Using Mobile Phone Technology to Study Migrant Recruitment Processes in Pakistan

Rabia Malik
Daniel Karell

Division of Social Science
New York University Abu Dhabi

IFMS 2018

Overview

Researching labor recruitment

Data collection with mobile phones

Expectations and obligations during recruitment

Promises and pitfalls

Researching labor recruitment

- **Concern over labor migrants' living conditions and life outcomes**
  - Existing focus on employment terms in host country
  - Increasing attention to factors in sending country

Researching labor recruitment

- **Concern over labor migrants' living conditions and life outcomes**
  - Existing focus on employment terms in host country
  - Increasing attention to factors in sending country
- **Sending country: role of recruiters and job brokers**
  - Recruiters connect migrants to overseas employers, but...
    (Abella 2004; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015)
  - Often unregulated (Barrientos 2014)
  - Selectively mediate information
    (Lindquist 2010; Rahman 2011)
  - Result in high fees and debt for migrants
    (Verité Report 2012; Segal and Labowitz 2017)

Researching labor recruitment

Recruiters are consequential for migration outcomes, but...

Researching labor recruitment

Recruiters are consequential for migration outcomes, but...

...recruitment is difficult to study.

Researching labor recruitment

Recruiters are consequential for migration outcomes, but. . .

. . . recruitment is difficult to study.

- ▶ Processual; unfolds over interconnected stages
- ▶ Informal, contingent, unregulated
- ▶ Migrants and household members may have different perceptions of the process at different times

Researching labor recruitment

Recruiters are consequential for migration outcomes, but...

...recruitment is difficult to study.

- ▶ Processual; unfolds over interconnected stages
- ▶ Informal, contingent, unregulated
- ▶ Migrants and household members may have different perceptions of the process at different times

For these reasons, recruitment has often been studied ethnographically (Kern and Müller-Böker 2015; Lindquist 2017)

Researching labor recruitment

Recruiters are consequential for migration outcomes, but...

...recruitment is difficult to study.

- ▶ Processual; unfolds over interconnected stages
- ▶ Informal, contingent, unregulated
- ▶ Migrants and household members may have different perceptions of the process at different times

For these reasons, recruitment has often been studied ethnographically (Kern and Müller-Böker 2015; Lindquist 2017)

How can recruitment processes be studied using (large scale) systematic data?

Mobile phones for survey research

- ► Mobile phone (and smartphone) ownership increasing, even in developing world (Poushter 2016)
- ► Recently used in social science research for difficult-to-measure situations, e.g., collecting real time conflict events data (Van der Windt and Humphreys 2016)
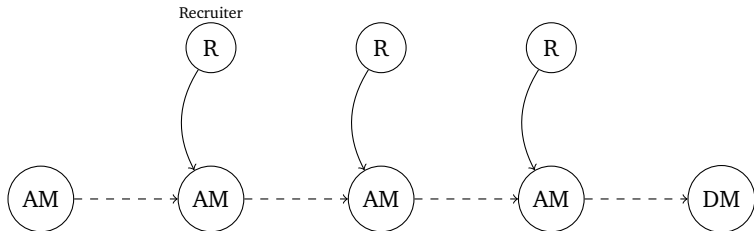- ► Relatively new method within migration research
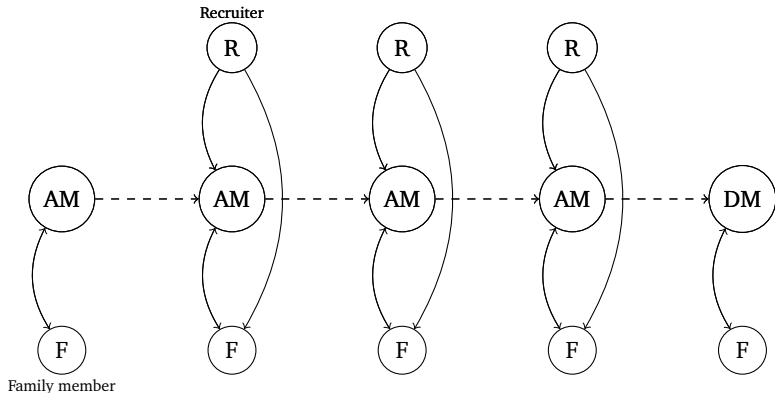
Design: Processes and social structures
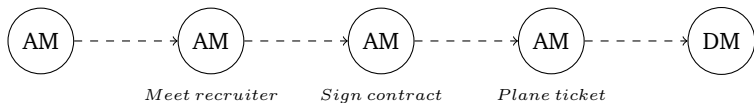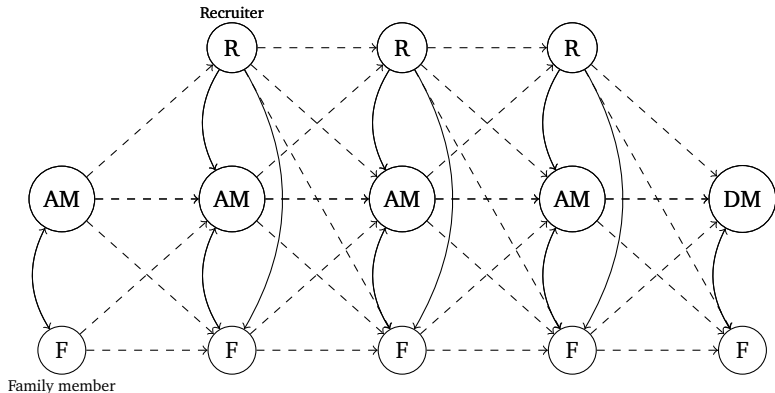
Design: Processes and social structures

