Does adult out-migration matter? The multi-dimensional well-being of elderly parents 'left behind' by migrant children in India

SHINJINI RAY, PRAVAT BHANDARI, RANGASAMY NAGARAJAN
International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai – 400088, India
Email: _shinjiniray24@gmail.com_

Abstract

Obtaining data from a nationally representative survey of oldage population—Building a Knowledge Base on Population Ageing in India (BKPAI) comprising 9852 older adults, this study empirically evaluates different dimensions of wellbeing among Indian elderly individuals left behind, by their adult migrant children. In the present study, we focus on five different dimensions of well-being among elderly, i.e. physical well-being, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, social well-being, and housing well-being. Data were analyzed using propensity score matching technique. We used different types of matching methods, including nearest-neighbour (within caliper), radius matching, and kernel matching. Findings suggest that the elderly individuals with migrant children were more likely to attain better physical and subjective well-being, whereas the migration of adult children showed adverse effect on the psychological and social well-being indicators. However, results did not show any statistically significant association between migration and housing well-being of left behind elderly. Given the rising proportion of ageing population in India combined with an increasing trend in rural-urban adult migration, our findings suggest that the policy makers should pay more attention on the migration status of children to keep track on the psychological and social welfare among Indian older adults.

Introduction

Well-being can be understood both as a theoretical construct—formulated to encompass rights-based approaches to development—and as a functional concept—formulated for ease of measurement and comparison (Waidler et al., 2017). Well-being is inherently multi-dimensional in its nature and it is based on capabilities approach.

The association between adult out-migration and the well-being of their left behind older parents is completely dynamic and complex in nature. Researches on well-being status of left behind elderly are still uncovered in Indian context. So, in current scenario it is necessary to understand how adult out-migration affect the overall well-being status of Indian left behind older adults.

Objectives
To assess the potential linkages between adult out-migration and multidimensional well-being of left behind older parents in India.

Data & Methods

Data source
This study used UNFPA elderly survey data namely, Building a Knowledge Base on Ageing in India (BKPAI), 2011.

Analytical sample
A total of 9852 older persons participated in BKPAI survey. For this study, we excluded 589 never married and childless elderly members. Therefore, the final analytical sample included 9263 elderly respondents aged 60 years and above. Individual and household both data sets have been used for this study.

Variable Description
We considered five well-being indicators- physical well-being, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, social well-being and housing well-being.

Statistical Methods
Comparisons of different dimensions of well-being between two groups i.e. elderly with migrant children and elderly with no migrant children was done using propensity score matching (PSM) technique. The left-behind elderly parents were considered as treatment groups whereas, non-left behind elderly were included as control groups. We used different types of matching methods, including nearest-neighbour (within caliper), radius matching, and kernel matching.
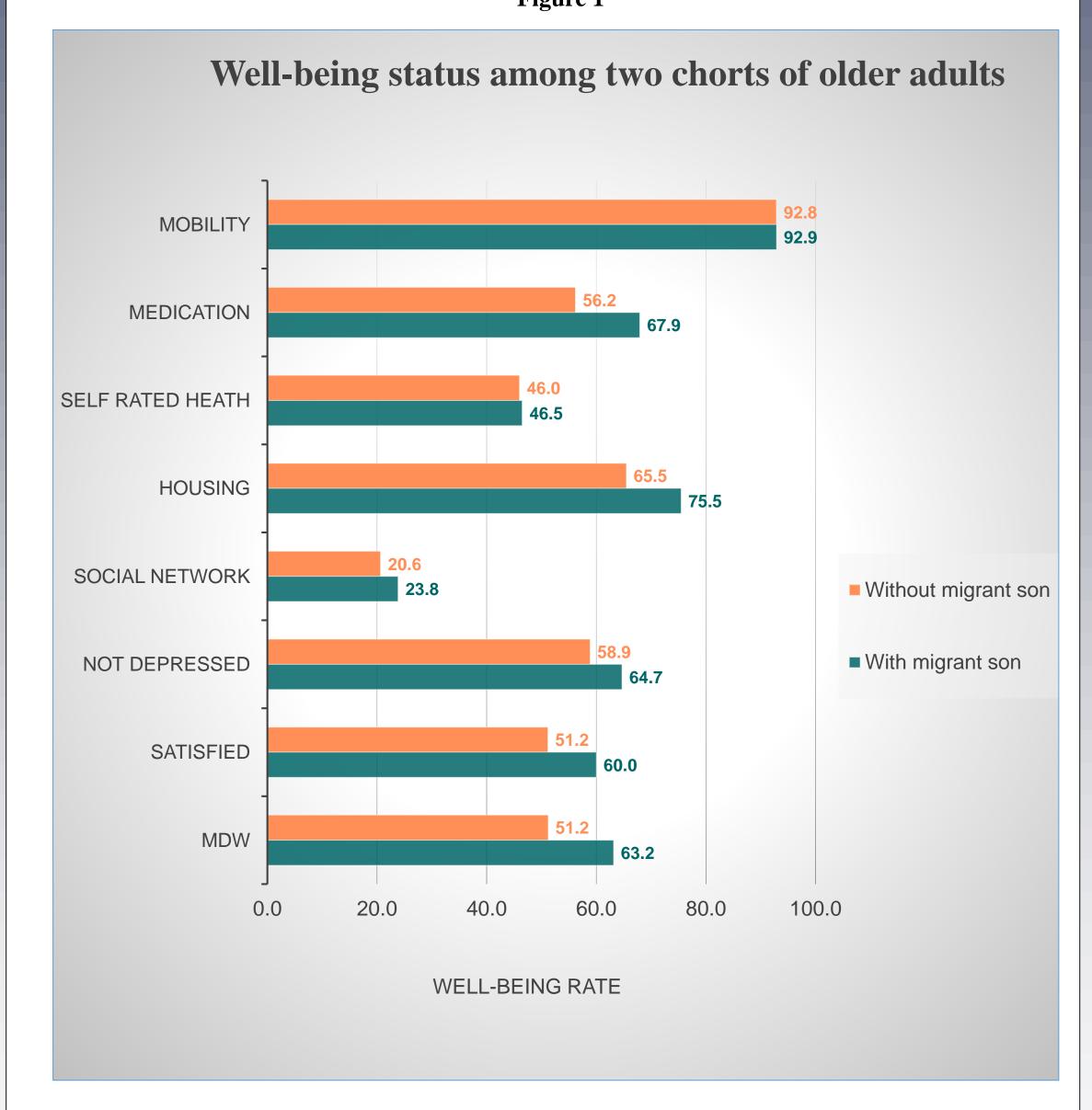
Results

