of economic insecurity and women's empowerment in post-apartheid South Africa (Posel 2006). Given that migration and its surveillance was seen as an apartheid obsession, the post democracy government has tended to shift its focus away from migration oriented data collection. As a result, "the coverage of labour migration in national survey instruments in South Africa declined during the 1990s, and then ceased in 2000" (Posel, 2003:1).

Therefore, "studies that give us a genuinely gendered understanding of the migration process, of the division of labor and its consequences for women's socio-economic status or health outcomes are scarce, especially in southern Africa" (Singh, 2007). The resultant problem is that the existing conceptual models are not gender-sensitive and therefore inadequate to explain the relationship between gender, migration and livelihoods. Gender-sensitivity, according to Boyd (2003), does not only mean using gender as a variable in a study or being aware of growing male or female participation in a particular field. Instead, it includes an understanding of how gender impacts on particular processes (in this case, labor migration) and how it is implicated in broader

structural dynamics that are supposedly gender-neutral (such as the livelihood strategies and other triggers of migration).

Fortunately, valuable work has continued to be carried out by demographic surveillance sites that have collected longitudinal data on labor migration. We use data from the Agincourt Health and Demographic Surveillance Site (AHDSS), located in a rural area of northeast South Africa, to look at the gendered nature of temporary labor migration in South Africa. Annual data collection in this site has been running since 1992 and this rich longitudinal data provides an important opportunity to investigate differences in male and female temporary labor migration. A good deal of research on migration has already been done using the AHDSS, including some research on sex differences in temporary female labor migration (see Collinson et al. 2006). This research, however, has not paid explicit attention to the gendered nature of mobility and its influence on the adaptive mechanisms in labor migration.

Aims

Our substantive concern is to contribute to a gendered understanding of temporary labor migration patterns and argue for new ways of incorporating sex differences in demographic analyses of migration. The paper examines sex differences in the duration and patterns of temporary migration through a gendered lens by analyzing the Agincourt HDSS data in the following ways. First, we explore the question of definition by asking whether measures of temporary labor migration adequately account for the gendered division of labor and,

particularly, sex differences in residential patterns in the rural (sending) area. We hypothesize that redefining the duration of migrations to include shorter time periods will better reflect women's rural residential patterns and capture more temporary female migrants. We expect that including more women by varying the definition may provide greater information about changes in patterns of temporary labor migration in South Africa. Second, we examine sex differentials in individual temporary migration patterns. We hypothesize that women's involvement in the informal labor market makes women's labor migrations more tenuous and may result in sex difference in the individual patterns of migration over time.

Data, study population and setting

The subdistrict of Agincourt is part of a former homeland in the district of Bushbuckridge and is located 500 kilometers northeast of Johannesburg. The Agincourt Health and Demographic Surveillance System currently includes 70,272 people from 11,665 households in 21 villages. The population has low levels of education, high rates of unemployment and high rates of circular labor migration (Tollman 1999). Our analysis will use individual data on residency status and residency patterns from the AHDSS. The AHDSS captures internal migration within the rural sub-district, in and out migration, as well as temporary migration. A temporary migrant is defined as a labor migrant who resides in the household for less than six months but whose return is assumed by the household respondent. Using this definition, Collinson et al (2006) found that

from 1992-2004, males age 15-50 had a high probability (60%) of becoming a temporary labor migrant; while women age 20-44 had a lower probability (25%) of becoming a temporary labor migrant. Women's temporary labor migration, however, has undergone a dramatic rise since about 1997 (Collinson et al 2006).

