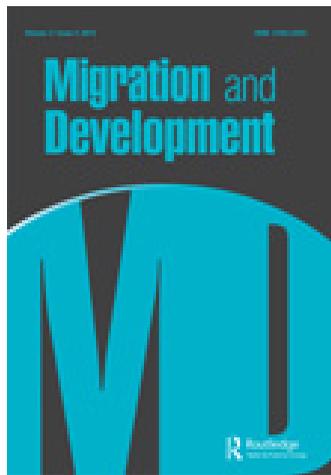


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Family–work dilemma of female migrants: patterns and strategies

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Focusing on the differentials associated with migrants' region of origin, this paper examines the effects of family structure on women's work. This analysis aims to provide empirical evidence to shed further light on the existing knowledge and to explore the more appropriate theoretical model regarding the association between family structure characteristics and immigrant women's work outside the home in the multicultural and multiethnic context. The multivariate results of this analysis support the key fact that the substantial effects of family structure characteristics on women's work outside the home tend to persist beyond the influence of migration status and ethnic diversity.

Keywords: family; work; multiculturalism; female migrants; human capital

Introduction

This paper highlights the role of family structure in the work status of female immigrants with varying ethnic backgrounds. This investigation aims to provide empirical evidence to examine the differentials between migrants and natives and between various ethnic groups of female immigrants regarding the association between family and work. It also aims to present evidence to discover which theoretical models focusing on the association between family and work (see below) can apply more suitably to female migrants. Accordingly, this study attempts to shed further light on the existing knowledge and prior studies reviewed below in relation to the association between family structure and migrant women's work outside the home. The discussion is mainly based on a research conducted in the multiethnic and multicultural context of Australia, which is known as one of the three traditional destinations for migrants throughout the world.¹ As a result, the substantial ethnic diversity of this context also provides the opportunity to highlight the differentials associated with the effects of family structure on female migrants' employment status across the regions of origin.

Background

Generally speaking, literature linking women's labour market activity to family structure is fairly abundant (e.g. Davis, 1984; Evans, 1984; Evans, 1996; Foroutan & McDonald, 2008; Ho, 2008; Kahanec & Mendola, 2007; Lehrer, 1999; Matysiak, 2009; Massey

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et al., 1993; Macunovich, 1996; Miller, 1996; Miller & Volker, 1983; Rindfuss & Brewster, 1996; Rosenfeld, 1996; Read, 2004; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1996). The importance of family features on women's labour market behaviour is also reflected in the UN's *double peak pattern* (2000) suggesting that women are very likely to enter the labour market in their early twenties and they will come back to the labour market when they spent a few years for their childbearing responsibilities.²

Family life cycle, in particular the presence of children at home, has been shown to have stronger effects on the labour force participation of females than that of males (Young, 1990). This is particularly the case when children are young (Bielby, 1992). Brooks and Volker (1985, p. 74) have also concluded that the age of the youngest child has 'possibly the most important single influence on female [labour market] participation'. The strong impact of the presence of young children at home on female employment status has also been documented by more recent studies (e.g. Ho 2008; Kahanec & Mendola, 2007; Lehrer, 2004; Matysiak 2009; Read, 2004; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1996).

Economic approaches assume an association between women's labour market activity and their husband's income. According to this assumption, a couple has a motivation to maximize the husband's income to cope with the household's costs, "with the wife withdrawing from the labour market, either totally or partly, to compensate by taking on the family tasks ..." (Evans, 1996, p. 74). Wooden and VandenHeuvel (1997, p. 132) have also employed the terminology of the 'labour-leisure choice model' in which *ceteris paribus*: the higher the husband's earning, the lower the wife's labour force participation. On the other hand, in the model of "spouse selection process" in which "high earning men may seek out work-oriented women", female labour market behaviour would be affected positively by husband's income (Evans, 1996). Also, according to the 'family investment model' termed by Baker and Benjamin (1997), the labour market activity of immigrants' wives is observed as complementary efforts to promote their husbands' human capital investments. Massey et al. (1993, p. 443) supported the idea of women's labour market activity, historically, as complementary earnings for themselves and their families. There are also some empirical findings to connect women's employment to husband's income in the Australia's multicultural labour market. Brooks and Volker (1985); Franz (1985); Evans (1996); and VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1996) all concluded that husband's income is an important determinant of female labour market behaviour. This has been observed to be particularly applicable to the work pattern of female immigrants. Wooden and VandenHeuvel (1997), for instance, found that labour force participation of immigrant married women with low household income is very low.

In addition, the literature has emphasized the fact that the connection between family structure and women's employment in multicultural and multiethnic settings is substantially associated with migration status and region of origin. For instance, Stier and Tienda (1992) and Yamanaka and McClelland (1994) found that the labour market behaviour of female migrants is less responsive than that of native-born women to family issues, in particular to the presence of young children at home. Wooden and VandenHeuvel (1997) have also asserted that the influence of children on female immigrants' employment behaviour, especially full-time work, depends on their birthplace so that the labour market behaviour of English-speaking background (ESB³) migrant women is more affected by the presence of young children at home compared with non-English-speaking background (NESB) migrant women. The variability of the asso-

ciation between family structure and female migrants' employment by birthplace was also documented by Evans (1984) and VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1996).

