Changing patterns of household decision-making and the education of rural migrant children: Comparing Shenzhen and Mumbai

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Abstract

In both China and India, migrant families face difficult decisions about education and livelihoods. In China, migrant children have limited access to urban schools, because of high documentary barriers to enrolment. In India, administrative barriers are fewer, but other structural factors, including households' need for child labour, restrict opportunities. Although much research globally has explored household negotiations leading to migration, we know little about livelihoods decision-making processes *after* initial migration. How is decision-making affected by changes in household dynamics as a result of moving to the city? Drawing on over 300 interviews with migrants in Shenzhen and Mumbai from 2007 to 2016, this paper compares the ways that Chinese and Indian rural-migrant households negotiate their children's limited access to education, and demonstrates significant shifts within families after the initial rural-urban movement in both countries. Mothers in particular gain greater roles in developing household strategies, and more attention is paid to the voices of (some, mostly male) children. However, contrary to existing literature on non-migrant populations, increased maternal and child autonomy within the migrant household does not necessarily result in educational gains. Instead, the exercise of agency outside the household remains highly constrained by structural factors including poverty and marginalisation, education policies and gendered social relations.

Keywords: Rural-urban migration, children, education, household decision-making, China, India

1. Introduction

In both China and India, tens of millions of rural people migrate as a household to the city, with significant impacts on children's education (NSSO, 2010; NBSC, 2012). In the Chinese context, research has focused on how rural-urban migration affects migrant children's education, given their limited access to state schools (Liang & Chen, 2007; Goodburn, 2009; Chen and Feng, 2013). In India, fewer administrative barriers to state education exist but opportunities are restricted by other structural factors, including households' need for child labour (Mukherjee & Das, 2008; Roy et al., 2015). Therefore, families face difficult decisions about education and livelihoods after relocating to the city. However, existing research on migration and decision-making globally focuses exclusively on decisions to migrate, typically understood as a household livelihood strategy, and not what happens afterwards (Chant, 1998; Hoang, 2011). Other literature has demonstrated significant shifts in left-behind family members' roles, particularly the gender dynamics of rural productive and reproductive work (Toyota et al., 2007). However, we do not know how the decision-making roles of migrants change as a result of shifts in household dynamics, and how this affects families' lives in the city.

Migrant children's education and household livelihoods negotiations after the initial move to the city are independently important topics: the first for developing education policy and the second for understanding migration as a dynamic, long-term process rather than a rupture. Approaches that employ a static framework of analysis fail to capture the highly dynamic nature of migration and the ways in which its meanings are renegotiated over time by different actors, as identities, expectations and ideologies adapt to changing circumstances (see, for example, De Haan and Rogaly, 2002). Furthermore, if migration changes negotiating power, this is likely to affect educational outcomes. Drawing on in-depth interviews with migrant parents and children in both Mumbai and Shenzhen between 2007 and 2016, this comparative paper therefore analyses changes in rural-migrant household dynamics, particularly the roles of mothers and children, in the context of negotiation of children's limited access to urban education, in order to understand both changes within the household and the effects on primary schooling. Section one examines the context of education and migration in China and India, and reviews the literature on household decision-making. Section two outlines the fieldwork methods. Section three analyses changes in household dynamics after the initial relocation to Mumbai and Shenzhen, and section four explores how these changes influence education and livelihoods decisions in the context of extensive barriers to education. The final section suggests implications for migration research and theory.

1. Migration, education and household dynamics in China and India

2.1. Comparing Indian and Chinese rural-urban migration

There are an estimated 260 million internal migrants in China (NBSC, 2012) and 450 million in India (Census of India, 2011). In both countries, the proportion of women and children migrants has increased over the past decade. Although reliable recent statistics are difficult to obtain, it appears that women constitute the majority of rural-urban migrants in China and India, and in each country there are between 33 and 36 million rural-urban migrant children (ACWF, 2013; NSSO, 2010). For Indian and Chinese men, and for Chinese women, the primary motive for rural-urban migration has been to find work. Although Indian women tend to cite marriage and household relocation as more significant reasons for migration, a substantial proportion of female migrants nonetheless enter the labour force after moving to the city (Bhagat, 2014).

Despite these similarities in rural-urban migration flows, the literature on labour migration in the two countries has been very different. Work on Chinese migrants focuses extensively on young unmarried women, moving for manufacturing work before, often, returning to rural China for marriage (Fan, 2003; Davin, 2005; Pun, 2012; Zhang, 2014). By contrast, Indian migration scholars primarily research seasonal and circulatory migration, mostly rural-rural and typically undertaken by men (Breman, 1996; Rogaly et al, 2001; Bird and Deshingkar, 2013; Mosse, 2016). Women have often tended to be seen as mere associational migrants (Mazumdar et al, 2013).

There are good reasons for some of these differences. Large-scale labour migration has happened in China only since the 1980s, so those who have moved are mostly first- or second-generation migrants. Often visually distinguishable from urbanites, they have been criticised for their "backward" dress and unsophisticated manners (Lei, 2003). Until at least 2014, they retained their "agricultural" household registration (*hukou*) status,

regardless of non-farm employment, remaining legally and administratively distinct from "non-agricultural" urbanites, and not counted as the "urban poor". The resources migrants can claim from the state, including education and medical insurance, also relate to *hukou* status. Given these institutional distinctions, one's status as a "migrant" remains a salient analytical category in China long after one relocates to the city.

By contrast, in India, migrant flows entered cities throughout the twentieth-century, blending with urban populations. Many are therefore now third, fourth or fifth generation migrants, indistinguishable from the ethnically, culturally and linguistically heterogeneous urban poor. Distress, unemployment and environmental shocks continue to motivate much rural-urban migration, which is often seasonal in a way that Chinese rural-urban migration is typically not (Deshingkar, 2017). Apart from subsidised goods provided through the Public Distribution System, migrants are (in principle) entitled to the same state services as local urban citizens. Despite sporadic outbursts of nativism and continued caste discrimination, there is little stigma attached to being *rural* as opposed to simply non-local.

