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Development and Immigration: Experiences of Non-US Born Black Women

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Abstract An exploration of inequality at the intersection of race, gender, and nationality offers a means to explore how complex economic and social forces combine to shape women's outcomes in ways that differ from men's. Women's responsibility for care work and other forms of unpaid labor inhibits labor force participation, and in some cases, redounds heavily on children. Those responsibilities, coupled with labor market discrimination against black women, US or foreign born, increases the difficulties single mothers face in providing for families.

Keywords Gender · Immigration · Blacks · Discrimination

Introduction

Gender relations in the US and globally are portrayed in the media as increasingly egalitarian. Indeed, anxiety over *men's* economic status is on the rise. This is reflected in the suggestion that the global crisis that began in the 2008 led to a "*man*cession," due to a more rapid rise in male than female unemployment early in the crisis in developed economies.

The pronouncement that the end of gender inequality is upon us, however, is premature. Race/ethnicity and household structure are key factors influencing gender outcomes, contributing to a troubling degree of inequality among women. Racial wage and employment inequality among women persists unabated in the US and in other racially heterogeneous societies (such as South Africa and Brazil).

Further, despite evidence of narrowing of wage gaps in developed economies and educational gaps in developing economies, we see continued and worsening economic conditions among single mothers. Women's disproportionate responsibility for children can inhibit their ability to get and keep stable jobs. This is because employers see them

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as "flexible" workers more than, for example, white men. Single parents face diminished social protection as governments cut spending. Further, declining job prospects for men reduces child support payment to custodial parents, usually women.

New research on foreign-born black women

An exploration of inequality at the intersection of race, gender, and nationality offers a means to explore how complex economic and social forces (including women's responsibility for caring labor) combine to shape economic outcomes in ways that may differ from men. Three papers presented at *The Invisible Woman* conference addressed the economic well-being of non-US black females with varying emphases ranging from child labor and education, to earnings differentials among US-born and immigrant black women, to usage of welfare assistance in the US.

Aramide Kazeem's (2011) research explores the determinants of child labor in Nigeria. Previous studies find that child labor is associated with parents' wages and income poverty as well as economic shocks (Basu 2000). One of the major concerns with child labor is that, born of poverty, it can in turn contribute to the reproduction of poverty. Engagement in work activities has been found to hinder school attendance, performance in school, and the ability to perform homework. Together these can undermine overall educational attainment as well as the quality of a child's education, both contributing to future poverty.

Child labor may be paid or unpaid, though most research emphasis has been placed on child labor done outside the household for wages. Some observers go so far as to argue that unpaid household labor should not be classified as child labor. Work done under the supervision of parents, it is contended, is not exploitative and, to the contrary, can represent an opportunity to develop useful skills (Bequele and Boyden 1988; Robson 2004).

Kazeem's work rectifies the lack of attention to unpaid child labor. Her data from Nigeria show that most child labor is performed in poor households, by girls, in rural areas, and is disproportionately unpaid. The role of gender is significant, since much of the unpaid labor is considered "women's work" with little if any gender substitution (that is, it would not be considered socially appropriate for boys to perform these tasks).

That girls are disproportionately given the responsibility for unpaid work in Nigerian households may help to explain the wide gender gaps in education in that country, where the net enrollment rate for school age girls in 2008 was 42% as compared to 60% for boys (World Bank 2011). A related contributor to child labor is mothers' education. Kazeem finds that children of mothers with the highest levels of education have the lowest odds of engaging in work.

These combined results tell an interesting story with important lessons for policymakers. At least in the Nigerian case, efforts to reduce child labor should be focused on rural areas and on investments that can reduce the unpaid labor burden of women and children. Given this, policymakers will want consider two factors that influence the level and distribution of unpaid labor women provide, with knock-on effects on girls. First, the determinants of the gender share of unpaid labor are related to women's bargaining power. The more bargaining power women have, the less

(often unpaid) time they may be coerced to provide on male plots, for example (Darity 1995). Time for women's remunerative activities is thus enhanced, raising household income and reducing the demand for child labor. There are several factors that influence women's bargaining power, including relative education. Kazeem's results confirm that increasing education for women reduces children's labor.

