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INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION: A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Around the world, more people are on the move, many for seeking new opportunity and a better life for themselves and their families. Many are even forced to move due to disaster and conflict. Gender is fundamental to any discussion of the causes and consequences of migration. Migration being such a dynamic phenomenon have been well-researched by scholars, but it is mostly assumed that the process and effects of migration is gender neutral, i.e. both men and women face same type of risks and vulnerabilities.

Whereas, increasing number of women migrants highlights the fact that gender influences reasons for migrating, risk and vulnerabilities faced by migrants are also shaped by it.

This article therefore focuses on unaddressed aspect of migration i.e., gender and how it affects migration and heightens the vulnerability and situation of violence faced by women. It further highlights the importance of international gender responsive conventions required to protect the rights of migrating women and the need for country specific legal legislations required to achieve the objective of protecting and assisting victims of forced migration and trafficking.

KEYWORDS: *Migration, Gender, Vulnerabilities, Sex trafficking, Gender-segregation, International Conventions.*

INTRODUCTION

Global migration affects an increasing number of countries at origin and destination with both positive and negative effects on the involved countries and individuals. Politics and policies shape the whole process of migration, beginning from the motivation to leave, through policies regarding predeparture training, choice of destination, and terms of admission, to policies regarding labour protection, and social and political inclusion. Gender is an important component of migration and is relevant to all these questions, as men and women in destination countries may be differently affected by the political environment or policies which will result in gendered patterns of migration. And thus, it is important to understand the causes and consequences of international migration from a gender perspective because hierarchical social relations and norms related to gender shape the migration experiences of migrants, whether male or female.

Understanding the role of women in migration involves not just disaggregating data by sex, but also understanding how gender relations affect each aspect of the migration cycle (Petrozziello 2013). In the analysis of female migration, it is critical to include a social interpretation rooted in gender norms and culture.

Gender is not just the biological difference but the social construct of "male" and "female''. Gender norms shape roles, expectations, and behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity, and they can create differential rights and opportunities for men and women. A gendered analysis of migration offers a perspective on gender relations i.e. how gender affects access to resources; and differences in power and equality in economic, social, and legal structures.

Migration can be empowering for women as it allows women to have access to employment and education, this further improves unequal gender norms and gives women the autonomy to make decisions. Nevertheless, migration may also increase vulnerabilities, including abuse and trafficking, particularly when migrants are low skilled or irregular. Understanding the intricacies of gender and migration can result in better programs and policies that enhances the rights and opportunities for female migrants and reduces their vulnerabilities.

HYPOTHESIS

The process of migration is affected by one's gender; women regarded as inferior and weaker sex by society are more vulnerable to the risk of violence while migrating and in destination country.

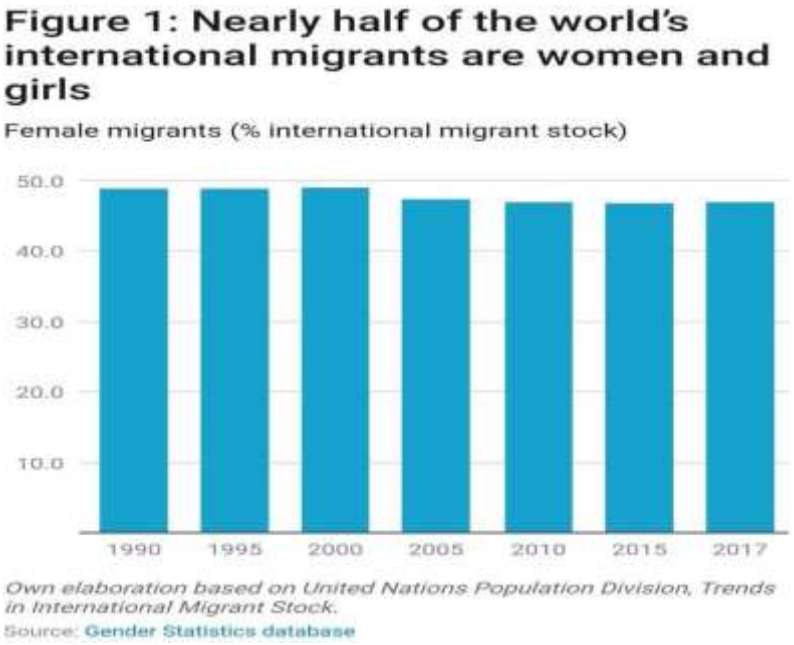
METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative type of research with some reference to statistics to support the argument. Thematic and textual analysis have been used for the research purpose.
Secondary sources like journals, books, articles, research papers have been used to make it informative.