Data and method

The discussion of this paper is based on several sources. Focusing on the multiethnic and multicultural context of Australia, this study primarily uses the 2001 and the 2006 Censuses of Population and Housing. The former includes customized tabulations, which are the matrices of relevant variables cross-classified against each other. The matrix or cell data are converted to individual records in SPSS format. This database of cross-tabulations deals with almost 5.4 million women in the main economically active ages,⁴ of whom approximately 25% are migrants. The examination begins with a descriptive analysis, followed by multivariate analysis using logistic regression. The multivariate results of this study provide the opportunity to explain the role of family structure characteristics when other competing determinants are held constant in the models.

Family structure, here, is identified by such characteristics as couple status (whether or not living with a partner), partner's income, the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home. Also, women's work refers to their employment status as a situation in which women are either 'employed' or 'not employed'. Other competing determinants of women's work considered in this analysis contain human capital endowments (educational attainment and English competency), migration aspects (migration status, duration of residence in the destination country and migrants' region of origin), religion and age composition. Appendix 1 provides further information about the definition and classification of characteristics included in this study. It is important to mention that the classification of the characteristics and the categories used in this study are constrained to the original database used in this study.

General patterns

According to the preliminary results of this study, it is evident that couple status has significant effect on women's work: as indicated in Table 1, the percentage 'employed' is greater for those women who live with a partner than for those women who do not live with a partner (about 68 and 61%, respectively). The results of the multivariate analysis, illustrated in Figure 1, also show that both women who do not live with partners and women whose partners have the lowest level of income are the least likely to be employed. In consistence with prior research highlighting the association between women's employment and partner's income (e.g. Brooks & Volker, 1985; Franz, 1985; Evans, 1996; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1996; Wooden & VandenHeuvel, 1997), the results of this study show that women are significantly more likely to be employed as partner's income rises (Table 1). Also, according to the multivariate results, those women whose partners have the lowest level of income are less likely to be employed than women whose partner's income is in the higher levels (Figure 2).

Furthermore, the findings of this study show that women's work is strongly connected to the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home. According to the findings, demonstrated in Table 1 and Figure 2, two major observations are evident. First, the absence of young children at home provides a substantial opportunity for women to work outside the home so that women with no young children at home are much more likely to be employed than women with young chil-

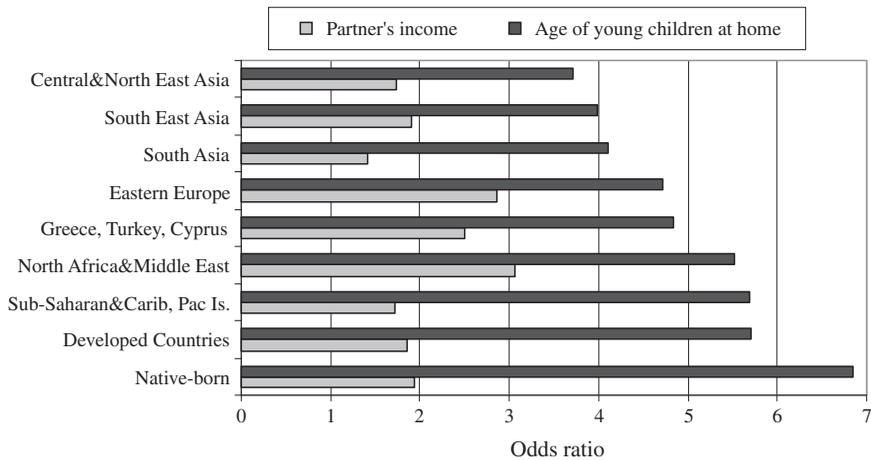


Figure 1. Likelihood of being employed for women aged 15–54 in Australia: for women ‘with no young children at home’ relative to women ‘with a child aged 0–2 years’, and for ‘women living with partners earning the highest level of income’ relative to ‘women living with partners earning the lowest level of income’ by region of origin.

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: (1) This figure is based on the results of logistic regression analysis (odds ratios), highlighting the influence of family characteristics on the likelihood of women’s employment across region of origin. (2) This figure only shows the likelihood of employment for women ‘with no young children at home’ relative to the reference group (that is, women ‘with a child aged 0–2 years’) and for ‘women living with partners earning the highest level of income’ relative to the reference group (that is, ‘women living with partners earning the lowest level of income’). (3) See Note 1 of Table 2 for technical description of odds ratios of this figure.

dren at home irrespective of the age of children. This provides further empirical evidence for the significant influence of these family factors on women’s work documented in prior studies (e.g. Foroutan 2012; Foroutan & McDonald, 2008; Kahanec & Mendola, 2007; Lehrer, 2004; Read 2004; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1996; Young, 1990). Second, the results of this study show that the employment status of women having young children at home is closely associated with the age of the child: the older the age of the child, the greater the likelihood of being employed. This pattern also supports preceding research (e.g. Bielby, 1992; Evans, 1984; Evans, 1996) and in particular the results of Brooks and Volker’s study (1985, p. 74), who concluded that the age of the youngest child has ‘possibly the most important single influence in female participation’ in the labour market.

