Abstract

This study is a pioneer effort to comparatively examine how the life satisfaction of children is influenced by their experiences of migration and by their interactions with parents in two geographical contexts: Ghana and China. It also provides evidence of how these relationships differ across gender groups in the two countries. This study uses survey data collected in 2010 and 2013 from school children and youths aged 11-20 in Ghana (N=1622) and China (N=2171) respectively. Results indicate that children a) who previously migrated but returned and currently live with both parents and b) who currently stay behind and have no previous migration experience are generally less likely to be satisfied with life. On the other hand, greater resilience in the outcome is associated with emotional support from parents. Also, there is suggestive evidence that Chinese girls are more vulnerable to the effects of parental migration and of being, at one point of life, migrant themselves. This evidence is not replicated among Chinese boys. In Ghana, girls of migrant parents without a personal migration experience and boys in non-migrant families who returned from abroad show some degree of vulnerability when assessing their life satisfaction. These findings add nuance to a field of research that has yet to conceptualize the complexity of children's experiences with migration and the way this complexity associates with child well-being.

The following publication Wu, Q., & Cebotari, V. (2018). Experiences of migration, parent–child interaction, and the life satisfaction of children in Ghana and China. Population, space and place, 24(7), e2160 is available at https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2160.

Experiences of Migration, Parent-child Interaction, and the Life Satisfaction of Children in Ghana and China

Ghana and China have both experienced significant migration flows in recent decades. At the turn of the century, Twum-Baah (2005) estimated the number of Ghanaian migrants at 1.5 million. According to the World Bank (2011), most Ghanaians abroad are located in Western, industrialized countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. Many of these migrants are parents who, either freely or forced by strict immigration policies, have chosen to leave their children behind in the care of others. Estimates from nationally representative data suggest that up to 37% of Ghanaian children, excluding orphans, lived without at least one biological parent in 2014 (Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Health Service & ICF International [GSS, GHS & ICF], 2014). Similarly, China since the 1980's has witnessed an unprecedented large-scale population flow from rural to urban areas, creating a total of 247 million migrants by 2015, or one-fifth of the nation's entire population (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2016). The number of children affected by this population flow reached 96.84 million by the year of 2010, with 35.81 million children having migrated with their parents to the cities and 61.03 million children having stayed behind in rural counties (Duan et al., 2013). Despite their slightly different situations, these Chinese and Ghanaian 'left-behind children' form a special youth population that deserves special attention.

The family circumstances and the mobility trajectories of children who remain behind in Ghana and China have not been empirically examined in detail. Although some research in African and Asian contexts has paid attention to child well-being and has documented an array of family arrangements that influence children's mobility patterns and well-being outcomes (see

for instance, Bledsoe & Sow, 2011; Cebotari, Mazzucato & Appiah, 2017; Cheng & Sun, 2014; Jordan & Graham, 2012; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2017; Wen & Lin, 2012; Wu, Lu & Kang, 2015), gaps remain. First, no comparative study has been done to understand how the life satisfaction of children is affected by their experiences of parental migration and by being, at one point in life, migrants themselves. Although studies have documented aspects of child mobility in the context of migration (Arthur, 2008; Bledsoe & Sow, 2011; Eremenko & Bennet, 2018), the empirical evidence from large-scale studies is still limited. Similarly, we know little of the relationship between parent-child interactions and children's life satisfaction in the two contexts under examination in this study. Second, transnational family research on children of migrants rarely includes a comparison group of children, i.e., from non-migrant families. This omission impedes conclusions pertaining to a larger population of children. Third, most of the empirical evidence on children of migrants is from adult assessments, which is problematic because adults and children may not report outcomes similarly. Recent evidence from Eastern Europe and South-East Asia shows that adults have a general tendency to under-report on children's outcomes, at least compared to assessments made by children themselves (Cebotari, Siegel & Mazzucato, 2016; Jordan & Graham, 2012). Last, although a gendered perspective of child well-being is being increasingly adopted by transnational family studies (Antman, 2012; Cebotari et al., 2017; Jordan et al., 2018; Vanore, 2015; Wen & Lin, 2012), gender differences in well-being of children as influenced by their experiences of migration are still sparsely understood.