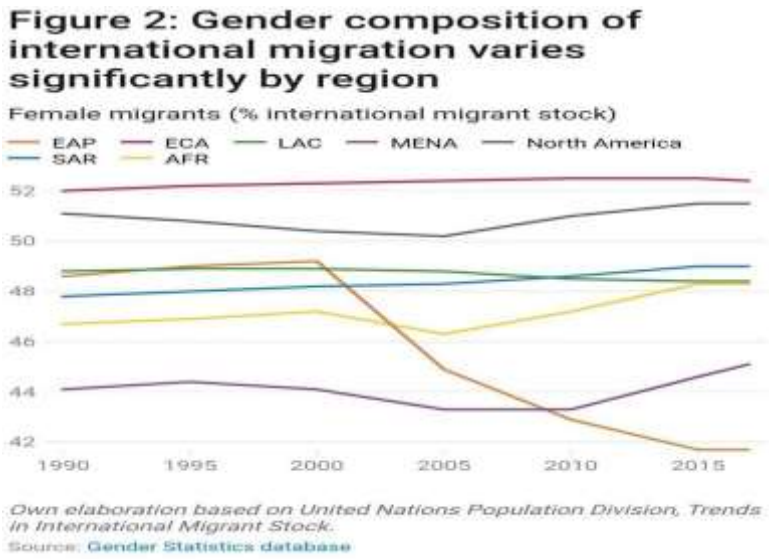
UNADDRESSED ASPECT OF MIGRATION

Migration theories have not addressed the gender aspects of international migration partly because of the assumption that most migrant workers were men; women are dependent on men and do not migrate independently. But as of 2000, the United Nations Population Division estimates that 49 per cent of all international migrants were women or girls, as shown in the table below

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However, the proportion of women among all international migrants varies considerably across regions, as shown in the following graph:



The graph depicts that the proportion of women among international migrants had reached above 52 percent in more developed regions like in North America and Europe and Central Asia (ECA) as compared to less developed regions like in East Asia and Pacific (EAP) and Latin America and Caribbean(LAC) region. The reason behind this trend can be that in more developed regions women have access to better employment opportunities and are not subjected to gendered social norms in comparison to less developed regions.

Analytical frameworks have either ignored the participation of women in international migration or have assumed that causes and consequences of it is same for both men and women and thus have not really analyzed the gendered nature of international migration and vulnerabilities that women are more prone to face than men.

REASONS BEHIND MIGRATION OF WOMEN

FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Marriage and family reunification are primary reason for women to migrate nationally and internationally. And this is mainly because of the gender norms which expect women to live with their spouses (UN DESA 1993, as cited in Martin 2004) for example, family reunification is the main cause of women immigrating to Australia, Canada, Europe, New Zealand, and the United States, (Ghosh 2009).

FOR ESCAPING SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Women often tend to migrate when they have social, political and economic aspiration which cannot be realized in the country of origin due to gendered social norms which hinder their growth. And to escape this structural based gender inequality, forced and abusive marriage, domestic violence and

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to have access to resources and equal employment opportunity, migration becomes an attractive choice for women. The IOM's studies in Moldova and Guatemala find that single mothers, widows, or divorcees that experience discrimination may use migration to escape social stigma (IOM 2004, 2005a, as cited by UNFPA 2006).
Thus, discriminatory social institutions play a push-pull factor in migration but exclusively for women (Ferrant et al. study (2014).

FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
From last few decades the trend of 'feminization of workforce' can be traced as women are increasingly migrating on their own to seek education and enhanced employment opportunity. According to International Organization for Migration (IOM) report, more than half of global migrants are women migrating independently to seek employment opportunities (IOM 2008, as cited by Ghosh 2009).