Second, much unpaid household labor is related to availability of particular types of physical infrastructure—nearby health clinics, clean water, cooking fuel, electricity, and transportation—suggesting the importance of good infrastructure to reduce the amount of time required for unpaid labor, and by extension, female child labor. Rural areas in Nigeria and other developing countries are more likely to lack adequate infrastructure than urban areas, consistent with Kazeem's findings that child labor is more common in rural areas.

Research identifies a strong link between physical infrastructure expenditures and women's unpaid care burden (Agenor et al 2010; Chowdhury 2010). For example, improved water and sanitation facilities decrease illness and time spent fetching water. Targeted infrastructure investments can reduce women's unpaid labor burden, thus freeing up time to spend in remunerative labor activities. Again, this can lead to increases in household incomes, thereby reducing child labor with benefits for children's well-being and economy-wide, long-run productivity growth.

Todd Hamilton (2011) compares the earnings trajectory of black Caribbean female immigrants by duration of residence to black women born in the US. His analysis permits an assessment of three explanations for intra-racial black earnings inequality in the US: productivity differentials, culture, and white favoritism toward black immigrants over US-born blacks.[1]

Hamilton's work shows that female immigrants from English-, French-, and Spanish-speaking Caribbean all have lower earnings at the time of their arrival than US-born black females. Over time, the size of the gap diminishes for all immigrant groups, though at very different rates, depending on linguistic background (even after controlling for English proficiency). Black women from Anglophone Caribbean are the only group whose earnings catch up—and eventually surpass—those of US-born women, both white and black. One explanation for this outcome might be selective migration—that is, that Anglophone Caribbean black immigrant women possess unobservable productivity characteristics that improve their labor market outcomes. To assess the selective migration argument, Hamilton compares outcomes of Anglophone immigrants with black movers (US-born black women who have migrated internally), two groups who might be construed as having similar unobserved characteristics. He finds that it takes longer for this immigrant group to catch up to and in some cases surpass the earnings of black movers than black non-movers, giving support to the selective migration argument.

[1] A fourth explanation is that demand-side factors coupled with spatial segregation (or concentration) can explain earnings differentials. For example, US-born black women are dispersed in urban areas across the north and in the rural south; Haitians are concentrated in the Boston and Miami areas, and immigrants from the Dominican Republic are in the Northeast. Given the differing macro-level conditions that shape opportunities for work, some portion of earnings differentials may be explained by differences in spatial dispersion. Hamilton controls for the state in which workers reside. An interesting extension in future research would be to use statistical metropolitan area (SMA) controls.

According to Hamilton's estimates, black female Anglophone immigrants are able to surpass the earnings of similarly qualified black natives after they have been in the US between 11 and 15 years. But the fact that there is an earnings crossover between these female migrants and US-born black women is itself problematic, and is consistent with the hypothesis that white employers exhibit favoritism toward Anglophone Caribbean blacks over US-born blacks. While some might interpret the results, instead, as support for the cultural deficiency argument, Hamilton underscores the data do not support such a claim. The initial earnings gap between cohorts of immigrants and native born black women has increased over time for new immigrants, controlling for productivity characteristics. It would be difficult to argue that the cultural endowments of earlier cohorts were significantly greater than that of later cohorts.

There is cause for limited optimism from Hamilton's results insofar as the earnings of black movers and some immigrant women catch up to and surpass those of similarly qualified non-Hispanic white women in the US. That, however, is only a partial picture, given that women of color from the Caribbean and native black women have significantly higher unemployment rates than similarly qualified non-Hispanic white women (Model 2008). While earnings regressions emphasize supply-side attributes, demand-side factors clearly matter, and in particular, the functioning of the job queue when jobs are scarce. There is evidence, for example, that black women in the US (of all origins) experience significantly greater job losses than white women and men in response to the Fed's contractionary monetary policies (Seguino and Heintz 2012, forthcoming).

Ruth Oyelere and Maharouf Oyolola (2011) tackle a very different question: does welfare assistance usage differ by race and nativity, net of factors that contribute to differential need, such as employment access and earnings? Race, ethnicity, and nativity are constituents of the debate on the determinants of welfare reliance, which ranges from pathologization (welfare use is seen to reflect "cultural deficiencies" of native and immigrant ethnic subalterns) to the role of systemic gender and racial discrimination that increases the need for income assistance, especially to support children.