AM ⇢ AM ⇢ AM ⇢ AM ⇢ DM

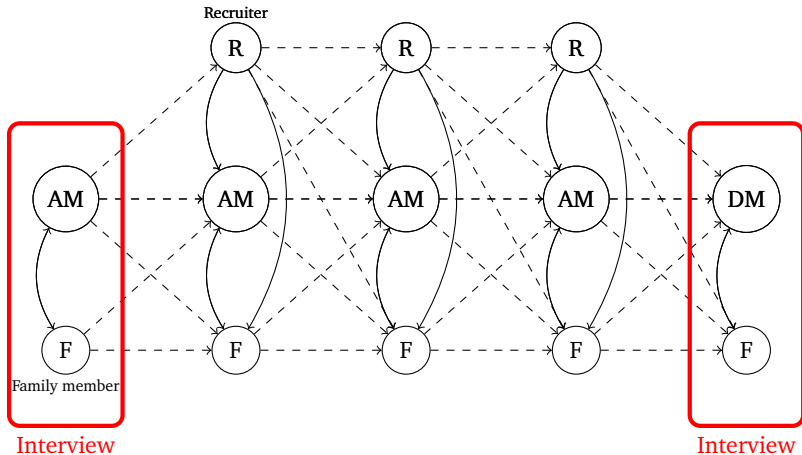*Meet recruiter*   *Sign contract*   *Plane ticket*

Design: Processes and social structures

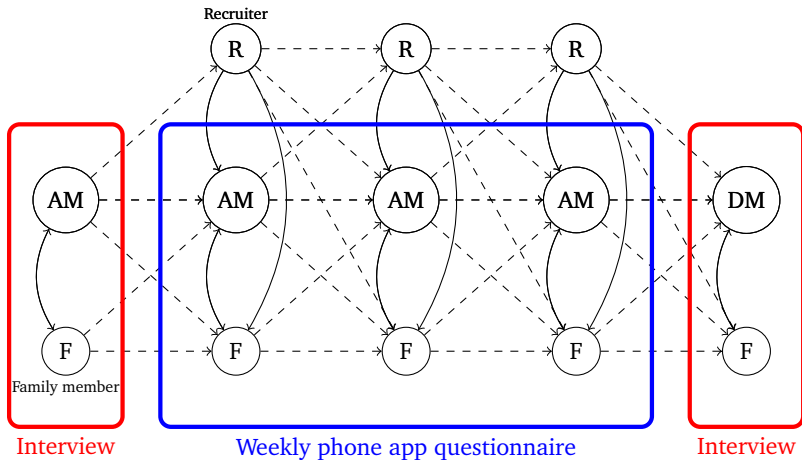# Design: Processes and social structures

Design: Processes and social structures

Design: Processes and social structures

Design: Processes and social structures

Data

Pakistan:

- ▶ Second largest South Asian supplier of labor migrants
- ▶ 94% employed in GCC
- ▶ Recruiters and job brokers are common (Atif 2009)
- ▶ Participants located in four high out-migration communities
- ▶ 35 aspiring migrants; 35 heads of households

Data: Summary of respondents

	Aspiring migrants N = 35	Heads of housholds N = 35
Location		
Abbotabad	4 (11%)	4 (11%)
Bajor	9 (26%)	9 (26%)
Rawalpindi	16 (46%)	16 (46%)
Sargodha	6 (17%)	6 (17%)
Ethnicity		
Pashtun	12 (34%)	11 (32%)
Punjabi	13 (37%)	12 (34%)
Other[a]	10 (29%)	12 (34%)
Male	24 (69%)	23 (66%)
Mean age	27.71	41.24
	(7.46)	(14.48)

[a] Category of other includes Hazarewal, Hindko, Kashmiri, and Muhajir.

Analyzing changing expectations

- ▶ Measuring respondents' (changing) expectations of monthly income saving through the recruitment process.
- ▶ **Question 1**: Are these expectations affected by strong/weak ties with someone promising a contract/visa to the migrant?
- ▶ **Question 2**: (How) Are findings different when data are also collected through mobile phones?

Preliminary results

Table: Increase in expectation of income saving

	Contract (Strong)	Contract (Weak)	Visa (Strong)	Visa (Weak)
↑ saving exp. exit v. entry (n=44)	x	x	x	**0.58*****
↑ saving exp. bwn stages (n=76)	x	x	**-0.29****	x

Mobile phone data collection pitfalls...

- Infrastructure problems: spotty cell phone coverage, power outages etc.
- Usage: Respondents did not receive notification of new questionnaire if app was not left running in background
- Clarification: Respondents could not immediately ask clarification questions regarding questionnaire
- Respondent fatigue: In exit interviews, respondents noted the high number of questions per week

...and promise

- Independent of interviewer biases
- Facilitates collecting information beyond survey questions, e.g., geolocation, interaction records
- Easier (and cheaper) to administer survey at regular intervals
- Allows more nuanced and frequent data collection: Questions can be tailored to respondents' situations
- Easier administering of experimental design
- New project will address many of these issues

Thank you

rabia.malik@nyu.edu
daniel.karell@nyu.edu

Appendix

Data

- Criteria for inclusion:
  - Aspiring migrant must be seriously considering migration, but not have taken any steps to do so
  - Head of household willing to participate in the study
  - Basic literacy
  - Participants recommended by research firm's local field coordinators and snowball sampling

- Interviews:
  - Conducted in rented office in community
  - Pairs arrive together, interviewed separately
  - Structured survey and open-ended questions
  - Training to use the phone app

- Phone app questionnaire administered weekly