

MIGRATION AND GENDER: WHO GAINS AND IN WHICH WAYS?

An Executive Summary

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INTRODUCTION

When people migrate
women become happier,
men become richer.

Previous research has concluded that when couples migrate, male spouses tend to experience improvements to their labour market outcomes, while the opposite is true for female spouses. This pattern holds even for married couples in which the wife has greater career opportunities than the husband. However, little attention has been paid to the distribution of non-economic gains of migration among spouses. The goal of the present study is to unravel both subjective wellbeing (SWB) and wage outcomes of internal migration by both gender and relationship-status. By teasing out these differences, we shed light on gender roles and norms which apply in society beyond the context of migration.

METHOD

Our key data source is the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA), a longitudinal panel dataset. Throughout the study we concentrate on internal migration within Australia. In our study, migration is defined as a residential move of 25km or more within Australia. We derive SWB from a survey question asking respondents to rate themselves on a 0 to 10 scale for the question: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life?” The measure of wages used is weekly wage and salary income.

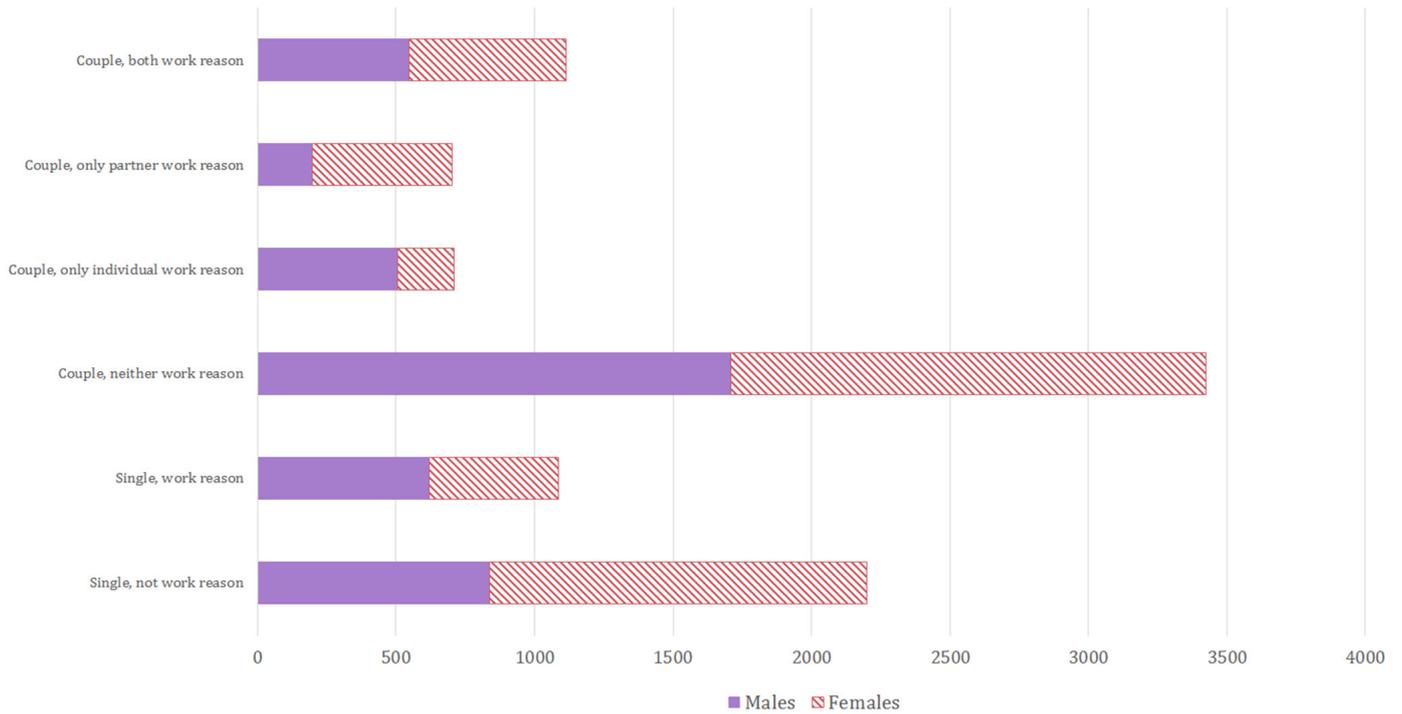
The final sample includes 14,330 observations covering 2,474 individuals.

