Women's migration in Iran: the level, trend and socio-demographic correlates

Introduction

The share of women in migration has been increasing during last decades. Therefore, world is approaching to a more feminized migration (Castles and Miller 1993). Such migration would have different social, economic and demographic consequences. The situation of women in Iran has had remarkable changes during last decades. Total fertility of the country has decreased to a below replacement level (Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2009; Statistical Centre of Iran 2013). Women's level of education has increased dramatically and there have been more opportunities for women to enter labor market. Along with the increase in mean age at marriage for both sexes, the rate of divorce has risen substantially (Mahmoudian et al. 2012; Civil Registration Organization 2013). Due to the above-mentioned changes, the share of women in internal migration has also increased. The proportion of migrant women in Iran has increased from 0.38 in 1976 to 0.49 in 2011. The women's migration in Iran in terms of socio-demographic factors, however, has not been addressed adequately. This paper aims to examine the level, trend and socio-demographic correlates of women's migration.

Theoretical background

Women's migration can be explained using different theoretical approaches. Chant and Radcliffe (1992) argue that women's migration can be explained by different approaches. In neoclassic approach women's rural-urban migration is related to few work opportunities and motivation for migration is the same for both sexes. In structural approach, the migration depends on social, economic and political changes in the society. In behavioral approach, ideologies and cultural norms identifying gender roles affect women's chance for migration. Relation between family members, in terms of authority and power, influences women's migration in the household strategy approach and women are normally banned from migration. Grieco and Boyd (2003) argue that gender relations, roles and hierarchies determine women's situation before, during and after migration.

Background studies

Todaro (1980) showed that the normal pattern of migration in Latin America was the migration of married men (with family members) and migration of never-married women. In the study of migrant women in the Philippines, Lauby and Stark (1998) showed that more than a half of the women were 15-24 years old and most of them were never married. The negative relationship between marriage and migration was also shown by other studies (Donato and Kanaiaupuni 1999; Aravena 2002). Shanthi (2006) showed that the percent of widowed women among rural-urban and urban-urban was higher. The effect of the number of children on the migration was not significant.

The positive relationship between women's migration and education was shown by some studies (Kanaiaupuni 2000; Feliciano 2005; Stecklov et al. 2010). It was also shown that the effect of education was stronger for women than men. Lauby and Stark (1998) also showed that older migrant women tend to be independent employee while younger women are

working as paid worker. Ackers (1996) showed that the labor force participation of migrant women is higher than that for their native counterparts.

Research method and data

The research method in this study is secondary data analysis. Data are drawn from 2% sample of Iran 2011 census. Target population comprises all women. Of them, 46726 women (6.3%) had changed their place of residence during 2006-2011. Migrant and non-migrant women are compared in terms of main socio-demographic variables.

Findings

As mentioned, the share of women in internal migration in the country, with fluctuations, has increased from 38% in 1976 to about 49% in 2011. More than 78% of them were living in urban areas. It was more likely for migrant women in to be in age group 20-34 years, have university education, be graduated in the fields of agriculture, engineering and production, and to be ever-married or widowed.

The majority of them (about 80%) have migrated as accompanies of other migrants (namely male head of the household). About 14% of them have migrated due to reasons related to work, education, and better life. Of the independent migrants, the reason of migration for 27% was work (finding a job, finding a better job, and job transfer), the reason for 30% was education (to continue or completing education), and the reason for the rest was seeking a better housing.

Work migrants were more likely to be 30-40 years old, divorcee, with university education (MA and more), and graduated in fields of education and health. Those who were in 15-25 age group, never married, with university education, and graduated in fields of agriculture, engineering, and social sciences were more likely to migrate for education.

Discussion

Although women have a substantial share in internal migration in Iran, they are not very active in migration decision making because most of them migrate along with other members of the family. The main reason for this is the very low level of women's labor force participation in the country. Only about 11% of women aged 10 years and more are currently in labor market. Continuing education is one important reason for migration. As there is much development in establishing educational institutions in different parts of the country, it can be predicted that such movements would be less important in the future. Women's empowerment, however, may enforce migration for work and better life. In a study of migrant women in Tehran (Mahmoudian et al. 2009) it was shown that finding a job, finding a better job, and improving life situation were the main motivations for migration. This migration can also be limited because of higher rate of unemployment for women, especially for those who are younger and have university education, and other social and cultural barriers.

It seems that the motivations for women's migration will increase because of the educational attainment, later marriage, relatively high level of family dissolution, and the below-replacement fertility. However, the lack of proper responses of the society to the migration (like higher level of women's unemployment) may negatively affect the migration in the future.

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