Adopting a comparative approach, the current study fills these gaps by presenting empirical evidence of the life satisfaction of children in migrant and non-migrant families in Ghana and China. Using cross-sectional data collected in 2010 in Ghana and 2013 in China, this study examines children from migrant and non-migrant families in these two contexts, seeking

common and/or unique features in the impact of experiences of migration and parent-child interactions on the children's life satisfaction. Moreover, the study explores whether the observed associations vary according to the child's gender. Capturing the life-satisfaction aspect of child well-being is important, as this outcome has been increasingly recognized as a key developmental marker in the wider transnational family literature (Cebotari et al., 2017; Dito, Mazzucato & Schans, 2016; Ma & Huebner, 2008; Wen & Lin, 2012).

In this study, migrant families are defined as those having at least one parent who migrated—internally in China or internationally from Ghana. Despite the difference between international and internal migration, they are both considered alternative strategies responding to broader social and economic forces and thus provide a reliable comparative angle (Lu, 2014; Pryor, 1981). Recent transnational family research on child well-being by DeWaard, Nobles and Donato (2018) refers to both internal and international migration under a common term, namely parental absence via migration (PAM). In this study, the comparison of the two types of migration is meaningful for several reasons. First, China and Ghana are both countries in the Global South that have experienced significant economic growth but have yet to complete the developmental stage of industrialization and urbanization. Labour migration is one feature that defines both countries' current stage of development. The two types of migration are thus driven by the same rationale—to seek better opportunities, both for migrants and for family members staying behind. Second, given the geographical size of China, the distance between sending and receiving communities for internal rural-to-urban migration can be comparable to that between Ghana and the receiving Western destinations, at least in terms of family separation. Distance is therefore a critical factor that determines how often the migrants and children can move between the sending and receiving communities, thus exerting significant effects on the family

arrangement and parent-child interaction patterns. Third, both international (Ghana) and internal (China) migration have resulted in large populations of children who stay behind in their place of origin, and studies show that these children face similar psychological challenges in terms of coping with separation from parents (Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2017; Wen & Lin, 2012). A comparison of China and Ghana will provide valuable insights on whether the relationship between parental migration and children's life satisfaction has effects that transcend a single geographical context. Finally, the comparison of Ghana and China was made possible by the availability of two sets of comparable data. Earlier comparative transnational family studies found both similarities and differences in children's well-being, when comparing, for instance, children's educational outcomes in two different geographical contexts (Cebotari et al., 2016; Lu, 2014). This two-country comparison provides an opportunity to examine whether the effects of parental migration in relation to other outcomes such as life satisfaction are consistent across contexts.

Background

Ghanaian and Chinese Migration Contexts

Both Ghana and China have long histories of migration, with people moving internally or to nearby regions in search of a better life. At the same time, each country has had specific patterns of migration as well as different migrant populations that warrant more detailed description.

Ghana was colonized by the British in the mid-1800s, at which time some small-scale overseas mobility occurred as people went to study in the United Kingdom, a trend that continued after the country became independent in 1957. Large-scale emigration of Ghanaians to

the Global North began in the early 1980 when Nigeria, which had previously attracted many labour migrants from Ghana, started to experience economic difficulties (Peil, 1995). Since then, Ghanaians have become one of the largest populations of Africans abroad. Although accurate numbers are elusive because of undocumented migration, the number of Ghanaian emigrants has recently been estimated at 1.5 million (Twum-Baah, 2005). The preferred destinations of Ghanaians are industrialized countries in North America and Western Europe, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands (World Bank, 2011).

Many of these migrants are fathers seeking work, though many Ghanaian mothers also migrate, whether independently or as part of family reunification (Dito et al., 2016). The preferred choice of Ghanaian parents is to leave children behind when traveling abroad for work (Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2017), although some of these children come as migrants themselves or are eventually reunified with their parents in the destination country (Dito et al., 2016). Among these, one intriguing group is children who are sent back to Ghana. According to Bledsoe and Sow (2011), reasons for children being sent back are: introducing children to family's ancestral roots, disciplining/controlling an intransigent child, and pursuing affordable quality education. Although precise statistics on Ghanaian children with a migration experience is not available, we know from recent collected longitudinal data in Ghana (Cebotari et al., 2017) that in the high out-migration urban areas of Kumasi and Sunyani, up to 5% of children enrolled in schools have been, at one point of their lives, migrants themselves.