Results

Redefining Temporary Labor Migration

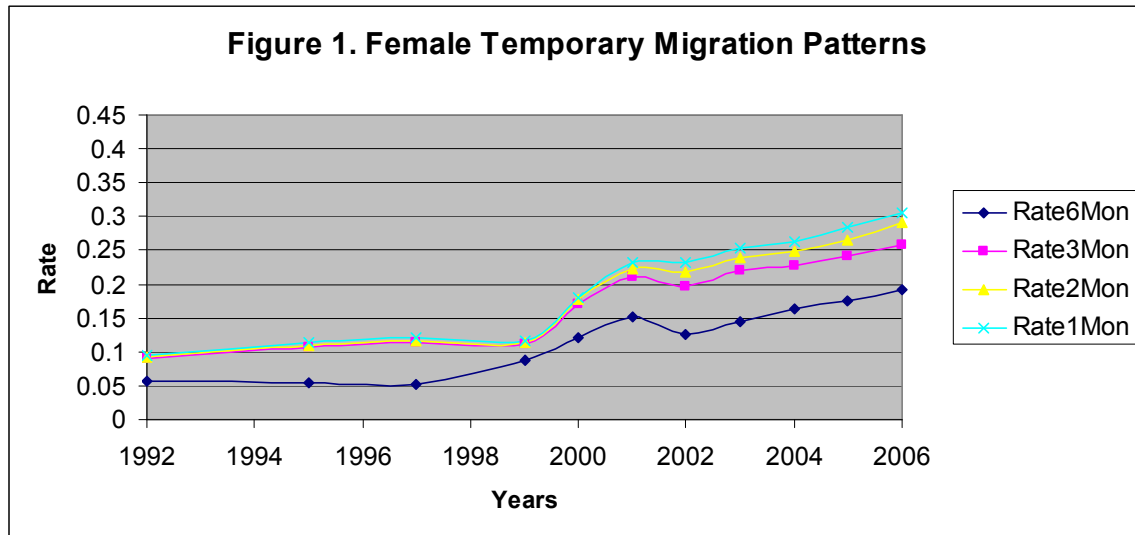
Within the Agincourt HDSS, the field definition used to identify temporary labor migration is the time of residence in the site. Someone who is away from the household for six months or more is considered a temporary labor migrant. The use of a six month cutoff is somewhat arbitrary and other definitions are used in other studies. Indeed, there is evidence that this definition of temporary migration may undercount female temporary migration. For example, female temporary migrants in the Agincourt area are more likely to work in the informal sector (45% of female labor migrants vs. 37% of male labor migrants) and a higher proportion of female temporary migrants work in the unskilled informal sector than men (25% vs. 16%) (Collinson et al. 2006). Since the informal sector is less stable and the labor is more likely to be seasonal (such as agricultural labor), it is possible that women leaving home to work for less than six months out of the year are being missed by the annual census update in the area. Previous research, therefore, may be biased by an undercount of female temporary labor migrants. We tested this hypothesis by both redefining

temporary labor migration and examining residential patterns of those currently considered temporary labor migrants.

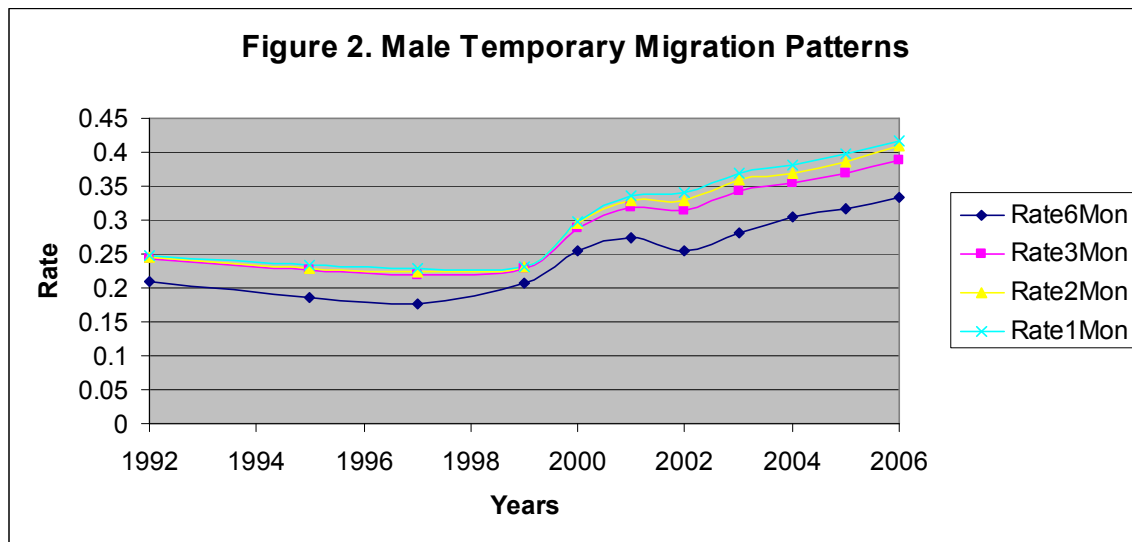
Since women's labor migration may be for shorter periods of time, the first task in unpacking the gendered nature of female temporary labor migration is to look at sex differences in patterns of residency in the site. For example, women working in 2004 spent an average of 7 months in residency in the site (with a standard deviation of 4.85), while men working in 2004 spent an average of 4.4 months in residence (with a standard deviation of 4.25). Even though these averages may reflect a greater propensity for women to work in the area or closer to the area, this finding suggests that defining temporary labor migration with a cutoff at six months may miss women who work for shorter periods of time away from the rural home and warrants further investigation.