Migration differentials

As already reviewed, prior studies have shown that the strength of the influence of family structure on women’s work varies by migration status. This means that, for instance, while the employment status of native-born women is substantially affected by family factors, the employment status of female migrants is relatively less responsive to these factors (e.g. Stier & Tienda, 1992; Yamanaka & McClelland, 1994). According to the results of this study, the migrant–native differences in relation to the association between family structure and women’s work are particularly the case for the presence of children at home and the age of the youngest child at home. This suggests that although the employment status of both overseas-born and native-born women is signif-

Table 1. Employment status of women aged 15–54 in Australia by family characteristics and migration status (%).

Family characteristics	Native-born women		Migrant women		Total	
	Employed	Not employed	Employed	Not employed	Employed	Not employed
Couple status						
Living with a partner	70.6	29.4	62.2	37.8	68.1	31.9
Not living with a partner	63.0	37.0	54.5	45.5	61.0	39.0
Total		3642,298		1244,338		4964,808
Young children at home						
Child aged 0–2 years	43.6	56.4	38.1	61.9	42.3	57.7
Child aged 3–7 years	57.9	42.1	51.9	48.1	56.2	43.8
Child aged 8 years or more	65.8	34.2	60.7	39.3	64.2	35.8
No young children	76.3	23.7	65.9	34.1	73.6	26.4
Total		3832,011		1290,278		5204,793
Partner's income						
Low income	56.5	43.5	44.2	55.8	52.3	47.7
Middle income	70.4	29.6	64.8	35.2	68.9	31.1
High income	72.4	27.6	68.4	31.6	71.4	28.6
Total		2460,427		879,959		3389,888

Source: Customized tables from the 2001 Australian Census of Population and Housing. (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Notes: (1) This table excludes those women whose employment status is 'not stated'. (2) In 'couple status', those women whose couple status is 'unclassifiable' are excluded. Also, in 'partner's income', those women whose partner's annual income is 'not stated' and those who are 'no partner' are excluded. (3) 'Total' column (beside 'Australian-born' and 'Migrant women') does also include those women whose birthplace is 'not stated'. (4) See Appendix 1 for definition of characteristics included in this table. (5) This table is obtained from a file that is partly affected by the issue of confidentiality caused by a large number of cross tabulations and small numbers in the cells of Super Table.

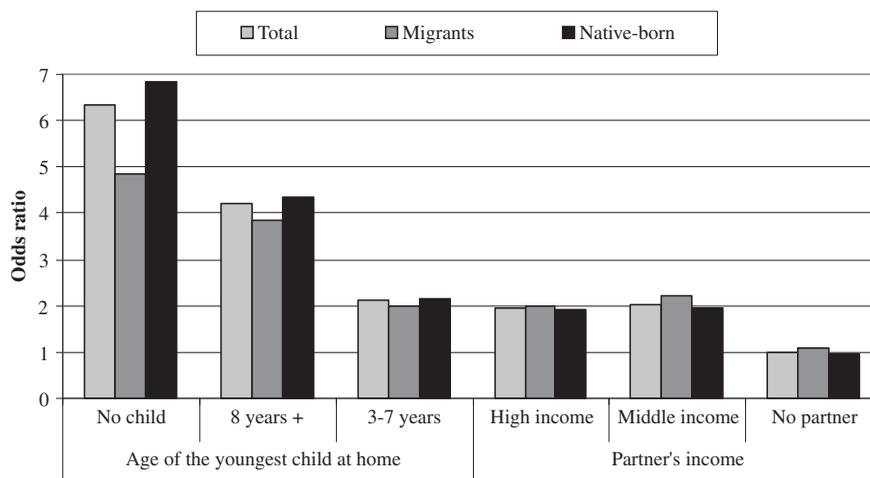


Figure 2. Likelihood of being employed for women aged 15–54 in Australia by age of young children at home (relative to ‘women with a child aged 0–2 years at home’) and by partner’s income (relative to ‘women with partners earning the lowest level of income’).

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: (1) This figure is based on the results of logistic regression analysis (odds ratios), fully illustrated in Appendix 2, highlighting the influence of family characteristics on the likelihood of women’s employment. (2) See Note 1 of Table 2 for technical description of odds ratios of this figure. (3) All notes of Appendix 2 also apply to this figure.

icantly affected by these family factors, the effect is markedly greater for the latter than for the former. In other words, the two major observations highlighted before in relation to the effects of the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home on women’s employment status are much more evident for native-born women than for migrant women (see Table 1 and Figure 2).