REASONS FOR MOVING

Just 30% of our migrant sample reported that they moved for a work-related reason. 40% of single males in our sample move for a work-related reason. In contrast, only 25% of single females move for this reason. The graph below illustrates that when only one partner in a couple moves for a work reason, that partner is more often male than female. However, among couples overall, it is more common for both partners to report that they moved for a work-related reason, and even more common for neither partner to report moving for a work-related reason.

The following results highlight that wage outcomes in isolation do not tell the full story of migration impacts and mask a wide range of experiences for different families.

Figure 1: Reasons for move



RESULTS - WELLBEING

Relative to the year before moving, both male and female singles experience higher levels of wellbeing for several years after migration. This difference is statistically significant in all five observed post-migration periods for females, and in four of the five for males. Predicted SWB changes after moving are small and non-significant for male spouses, but are relatively large and significant for female spouses.



Figure 2: SWB around Migration for Singles

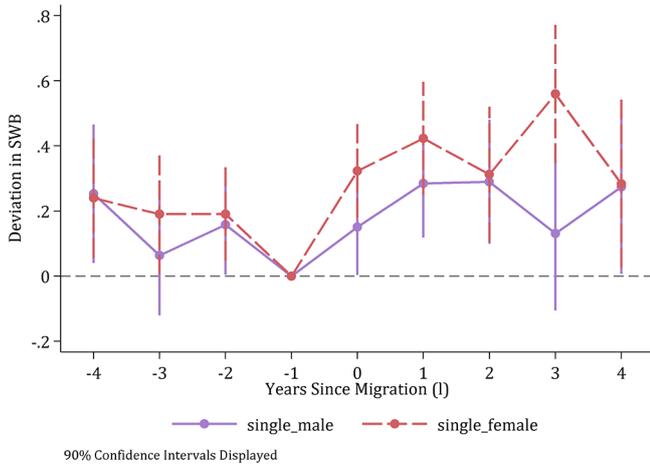
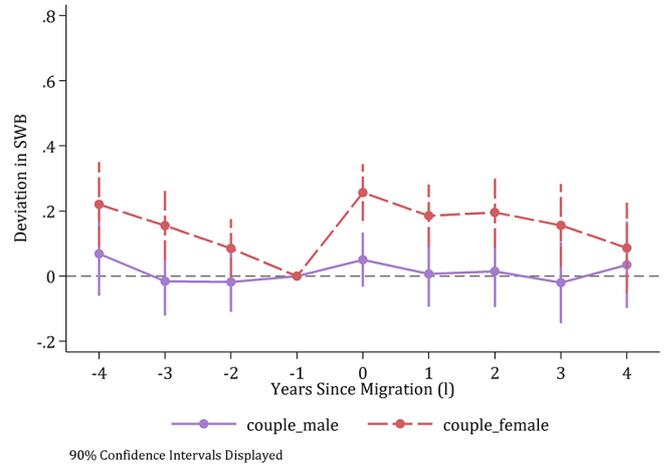


Figure 3: SWB around Migration for Couples



The predicted gains for both males and females in couples are not as large as for single males and females. The estimates for males and females are significantly different from one another in one of the five years after migration for singles, and four of the five years for couples.

In groups for which we observe an increase in SWB after migration, we also observe a decrease in SWB in the years preceding the move. Hence, migration appears to allow those people to leave their unhappiness behind.

RESULTS - WAGES

For single males, wage gains are positive relative to the year before moving in all years afterwards, and statistically significant in three of the five years. The predicted wage increase for this group ranges from \$58-\$203. In contrast, the increase in wages for single females is not significantly different from zero in any year after moving.