Using information about the number of months spent living in Agincourt during the previous year, we redefined temporary migration to include those that are away from the site for 6 months (the traditional definition), 3 months, 2 months and 1 month. Figure 1 shows that redefining temporary migration results in a significant increase in the number of female temporary migrants captured at all time periods. Notably, Figure 1 shows that broadening the definition to include women gone for shorter periods of time during the 1990s almost doubles the rate of female temporary migration and reveals an earlier start to the increase in women's temporary migration. Interestingly, the time periods that women are absent from the rural home seem to be increasingly diverse. During the 1990s, the rates for female migrations between one month and 3 months were almost

identical. Starting in 2001, these rates have diverged, resulting in 30% of the population of women being gone for at least one month out of the year.



Of further note is the different trend between men and women after the deregulation of mobility in the late 1980s and democratization of South Africa in the early 1990s. Scholars expected temporary labor migration to decrease during this period because permanent migration to destination communities was no longer illegal for black workers and their families (Posel 2006). Figures 1 and 2 show that while temporary male migration in Agincourt did initially drop around democratization in 1994, female migration increased throughout the 1990s, a pattern not discernable with the six month definition of temporary migration. The finding of an earlier increase in temporary female labor migration is consistent with national data on women's employment. An analysis of the October Household Survey (OHS 1995-1999) data shows that in 1995, 38 percent of all women between the ages of 15 and 65 were either working or actively looking for work in South Africa, and by 1999, this had increased to 47 percent (Casale and Posel, 2002).



In general, however, the overall pattern of the increase in female temporary migration in Agincourt is quite similar for all definitions, with a dramatic increase appearing after 1999 and continuing to increase through 2006. The benefit of using a more inclusive definition of temporary labor migration is the gain in numbers for both men and women and a clearer understanding of the sex differences in changes in temporary female labor migration during and after democratization.

Examining the residential patterns of temporary migrants we found that female circular migrants have similar residential patterns as male circular migrants. Data from the AHDSS shows that of those defined as temporary migrants using the 6 month definition between 1992-2006 women spent an average of 2.23 months in Agincourt, while the corresponding male average is 2.03. Of those migrating for more than 6 months, there seems to be only a small