However, there are also common trends in the two countries, the study of which challenges localised explanations of migrant experiences. This study focuses on one such trend: in both countries, migrant children – in this article, those who have migrated from rural to urban areas with their parents – face difficulties in accessing urban state schooling.

2.2 Education for migrant children

In 2008, all Indian children had the right to education at a state primary school (6-11 years) and middle or lower-secondary school (12-14), free from tuition fees. However, 18% of rural and 10% of urban children did not attend primary school regularly in 2006. Of the out-of-school children, more were girls than boys, and many who did not attend schools in urban areas were migrants (DHS, 2007). The implementation of the Right to Education Act in 2010, which made it legally mandatory to send children to school, has not necessarily improved this situation. In a 2013 survey, 99% of Mumbai's slum-dwelling parents (many first- and second-generation migrants) were unaware of their legal obligations, while reported full-time child labour increased across India during 2009-15 (Kumar, 2013; Childline India, 2015). While there has been little research specifically on rural-urban migrant children's schooling, other work suggests that the need for child labour is a significant factor in preventing attendance (Kambhampati and Rajan, 2006; Roy et al., 2015). Other issues include high indirect and opportunity costs, distance to schools and lack of enrolment documents (Reddy & Sinha, 2010).

In China, gaining an education outside one's place of origin has historically been difficult and costly. Although the 2006 Revised Compulsory Education Law required urban authorities to extend state school places to migrant children, and fees for primary (ages 6-12) and junior-middle school (12-15) were abolished in 2008, city governments continue to use *hukou* status to exclude outsiders (Goodburn, 2016). In many cities, only registered migrants fulfilling strict criteria and in possession of up to eight different types of documents can enrol. Although few children are out-of-school, many migrants attend substandard migrant-run private schools (Goodburn, 2015). Many more children are left behind in, or sent back to, rural areas.

The lack of straightforward access to state schooling means that families who move from rural to urban areas in both countries face difficult decisions about education and livelihoods, defined here as the capabilities, assets (material and social) and activities required for a means of living (Carney, 1998). Which children, if any, can be enrolled in city schools, which should be sent home, and which should begin paid or unpaid labour? Such decisions typically involve several household members, and, as such, are comparable to the original migration decision. Research in both the New Economics of Labour Migration and Livelihoods schools has interpreted migration as a household strategy, to minimise risks to household income by diversifying income sources (Stark & Bloom, 1985; de Haan, 1999). A range of feminist sociological studies have allowed household approaches to move away from early assumptions that households are monolithic units, by drawing attention to the divisions of labour and power within households, and how these affect the ability of different individuals to migrate. These distinctions include not only those of gender, but also of age and family role, and the intersections between them (Huijsmans, 2014). Thus research has examined pre-migration processes of household decision-making as to which livelihood strategies are pursued by which members (Chant and Radcliffe, 1992; Chant 1998). Evidence from Latin America, Bangladesh and Vietnam, among others, suggests that gendered divisions of labour play an important role in determining who migrates (Chant, 1998; Dannecker, 2005; Hoang, 2011). However, it is unclear what happens after migration has begun: for example, how the entry of women and children into paid labour affects the processes and outcomes of decision-making, and how factors such as age and gender influence intra-household dynamics.

2.3 Household decision-making after rural-urban relocation

Early research on gender and migration in the global context suggested that migration altered familial relationships by exposing women to more egalitarian gender norms, and offering new opportunities for paid labour, thus increasing their participation in household decision-making (Mahler and Pessar 2006). These findings correspond with much economic literature on intra-household bargaining, which suggests that an increase in a member's contribution to household income enhances their say in the allocation of household resources. In particular, Sen's (1990) model of "cooperative conflict" highlights the role not only of increased contributions, but of the perception of increased contributions, which may be highly gendered. As Kabeer points out, women's perceived contributions are likely to be related to the visibility, as well as the extent, of "gainful work" (Kabeer, 1994:110). The greater visibility of remunerated labour outside the home, as opposed to unpaid (or even paid) work at home, is thus seen as an important factor in improving women's "fall-back position" in household negotiations (Sen, 1990; Kabeer, 1994). If migration facilitates migrant women's entry into the labour market, it may therefore be thought likely to improve their position in household decision-making.

However, more recent work on international migration has demonstrated more negative intra-household impacts, especially for poor, undocumented and socially isolated women (Zentgraf, 2002). In the Indian context, it is unclear how rural-urban migration affects familial relationships. In particular, there has been limited research on women labourers, seemingly because of the assumption that most women migrate only for marriage (Singh, Keshri and Bhagat, 2016). However, survey evidence suggests nearly a third of women who had not worked outside the home before migration entered the urban labour market (Mazumdar et al., 2013). In China,

most rural women have worked outside the home, but often on household land where they have not earned an independent wage. Although the gains in intra-familial autonomy of Chinese unmarried women migrants have been studied, the impacts of migration on married migrant women have not (Goodburn, 2015). In both countries, separation from rural patrilineal kinship structures seems likely to increase married women's decision-making power, but this has not been researched.

Even less clear than the impacts of migration on married migrant women's autonomy are its impacts on children's roles in household negotiations.[1] Motivations for migration have long been considered to be influenced by children's presence, and attention has been paid to independent child migrants, but few studies have considered children's involvement in family migration decision-making (Huijsmans, 2011; Hoang and Yeoh, 2015). None at all, to my knowledge, have examined children's roles in family livelihoods negotiations *after* moving to the city. Yet just as women's autonomy may be affected by distance from rural families, labour force entry and aspects of urban lifestyles, so too may that of some children. Children's agency may not necessarily take the form of overt resistance to parental decisions; more mundane examples may include, for example, greater participation in household discussions, greater ability to realise goals or even increased capacity to form aspirations (Choi et al, 2018). Moreover, all these forms of agency may shift as children become older: for example, the ability of those in their second decade of life to engage in these types of action is likely to be greater than those in their first decade.