In addition, the results of this study show that female migrants’ work is relatively more affected by partner’s income than that of native-born women. This suggests that migrant women are more likely to be employed as partner’s income rises, compared with native-born women (see Table 1). This pattern accords with the ‘family investment model’ discussed before in which immigrants’ wives participation in the labour market is observed as complementary efforts to promote their husbands’ human capital investments (Baker & Benjamin, 1997). In the interim, the results of multivariate analysis show that the migrant–native differentials with regard to the effects of this family structure characteristic on women’s employment status are small (see Figure 2). Moreover, according to the results of this study, there is no significant difference between overseas-born and native-born women in relation to the effect of couple status on their work pattern. This means that those women who live with a partner are more likely to be ‘employed’ than those who do not live with a partner, whether overseas-born or native-born (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Ethnic differentials

According to the literature reviewed above, the influence of family structure on female immigrants’ work varies by background country. For instance, the labour market participation of migrant women from Mediterranean and Eastern European countries in Australia has been asserted to be less affected by both having a husband and the

number of children, compared with other migrant groups (Evans, 1984). Also, as already reviewed, the work pattern of migrant women from non-English-speaking countries has been documented to be less affected by family structure especially the presence of young children, as compared with migrant women with English-speaking background (Foroutan, 2011b; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1996; Wooden & VandenHeuvel, 1997).

The possible variability of the association between family structure and migrant women's work by birthplace has also been considered in this study. According to the multivariate results of this study, two major observations can be made. First, the general patterns highlighted earlier regarding the effects of couple status and partner's income on female migrants' work vary slightly across the regions of birth. However, it is still worthwhile noting that while the effect of partner's income on the work status of female migrants from South Asia is very small, the work status of female migrants from Eastern Europe; Greece, Turkey and Cyprus; and the North Africa and Middle East is relatively more affected by this family factor, as the general patterns highlighted earlier. Second, despite the fact that the effects of the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home, as the general patterns highlighted before, remain substantially significant on the employment status of women irrespective of migration status and birthplace, this significance varies somewhat across the regions of origin. This suggests that not only is the employment status of native-born women more significantly affected by these family characteristics compared with migrant women from each region of birth but also the influence of these family characteristics on migrant women's employment status varies by migrants' region of origin: while the influence of the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home on the employment status of migrant women from the three Asian regions of origin is not as strong as that for migrant women from elsewhere, the employment status of migrant women from Developed Countries; Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean & Pacific Islands; and North Africa and Middle East is more significantly influenced by these family structure characteristics as the general patterns highlighted before (see Figure 1). These ethnic differentials can be partly explained by the pattern discussed earlier in relation to the different impacts of family structure on the work pattern of ESB and NESB migrant women. This seems to be particularly the case for migrant women from Developed Countries as they are mainly from English-speaking countries such as the UK and New Zealand (see Appendix 3).

Religious-ethnic diversity

Family responsibilities and traditional roles in the household emphasized in religions have been identified as the main explanation for the significant influence of religion on female labour force participation (Lehrer, 2004; Foroutan, 2008b, 2009a). Accordingly, the effect of religion on women's work outside the home serves "to reinforce traditional gender role attitudes" (Evans, 1996, p. 79). On the basis of the classification of variables available on the original database used here, this analysis is also able to examine the effects of family factors on the work status of Muslim immigrants across their substantial regions of origin from a comparative perspective.

Generally speaking, the major patterns highlighted before with regard to the effects of the family structure characteristics on migrant women's work patterns also apply to Muslim immigrants. From a comparative perspective, however, the results show that while partner's income has a relatively greater effect on the employment status of Muslim immigrants, the employment status of non-Muslims is more affected by the

presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home as the general patterns highlighted before. However, the differences between these two groups highlighted here are small (see Table 2). In addition, the above patterns need to be investigated in details by migrants' region of origin due to the fact that Muslim immigrants in Australia are substantially diverse by birthplace in terms of socio-demographic characteristics influencing labour market activity (Foroutan, 2008b, 2008d). Further investigation in this study shows that although the general patterns discussed before in relation to the impacts of family structure apply entirely to the employment status of immigrant Muslims and non-Muslims in each region of birth, the two following major observations can be addressed.

First, couple status and partner's income have different effects on the employment status of these two groups of women whose regions of origin are Eastern Europe and Central & North East Asia. This means that the effects of these family characteristics on the employment status of Muslim immigrants from these two regions of birth are greater than those of non-Muslim immigrants from the same regions, as the general patterns highlighted before. In the interim, the differences related to the effects of these family structure characteristics between Muslim and non-Muslim immigrants from elsewhere are small. Second, the influence of the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home on the employment status is stronger for non-Muslim immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands; Developed Countries; South East Asia; Eastern Europe; and Greece, Turkey and Cyprus, as compared with Muslim immigrants from the same regions of birth. The opposite is the case for the remaining regions of birth (see Table 2). In fact, the above two main results showing variable patterns across the regions of birth suggest that someone cannot simply say that family structure has greater effect on the employment status of either Muslim or non-Muslim immigrants. A more important fact drawn from the observed patterns here is that the differentials between these two religious groups of immigrants in relation to the effects of the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home are not significant mainly because the effects still remain substantially high across the regions of birth for both religious groups of migrant women. In sum, these results emphasize the major fact that the family structure characteristics are able to impose their substantial influence on immigrant women's employment status regardless of religious affiliation.