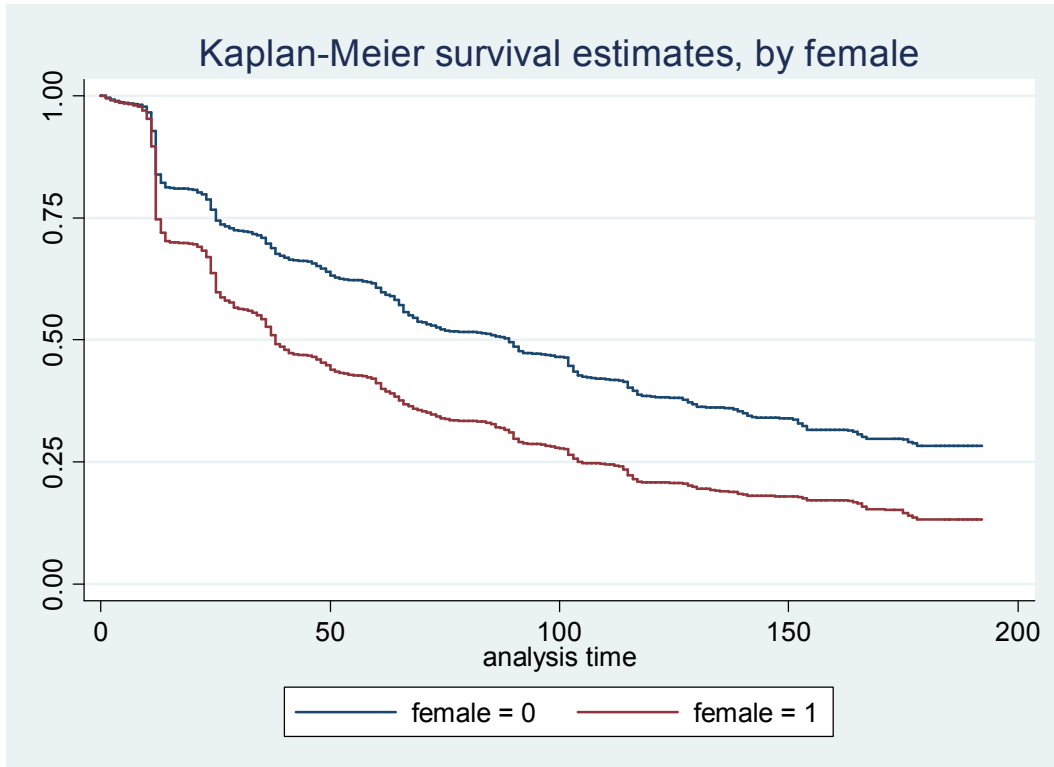
sex differential in residential patterns. While women are more likely to be employed in or near Agincourt, women that leave for significant periods of time, stay away as long as men that do the same. This finding also casts doubt on the importance of redefining temporary labor migration but warrants further analysis.

Residential transitions within migration patterns

We found a more important difference in the temporary migration patterns of men and women by examining individual rather than aggregate patterns of temporary labor migrations. To track individual patterns of temporary labor migration we measured transitions between migrating and not-migrating. First we identified the number of times each individual transitioned from a permanent resident to a temporary migrant or from a temporary migrant to a permanent resident. We then calculated transition rates for each individual by dividing their transitions by the number of years they were observed in the Agincourt site. Of those that ever have a temporary migration, women have a statistically significant higher average transition rate than men. The higher transition rate holds true for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 month definitions of temporary migration. For adults 16 or older at the time of the first observation, men's transition rate using the 6 month definition is .147 and women's is .2194. While women are significantly more likely to never become a temporary migrant, female temporary migration seems to be more tenuous than male temporary migration. Over time, women in Agincourt stop and start temporary migrations more than men.

