

Essays on Women's Empowerment and Natural Disaster: The Case of Nepal

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Summary

Outmigration is an increasing trend in many developing countries. In Nepal, where remittances exceed 20% of GDP, outmigration is dominated by male household members due to cultural and legal constraints on women. Various social impacts of outmigration are well examined in the literature; however, the impact of male-dominated outmigration on women's empowerment and employment is relatively undocumented. The first part of this dissertation examines the impact of male outmigration on women's employment and empowerment. We employ ethnicity-specific migration network and favorable rainfall shock as instruments to address endogeneity in male outmigration. Our empirical evidence shows that married women in households with male outmigrants are more likely to be self-employed. These women are also less likely to be in polygamous relationships and more likely to have the final say on their own health issues. However, further investigation demonstrates that these women are less likely to have freedom to visit their family or relatives, which is probably due to increased cohabitation with their parents-in-law.

The second part of the dissertation focuses on the impact of a catastrophic 7.6 magnitude earthquake on 25 April 2015. It resulted in widespread loss of lives and properties, disrupted public infrastructure and services, and dented economic growth. Although there is ample literature on the

impact of natural disasters on a range of outcome variables over medium to long run, there are limited studies on the impact of a large earthquake on private and public coping strategies, especially in response to loss of properties or lives, in the short-term. We study the effect of the 2015 earthquake on private and public coping strategies in response to death of household member and loss of property using a unique census of all the houses destroyed by the earthquake. To address the endogeneity of severity of housing damage, we utilize distance of ward from the epicenter of the earthquake as an instrumental variable. Our empirical evidence shows that the severity of housing damage do not affect change in school dropout, change in pregnant women getting regular checkup, change in immunization among children, and change in employment (quit or change job). However, we find evidence that the severity of housing damage affects public transfers and the likelihood of displacement from own house. Moreover, controlling for house fixed effects, we show that having a dead or injured household member affects change in school dropout and change in employment. Our results imply that large public transfers and rapid restoration of public services might have offset the expected negative effect during the short-term.

We also present supplementary analysis on the impact of the earthquake on health outcomes using nationally representative demographic and health survey done before and after the earthquake. The difference-in-differences estimation shows that while adults are more likely to be thin immediately after the earthquake in the affected districts, there is no statistically significant change in child health outcomes related to malnutrition. As abovementioned, the results imply that the massive post-earthquake relief operations, and the rapid restoration of health services in addition to substantial public and private cash and in-kind assistance to the affected households might have more than offset the expected negative effects on children's health outcomes in the short-term.