Figure 4: Wages around Migration for Singles

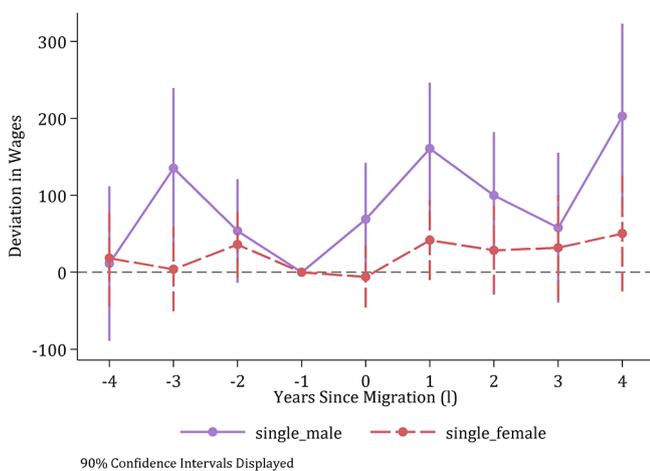
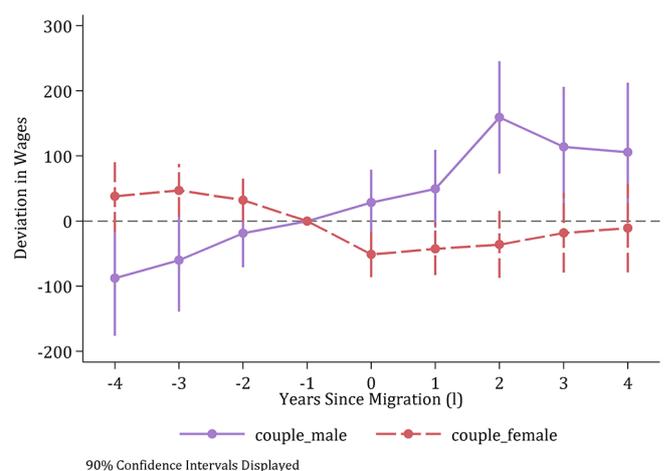


Figure 5: Wages around Migration for Couples



Wages tend to increase for male partners and fall for female partners, and these results are significantly different by gender in all years after migration. This is consistent with previous research which has focused mainly on married couples.

On average, in the initial and first years after migration, the increase in wages for male partners is small, on average, (\$29-\$50) and not significant. In later years, males can expect larger and (mostly) statistically significant higher wages relative to before moving (\$106-\$159). The estimates for females are significantly negative (\$43-\$51) in the initial and first years after moving, but fade in later years.

We note that, before migration male spouses appear to be on a rising wage path and female spouses on a falling one, though there is little statistical significance to this finding. This could suggest that there is rising inequality of earnings for males and females in couples even before migration, but migration amplifies this trend.

RESULTS – MOVING FOR WORK REASONS

Wages increase for people who move for work related reasons, and not for those who don't, regardless of gender or relationship-status. Wage gains from moving for a work reason are generally larger for males than females, but this potentially reflects the fact that males earn more than females on average. Women do experience significant wage gains if their motivation for moving is work-related.

Separating wellbeing results by reason for moving, single individuals who move for reasons unrelated to work experience positive and significant SWB gains. The SWB gains are smaller and mostly not significant for those singles who move for a work reason. For couples, SWB outcomes are generally more positive for females than for males regardless of reason for move. We see much less evidence that male spouses, who do tend to experience increases in wage earnings, are happier with their lives after migration.

Even after incorporating reasons for moving, we still find some evidence that female spouses are more likely than male spouses to reap wellbeing gains from migration. In other words, whether or not one moves for a work-related reason seems to explain differences by gender in wage outcomes but not SWB outcomes.





CONCLUSION

For singles, we find that though wages increase significantly only for men after moving, wellbeing increases for both men and women. Moreover, despite the finding that migration has more favourable outcomes for the earnings of male spouses than female spouses, we observe the opposite pattern for wellbeing. In this sense, small (and mostly insignificant) differences by gender in migration patterns for single individuals appear to be amplified for couples. Wage patterns become much more similar by gender when we disaggregate by whether one moves for a work-related reason or not. Both men and women who move for work reasons earn significantly more thereafter. However, when disaggregating results by reason for moving, we still observe differences by gender for SWB.

Further investigation is warranted to understand the mechanism behind the difference in results for men and women. The question remains as to why men and women tend to move for different reasons. While there is a possibility that men and women have different preferences over wages and career development relative to other aspects of life, there may also be contextual differences. In particular, men may receive greater wage and status payoffs than women to focusing on their careers, or social norms may pressure female spouses to forgo personal career goals to achieve what is best for the family. Our SWB results suggest that this outcome is not harmful to life-satisfaction of women. Female spouses may tend to experience career disruptions when they and their partner migrate, but they appear to be compensated in other ways.

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