If migration enhances women's intra-household autonomy, might we expect this to improve their children's education, perhaps especially that of daughters? Empirical evidence from other countries, although not in the context of migration, suggests that increasing mothers' agency in intra-household resource allocation improves outcomes for children, and girls in particular as mothers may prioritise investment in daughters (Thomas 1990; Murthi et al., 1995). In China, research indicates that increases in non-migrant women's labour income, unlike improvements in men's income, lead to increased educational attainment of daughters, while an investigation of mothers' and daughters' education in India concludes: "when mothers have bargaining power… they are likely to increase collective household welfare rather than to perpetuate discriminatory practices" (Qian 2008; Kambhampati and Pal, 2001:117). Similarly, if migration enhances child agency, this may positively influence educational outcomes or at least attendance.

However, it is unclear how these potential changes may intersect with the formal and informal constraints on migrant children's education in both countries. By focusing solely on the development of household strategies, and in this case how the process of developing strategies evolves after the initial rural-urban relocation, there may be a danger of an over-emphasis on agency (Wallace, 2002). This can be counterbalanced by a consideration of the structural factors which constrain the creation and deployment of household strategies; here, for example, state educational policies, urban living conditions and the urban labour market. However, structural constraints are not only objective, but are also culturally defined, and may be highly gendered (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000). By focusing on the ways in which households make livelihoods decisions in the context of multiple structural constraints after first moving to the city, this article draws attention to the ways in which gains in intra-household autonomy may not translate into the ability to exercise agency beyond the household or into the improved outcomes we might expect for other household members. This article thus takes

an important step towards a fuller understanding of how the ongoing process of migration contributes to shifting family dynamics in ways which create new forms of gender (and to some extent, age) relations, with important implications for both household research and migration studies.

2. Fieldwork Methods

The following analysis is based on several rounds of fieldwork with rural migrant families in Mumbai and Shenzhen. Initial interviews took place in 2007-2009, with follow-up interviews in both sites in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra state on India's west coast, is India's richest and most populous city, with a population of about 21 million in 2011. It has more rural migrants than any other Indian city (Sridhar, 2010). In 2007-08, I interviewed migrants in slums and construction sites across the city. Construction employs over 40% of the migrant workforce (Sarde, 2008:11). I was assisted in finding sites by NGOs providing services to migrants, and taught English (unpaid) in the slum and construction-site schools of three NGOs, which facilitated my acceptance in these communities.

Shenzhen is a city in Guangdong province, immediately north of Hong Kong in the Pearl River Delta. The 2012 population was approximately 14 million, of whom only around 3 million had legal permanent residence (hukou). The rest were migrants, giving Shenzhen the largest number of rural-urban migrants of any Chinese city (NBSC, 2012). Since becoming China's first Special Economic Zone in 1980, Shenzhen has become a major manufacturing centre. I conducted initial interviews in sites of high in-migration, which I identified with help from local students and a researcher from a local labour research organisation, and taught English (again unpaid) in two private migrant-run schools.

I conducted semi-structured interviews in Shenzhen and Mumbai with parents and with children aged 6-12 in 2007-09, with follow-up interviews with some of the same children, now aged 14-20, in 2014-16.[2] I used snowball and intercept methods to find the original interviewees, interviewing 136 parents and 80 children in Mumbai in 2007-08, and 92 parents and 66 children in Shenzhen in 2008-09 (see Table 1 below). Index children of parents interviewed, and the separate (mostly un-related) group of children interviewed, were all aged between six and 12 years old, both at the time of migration and at interview, and had migrated not more than five years earlier. Parents were mostly aged 25-40, with a mean of 3.3 living children in Mumbai and 2.6 in Shenzhen.[3] Families had lived in the city for between two months and five years, such that data is drawn from both seasonal migrants and those intending longer-term settlement. In practice it was difficult to distinguish settlement patterns, since many of those who had been in the city for several years had not intended to stay so long, while others hoped to settle on a long-term basis but would return to their native place at least annually for weeks or months. In both countries around 40% of those interviewed had migrated from within Maharashtra and Guangdong, while the remainder came from states/provinces nationwide, including particularly, in India, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, and in China, Sichuan, Chongqing, Hubei and Jiangxi.

Interviews were conducted in Mandarin and Hindi. My Mandarin is fluent, and deficiencies in my Hindi were compensated for by the assistance of a native Hindi-speaker during the first four months in Mumbai in 2007, and again in 2015-16. Where interviewees were not comfortable in Hindi, they selected another member of their community to translate from their language into Hindi. Interviews were not recorded; instead detailed

notes were taken. This paper draws mainly on data from interviews with parents, mostly mothers, as well as children, about their experiences of education and household decision-making processes after they moved to the city.

In 2014-16, I was able to contact five youths from the original children's sample in Mumbai and 12 in Shenzhen for supplementary follow-up interviews, which focused on the longer-term impacts of migration. The sample was then expanded by inclusion of an additional ten migrant youths in each city, introduced to me by those I interviewed, who had not been part of the original sample but who would have fit the same age and migration criteria in 2007-2009. Again, data were recorded by means of extensive note-taking. This paper uses these later interviews as a complement to the first round of interviews, to illuminate the longer-term consequences of educational decision-making. Of course, these later interviews include only those who had remained long-term in the city (and four who had returned to the countryside before re-migrating); short-term and seasonal migrants are thus excluded.

Table 1: Numbers of those interviewed in Mumbai and Shenzhen, 2007-2016

	2007-09	2014-16
Mumbai	Children (aged 6-12): 80 Mothers: 94 Fathers: 42	Youths (aged 14-21): From 2007-09 cohort: 5 Additional youths: 10
Shenzhen	Children (aged 6-12): 66 Mothers: 63 Fathers: 29	Youths (aged 14-21): From 2007-09 cohort: 12 Additional youths: 10

Data from both sets of interviews were analysed comparatively and thematically, using an iterative process of inductive and deductive coding to explore key themes in interviewees' accounts of their experiences and actions. This process involved identifying both country-specific and common themes, and allowed for refinement of research questions, to focus on the aspects most important to the subjects. All names of informants used here are pseudonyms, since much of the information was sensitive or potentially compromising. Although results cannot be generalised straightforwardly to other Chinese and Indian cities, let alone other countries, the findings highlight similarities and differences among migrant families' decision-making processes in the context of highly constrained educational choices, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of how livelihoods negotiations among families develop across the whole process of migration, with important implications for theoretical frameworks of migration, gender and household research.

