

Gender Asymmetry in the Beliefs about Family Migration Decisions

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Extended Abstract

Prior research on job-related family migration found that when the husband receives a job offer that requires moving to another place, wife is more likely to move with her husband. When the wife receives a job offer that requires moving to another place, however, she is more likely to give up on the opportunity and stay in the origin. The dominant theoretical model proposed by labor economist (Mincer 1978) argues that this gendered “tied-spouse” phenomenon is a consequence of the gender differential in earnings. Because husband and wife try to maximize their household income when they face a job-related migration decision, the spouse who earns less tends to be the “tied.”

In this paper, we examine lay people’s beliefs concerning family migration decisions using the computerized multivariate factorial survey (vignette) method developed by Li, Chang, and Jasso (2007). We construct vignettes for fictitious couples living in New York City, in which a spouse, either husband or wife, receives a job offer that requires moving to Washington DC. In the vignettes, we experimentally manipulate characteristics that have been suggested to affect family migration decisions, including current earnings, the pay raise associated with the job opportunity, gender role attitudes, children, marriage conditions, and demographic variables such as age and education. The

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respondent reports what they think the fictitious couple would do—would they take the job offer and move, would they decline the job offer and stay, or would they decide to commute (i.e., one takes the job and moves, and the other stays).

We find a clear gender asymmetry such that respondents in a convenience sample are more likely to report that the fictitious couple would take the job offer and move if the husband, rather than the wife, is the one who receives the job offer. Because earnings are controlled by random assignment in the vignette construction, the standard economic explanation on the basis of maximizing their joint economic well-being obviously fails. We discuss the implications of the gendered beliefs in family migration decisions for gender stratification in an era of globalization in which inter- and intra-firm job mobility that requires relocation is increasingly common.

References

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