If minority native and immigrant black women earn less than white women, we might expect their rates of welfare usage to be relatively higher. Oyelere and Oyolola further explore whether an individual's social and institutional experience influence the propensity to rely on welfare assistance. Those conditioned to the norm that self-sufficiency is a virtue and that accepting assistance is "shameful" may be less inclined to apply and receive welfare assistance than others (even if they need it). In contrast, those socialized to view dependency as an integral feature of the life experience at some point or other (those performing unpaid caring labor, the ill and elderly, and children all face constraints in attaining economic self-sufficiency) may be less sensitive to social disapprobation associated with US welfare assistance. For this reason, the authors test for the effect of birthplace on welfare usage (a proxy for socialization), controlling for income-related factors.

However, in addition to these factors, the ability to weather economic distress without relying on welfare assistance is partly a function of accumulated savings, financial wealth, and other assets. The wide racial wealth gap would suggest that white women's fallback position in the event of economic distress is significantly stronger than that of women of color (Oliver and Shapiro 2006). The authors were not able to control for wealth assets. Despite that, they find welfare usage rates by

race do not differ, controlling for other factors that might influence the need for welfare. This is particularly interesting, since race coefficients could be upwardly biased in the absence of a control for wealth.

The authors do find that blacks and Hispanics born in the US or its protectorates, as well as Native Americans exhibit a higher rate of welfare usage than women of color born outside the US. The authors conclude from this result that while race cannot explain welfare usage, social experience as proxied by birthplace can.

Some might conclude that these results fail to resolve the debate as to whether the model minority hypothesis holds sway or whether racial discrimination against US-born women of color is differentially harsh. The reality is, however, that many factors, some of which are difficult to account for in a quantitative analysis, explain reliance on welfare assistance. The degree of responsibility of the household head for care of relatives and the prevalence of children with disabilities will influence welfare usage, for example.[2] Without job flexibility and employers' willingness to support workers as parents, some women may not be able to retain their job. Spatial variables such as the costs of going to work matter, including the cost (and availability) of quality childcare and the accessibility of public transportation.

From a policy perspective, the most striking factor affecting welfare usage rates in the Oyelere and Oyolola study is education. Regardless of race or birthplace, the rate of welfare usage falls precipitously with increased education. Racial gaps in welfare usage in the aggregate pale in comparison to the size of gaps by educational attainment, suggesting a misplaced focus on continued racial debates.

Our best strategy for approaching these issues is to reframe and refocus the welfare debate in two ways. First, as feminist economists have noted, welfare usage is a not pathologized choice. Rather, it reflects the fact that humans at some stage of their lives are dependent on others and that lifelong self-sufficiency is an unrealistic goal. Further, the unpaid care work of providing for children's well-being is just that—unpaid. Social supports are needed not only to ensure the well-being of children but also the parents that care for them. We all benefit from well-socialized and cared for children. Children, after all is said and done, are public goods. Second, if our goal is in fact to promote self-sufficiency, one of the most efficacious methods for reducing welfare usage, as the data produced by Oyelere and Oyolola show, is to work toward educational equity and to reduce the disastrously high drop-out rates in the US that exceed those of any other industrialized country.

Conclusion

The absence of policy discussions on the well-being of women of color, and in particular, black women underscores that 25 years later, black women continue to be invisible in the national discourse—with the notable exception of debates over

[2] While the authors were able to control for the adult's health, data on racial differences in children's health were not available. But we know that the health status is worse for children of color than for white children. Spatial segregation that can limit access to heath care services and influence the environmental quality of a neighborhood can play a role in the child's heath, with subsequent impacts on parents' ability to engage in paid labor. This is especially the case for adults whose employers do not offer paid sick leave or permit time off for family care.

welfare with racial undertones. Moreover, the precarious position of single mothers, exacerbated in black families by lack of job prospects for black males, has not generated any serious public policy proposals in the US that would attenuate poverty rates, and ensure that children in lone mother families receive the support they need to grow into productive adults.

The variety of pressures on governments to cut budgets, coupled with the stagnant job market that is expected to persist at least until 2017, imply that the position of women, and especially black women, is not likely to improve any time soon without policy intervention. This is problematic on a number of counts. Apart from equity issues, research on gender inequality and economic growth tells us that the failure of policymakers to be concerned with the economic conditions of women is costly for the entire economy, due to the dampening effect on economic growth rates. Invisibility comes at a high societal cost.

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