

Divergent Developmental Trajectories of Children in Migrant Families in China: A Comparative Analysis by Social Origin and Gender

Abstract

Using the 2013-2015 China Education Panel Survey, the first nationally representative survey of junior high school students in China, Dr Liu examines how the impact of parental migration and child migration on children's cognitive development and school enrollment might vary by the children's urban/rural origin and gender. While prior studies have focused exclusively on left-behind children of rural origin affected by massive migration in China, this study shows that urban left-behind are not immune to the potential adverse impact of parental migration. The adverse impact of being left-behind is shown to be even stronger for children of urban hukou, as they are less likely to have extended family support networks and have adjusted to the migration culture prevalent in rural communities and thus are more penalized by the lack of parental engagement. This study also suggests a significant gendered impact of parental migration. Girls overall are more likely to be negatively impacted by parental migration when they are left-behind. Meanwhile, children migrating with their parents significantly outperform their peers remaining in the origin. Causal analysis adjusting for selection of child migration suggest that policies enabling more children to migrate with their parents and enroll in urban public schools would significantly benefit those left-behind by their migrant parents.