Figure 1

Well-being status among two chorts of older adults

Table 1: Estimated propensity score values

Items	At least one migrant children vs. No migrant children				
	A	B	C	D	E
Mean Propensity Score	0.27	0.39	0.19	0.22	0.47
Standard Deviation	0.19	0.14	0.24	0.18	0.33
Region of Common Support	0.097 – 0.632	0.142 – 0.740	0.317 – 0.989	0.219 – 0.827	0.097 – 0.632
Significance of Balancing Property	0.01	0.005	0.01	0.01	0.005
Number of Blocks	8	8	8	8	8

Source: Authors' calculation based on BKPAI 2011 data
A=Physical well-being, B=Psychological well-being, C=Subjective well-being, D=Social well-being, E=Housing well-being

Table 2: Migration effects on different dimension of elderly well-being

Matching Types	Dimensions of Well-being	Effect of Migration		
		ATT	t-value	P>z
Nearest-neighbour matching	Physical	0.59	2.04	0.04
	Psychological	-0.64	-4.12	0.03
	Subjective	0.88	1.86	0.00
	Social	-0.38	-3.51	0.05
	Housing	0.95	2.17	0.10
Nearest-neighbour matching within caliper	Physical	0.56	2.32	0.04
	Psychological	-0.69	-3.87	0.01
	Subjective	0.90	1.93	0.01
	Social	-0.38	-3.33	0.04
	Housing	1.00	2.47	0.08
Radius matching	Physical	0.71	2.48	0.04
	Psychological	-0.71	-4.02	0.02
	Subjective	0.90	2.12	0.00
	Social	-0.36	-3.12	0.04
	Housing	0.95	2.41	0.11
Kernel matching	Physical	0.75	2.67	0.06
	Psychological	-0.67	-3.91	0.01
	Subjective	0.86	1.84	0.00
	Social	-0.45	-3.67	0.05
	Housing	1.10	2.60	0.15

Source: Authors' calculation based on BKPAI 2011 data

Summary

- The migration of adult children helps the left-behind parents to become self-dependent as the older parents are bound to do their routine tasks independently in the absence of their adult children and that influences better functional ability to perform the instrumental activities.
- The impact of adult out-migration on parental emotional well-being was substantial and indicated negative outcome.
- The worse psychological well-being may lead to poor social well-being of left behind older parents.
- Although the present study did not find any significant association with the migration of adult children and housing well-being of their older parents but the remittances sent by their adult sons helps to improve the housing living standards of left behind elderly.

Policy Recommendation

- Stakeholders should develop policies that encourage industries to move job opportunities from the more developed areas to the less developed areas where most migrant workers originate. That will help to decrease the number of left behind older parents in the nation.
- From the intervention perspective, public health policies that focus on the alleviating depressive symptoms in left-behind parents are urgently needed in order to enhance psychological wellbeing in this vulnerable group.

Selected References

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About the Authors

Shinjini Ray is a PhD scholar at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India. Her research interest mainly lies in population ageing, migration and development, population policy and programmes, public health.

Pravat Bhandari is a research scholar at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India. His research interest is focused on population ageing, social policy, reproductive and child health, public health and morbidity.

Rangasamy Nagarajan is a professor and Head of the Department of Development Studies at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India. His research interests are in population studies, demography. He has authored a good number of research paper in international and national peer reviewed journals.