

FAMILY LIFE COURSE TRANSITION
AND THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNAL MIGRATION

by

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Introduction

It is an axiom of everyday life experience that significant family life course transitions often are trigger events for migration behavior. As Cook (2006:2) notes, “migration and the family are interdependent because a change in one nearly always involves a change in the other.” It is thus perhaps surprising that family life course events (i.e. marriage, childbearing, separation, divorce, etc.) are seldom adequately conceptualized and measured as alternative family-level explanations to the more ubiquitous micro-economic work and income explanations for why families move. Equally infrequent is the careful modeling of the consequences of family life course transitions after migration, since transitions such as marriage and divorce can have dramatic impacts on the economic well-being of individuals and families.

The usual approach in the demographic literature is to develop arguments about migration causes and consequences in relation to family and household structure, rather than family life course processes. For example, there is now extensive demographic empirical research on the effects of married couple migration on the employment and income of married women. This literature generally shows that following a move, married women are less likely to be employed and thus are likely to experience an income decline that sometimes lasts for several years (Mulden and Van Ham 2005, Clark and Huey 2006, Cushing and Poot 2004, Greenwood 1997). However there is relatively little research on the impact of family life course transitions on either migration or on the economic outcomes of migrant families (Cook 2006). A major reason for the minimal family life course transition migration literature is undoubtedly due to the lack of a prospectively designed, national longitudinal internal migration survey for the U.S., which would provide not only current migration but also family life course and economic outcome event history data.

We use data from the 1996-1999 and the 2001-2003 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which interviews persons at 4-month intervals to obtain information on monthly migration behavior as well as family life course transitions and an extensive series of welfare, work, and income participation data. Preliminary estimates of family life course experiences by migration experience are shown in table 1; table 2 presents estimates of family economic outcomes of interest. Although not designed as a migration survey, the SIPP is arguably the best nationally representative, current period data set available to study the causes and consequences of migration in the U.S. Its longitudinal design permits comparison of these outcomes over time for migrants and nonmigrants with varied family life course process experiences using a difference-in-difference approach for reducing bias in estimates due to selection to migration.

The objective of this paper is to provide new evidence on family life course transitions and migration. Specifically, we address the following research questions:

1. What are the proportions of families and individuals who experience life course transition events before and after migration compared with non-migrant families and individuals? Are these life course transition event patterns the same or different for interstate and intrastate migration?
2. How do before and after migration family life course transitions affect post-migration welfare receipt, employment, poverty level, and family earnings gains or losses?
3. Are the before and after migration effects of family life course transitions on post-migration economic outcomes explained (mediated) by state economy characteristics, state welfare policy eligibility indicators, and by family network ties?

Life Course Theory and Migration

Life course theory as applied to migration posits that causes and consequences of migration behavior ensue from transitions in family and socioeconomic status that occur over the life course. While the idea that life cycle stages condition housing and employment decisions is not new, Rossi's (1955) application of this perspective to migration behavior was a stimulus to empirical analyses, particularly of elderly migration (Litwak and Longino 1987, Wiseman and Rosman 1979, Longino et al. 1991, De Jong et al. 1995, Robison and Moen 2000, Stoller and Longino 2001, Walters 2002). Unfortunately, as noted earlier, full event-history longitudinal data were seldom available for researchers to test a complete life course transition model of the elderly population, which include such family life course events as retirement, disability onset, chronic health incidents, kin care transitions, death of a spouse, etc. In the absence of direct life course transition measures, age of respondent often is used as a proxy measure for life course stage.

As applied to younger adults, life course theory of migration stems primarily from the age-related character of 1) family demographic transitions, and 2) social mobility transitions. The logic of migration as triggered by family demographic processes focuses on the impact of such vital events as marriage, childbearing, divorce, separation, and death. Because of time-series data limitations, Rossi and many subsequent researchers have not been able to use direct life course measures, and instead have characterized households by age of the head and number of children or household size. For example, Frey (1984) used age cohort data as proxy measures of life course processes to show different black and white suburban destination migration patterns in major U.S. metropolitan areas. Age cohorts were posited to reflect shifting cohort patterns in family formation and childbearing over the three-decade study period. Similarly, Bellemar (2004) used individual

age as a proxy for life cycle transition to develop and document a dynamic model of out-migration behavior for German immigrants.

