

Migration and Health

Examining the Linkages through a Gender Lens

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Migration and Health in China

A joint project of

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Sun Yat-sen Center for Migrant Health Policy

Working Paper 2015–6

February 2015



UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

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Introduction to Working Papers on Migration and Health in China

This paper is part of a series of outputs from the research project on [Migration and Health in China](#).

China is confronted by major challenges posed by the massive population movement over the past three decades. In 2009, approximately 230 million rural inhabitants moved temporarily or permanently to cities in search of employment and better livelihoods. Such large-scale mobility has huge implications for the pattern and transmission of diseases; for China's health care system and related policies; and for health of the Chinese population in both receiving and sending areas. The health and social issues associated with population movement on such an unprecedented scale have been inadequately addressed by public policy and largely neglected by researchers. Based on interdisciplinary research across the health, social science and policy fields, this project constitutes a major effort to fill research and policy gaps. Collectively, the papers and commentaries in this series aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of the health and public policy implications of rural to urban migration in China, to inform policy and to identify future research directions.

This project is a collaboration between UNRISD and the Center for Migrant Health Policy, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China, and funded by the China Medical Board.

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
STD	Sexually transmitted disease

Summary

Analysing migration through a gender lens involves understanding the social relations and norms that influence women's and men's roles and responsibilities, and their differential access to resources and services. Gendered norms around men and women's roles and responsibilities have also shaped migration processes and debates. Migration has often been regarded as a predominantly male phenomenon, with men migrating for work, while women—when they migrate—are often viewed as dependent family members. Yet the evidence points to large flows of independent female migrants globally. These global trends are reflected in the Chinese context where migration research has pointed to processes of feminization and found that many women do in fact migrate independently and as primary breadwinners.

Given women's gendered responsibilities of caring for other family members—including children, the sick and elderly—migration can potentially affect not only the health and well-being of the female migrants themselves, but also other family members (whether migrants or those left behind).

The paper discusses the tensions between the feminization of migration and the domestic roles women typically assume, including unpaid care work. It then examines issues related to health of migrants, through a gender lens. Discussion primarily focuses on some key areas that have particular resonance in debates around the health and well-being of migrants—occupational health and work, sexual and reproductive health, and mental health. The paper then moves on to a more detailed analysis of the impact of women's domestic roles—particularly unpaid care work—in the context of migration and consider the implications of this for health and health care. The paper concludes by considering what potential migration offers for changing gender norms and reflects on the implications of the global debates raised in this paper for the Chinese context.

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