Two typical patterns

The discussion below provides two typical patterns amongst female immigrants regarding the association between family and work. The first pattern refers to the situation of female immigrants from South Asia, who are largely Indians and Sri Lankans (about 50 and 30% respectively), and the remaining are mainly Pakistani and Bangladeshi (See Appendix 3). This migrant group represents a substantially greater contribution of human capital indicated by high education and high English language proficient, which mainly lies in the matter of selectivity of migration from the region to Australia (Foroutan 2008c; Foroutan & McDonald 2008; Jones 2000). It is worthwhile mentioning that characteristics such as education and English skill play vital role in the settlement and success of immigrants in the destination country and in its labour market (e.g. Brooks & Volker, 1985; Evans, 1984; Foroutan, 2008a, 2011b; Hugo, 1992; Hook & Balistreri, 2002; Khoo & McDonald, 2001; Read, 2004; Sorensen, 1993; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1996; Wooden, 1994).

Table 2. Likelihood of being employed for women aged 15–54 in Australia by family characteristics, religion and region of origin.

Family characteristics and religious affiliation	By region of origin									
	Total	Native-born (1)	Developed Countries (2)	Eastern Europe (3)	South Asia (4)	South East Asia (5)	Central, North East Asia (6)	Greece, Turkey, Cyprus (7)	N. Africa, M. East (8)	Sub-Saharan, Caribbean, Pacific Is. (9)
MUSLIM WOMEN										
Young children at home	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Child aged 0–2 years	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.0	2.3	1.5	1.8	1.9	1.7	2.4
Child aged 3–7 years	3.9	4.0	4.2	3.4	4.4	2.6	3.0	3.4	3.2	3.4
Child aged 8 years or more	5.4	7.6	4.9	4.4	4.6	3.1	3.8	4.5	4.9	4.6
No young children										
Partner's income	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Low income	2.4	1.8	1.5	4.4	1.4	1.9	2.5	3.1	2.1	1.9
Middle income	2.5	1.9	2.1	4.1	1.3	1.4	3.1	3.3	3.1	2.4
High income	1.0	0.9	0.8	1.2	1.1	0.8	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.4
No partner										
Number of valid case	70,000	17,134	1171	5158	5831	5664	6905	9355	14,859	3591
NON-MUSLIM WOMEN										
Young children at home	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Child aged 0–2 years	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.2	1.9	1.8	1.7	2.1	1.9	2.2
Child aged 3–7 years	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.1	3.3	3.1	3.1	4.6	3.2	4.0
Child aged 8 years or more	6.3	6.8	5.7	4.7	3.9	4.1	3.6	4.7	4.7	5.7
No young children										
Partner's income	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Low income	2.0	1.9	2.1	3.1	1.4	2.3	1.8	2.5	2.3	1.9
Middle income	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.7	1.3	1.9	1.6	2.1	2.7	1.7
High income	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.8	1.1	1.4	1.0
No partner										
Number of valid case	4801,156	3676,093	575,277	76,787	49,720	194,961	94,624	23,666	14,982	77,951

Source: See Table 1. *Reference group

Notes: (1) In each model (column), dependent variable is 'employment status' in which 'employed' is coded as 1 (one) and 'not employed' is coded as 0 (zero); the numbers (odds ratios) show the likelihood of being 'employed' relative to the reference group in a given variable. (2) This table is based on the results of multivariate analysis that are fully available in Appendices 1 and 2. (3) This table excludes those women whose education, English proficiency, partner's income, year of arrival in Australia, birthplace and employment status are 'not stated' or 'inadequately described'. (4) See Appendix 1 for classification and definition of characteristics included in this table. (5) Appendix 3 provides a list of major countries of birth for each region of origin. (6) Note 5 in Table 1 also applies to this table.

