

African Female Migrants' Market Employment and Multiculturalism: Demographic and Comparative Perspective

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Description of topic

The increasing trend in women's participation in paid work is one of the most important characteristics of labour markets throughout the world, such that this increasing trend has been viewed as 'one of the fundamental facts of gender relations in this century' (Cotter, Hermesen, and Vanneman 2001: 430). The substantial changes in gender roles reflected in women's paid work has also been explained as part of 'a more important social revolution, a revolution in sex roles' so that 'in industrial societies, it used to be that a woman would be asked what her husband does for a living. Now, increasingly, men are being asked what their wives do' (Davis 1984: 397).

However, the increasing trend of women's participation in paid work is subject to the context in which this participation takes place so that the conduct of research in different contexts is essential to reveal the varying aspects of this phenomenon. To this end,

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research of Australia which, as a multicultural country, contains a remarkable diversity in terms of ethnicity and migration aspects provides a good opportunity to examine the competing determinants of women's market employment.

On the basis of the results of an empirical study, this paper highlights the patterns and the determinants of African female migrants' market employment in the Australian multicultural setting. Market employment in this study is identified by employment status and occupational levels. In terms of employment status, women in this study are either 'employed' (employee, employer, own account worker, and contributing family worker) or 'not employed' (unemployed looking for full-time work, unemployed looking for part-time work, and not in labour force). Also, the occupational level of working women is classified into three major categories that includes the high occupations (professionals and managers), the middle occupations (clerical, sales and service workers) and the low occupations (manual and tradespersons).

Background & Theory

Theoretical hypotheses explaining market employment of (migrant) women are various. In order to have a clearer and more comprehensive view, theoretical hypotheses can be classified into two broad groups. On the one hand, there are those theories that are based on ascribed characteristics (i.e. characteristics such as gender, race, and ethnicity that are endogenous to the person and usually cannot be changed). According to this approach, the labour market environment is so structurally organised that (migrant) women are disadvantaged and discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, gender etc. This

can be especially the case for female migrants. This approach contains gender theory² and prejudice/discrimination theory³. For instance, in gender theory, women's disadvantaged position in the labour market is observed as a centuries-long tradition throughout the world and despite an increasing trend of women's participation in paid work, women still experience occupational segregation and wage differentiation even in the same occupations as men. Meanwhile, the new labour market is not still sufficiently compatible with women's household responsibilities enabling them to combine adequately family and work.

On the other hand, there are theories that are mainly based on achieved characteristics (such as education, qualification, language skills, and experience that are obtainable by personal efforts and circumstances). In this approach (including human capital theory⁴ and assimilation or adaptation theory⁵), it is assumed that (migrant) women's market employment depends mainly on their contribution of the required skills and that the possible differences and disadvantages between migrants and the native-born are attributed to their different human capital contributions.

In this research, it is believed that these two main approaches deserve attention for understanding women's market employment. It is acknowledged that the census sources may not reveal all dimensions of disadvantages and discriminations against migrants in

² For instance, see Blumberg 1984, Massey et al 1993, Ware 1993, Oppong 1993, Hakim 1996, Riley 1998, Nussbaum 1999, Semyonov, Lewin-Epstein, and Brahm 1999, Moghadam 1999, Ashford 2001, Kaiser 2005.

³ See, for example, Kelley and McAllister 1984, Collins 1988, Foster, Marshall, and Williams 1991, Evans and Kelley 1991, VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996.

⁴ Sjaastad 1962, Becker 1964, Becker 1985, Straubhaar 1986, Borjas 1989, Massey et al 1993, Preston 1997, Anker 1998, Cerrutti and Massey 2001, Baunach and Barnes 2003.

⁵ For example, Duncan and Liberson 1959, Gordon 1968, Burnley 1975, Morokvasic 1984, Peterson and Peterson 1986, Desbarats 1986, Kossudji 1989, Berry 1992, Castles 1992, Chiswick 1993, Gilbertson 1995, Baubock 1996, Friedberg 2000, Hook and Balisteri 2002.

the labour market of the destination country. In sum, based on the theories of human capital and assimilation (adaptation), in this research, it is assumed that (immigrant) women's market employment is basically related to their contribution of human capital and the degree of their adaptation with the new society. Accordingly, this study considers educational attainment, English competency, time spent in the destination country and ethnic origin as the main determinants of women's market employment when simultaneously controlling for other competing variables able to be measured such as age composition and family formation. It is, however, worthwhile noting that because this study is based on multivariate analysis, we are able to highlight the market employment differentials of African female migrants with both the native-born and female migrants from other regions of origin when other characteristics (including human capital, age composition, family formation and migration aspects) are simultaneously held constant.

Data and method

This empirical investigation is based on special tabulations from the 2001 Population and Housing Census of Australia. It contains almost 5.4 million women in the main economically active ages (15-54 years old). The tables are matrices of relevant variables cross-classified against each other. The matrix or cell data are converted to individual records format. The examination begins with bivariate analyses. Using SPSS software, logistic regression is, then, applied as a standardisation procedure. Statistically, approximately one-fourth of women considered in this analysis are overseas-born. Amongst female African migrants included in the analysis, a relatively greater proportion are those whose countries of origin are South Africa, Egypt, Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zambia, Somalia and Ethiopia.

Expected findings

On the whole, the results of this research highlight the patterns and the determinants of market employment (employment status and occupational levels) of African female migrants. Because of using multivariate results, we are able to explain the effects of each factor while simultaneously controlling for other determinants included in the analysis. This means that the multivariate results provide the opportunity to explain the significance and importance of the factors influencing market employment of African female migrants in a comparative perspective. Also, the paper examines the market employment differentials of African female migrants with both the native-born and female migrants from other regions of origin such as those with Asian and European backgrounds. Again, the patterns related to the employment and occupational differentials of African female migrants with both the native-born and female migrants from other regions of origin are highlighted while other characteristics included in the analysis such as age, human capital, family composition and migration aspects are simultaneously held constant

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Based on the findings of an empirical research, this paper examines the patterns and determinants of the market employment (that is, both employment and occupational statuses) of African female migrants. Focusing on the multiethnic and multicultural setting of Australia where approximately one-fourth of population is overseas-born with a substantial ethnic diversity, this paper is also able to highlight work differentials between this migrant group with both native-born and female migrants from other regions of origin. As the status and success of migrant groups in the labour market has been observed as a key indication of migrants' settlement in the destination country (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996), while acknowledging issues arising from selectivity of migration, the multivariate findings of this study provide a basis for settlement assessment of African female migrants.

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