3. Findings: Changes in household dynamics after initial migration

This section draws primarily on the initial round of interviews to explore how household dynamics changed as a result of migration. As all interviews in 2007-2009 were with families who had migrated within the previous five years, analysis here necessarily focuses on the short- and medium-term impacts of migration. Some of the

longer-term impacts are discussed in the following section, on the negotiation of schooling and livelihoods decisions, which draws on interviews with migrant youths in 2014-16 as well as parental interviews from the earlier round, to examine how decisions relating to education, migration and labour are made within migrant households, and the impacts of structural constraints.

4.1. India

Most migrant mothers in Mumbai described themselves as having no work[4], or as having worked unpaid on their own land, before migration. These women had typically not planned to work after moving to the city, yet urban living costs and the availability of low-skilled paid work, as well as the increased acceptability of women's work outside the home, led many to join the labour market. Although a large number were not in paid work, these were typically the most recent migrants, many of whom indicated intention to find work later. The employment of all migrant women (and almost all migrant men) was within Mumbai's informal economy, characterised by low and irregular income, lack of social security, little regulation and absence of legal protections. By far the most common positions for women aged 25-40 were live-out domestic servant and unskilled construction worker. A few were street or market vendors, waste pickers or did piecework at home. The type of work was affected by length of time in Mumbai, since finding a domestic service position often depended on building a network of contacts, whereas many construction workers, male and female, migrated directly to construction sites. Women were typically paid less than men for the same work: in 2008, an unskilled woman construction worker earned on average Rs.50-60 a day, while a man earned Rs.100. Only very few women, typically domestic servants whose husbands were not in regular work, earned more than their husbands.

Regardless of lower earnings, the entry of mothers into the urban labour market often significantly affected household dynamics. In line with previous research from a range of countries highlighting the gains in personal autonomy experienced by migrant women entering wage-earning employment, I found that 40 of 59 women who began paid labour reported a greater say in family decision-making, in particular regarding household expenditure (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). Even some who had engaged in paid farm labour indicated that paid work in Mumbai had increased their role in determining household spending. For some, their rural earnings had been paid to their husband or in kind, whereas in Mumbai the vast majority received wages directly in cash. Migration increased the visibility of these women's contribution to household income and allowed them a greater control over distribution of their earnings.

Domestic servants reported the greatest increase in household bargaining power. Although domestic service was commonly seen as more socially acceptable for women than most other work outside the home, since it was "inside" (i.e. within the domestic sphere), in practice it involved significantly more engagement with the city than construction labour. Whereas many construction workers seldom left the site, often far from central Mumbai, domestic servants travelled daily to their place(s) of work, and sometimes fulfilled errands. This gave them an access to and knowledge of Mumbai that most female and even many male construction workers lacked. Domestic service also paid slightly higher average wages than construction, and often benefited from more flexible conditions.

Distance from left-behind families also altered patterns of household decision-making after initial migration, both directly (by decreasing the say of migrant fathers' rural kin), and indirectly (by facilitating migrant mothers' paid employment). For example, Abha, from Uttar Pradesh, was prohibited by her parents-in-law from working outside before migration, even fetching water or firewood. In Mumbai she worked in domestic service, earning Rs.2,000 a month. Instead of seeking permission, Abha and her husband had decided to conceal her employment from his parents – this was not difficult given the universal lack of access to communication technology, including regular access to telephones, among informants. Abha stressed her increased decision-making power, especially with regard to her children: she had taken her ill daughter to a local clinic, whereas before migration her in-laws had not permitted medical treatment for girls. There were other changes in their household's domestic arrangements. Whereas men and women had eaten separately in the village, with men dining first, in Mumbai Abha and her husband ate together, as did most of their neighbours (Interview MBCC04 21/02/2008). The distance from village patriarchal family structures, and the "nuclear" living arrangements of most migrant families, provided space (both literal and metaphorical) for mothers to take a more equitable role, often benefitting their children.

Other women experienced similar shifts. Sanavi, from Karnataka, had laboured on her husband's family land, but had not been permitted to work for wages. After a few weeks in Mumbai, she discussed with her husband the possibility of domestic service. Initially reluctant, he agreed when she emphasised her potential earnings. However, Sanavi could not find a position, and turned to unskilled construction work alongside her husband, a decision with which he was unhappy. Sanavi's account highlights her role in the bargaining process even before earning:

> *I told him there was no other choice, construction work was the only kind of work left for me. My husband was angry and we argued for several days. In our village it is not acceptable for women to do such work, because her parents-in-law will not permit it, but here husband and wife decide together…it is a shared decision* (Interview MBPN07 13/01/2008).

Distance from family members in the village could also increase children's autonomy, with several boys reporting feeling freer in Mumbai, since they were no longer obliged to obey paternal grandparents. Again, waged work was important: four older boys (aged 11-12) in paid labour reported specifically that they had taken a greater role in family discussions since beginning work. For example, one 12-year-old boy had initiated the decision for him to work full-time as an embroiderer in a workshop, rather than continuing to take in piecework after school (Interview MBCRR11 23/11/2007). However, children's participation in discussions appeared to be gendered. Although five girls aged 10-12 years were employed full-time in domestic service, none had been included in the decision about beginning labour, and none reported a greater role in household negotiations. Several migrant girls indicated that they felt less free in the city, typically seen as more hazardous for young women. Although many Indian adult women reported gains in autonomy, the same cannot be said for their daughters.