The results of this study show two different pictures regarding the work pattern of female immigrants from South Asia. On the one hand, the employment level of South Asian female migrants is significantly high: about 60% of them are employed. Also, multivariate analysis illustrates that the employment level of this immigrant group is not substantially lower than native-born women. This high rate of employment participation of female immigrants from South Asia can be partly associated with their high human capital discussed above. On the other hand, female immigrants from South Asia represent a unique occupational pattern: while most migrant groups are almost as likely as native-born to work in the high-level jobs (professionals and managers), South Asian female immigrants are about half as likely as native-born to be employed in the high-level jobs (see Figure 3). This work pattern of South Asian female immigrants seems interesting and typical because of the fact that while their participation in the labour market is substantially high, they mainly work in the middle occupations (clerical, sales and service workers) despite their eligibility of taking the high occupations due to holding high education and English skill. This work pattern can be mainly explained by the role of commitment to family: South Asian female migrants participate in the labour market predominately, but they tend to deliberately choose less demanding jobs such as clerical, sales and service works. This decision provides them simultaneously with two good chances associated with family: first, they benefit a much better situation to combine appropriately their responsibilities both inside and outside the home (family and work). Second, they still have opportunity to play a role as secondary earners for family and household budget. It is worthwhile to state that both Indian and Sri Lankan male migrants, as the two largest groups of South Asian migrants, earn

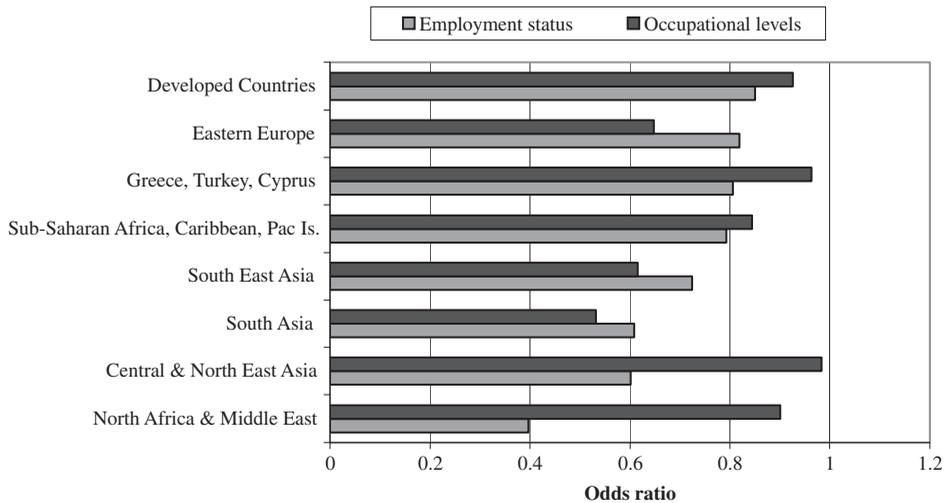


Figure 3. Likelihood of 'being employed' and of 'working in professional and managerial occupations' for female migrants aged 15–54 in Australia by region of origin relative to 'native-born women', (odds ratios).

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: (1) See Note 1 of Table 2 for technical description of odds ratios of this figure for employment status. (2) For 'occupational levels' in which 'working in professional and managerial occupations' is coded as 1 (one) and 'working all other occupations' is coded as 0 (zero), the numbers (odds ratios) show the likelihood of being employed in professional and managerial occupations' relative to the reference group. In 'occupational levels', only employed women were included.

higher incomes indicative of full-time employment compared with both all male migrants and all Australian men, which mainly lies in the fact that Indian and Sri Lankan migrant men markedly work in professional occupations in Australia (Foroutan 2008c; Foroutan & McDonald, 2008; Jones 1999; Jones 2000). Accordingly, the two following theoretical models tend to be more suitable for the work pattern of South Asian female immigrants: the model of “spouse selection process” in which “high earning men may seek out work-oriented women” (Evans, 1996, p. 75), and the “family investment model” (Baker & Benjamin, 1997) in which wives’ employment in lower occupations has been identified as complementary efforts to promote their husbands’ human capital investments.

The second typical pattern in this study regarding the association between family and work refers to the situation of female immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA) region. They are largely Lebanese and Egyptians; then, the major source countries of the remaining are Syria, Israel, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Jordan and Kuwait (see Appendix 3). The MENA region is often characterized by women’s high attachment and commitment to family so that gender roles are mainly constrained within the frame of household resulting in characteristics such as high fertility and low rate of work outside the home for women (e.g. Foroutan, 2009a, 2009b; McQuilan, 2004; Omran & Roudi, 1993). The results of this study also show that female immigrants from the MENA region contribute a very low employment level so that only one-third of them are employed. From a comparative perspective, not only are they markedly less likely than native-born women to be employed but also their employment level is significantly lower than all other migrant groups (see Figure 3). This typical work pattern of female immigrants from the MENA region also provides empirical evidence to highlight the influence of family on women’s work: in the course of cultural characteristics of the region of origin, this migrant group prefers to give high priority of commitment to family rather than to work outside the home. It is interesting to mention that they perform such a role in a residing country where, totally in contrary to their region of origin, women’s participation in work outside the home is substantially high,⁵ but female immigrants from the MENA region insist to keep their commitment to the values of family (Table 3).

Table 3. The economic activity of selected groups of the MENA immigrants aged 15 years and over in Australia by country of origin (%), 2006.

