

Remittances and Changing Gender Power Relations in Recipient Households

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Abstract

This paper analyses household expenditures strategies of male and female beneficiaries of remittances in the Metropolitan Area of Pereira located in the coffee region of Colombia. The objective of the analysis is to study the role of migrants in redefining gender roles in their communities of origin through remittances. I compare expenditures profiles in six types of households, defined by their status as remittance beneficiaries, gender of the remitter and gender of the household head. The differential patterns of expenditure are considered proxies for women's empowerment at the household level. I argue that female beneficiaries expend more on human capital and living expenses than male beneficiaries. In the analysis I control for the presence of children, civil status and the beneficiaries' life cycle stage among other variables.

Objective and Motivation

The participation of women has been one of the principal characteristics of the Colombian contemporary migration flow. More than fifty percent of the Colombian migrant population are women. Colombian women are important agents in the redefinition of gender roles in a transnational context. Through their active participation in the labor markets at destination they challenge and transform the existing gendered power relations at origin and destination. At destination they redefine their role in the household given their empowerment promoted by their labor force participation and diverse cultural values observed in other migrant groups and natives. Migrant Colombian women are also agents of change in the definition of gender roles at origin at the household level. The remittances they send to their families left behind tend to empower other recipient women who often distribute resources within the household members.

The principal aim of this paper is to investigate the agency of migrant women in transforming gender roles at origin through the use of remittances. I hypothesized that migrant women change gender roles at origin by sending remittances to other women who redistribute these resources within the household. I study this hypothesis by comparing the expenditure patterns of male and female beneficiaries. The typology that I use is illustrated in the following table.

		Remitter	
		Male	Female
Beneficiary	Male	A	B
	Female	C	D

I argue that the socio-demographic profile of male and female senders and recipients are different in terms of age, relation to the household head, education and labor force participation. Therefore, their interests and needs should also reflect diversity in the distribution of household income among expenditure items, controlling for the presence of children in the household and their stage in life cycle.

Methods of Analysis and Data Sources

Using data collected in 2002 in the Metropolitan Area of the city of Pereira in the coffee region in Colombia I describe the differences in the distribution of household income and of remittances in thirteen consumption items. The data come from a representative sample of a metropolitan area with high prevalence of migration. In a census of the area one out of every five household reported a member living in a different country, and about seventy percent of those households received remittances.

The analysis is carried out in two parts. The first part describes the distribution of expenditures between households receiving remittances and households not receiving remittances. The second presents an analysis of expenditure strategies in households receiving remittances by gender of the household head and gender of the remitter. I use a series of Tobit regression models by expenditure item. Expenditures by item is dependent variable, the gender typology between beneficiary and the remitter as the independent variable, and controls for education, civil status, stage in the life cycle, labor market participation and presence of children in the household.

Expected Results

I expect to observe differences in the levels of consumptions between beneficiary household and non-beneficiary households. These differences will vary by socioeconomic stratus and they will be an indication of a differential pattern of expenditures of the remittances, particularly in the case of high socioeconomic strata.

The series of regression models should show significant differences in the variation explained by the beneficiary/remitter gender categories. I expect that expenditure strategies reported by female beneficiaries are oriented towards expenditures in human capital and basic consumption. Male beneficiaries are expected to employ the resources they received from their relatives abroad in items such as entertainment, transportation, acquisition of amenities, among others.

Conclusions

The analysis will provide evidence to suggest that migrant women are active agents in the redefinition of the gender roles in their communities of origin, particularly in areas of high prevalence of international migration. The remittances they send to other women at the origin reshape the power relations within the household and the distribution of resources among the household members.