The current study builds on these life course migration studies by testing the thesis that family life course transitions constitute a fundamental explanation for the causes and the economic consequences of migration in the U.S., in addition to alternative explanations of state economic opportunity characteristics, inequality in state welfare eligibility stringency indicators, family network ties, and individual human capital. We use longitudinal, nationally representative SIPP data and event-history methods to construct direct measures of three family demographic life course transitions -- 1) marriage, 2) birth of a child, and 3) separation or divorce -- and two post-migration socioeconomic life course transitions -- 4) gaining a job after unemployment and going on public welfare. We hypothesize that marriage, childbearing, and separation/divorce will be related to both migration behavior and to the economic well-being of migrant families. We further hypothesize that some of these relationships will be conditioned by state economic and welfare eligibility rules indicators, and by family network ties, particularly for poor families. In addition, we include a measure of return migration behavior as a control variable based on migration theory and literature documenting attachment to place of origin effects (Dublin 1998, Schram et al. 1998).

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Table 1. Proportion of Families and Individuals Who Experience Family Life Course Events, Before and After Migration Compared with No Migration ($n = 101081$ unit heads*)

<i>Family Life Course Events & Migration Behaviors</i>	<i>Interstate Migrant (n = 4333)</i>		<i>No Interstate Migration (n = 96748)</i>		<i>Intrastate Migrant (n = 16809)</i>		<i>No Intrastate Migration (n = 84272)</i>		<i>Attrition Cases (n = 37520)</i>	
	Before	After	95.71 %		Before	After	83.37 %		Before	After
Percent of Total	4.29 %	3.95 %	95.71 %		16.63%	5.51 %	83.37 %		37.12%	0 %
Got Married within 8 Months of Move	5.24 %	3.95 %	5.98 %	4.42 %	2.18 %	5.51 %	4.72 %	3.90 %	0 %	0 %
Became Single within 8 Months of Move	3.21 %	1.68 %	4.42 %	4.42 %	1.33 %	2.60 %	3.90 %	3.90 %	0 %	0 %
Birth in Family within Year before Move	2.08 %	1.06 %	2.78 %	2.78 %	1.76 %	1.37 %	2.27 %	2.27 %	0.15 %	0.15 %
Interstate Migrant	100.00%	-	-	-	16.75 %	-	-	-	3.19 %	3.19 %
Intrastate Migrant	64.97 %	-	-	-	100.00%	-	-	-	12.13 %	12.13 %
Attrition	26.79 %	-	-	-	26.24 %	-	-	-	100.00%	100.00%

* Unit heads may be single individuals or family heads; only one head per family is included in study sample.

Table 2. Mean Post-Migration Family Earnings, Poverty Level, Welfare Receipt and Employment Gain Compared with Mean Levels among Non-Migrants ($n = 101081$ unit heads*)

<i>Economic Well Being Indicator</i>	<i>Interstate Migrant</i>	<i>No Interstate Migration</i>	<i>Intrastate Migrant</i>	<i>No Intrastate Migration</i>
Average Family Monthly Earnings [dollars]	3163.58 (3454.91)	2949.2 (3342.0)	2960.25 (3295.26)	2985.96 (3398.14)
Average Poverty Level	4.97 (3.48)	3.53 (2.88)	4.46 (3.20)	3.61 (2.88)
Percent Receiving Welfare	1.41 %	3.10 %	2.87 %	2.53 %
Percent Getting a Job after Unemployment	35.86 %	35.51 %	29.66 %	33.83 %

* Unit heads may be single individuals or family heads; only one head per family is included in study sample.