The economic activity	Lebanon	Iraq	Iran	Syria	Turkey	Total Australia
Labour force participation rate						
Males	60.5	53.6	67.5	62.4	61.0	72.6
Females	26.7	24.4	50.1	28.0	34.3	59.8
Total	44.2	39.7	59.2	44.7	48.0	66.0
Full-time employment rate						
Males	35.3	26.1	43.4	38.1	40.0	53.0
Females	10.9	9.5	22.5	11.3	15.8	27.4
Total	23.5	18.2	33.4	24.2	28.2	39.8
Unemployment rate						
Males	11.8	21.4	11.4	10.9	9.8	5.0
Females	12.7	24.4	12.0	14.2	13.3	4.8
Total	12.1	22.3	11.7	12.0	11.0	4.9

Source: The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): The 2006 Census of Housing and Population (<http://www.abs.gov.au>).

Summary and conclusion

Giving particular focus to the differentials associated with migration status and migrants' region of origin, this paper has examined the effects of family structure on women's work. The study has benefited the substantial ethnic diversity of the multicultural and multiethnic context of Australia. Irrespective of migration status and ethnic background, the four major general patterns observed in this analysis do not go against the grain of conventional wisdom as they are in harmony with our assumptions derived from prior studies and beliefs. According to the findings of this analysis, women have been found to be more likely to be employed when they have: (1) a partner, compared with women who do not live with a partner; (2) a partner whose level of income is higher, compared with women whose partner's income is in the lowest level; (3) no young children at home, compared with women who have young children at home; (4) older children at home, compared with women with younger children at home.⁶

Moreover, in the course of the general patterns highlighted above, this paper has found that the influence of family factors on women's employment varies partly by migration status and migrants' region of origin. The results of this analysis have shown that the work of female immigrants is more significantly affected by partner's income than that of native-born women. The migrant–native differentials related to the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home are more evident because the employment status of native-born women has been found to be more significantly affected by these family factors than that of migrant women. Moreover, while the differences between migrant women by region of origin in relation to the influence of couple status and partner's income on their employment status are small, the differences are relatively greater with regard to the influence of the presence of young children at home and age of the youngest child at home on the employment status of migrant women across the regions of origin. The differences related to the effect of the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home on the employment status of migrant women by region of origin have been partly explained by the fact that the employment status of migrant women from English-speaking countries is relatively more affected by these family factors than that of migrant women from non-English-speaking countries. The results have also shown that the differentials associated with the effects of family structure characteristics on employment status of female immigrants by religion are not significant.

Accordingly, sitting well with the 'complementary earnings' (or the 'family investment') model (Baker & Benjamin, 1997; Massey et al., 1993) and the 'spouse selection process' model (Evans, 1996), the results of this study suggest that although the magnitude of the effects of the family factors varies somewhat by migration status and migrants' region of origin, the magnitude for all groups of women is still substantially high. This is a more evident observation for the presence of young children at home and age of the youngest child at home, which provides empirical evidence to support and update prior research identifying the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child at home as factors that have "possibly the most important single influence on female participation" in the labour market (Brooks & Volker, 1985, p. 74). In sum, these results not only support a higher value attached to family life rather than to work outside the home amongst women in Australia asserted in the preceding cross-national research⁷ (Brusentsev, 2002), but also suggest that the strong association between family structure characteristics and women's work status persists beyond the influence of migration status and ethnic diversity. From a viewpoint of

policy implication, these results suggest that the policy of the ‘family-friendly environment’ (The European Parliament on the Demographic Future of Europe, 2008) and the improvement of living conditions for families and children, (such as maternity leave, childcare and part-time positions etc.) not only needs to be considered as a global policy to the work life of all women regardless of their migration status and ethnicity, but also operates as a more useful policy in the settlement and success of female immigrants in order to enabling them to balance between work and family.

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Notes

1. The United States of America, Canada and Australia are known as the three traditional destinations for migrants throughout the world (Freeman & Birrell, 2001).
2. However, it should be also noted that the double peak pattern is no longer as prevalent as it was in the past because ‘women are finding ways to combine family responsibilities with market work’ (United Nations 2000, p. 111).
3. ESB refers to English Speaking Background immigrants in Australia who were born in Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the Republic of South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, whereas all other overseas-born persons are classified NESB: Non English Speaking Background (Wooden & VandenHeuvel, 1997, p. 129).
4. Based on the composition of overseas-born women aged 15–54 by individual country of birth, the classification of regions of origin in the original database used here was developed. Also, this paper aims to compare the employment of Australian-born women with that of overseas-born women. Accordingly, the same age range (that is, 15–54) has been used for both Australian-born and overseas-born women in this paper to keep the consistency and accuracy of the comparison.
5. Labour force participation rate for Australian-born women is about 70 per cent (Foroutan, 2008a, 2008b).
6. It is also acknowledged that the work pattern of this migrant group might be in part the consequence of disadvantage and discrimination hypothesis (Foroutan, 2011a).
7. It is, however, acknowledged that besides the cultural differences in values attached to family rather than to market employment, these cross-national differences in women's employment can also be partly due to institutional and political variations in employment characteristics such as availability of part-time work, pay rates etc.