4.2 China

Before migration, most Chinese migrant women had engaged in farm labour on their own land, with a significant minority also involved in off-farm employment, such as running a small shop, selling produce or craftwork. Less than a fifth described themselves as "unemployed" before migration but, as in India, all had been involved in farming. In Shenzhen, though, only mothers caring for infants called themselves unemployed, and many had migrated specifically to work. Some worked alongside their husbands as street and market vendors, operators of shack restaurants, wholesalers, or refuse collectors. Others found waged employment as factory machinists (typically younger women aged 25-30) or cleaners, earning around RMB 2000 a month. The gap between men's and women's wages was much smaller than in India, though women typically earned less than men – who, if not small business owners, were employed as construction workers, security guards, factory assembly line workers and in other usually low-skilled positions. Again, the large majority of both sexes were employed in the informal economy.

Despite low salaries and poor working conditions, most migrant women seemed proud of their independent income, and 70% (58 of 83) who worked outside the home reported greater roles in household decision-making. Many, particularly those in wage labour, contrasted their urban employment positively with "having nothing to do" in rural China. Since all had engaged in at least some farming, this expression seemed connected more to an internalised sense of worthlessness attached to women's rural labour. Even many of those who jointly ran family businesses emphasised their enhanced contribution to household income. One woman said of the fish-vending business she ran with her husband: "I do half, he does half. We are partners. We discuss and decide things together." (Interview SZXS02 30/09/2008).

Many women also emphasised increased control of household resources. As one woman from northern Guangdong, running a small restaurant with her husband, explained:

> *Although I cannot always control his small spending, big spending must be discussed together, and we will find compromises. We both work hard, we both earn money – that money is not only my old man's!* (Interview SZML12 14/06/2008).

Migrant women reported the greatest gains in household expenditure decisions: for example, remittances (how much, and to whom); long-term investments (whether/where to build a house in rural China, or invest more in urban accommodation); how much to spend on children; and investment in children's education (discussed in the next section). As in India, mothers' enhanced roles appeared to relate in equal measure to the greater visibility of women's economic contributions to the household, and separation from husbands' families. While, unlike their Mumbai counterparts, many families in Shenzhen owned mobile telephones which could be used to sustain contact with "left-behind" family members, physical distance nonetheless provided scope for increased autonomy. Qian from Guangxi, a market vendor whose husband worked as a security guard, explained:

> *Of course we discussed these things together before coming to Shenzhen. But now, it's rather different. My husband seeks my advice more. I told him that we should eventually buy an apartment closer to my parents, since we won't go back to [husband's village] to live. We argued, but my opinion didn't change and he finally agreed with my way of thinking* (Interview SZML06 01/05/2008).

As this example highlights, for some families migration not only increased the distance from patrilineal kin networks, but brought them closer to the mother's natal family, augmenting the mother's role in decision-making. Huang, a Hunanese woman who married a Shaanxi migrant in Shenzhen before relocating to her own village and re-migrating after her children's birth, emphasised how little contact she had with her husband's parents. Her own parents, living closer to Shenzhen, had looked after her older daughter for two years, and Huang had had the greater say in childrearing. Other migrant mothers described a similar pattern. Some emphasised that they would like their daughters to marry migrant men too, such that they could remain closer to their natal families: "It is better [for my daughter]… to stay here to have children and depend on her own family" (Interview SZFT01 19/11/2008).

Stricter Chinese legislation on education and child labour, and much lower poverty levels than in India, meant that only one migrant child of 12 was in full-time labour in 2008, so it was not typically the case that children's say in household matters could be increased by paid work. Nonetheless, several older Chinese girls (aged 10-12) helped in parents' businesses before or after school. One 11-year-old reported proudly that she was more grown up than her younger brother, because she prepared vegetables for their parents' business, but this did not seem to result in greater involvement in household negotiations (Interview SZCML13 17/10/2008). Although several parents spoke positively of having "sensible" daughters they could "rely on", few gave a higher priority to the girls' opinions in household decision-making, even those concerning girls' own futures. A follow-up interview in 2016 with Choiwa, now 17, highlighted this pattern:

> *My parents put more responsibility on me after coming to Shenzhen. They relied on me to help with business and take care of my brother, as well as study. It's because I'm the eldest and a girl – I am more careful…They needed me to help here so I had to stay in Shenzhen. They discussed sending me back… but they needed me here so I had to enrol in vocational school. Actually, I would have preferred to start shop work, but this would not be acceptable to my parents and I did not discuss it with them* (Interview SZCFT02R2 12/08/2016).

As the next section shows, other children – both girls and boys – were given similarly little say in decisions to send them back to rural China. However, although in both Mumbai and Shenzhen I discovered examples of boys who had rebelled against parents, daughters in neither country had disobeyed parents' decisions. These differences between girls' and boys' behaviours highlight the persistence of patriarchal norms in both countries, where girls are encouraged to conform, both bodily and verbally, to stricter standards aimed at producing obedient and undemanding women (Basu et al, 2017).

4. Negotiating schooling and livelihoods decisions in the context of structural and institutional constraints

5.1 India

Much of the existing literature on (non-migrant) household decision-making and childrearing implies that gains in maternal income and autonomy will improve educational opportunities for children, especially for girls (Kambhampati & Pal 2001; Qian 2008). However, my data suggests that, in many cases, migration *worsened* educational outcomes, especially for daughters, despite gains in maternal autonomy. This section examines this surprising result and how it relates to the structural contexts in which households negotiated education and livelihoods decisions.

Girls' school attendance fell significantly after migration to Mumbai, from 85% (55) to 63% (40), as daughters dropped out to take over domestic duties and care for younger siblings. Research on the National Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act has shown how women's entering the paid rural labour force necessitates the removal of older daughters from school to care for younger children at the work site (Bhattacharyya and Vauquline, 2013). After relocating to the city, poor living conditions increased migrant families' domestic burdens, while migration away from extended family reduced options for sharing these burdens, such that the domestic chores of mothers who entered the urban labour force now fell upon daughters. This appeared especially common in families with an older daughter and several younger siblings, suggesting – in line with other studies – that birth order intersects with gender to play an important role in determining children's life chances (Congdon-Fors and Lindskog, 2017).[5] It was also especially the case where mothers worked in construction. Strict shift times and regular overtime prevented them from accompanying children to school or crèche, or collecting water at set times, while infants could no longer be taken to the workplace (as was sometimes possible for domestic servants). By contrast, in families where mothers did not enter the labour market, a smaller number of boys began paid work instead, necessitating their dropping out of school. Overall, boys' school attendance also fell, from 87% (62) before migration to 76% (54) after, but this was a smaller decrease than for girls.