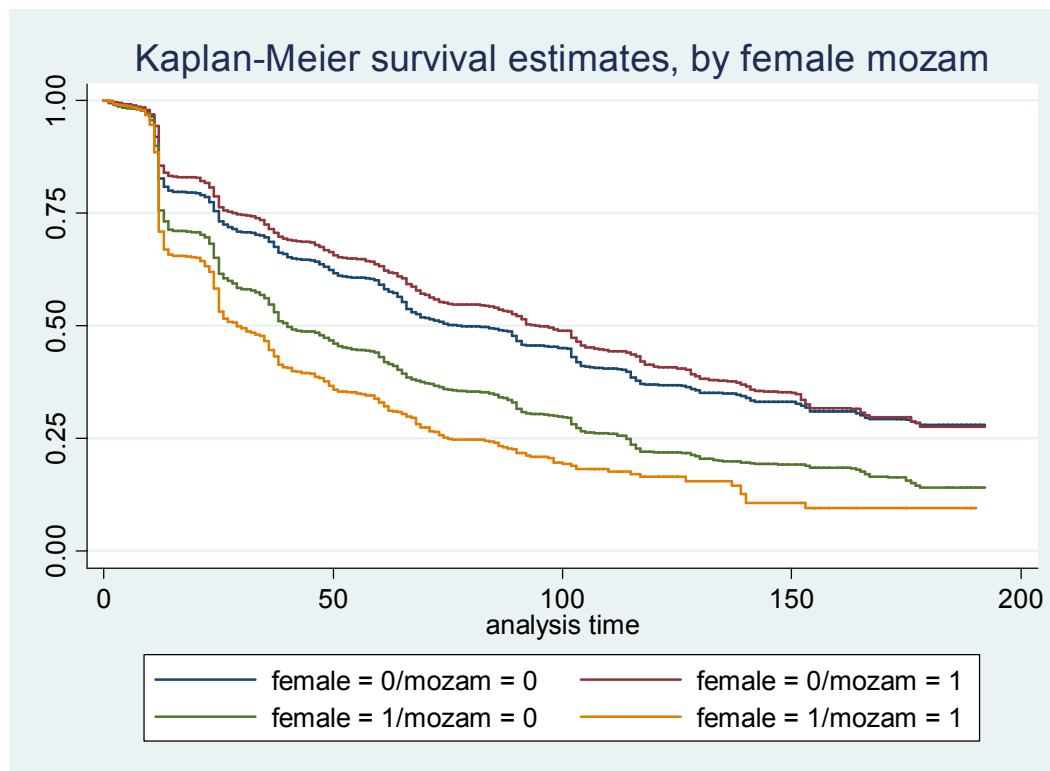
To further examine the sex differences in duration of temporary labor migration, we conducted a survival analysis of temporary labor migrations. Figure 3 below is a Kaplan-Meier survival estimate for men and women's migrations from 1992 to 2006. A migration ends (a failure) when a person's residency status changes from being a labor migrant (using the 6 month definition) to a permanent resident of the site. The survival curves in Figure 3 show that women's migrations have a lower chance of surviving to the next time period starting at 12 months when women's migration survivor function drops to .74 while men's remains at .83. This difference expands further with analysis time. For example at 36 months women's survival function is .5268, while men's is .6976. At 75 months women's survival function is .3378 while men's is .5193. A Cox Proportional Hazard Model provided further information about the differential risk of stopping a migration between men and women. Women have a hazard ratio of 1.67 to that of men.

Figure 3. Survival Estimates of Temporary Labor Migration. Time=Months



We also found through this survival analysis that sex differences in migration duration are influenced by nativity. Figure 4 below shows that women that are refugees from Mozambique have the lowest survivor function while male refugees from Mozambique have the highest. South African men and women have less divergent survivor functions when those from Mozambique are separated out.

Figure 4. Survival Estimates for Labor Migrations, Time=Months



Discussion

Using a gendered lens to examine female temporary labor migration has provided new insight into sex differences in temporary labor migration in South Africa. Redefining temporary labor migration in rural South Africa to allow for sex differences in the labor market clarified the trends in male and female temporary labor migration in post-apartheid South Africa. Further analysis revealed that individual patterns of temporary migration also varied by sex.

National level data suggest that important gender transitions are occurring in post-apartheid South Africa. The October Household Survey (OHS) (1995-1997) data also shows that the marital rate among South African women has

fallen since independence and more women are being reported as heads of households (Casale and Posel 2002b). The percentage of household heads between the ages of 15 and 65 who are female increased from 28 percent in 1995 to 34 percent in 1999 (Casale and Posel 2002b). Increase in female-headed households along with a decline in reported marital rates may indicate women's choice to delay marriage or remain unmarried.

Women's higher rates of transitions into and out of temporary labor migration is an important component of these gender transitions and provides further evidence for a complex, interactive effect of changes in gender norms and economic opportunities on the current and future social landscape of South Africa. Further investigation is needed, however, to understand how these sex differences are related to individual and household livelihood strategies. In future research we plan to examine sex differences in the social and economic triggers of temporary migration in order to further ascertain how female temporary labor migration is impacted by gender norms, economic insecurity, household composition, and mortality in rural South Africa.

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