FOR WELL-BEING OF FAMILY THROUGH REMITTANCES:
An important aspect of migration is remittances i.e., money sent home by migrant to support their families and many studies reflect that women tend to remit more than men but because women are largely employed in low paying jobs the overall amount still remains below men.
Also, the motivation behind remitting differs as men sends funds mainly for investment purpose but women tend to remit mainly for well-being of family like education, health care, nutrition, etc.
Further, sending and receiving remittances increases women's autonomy as sender women becomes financially independent and empowered and women who receives remittances have moved from subsistence agriculture to running small business like in Philippines (IFAD and UN- INSTRAW 2007, as cited by IOM 2012).

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH MIGRATION OF WOMEN

GENDERED SOCIAL NORMS
Women do migrate to escape the existing structural inequality, but this doesn't imply that at the destination country they will have access to equality of treatment and opportunity. Even there the social norms affect their lives and the general attitude towards female immigrant is not as acceptable as male. And consequently, they have to face dual vulnerability i.e. as a migrant and as a woman.

GENDER-SEGREGATION IN LABOUR FORCE
Migration leads to reinforcement of gender segregation as women often migrate in response to gender- specific labour demands that reflects norms and stereotypes and gender-based hierarchies.

Women are often expected to work in domestic sector or garment industry or work as caretakers due to the existing stigma around women as weaker and emotional sex. Some employers even consider women as more 'docile' and 'cheaper' employees (Hugo 1993, as cited by Martin 2004).

Gender-segregation occurs in high skilled profession as well, for example in Canada, Japan and USA migrant women are especially hired for high skilled nursing profession (UNRISD 2005, as cited by Piper 2005).

LOW WAGES IN COMPARISON TO MEN
According to the structuralist Dual Labour Market theory, there are two tiers of jobs produced by a capitalist system. First tier includes jobs that are secure, permanent and well paid, mostly men are employed in this category and women forms the majority of second tier jobs which are temporary and poorly paid.

Because women are mainly employed in domestic and caregiving sector and this caregiving sector is not highly valued either socially or economically resulting in lower wages for women and fewer rights, regulations, contracts for protecting them (Yeates 2005, as cited by Petrozziello 2013).

Along with low wages another negative factor in domestic sector is that this sector is not covered under any labour legislation, social security scheme or welfare provision and thus women are deprived of rights accorded to workers. Male migrants in comparison to women are mainly employed in industrial or construction sector which comes under labour legislation; thus, they get more rights than women.

REMITTING LOW IN COMPARISON TO MEN:
Large number of workers who are undocumented and receives lower wages have experienced delayed payments or even non-payment of wages from their employers resulting in low remittances or no remittances. Women more than men works in unregulated and unprotected sector and thus are more prone to vulnerability of non-payment or unreasonable deduction of their wages without their consent, thereby affecting their ability to remit.

ADVERSE EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON WOMEN LEFT BEHIND:
Migration not only affects the migrants but also their family members who are left behind and particularly women of the family. When male relative of women migrates i.e., either husband or father, women find themselves co-residing with other male members who may restrict their activities outside home.

Also, sometimes women must take extra responsibility and burden by undertaking income generating activity if the male member does not send remittances on regular basis. Thus, women left behind must bear dual responsibility of childcaring and upbringing along with taking care of other elderly members and of generating income to support her family.

It is also seen that after migration of male members, women are mainly responsible for making decisions as head of the family and it consequently empowers them and improve their social standing. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to ignore that in many cases when the male counterpart returns, they strive to regain their dominant position and are mainly successful in doing it due to long established patriarchy in society and thus

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reinforces gendered social norms and relegates women into position of inferiority again.

FORCED LABOUR AND TRAFFICKING

International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that women and girls form the overwhelming majority of people trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation i.e. around 98%. Infact, trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of forced labour and sexual exploitation is one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity which urgently needs to be regulated through gender responsive legislations at national and international level. Trafficking builds and perpetuates on existing gender inequalities and its process involves coercion, violence and exploitation making women most vulnerable of all migrants.

Refugee women and girls or forcedly displaced people are particularly vulnerable when they find themselves caught up in situations where their security cannot be ensured and thus, they can be subject to sexual violence and exploitation.