In China, beginning in the mid-1980's, there has been a massive population flow from rural counties/villages to urban cities/towns. According to statistics provided by the National Health and Family Planning Commission (2016), the number of migrants in China reached 247 million in 2015, or 18% of the nation's entire population. At first, rural-urban migration was mostly

temporary—occurring outside the agricultural growing season—and migrants generally did not bring their families with them. This pattern of migration has gradually shifted in recent years to a more permanent migration, in which migrants move to cities with their families (Liang, 2007). The majority of these migrants are clustered in the eastern and southern coastal regions, where there is rapid economic development and a growing demand for cheap labor (Duan & Yang, 2009).

However, under the household-registration system in China, which assigns each citizen a residence status at birth (*hukou*), migrants have encountered many barriers to public services in cities, such as schools and social welfare, because they lack legitimate urban residence. The *hukou* system often results in a dilemma for children of migrants—go back to their hometowns to pursue their education but be apart from their parents, or stay in the city with their parents and give up on their schooling (Wu, Tsang, & Ming, 2014). This has generated a large number of children who migrate with their parents and live in the city for a certain period of time but later return to their place of origin. Therefore, weighing the costs and benefits, a considerable proportion of migrants choose to migrate alone and leave their children behind, resulting in a large number of children being separated from parents for extended periods of time.

Parental Migration and Child Well-being

Since the early 2000s, transnational family studies have focused specifically on families living across borders and the effects of migration on relationships between family members (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Transnational family studies generally emphasize the emotional discomfort for both migrating parents (Dito et al., 2016; Parreñas, 2001) and for children who stay behind (Cheng & Sun, 2014; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2016; Wen & Lin, 2012). Scholars

argue that children whose parents migrate: tend to face emotional challenges, especially when mothers migrate (Parreñas, 2001; Jordan & Graham, 2012); encounter difficulties in their care arrangements (Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014); and show rebellious behaviour and tactics of indifference towards their parents abroad (Dreby, 2007). Transnational family research has also found that children of migrants are disadvantaged in other well-being outcomes, such as school engagement (Wen & Lin, 2012), health behaviour (Hu, Lu, & Huang, 2014), educational performance (Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016), happiness (Jordan & Graham, 2012), and life satisfaction (Cebotari et al., 2017; Su et al., 2013).

Based on these studies, the well-being challenges for children of migrants seem to outweigh the advantages, in both international and internal migration contexts. This is largely due to the fact that theories used in the area of transnational family research view close proximity between the child and the parent as a necessary condition for maintaining meaningful emotional connections. Attachment theory, for instance, claims that stable, long-term parental input is critical for children's healthy emotional development (Bowlby, 1958). Similarly, object relations theory posits that the way children relate to situations in their lives is shaped by their experiences of parental migration (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova & Louie, 2002). Finally, the human ecology theoretical framework sees family interactions as the most influential predictor for children's quality of life and overall development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Zhao & Shen, 2010). All these theoretical frameworks imply that child development is influenced by the parental input and by interactions within family.

More recently, transnational family research has begun to consider the diversity of factors that exert complex effects on the well-being of children who stay in their place of origin. Based on quantitative studies in different contexts, it has been argued that, despite the geographical

separation caused by migration, migrant parents are able to maintain active links with children and families in their place of origin and continue to be engaged and involved in the decisions concerning children and their well-being (Cebotari et al., 2016; Jordan & Graham, 2012, Jordan et al., 2018; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014; Wen & Lin, 2012). This is in line with household strategy theory (Stark & Bloom, 1985), which posits that parental migration is primarily a family strategy aimed at maximizing the well-being of children and other family members who stay behind. Indeed, the money sent back by migrant parents has been found to enhance children's nutrition and physical health, facilitate their education and the formation of human capital, and reduce the risk of child labour (Asis, 2006; Howard & Stanley, 2016).

