The Realities of Keeping the Homefires Burning

Lives of Wives Who Stay Behind

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Focus Points

- Experiences of women who remain behind
- As related to migration's impact on gender relations or gender inequality
- Factors that explain neglect of experiences of partners left behind
- Recommendations to address women's challenges

Need to focus beyond the economic impacts.

Impacts on women's daily lives

- Increase in their responsibilities as *de facto* managers of their households
- Some shifts in gendered division of labour through assumption of "men's" responsibilities
- Lone parenthood
- Lack of rest and mobility

"He suffers there and I suffer here"

Impacts on Gender Relations/Inequality

- Any changes to patriarchal control over household affairs and women?
- IOM: Temporary migration to Canada has brought about *"new relationships among genders"* and it "*contributes to improving the situation of women*" (IOM 2006: 11)
- Such a view is problematic: Women may not want these added responsibilities and men's control continues during their absence

Women: Burdened and stressed

- While some women had assumed greater control over household affairs, this was often not seen in a positive light, but instead as a stress-inducing situation:

  "I have a bit more control over everything, and I have more to take care of as well… I have to think about how to do everything."

- Weight lifted upon men's return, and a "return to normal", or an intensified normal

Men: Continued authority & control

- Telephone communication – Men advise or instruct women

  "She's like an informant… So I know"

- In-laws and community members - *Suegras* watching out for their sons' interests, and issues of faithfulness

  "people here don't think about the fact that they're suffering there, but rather about what they [women] are doing here."

Explanatory Factors

Why is there a lack of attention to experiences of partners who remain behind?

- Gender blindness
- Framing and focus of labour migration programs also blind us to non-economic issues and non-migrants
  - Employer-focused and –driven
  - Government approaches to migration

Employer Influence

- LSPP caters to the needs of employers
  "new style of immigration" (Trumper & Wong)
- FERME's interest and focus:
  "the money that each worker represents…They don't see the worker as a human being" - - Guatemalan consular officer
- IOM feels constrained:
  "everything that happens, you have to show how this improves the business" – Chief of Mission, IOM Guatemala

Approaches to Migration

- Migration management – Destination countries set the agenda, prioritize macroeconomic interests
- Migration and development – Economic focus on remittances
- In both, social dimensions are neglected, including rights, equality, and social cohesion (Piper & Grugel, 2007)

Recommendations

Yes, economics drive this policy but impacts on partners are not just social externalities

Consider the following (including in any forthcoming bilateral agreement):

- Institutional (government/IOM) support for partners (see Jamaica)
- Funding of women's groups to address women's needs at the community level

Questions and Comments Welcome