The negotiation of decisions over who should go to school and who to work differed between households, but several patterns were observable. In line with Sen's (1990) model of "cooperative conflict" and the findings from other studies of migration and women's autonomy, where the mother had entered the urban labour market, she had typically been extensively involved in the decision, sometimes taking the lead. Some mothers were keen to earn an independent income and accepted that this would necessitate daughters dropping out. The decision to withdraw daughters was made easier by difficulties accessing Mumbai state schools, which often required long journeys along routes considered dangerous for unaccompanied girls, or which presented administrative barriers such as requiring birth certificates, which many rural girls lacked. Daughters' withdrawal was also justified on the grounds that lack of schooling could actually benefit families, since less-educated daughters could have less-educated husbands, thus requiring lower dowries. Older girls were also withdrawn from school for marriage: follow-up interviews in 2015-16 revealed that daughters aged 13-17 were typically informed that they were being sent to their home village for arranged marriages, rather than being consulted.[6]

Other women were more reluctant for daughters to drop out, reasoning that girls required education to find a husband or in case of widowhood. Families therefore discussed strategies to avoid girls' leaving school, including mothers taking infants to work or finding more flexible work. Sanavi's 8-year old daughter Ketana had dropped out when Sanavi persuaded her husband to allow her to begin construction work, but after a year she found employment as a domestic servant, enabling her daughter to re-enrol (Interview MBPN07

13/01/2008). In this household, the mother, away from patriarchal family structures, took an active role in persuading her husband that she should work, and, eventually, in finding a job which would allow her to keep both children in school. Eight years later, Ketana, now aged 16 and awaiting her tenth standard examination results, was one of the very few migrant girls I encountered still in education in Mumbai (Interview MBPN01 04/05/2016).

In none of the cases of dropout was the daughter herself consulted. Nor was it considered that a son might leave school to do housework. This was true regardless of comparative school performance and of birth order. Munau, a 10-year-old girl from Uttar Pradesh, had studied well, but was withdrawn without consultation after her mother's wages were docked for taking her baby to work. Munau's 12-year-old brother was not a good student and frequently truanted, yet both Munau and her mother laughed at the suggestion that he care for the younger children. Childcare was not a suitable task for a boy as he would "not take care", "not be willing" and his father "would not allow it" (Interview MBCSN02 09/11/2007). Despite increases in maternal autonomy, rigid gender roles continued to structure household discussions, and it was difficult to identify any increase in the agency (however broadly defined) of girl children.

In other households, typically high-caste families and those from more conservative northern states, the mother was averse to taking up paid work. However, many reluctantly accepted this as a better option than withdrawing a son from school. Neither Madhev nor his wife Meenakshi, from Madhya Pradesh, wanted Meenakshi to go out to work. However, after six months, Madhev reluctantly suggested she work in construction. Meenakshi, who agreed to conceal her work from her husband's family, was unhappy doing heavy manual labour for very low wages. However, the household had faced a stark financial choice between finding paid work for the wife, or withdrawing their 11-year-old son from school to work full-time, and husband and wife agreed it was better for him to study. The son himself had had some involvement in the decision: Madhev stressed that he had wanted to remain in school, and studied well. However, to facilitate Meenakshi's work, her nine-year-old daughter ceased attending school regularly (Interview MBGK04 20/01/2008). The son went on to complete four more years of school and three months of vocational training before finding semi-skilled work as a welder in the city, while their daughter was sent back to the village at 14 to prepare for marriage (Interview MBGK01 16/12/2016). That she had also been doing well at and enjoying school was of less importance, and the girl had not been involved in decision-making. This was a common pattern: despite maternal involvement and the exclusion of patrilineal kin, traditional gender hierarchies retained a strong sway, precluding consultation of daughters, even those no longer young children.

Finally, for some conservative, particularly Muslim, families, the dishonour of a mother's labour was too great for her to go out to work. In these cases, a son was required to work instead – leading to a surprising finding of more daughters than sons in education in Muslim families. The case of Badia from Uttar Pradesh was typical: not permitted to work outside the home, she engaged in piecework in the family's shack, but this and her husband's wage brought insufficient income to survive in Mumbai (Interview MBVS03 09/12/2007). Her 10-year-old son, Harun, therefore worked full-time on the construction site, while her daughters, 11 and 8, attended NGO classes. Harun had not been consulted, but he was proud of his earnings, paid directly to his father:

> *If I didn't work, I would just be idle. The school here is useless. Work is hard but better than school. I can earn money this way. When I am older I will be a skilled labourer and earn much more* (Interview MBCVS06 09/12/2007).

Harun's father had removed him from school, but I encountered two boys who had entered the labour market against parents' wishes. Refusal to attend school essentially forced the acceptance of these sons' choices among their families, made easier by the additional income. The father of an 11-year-old from Bihar told me: "He doesn't want to go to school…We told him to, but he isn't interested and he doesn't listen to his parents anymore", before confirming "We need the money he earns" (Interview MBJG12 15/03/2008). By contrast, no daughter had disobeyed parents to take up (or refuse) paid or unpaid labour. Nor did most girls in paid domestic service appear to exercise increased autonomy in other ways. Asked about long-term goals, the response of 12-year-old Sangita was typical:

> *I don't know. Nothing. I will do this [work] until it is time to go back to the village to marry.*
>
> *[When will that be?]*
>
> *I don't know. When my father tells me* (Interview MBCKV01 15/01/2008).