In addition to economic gains, children of migrants are often exposed to new information, ideas and life perspectives, which migrant parents routinely convey through different channels of parent-child interaction (Toyota, Yeoh & Nguyen, 2007). This suggests that parent-child relationships can play an important role in children's well-being even when the parent is not physically present. Research shows that the quality of the parent-child relationship and the emotional contact that migrant parents are able to maintain with their children are important predictors for the children's emotional outcomes (Jordan & Graham, 2012; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2017). Children who feel cared for and are able to communicate with parents over large distances have a greater understanding of parental migration (Dreby, 2007) and spend more time doing homework and leisure activities (Jordan et al., 2018). This is true in both Ghana and China, where frequent communications and positive relationships between children, parents, and caregivers were found to positively influence both children's feelings towards migrant parents and their reported assessments of life satisfaction, happiness and psychological health (Cebotari

et al., 2017; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014; Ma & Huebner, 2008; Mazzucao & Cebotari, 2016; Su et al., 2013).

Gender differences are also of significance when measuring children's outcomes, as boys and girls may respond differently to the effects of parental migration (Antman, 2012; Jordan et al., 2018; Wen & Lin, 2012). Although specific gender norms exist in each context characterized by migration (Parreñas, 2001), the general narrative is one in which girls are more disadvantaged when parents migrate. For instance, studies suggest that emotional support from parents is more important for the mental well-being of girls because girls are more emotionally attached to their migrant parents (Cross & Madson, 1997; Ma & Huebner, 2008). In China, Gao et al. (2010) found that girls of migrant parents are more at risk for unhealthy behaviors such as drinking and smoking, compared to girls who live with both parents. Similarly, in Ghana, Cebotari et al., (2017) found that girls in transnational families are less likely to positively report on their life satisfaction and happiness, particularly when they live in unstable care arrangements or in divorce-affected families.

However, despite the recent attention given to transnational family dynamics in relation to child well-being, this area of study has a major gap. Most transnational family studies use a simplified notion of children's mobility and often conceptualize children of migrants as immobile. Nevertheless, with the high prevalence of transnational families in the world, transnationalism is increasingly considered as a process rather than a state (Mazzucato & Dito, 2018). There is a need for a more nuanced examination of the transnational mobility that takes into account the children's mobility trajectory and their varied experiences of parental and own migration. A number of studies on children's mobility show that many Ghanaian 'left-behind' children had actually returned from abroad (Arthur, 2008; Bledsoe & Sow, 2011). In China,

close to one-fifth of children in some rural areas have had a previous migration experience (Wu et al., 2015). These studies point to difficulties that children with a migration experience face when living as 'left-behind'.

In summary, transnational family studies indicate that the experience of parental migration may affect child well-being in different ways. However, these insights have only recently captured the attention of scholars in transnational family research, and more evidence is needed to understand the relationship between children's migration mobility and their well-being.

Methods

Data

Data for this study came from two large-scale surveys in Ghana and China. The survey in Ghana was conducted in 2010 among junior and secondary school children (N = 1622) in four high out-migration urban areas: the greater Accra region, Cape Coast, Sunyani and Kumasi. The survey was based on a stratified sampling procedure, where children from twenty-two schools (both low- and high-quality, both public and private) were selected. In each selected school, one class was randomly selected from each of the three grades and then, the remaining classrooms were purposively sampled to additionally select a sufficient number of students in transnational families. All students were informed of the voluntary nature of their involvement and the survey response rate reached 85%. In total, 1622 students between the ages of 11 and 20 were sampled and retained for analysis. The age range reflects the distribution of ages of students in these classrooms.

The survey in China was conducted in 2013 in three metropolitan cities where most migrants are concentrated—Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, and in three rural provinces where most migrants originate—Guizhou, Anhui, and Jiangsu. For the present study, we drew upon data from the three rural provinces. The study sample was recruited through multi-stage random sampling. First, two counties with different socioeconomic status were selected in each province. Second, within each county, four primary schools and four secondary schools were randomly selected based on a complete list of all schools in that county. Third, from each selected school, 60 students (4^{th}-6^{th} grade for primary schools or and 7^{th}-9^{th} grade for secondary schools) were randomly selected from the school roster and invited to participate in the study. Prior to administering the questionnaire, participants were asked for consent to participate in the survey. Following this sampling strategy, the survey response rate reached 91%. To ensure that the age range of Chinese students matched that of the Ghana data, we retained for analysis only students between the ages of 11 and 20, resulting in a final sample of 2171 Chinese children.