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Appendix 1. Definition and classification of characteristics included in this study

Characteristics	Classification	Definition and categories
Migration status	Migrant women	Anyone who was overseas-born in the census (overseas-born).
	Native-born women	Anyone whose country of birth was stated as Australia in the census (Australian -born).
Employment status	Employed	Employee, employer, own account worker, and contributing family worker.
	Not employed	Unemployed looking for full-time/ part-time work, not in labour force.
Educational attainment	Low education	Did not go to school, Year 8 or below.
	Middle education	Year 9-12 or equivalent, certificate level.
	High education	Postgraduate degree, Graduate diploma and Graduate certificate, Bachelor degree, Advanced diploma and Diploma level.
English proficiency	Very well	Only speak English, Speak English very well.
	Well	Speak English well.
	Not well	Speak English not well.
Couple status	Living with partner (Partnered)	Here, living with a partner (partnered) includes husband, wife in a registered marriage, and partner in a de-facto marriage (opposite sex).
	Not living with partner (Not partnered)	Anyone who is not 'partnered' as defined above.

Note: It should be noted that the classification of these characteristics is based on the original database used in this analysis.

Appendix 2. Likelihood of being employed for women aged 15–54 in Australia by selected characteristics and migration status and religion (odds ratios)

Characteristics	Total (All women)	By migration status	
		Native-born women	Migrant women
Young children at home			
Child aged 0–2 years	*	*	*
Child aged 3–7 years	2.125	2.172	1.999
Child aged 8 years or more	4.215	4.330	3.835
No. young children	6.347	6.844	4.841
Partner's income			
Low income	*	*	*
Middle income	2.038	1.955	2.238
High income	1.969	1.937	1.995
No partner	1.003	0.969	1.108

(Continued)

Appendix 2. (Continued).

Characteristics	Total (All women)	By migration status	
		Native-born women	Migrant women
Age groups			
15–24 years	*	*	*
25–34 years	1.494	1.404	2.128
35–44 years	1.465	1.367	2.327
45–54 years	1.077	1.020	1.855
Educational attainment			
Low education	*	*	*
Still at school	0.895	1.153	0.562
Middle education	2.795	3.657	1.728
High education	7.222	10.539	3.236
English competency			
Not well	*	*	*
Well	1.411	1.368	1.751
Very well	2.380	2.003	3.645
Duration of residence in Australia			
Born in Australia	*		
10 years or less	0.488		
More than 10 years	0.938		
Number of valid cases	4,871,156	3,693,184	1,226,630

Source: See Table 1. *Reference group.

Notes: (1) See Note 1 of Table 2 for technical description of odds ratios of this table. (2) This table excludes those women whose education, English proficiency, partner's income, year of arrival in Australia, birthplace, and employment status is 'not stated' or 'inadequately described'. (3) See Appendix 1 for classification and definition of characteristics included in this table. (4) Note 5 in Table 1 also applies to this table.

Appendix 3. Migrant women aged 15–54 in Australia by region of origin and major country of birth

Region of origin and country of birth	%	Region of origin and country of birth	%
Developed Countries	48.86	Eastern Europe	6.96
United Kingdom	44.13	Eastern Europe	34.40
New Zealand	20.51	Yugoslavia Federal Republic	17.19
Western Europe	9.04	FYR. of Macedonia	15.75
Southern Europe	8.55	Croatia	14.56
Northern America	4.66	Bosnia and Herzegovina	9.31
Others	13.11	Others	8.78
Total	100.00	Total	100.00
South East Asia	17.19	South Asia	4.63
Viet Nam	30.11	India	49.20
Philippines	24.85	Sri Lanka	31.14
Malaysia	15.44	Burma (Myanmar)	6.10
Indonesia	9.00	Pakistan	5.93
Singapore	6.50	Bangladesh	4.83
Others	14.10	Others	2.80
Total	100.00	Total	100.00
Central & North East Asia	8.65	North Africa & Middle East	3.78
Chinese Asia (including Mongolia)	83.76	Lebanon	54.16

(Continued)

Appendix 3. (Continued).

Region of origin and country of birth	%	Region of origin and country of birth	%
Iraq	7.04	Egypt	17.06
Iran	5.75	Syria	5.19
Afghanistan	3.01	Israel	4.16
Kazakhstan	0.17	Sudan	2.87
Others	0.28	Others	16.56
Total	100.00	Total	100.00
Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, Pacific Is.	7.00	Greece, Turkey, Cyprus	2.93
Polynesia (excluding Hawaii)	33.05	Greece	55.41
South Africa	31.02	Turkey	29.65
Melanesia	13.29	Cyprus	14.94
Mauritius	6.71	Total	100.00
Zimbabwe	5.37		
Others	10.56	Grand total (%)	100.00
Total	100.00	Grand total (number)	1,298,179

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: (1) This table excludes those women whose birthplace is 'not stated' or 'inadequately described'.

(2) The classification for the regions of origin is based on the original database used in this analysis.