While some younger girls, aged 6-9, expressed desires for future urban employment (as teachers, doctors or beauticians), their curtailed education opportunities made these outcomes highly unlikely, and few of those over 10 expressed any concrete aspirations at all, accepting that marriage and return to the natal village would shape their future. NGO workers who had introduced me to many of the original informants confirmed that many of the girls I had interviewed in 2007-08 had been sent back to rural India in the following years, and of the 15 interviews conducted with migrant youths in 2015-16, only four were with girls who had remained in Mumbai since primary school. One further girl, Sonal, had been sent back to Uttar Pradesh for marriage aged 17 but had re-migrated with her husband two years later and was now engaged again in domestic work (Interview MBND01 17/12/2016). Like Sangita above, she had not been consulted on her withdrawal from school at the age of 13, which had been necessitated by her father's illness, or on her return to the village. The only household decision in which Sonal reported having taken part was (after leaving her natal family) that to return to Mumbai, aged 19, which she had discussed over several months with her husband, who had ultimately made the decision to move.

5.2 China

Migration to Shenzhen had also, for many children in 2008-09, worsened educational opportunities. Unlike in Mumbai, this was unconnected to women's labour force entry: smaller family sizes, better living conditions and a more equitable division of household tasks meant the almost universal paid labour of Chinese migrant mothers did not necessitate daughters' dropping out. In Shenzhen, worsening educational opportunities related more to institutional barriers excluding non-local children from urban state schools. This picture is familiar from extensive previous literature which highlights how migrant children are frequently prevented from enrolling in state schools and instead attend low-quality private migrant schools (Liang & Chen, 2007; Goodburn, 2009). What is much less explored is how households formulate responses to this exclusion; specifically, whether to

make additional efforts to enrol children in state schools, send children home to the village for education, or place them in migrant schools. This section explores such decision-making.

The proportion of 6-12-year-old children of both sexes attending state school fell dramatically after moving to the city, from 87% (78) to 17% (15), with slightly more girls than boys enrolled in unlicensed migrant schools. The main barrier to state school entry in 2008 was the requirement for six official documents, likely a deliberate strategy by China's urban authorities to prevent mass migrant enrolment (Goodburn, 2009). These included family planning certificates; birth certificates; proof of one year's social insurance payments by both parents; and certified rental contracts. Very few families had all these documents, which could be difficult and expensive to obtain, especially where parents had no official employers and lived in illegally-let accommodation. As in India, girls were more likely than boys to lack documents, though this had less to do with obstacles to birth registration than with deliberate attempts to evade gendered state family planning quotas.[7]

Despite the administrative differences, analysis of household negotiations over school enrolment decisions in Shenzhen highlights several key similarities with Mumbai. Although discrimination was much less overt in the Chinese case, where it was universally accepted that women should work, dowries were not customary and no parents indicated that educating daughters was pointless, there tended to be gender differences in both the educational decisions and the decision-making processes. As in India, mothers' increased control of household resources seemed ineffective in enhancing daughters' educational opportunities against the background of highly constrained choices. Only in single-child households (just 16% of families) did it appear that gender considerations played no part in determining schooling outcomes. This may have been because parents of single girls would be reliant on their daughter for support in old age, despite customary patrilocal marriage, or simply because greater resources were available for education.

Many families with two or more children made more effort to enrol their son in a decent-quality school than their daughter. For some, this was primarily a question of documents, since their unregistered daughters could not enter Shenzhen state schools. However, for others there was a concurrent prioritisation of boys' education. A father from rural Guangdong, who lacked the documents to enrol any of his children in state school, proudly explained the sacrifices his family made so that his 10-year-old son could attend "elite" private school. These included not only that his two daughters attended a cheaper local migrant school, but that the younger girl had not been enrolled until she was eight so as to delay fees (Interview SZHB04 08/07/2008). This pattern of delayed enrolment of younger girls was common – more so than for boys – and was accepted as a financial necessity by both mothers and fathers. In rare cases, even girls with enrolled younger brothers were not yet in school.

Other families made more efforts to obtain the documents needed to enrol sons, although this decision was not typically ascribed to the child's sex. The parents of 10-year-old Weilun from Jiangxi were reluctant for him to attend the low-quality migrant school his older sister attended, so purchased a fake "certified" housing rental contract, allowing him to enrol in state school. His mother, the driving force behind the decision as well as the acquirer of the forged document, explained that this was because Weilun needed more guidance and discipline than his "more careful" sister (Interview SZBA02 22/06/2008). In two other families, a younger son reaching school age or joining parents in the city was the catalyst to acquire documents that would allow not only the son

but also an older sister to enrol in state school. Even where attempts to enrol children in state school had ultimately failed, parents' accounts highlighted often greater efforts taken for sons.

When decent quality schooling could not be obtained in Shenzhen, families faced difficult decisions about whether to send a child home alone to the village. Rural schools had qualified teachers and were much cheaper than urban migrant schools, but facilities were not necessarily better, and there were psychological costs of separation. In one example of a seven-year-old boy returning to his grandparents in Hunan, the boy himself initiated the decision, as he begged to leave his Shenzhen school (Interview SZCML11R2 24/08/2015). More commonly, however, parents instigated return, sometimes in discussion with older children and left-behind family members who would usually assume the role of carers. Since high school education was effectively barred to non-locals in Shenzhen, it tended to be those aged 15-16 who were sent back. In this age group, girls outnumbered boys in my sample.[8] Again, older daughters were seen as more careful and less in need of parental supervision, yet their opinions were rarely given much weight in decision-making. Linlin, interviewed in 2016, explained that she had told her parents she did not want to go to rural Shaanxi at the age of 16, yet had been overruled. Only after nearly two years of lower grades under the more intensive rural curriculum did her parents allow her to drop out and return to Shenzhen, aged nearly 18 (Interview SZCXS02R2 26/08/2016).

Few mothers wanted their daughters to return to rural China permanently, and many expressed strong opinions that the city would be better for their daughters in the longer term. Some phrased this specifically in terms of greater women's autonomy in Shenzhen. Nonetheless, in all cases mothers were participants in the decision to send a daughter back temporarily for schooling, and were sometimes the lead decision-maker, especially where the child was sent to maternal grandparents. Sending an older daughter back for lower-cost rural education was justified not only in terms of the girl's education but also that more funds were then available to support the education of a younger child – often a son – in the city. Furthermore, both parents typically assumed that daughters would obey decisions to return to the village. By contrast, I encountered two cases where a sent-back son had re-migrated to work in Shenzhen without parental permission. Mingliu, who had run away from his grandparents' home in Sichuan in 2012 aged 15, explained:

> *I told them I wasn't willing to go back but they didn't listen… [When I ran away] my parents were very angry and my father threatened to beat me. But they couldn't make me go back. They gradually understood this. Now they are happy I have a job in Shenzhen: they see that I earn 2000 yuan a month* (Interview SZCML08R2 14/08/2016).