Male migrants also experience violence and labour exploitation but because they work in documented and regulated sector like agriculture and construction, their rights of protection against it are more secured in comparison to female migrants, who usually work in undocumented sector like domestic and entertainment and thus their exploitation occurs in invisible labour market situation and consequently they have no recourse to protection against it.

According to Global Investigative Journalism Network report, Indian women are regularly trafficked through the United Arab Emirates and forced to work as domestic workers in other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council region. These women brought here are not even registered with their embassies and thus can be subject to appalling working conditions.

OTHER VULNERABILITIES

Due to inadequate access to resources and information and lack of networks and connections, many irregular women migrant depends on recruitment agencies to assist in their migration. For example, in Philippines, 1200 agencies exist for this purpose and these agencies charge very high rates unreasonably. And because migrant women earn less than men their accrued debt can be very difficult to pay off and it also reduces their financial gain (Ghosh 2009).

Migrant women are also at the risk of gender-based violence and sexual abuse from agents and escorts which even increases their vulnerability to trafficking.

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTIVE EFFORTS

To protect human rights of women and to promote better understanding of it, there is a need of improved research and data collection activities which will provide a basis for the formulation of gender-specific migration policies and programs.

Many countries have recognized the benefits and risks of female migration and have discussed it in international forums like in the UN Population Conference in Cairo in 1994, and the UN Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, as well as the 10- and 20-year reviews of each. In 1994, the UN General Assembly adopted the **Resolution on Violence against Migrant Women**, which was later adopted by the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the UN Commission on Human Rights (Oishi 2002). Even ILO recognizes that ensuring rights of migrants increases the benefits of migration for both source and destination countries and contributes to poverty alleviation.

Many international conventions, declarations, and laws have been established to protect women and migrants like, **The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families** which focuses on basic protections and equality of treatment for migrant workers, regardless of status; and **Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women** which promotes human rights and equal treatment for women and girls and 189 states are party to it. Further, it highlights the migrant women's' basic rights as well as the gender-based differences, vulnerabilities, and forms of discrimination faced by them and gives recommendations regarding it to state parties (CEDAW 1979). **ILO Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers, 2011** aims to regulate domestic labour standards for protecting their rights. The **Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person, especially Women and Children** was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2003, which stipulates that state parties must adopt or strengthen legislative measures to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, protecting and assisting victims of trafficking. It also aims to facilitate cooperation among states to meet these objectives.

Many countries have also adopted measures to protect the rights of vulnerable migrant, particularly women, like Indonesia and Malaysia signed a memorandum of understanding in 2006 that requires contracts for domestic helpers; designates the rights and obligations of both migrants and employers; and requires that employers not withhold wages until the end of the contract. Some countries have even offered protection and assistance to victims of forced migration, trafficking, refugees and to undocumented migrants and in all these categories women forms a major part.

Even after all these efforts, the risks faced by female migrants continues and the full benefits of migration to advance gender equality is yet to be realized. And for this to be actualized all countries should implement all international legal instruments and conventions that protect and promote the rights of migrant women and girls, should review their national migration legislation to identify discriminatory provisions and modify them. Focus should also be on developing legal literacy programs to promote better understanding of rights of women.

CONCLUSION

The feminization of migration, resulting in large numbers of women in more vulnerable situations in destination countries are giving additional impetus and urgency to address the human rights of women migrants worldwide. Conducting more research and collection of sex disaggregated data will be crucial

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in addressing knowledge gaps and providing a more complete analysis of gender and migration. It will consequently improve programs and policies, which will increase the benefits of migration and will reduce vulnerabilities faced by women migrants. Thus, integrating gender, migration and development policies should be the central concern of policy makers and they should reinforce each other to develop gender specific rights-based approach.

Migration remains on the margins of the global policy agenda, except for disaster and conflict- induced migration. Hence, more joined-up thinking between the agencies of the UN system and other actors are required. Convergence of international conventions and national approaches is very important to protect the rights of vulnerable migrants and trafficked victims. Even the need of bilateral agreements between countries to secure rights of migrant women cannot be neglected, along with the enforcement of international conventions.

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