Using Mobile Phone Technology to Study Migrant Recruitment Processes in Pakistan

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IFMS 2018
Overview

Researching labor recruitment

Data collection with mobile phones

Expectations and obligations during recruitment

Promises and pitfalls
Researching labor recruitment

- Concern over labor migrants’ living conditions and life outcomes
  - Existing focus on employment terms in host country
  - Increasing attention to factors in sending country

- Sending country: role of recruiters and job brokers
  - Recruiters connect migrants to overseas employers, but...
    (Abella 2004; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015)
  - Often unregulated (Barrientos 2014)
  - Selectively mediate information (Lindquist 2010; Rahman 2011)
  - Result in high fees and debt for migrants (Verité Report 2012; Segal and Labowitz 2017)
Researching labor recruitment

- Concern over labor migrants’ living conditions and life outcomes
  - Existing focus on employment terms in host country
  - Increasing attention to factors in sending country
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Researching labor recruitment

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Researching labor recruitment

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- Processual; unfolds over interconnected stages
- Informal, contingent, unregulated
- Migrants and household members may have different perceptions of the process at different times

For these reasons, recruitment has often been studied ethnographically (Kern and Müller-Böker 2015; Lindquist 2017). How can recruitment processes be studied using (large scale) systematic data?
Researching labor recruitment

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Mobile phones for survey research

- Mobile phone (and smartphone) ownership increasing, even in developing world (Poushter 2016)
- Recently used in social science research for difficult-to-measure situations, e.g., collecting real time conflict events data (Van der Windt and Humphreys 2016)
- Relatively new method within migration research
Design: Processes and social structures

AM  Aspiring migrant  DM  Departing migrant
Design: Processes and social structures

AM → AM: Meet recruiter
AM → AM: Sign contract
AM → DM: Plane ticket
Design: Processes and social structures

Aspiring migrant (AM) meets recruiter (R) and signs a contract. The recruiter provides a plane ticket. The aspiring migrant then departs as a departing migrant (DM).
Design: Processes and social structures

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Design: Processes and social structures

[Diagram showing interactions between Aspiring Migrant (AM), Departing Migrant (DM), Recruiter (R), and Family member (F) with labeled processes such as "Meet recruiter", "Sign contract", "Plane ticket", and "Family member"]

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Design: Processes and social structures

Aspiring migrant (AM)
Departing migrant (DM)
Recruiter (R)
Family member (F)

Meet recruiter
Sign contract
Plane ticket
Interview
Weekly phone app questionnaire

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Design: Processes and social structures

- Aspiring migrant (AM)
- Departing migrant (DM)
- Recruiter (R)
- Family member (F)

- Meet recruiter
- Sign contract
- Plane ticket
- Weekly phone app questionnaire
- Interview

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Data

Pakistan:

► Second largest South Asian supplier of labor migrants

► 94% employed in GCC

► Recruiters and job brokers are common (Atif 2009)

► Participants located in four high out-migration communities

► 35 aspiring migrants; 35 heads of households
## Data: Summary of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aspiring migrants (N = 35)</th>
<th>Heads of households (N = 35)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbotabad</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bajor</td>
<td>9 (26%)</td>
<td>9 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawalpindi</td>
<td>16 (46%)</td>
<td>16 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sargodha</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pashtun</td>
<td>12 (34%)</td>
<td>11 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>13 (37%)</td>
<td>12 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^a)</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
<td>12 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean age</strong></td>
<td>27.71 (7.46)</td>
<td>41.24 (14.48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Category of other includes Hazarewal, Hindko, Kashmiri, and Muhajir.
Analyzing changing expectations

- Measuring respondents’ (changing) expectations of monthly income saving through the recruitment process.

**Question 1**: Are these expectations affected by strong/weak ties with someone promising a contract/visa to the migrant?

**Question 2**: (How) Are findings different when data are also collected through mobile phones?
Preliminary results

Table: Increase in expectation of income saving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Contract (Strong)</th>
<th>Contract (Weak)</th>
<th>Visa (Strong)</th>
<th>Visa (Weak)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↑ saving exp.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>0.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exit v. entry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=44)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑ saving exp.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bwn stages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mobile phone data collection pitfalls...

- Infrastructure problems: spotty cell phone coverage, power outages etc.
- Usage: Respondents did not receive notification of new questionnaire if app was not left running in background
- Clarification: Respondents could not immediately ask clarification questions regarding questionnaire
- Respondent fatigue: In exit interviews, respondents noted the high number of questions per week
...and promise

- Independent of interviewer biases
- Facilitates collecting information beyond survey questions, e.g., geolocation, interaction records
- Easier (and cheaper) to administer survey at regular intervals
- Allows more nuanced and frequent data collection: Questions can be tailored to respondents’ situations
- Easier administering of experimental design
- New project will address many of these issues
Thank you

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Appendix
Data

Criteria for inclusion:
- Aspiring migrant must be seriously considering migration, but not have taken any steps to do so
- Head of household willing to participate in the study
- Basic literacy
- Participants recommended by research firm’s local field coordinators and snowball sampling

Interviews:
- Conducted in rented office in community
- Pairs arrive together, interviewed separately
- Structured survey and open-ended questions
- Training to use the phone app

Phone app questionnaire administered weekly