As in India, boys who disagreed with their parents' educational decisions sometimes expressed their agency by open disobedience, yet no girl in either country had done so. Nor was it easy to detect more subtle expressions of child agency among migrant girls. Of course, by definition, these forms are more difficult to identify. Nonetheless, at least in comparison to their similarly-aged brothers, girls took a lesser role in household negotiations over both education and livelihoods, and where older daughters expressed opinions, these appeared to be given less weight than those of sons.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In both Mumbai and Shenzhen, educational access for many children worsens after relocation to the city, with girls experiencing the most serious declines. This is despite changes in household dynamics which increase the role of mothers in decision-making and allow the voices of (some) children to be heard. Examination of the processes of household negotiations over schooling decisions reflects increased maternal autonomy as a result of women's entry to the urban labour market, in line with the migration literature from other countries, and of separation from patrilineal kin (Dannecker,2005; Mahler and Pessar, 2006). However, it also highlights the structural and institutional constraints on educational choices which limit the application of this autonomy outside the household, and which are themselves gendered. In Mumbai, migrant households cannot survive on a single income, so daughters are removed from school to perform domestic roles when mothers go out to work, while a smaller number of sons drop out to undertake paid labour when mothers do not. The same economic factors which underlie positive changes in family dynamics (gains in household negotiating power for women and some children who enter the labour market) thus also necessitate children's withdrawal from school to substitute. To a lesser extent, economic factors play a role in Shenzhen too: school enrolment, most typically of younger sisters, is delayed because the high costs of (private) schooling in the city are a heavy burden even with two adult wages.

In Shenzhen, the greater structural constraints are the administrative institutions which prevent migrant school enrolment, including the *hukou* system and related residence permits, and local and national policies which place heavy bureaucratic limits on enrolment. Although the use of such policies by urban governments is specific to China, registration is an issue in India too, as girls' births are less likely to be registered, and girls are thus less likely to possess a range of identity proofs. In China, this situation is exacerbated by the gendered implications of state family planning policies, which encourage parents actively to conceal female births rather than simply failing to register them as in India. In both countries, lack of documents makes it more difficult for girl children to enter urban state schools.

In both countries, structural factors – systems of registration, local and national policies, urban living conditions and the urban labour market – particularly disadvantage migrant girls through their interaction with gender norms and expectations, reducing parents' or children's ability to exercise genuine agency in educational choices. Although discriminatory attitudes exist towards daughters (much stronger and more frequently expressed in India), it should be emphasised that these attitudes alone do not cause decreases in decent schooling for girls after rural-urban relocation. Instead, even minor differences in gender attitudes interact with major structural barriers to schooling to amplify negative outcomes for migrant girls. Mothers may be inclined to improve children's welfare and increase gender equity, as the literature suggests, and migration does seem to improve their autonomy in household decision-making. Nonetheless, structural constraints on migrant education in Mumbai and Shenzhen mean that they cannot ensure that this benefits their children, least of all their daughters.

Although the details of each case differ, then, the broad patterns – increased autonomy for mothers and (some) children, which nonetheless fails to improve educational opportunities for most children – are the same. This is important for household research and its guiding models, as well as specifically for migration studies.

Focusing on the structural and cultural circumstances in which households operate, and how their members understand their situation as it intersects with gender and family-role norms, can counterbalance the danger of over-emphasising the agency of households implied by the concept of household strategies. Undertaking comparative qualitative research, as in this study, is particularly important as a method for elucidating which structural factors are important for households. The conclusions are also highly relevant for migration research and theory. First, they suggest that more attention should be paid to the non-economic consequences of migration, which are particularly serious for children, and to the constraints which limit the exercise of increases in women's and children's agency which might be gained through migration. More broadly, while migration can be understood as part of a household strategy for livelihood improvement, enquiries into the dynamics of livelihoods negotiations should not end at the point of migration, nor be contained to the area of origin. Instead, negotiations are part of a process which continues into the destination area and is reformulated with changes in household roles and intersection with broader factors, leading to new inequalities, tensions, and conflicts of interest.

Notes

[1] There are, of course, two distinct but overlapping meanings of the term "children": those in the temporary life stage of childhood, and those in the permanent kin relationship with parents. This article explores both senses of the term, with an emphasis on the former particularly in the context of the first round of data collection when child participants were of primary-school age, but also focusing on the latter especially in the context of evolving family dynamics between parents and offspring in their second decade of their lives.

[2] Here the term "children" is used to refer to the kin relationship between parents and their offspring, rather than to characterise youths aged 14-21 as being still children in the chronological sense.

[3] The perhaps surprisingly small difference in family size between Mumbai and Shenzhen may be a result not only of the relative ease with which migrant families can evade birth planning quotas, but also of regional variations within China: it was noticeable that Chinese households with more than two children originated almost exclusively from within Guangdong province.

[4] Almost all women described as "not working" in the village actually engaged in extensive unpaid domestic and/or farm work as well as childcare. The description of these women as "not working", given by their husbands and the women themselves, helps to illustrate the "invisibility" of rural women's unpaid labour.

[5] In this study, however, findings on the effect of birth order were not statistically significant, likely owing to small sample size.

[6] Although legal marriage age for women in India is 18 years, between 48% and 60% of rural girls marry younger (UNICEF India, 2016).

[7] Since rural family planning quotas have long allowed couples a second child if their first is a girl, and registration of out-of-plan births involves a large fine, many second or third female births are not officially registered.

[8] This accords with Ling's (2017:163) findings from Shanghai, where parents felt more confident in sending daughters home to pursue further education, but contrasts with other studies which found no gender difference among those sent back for high school (e.g. Koo et al, 2014).

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