In this study, we consistently use the term "children" to express the type of relationship that respondents have with their migrant parents. To avoid capturing effects other than parental migration, the final samples for analysis (1622 in Ghana and 2171 in China) did not include children who were separated from parents because of parental divorce or death. The two studies both went through research ethics review and received approval.

Measures

The measurements included in this study are identical and were measured in similar ways in Ghana and in China. The outcome variable was self-reported *life satisfaction*. It was measured

by asking children to rate their satisfaction with life on a 5-point Likert scale, where "1" indicated dissatisfaction while "5" indicated satisfaction.

The *experiences of parental migration*, the main variable of interest, was coded into four groups and included: 1) children who currently lived with both parents and never had experienced migration (reference group); 2) children who currently lived with both parents but had previously migrated with parents; 3) children who currently had a migrant parent and had never experienced migration; and 4) children who currently had a migrant parent and had previously migrated with parents.

Two aspects of children's relationship with parents were measured to capture the quality of parent-child interaction. Parental demand was assessed by asking how often *mothers or fathers make too many demands* or issue orders to children, on a 4-point scale with the following responses: 'never', 'sometimes', 'often', and 'always. For analysis, binary versions were created where 1 indicated both 'often' and 'always'. The two indicators were standardized as binary to facilitate comparison between the two countries and to better capture the positive variation in the answers. *Maternal and paternal emotional* support was assessed by asking participants whether they turned to their mother or father for support when they felt lonely or sad. These were binary measures coded as 'yes' or 'no'.

This study controlled for the following sociodemographic variables: *gender* (1=female), *age* in full years, *number of siblings*, *educational status of father and mother* (1=completed secondary school). An additional proxy for household wealth was included because migration is often selective, and those who are able to offer better conditions at home for children are also more likely to migrate internally or internationally. To address this selectivity, we employed a methodological tool developed by McKenzie (2005) to create a *household asset index*. Principal

component analysis was employed to generate an index based on five types of goods—television, refrigerator, computer, mobile phone, and motor bike—with exactly the same type of goods used in the Ghana and China data. The asset index was used (instead of a direct measure of family income) for two reasons: first, the amount and value of family income is likely to vary across contexts and is difficult for children to measure; and second, asset data is generally acknowledged to better explain migration decision-making and child capital investments (Acosta, 2011; McKenzie, 2005).

Data Analysis

The study employed hierarchical linear regressions with robust standard errors using Hubert-White sandwich estimators to address any arbitrary forms of heteroscedasticity and to correct for clustering of observations at the individual level. We treated the outcome variable as continuous and approached the intervals between points as approximatively equal. In doing so, the assumptions of normality and equal variances across samples were met, based on Shapiro-Wilk and Levene tests.

The analyses in Ghana and in China employed the same outcome and explanatory variables and followed the same steps, thus reducing the methodological cost of comparing the two contexts. The sociodemographic variables were first entered into the regression, followed by children's migration experiences and parent-child interaction variables at the second and third step. To further examine potential gender differences in the samples, additional regression models were performed with female and male participants separately.

This study used cross-sectional data and therefore, the results reflect associations and not causation. All indicators were tested for collinearity and none was detected. Multilevel modelling

was considered but not fitted because the intra-class correlation estimates showed little variation of cases (below 0.10) at the school level.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of all study variables in the total sample and by groups of children with different migration experiences. The mean score of satisfaction with life was slightly higher in the Ghanaian sample (4.09) than in the China sample (3.76). In the Ghana sample, 52.8% were female and the average age of children was 15.49 years. In the China sample, 48.3% were female, with an average age of 13.43 years. Children had on average 5.21 and 1.05 siblings in Ghana and China, respectively. The educational level of the Ghanaian parents was significantly higher than that of the Chinese parents: 63.7% and 18.1% of Ghanaian and Chinese fathers, respectively, had completed secondary education; the proportions for the Ghanaian and Chinese mothers were 47.8% and 11.2% respectively. The stock of household assets was slightly higher in China compared to Ghana. Specifically, from the list of five, the average number of goods possessed by the Ghanaian and Chinese families were 3.39 and 3.48 respectively.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The indicators of parent-child interaction showed some differences between the contexts, in that 12.4% and 15.9% of Ghanaian and Chinese children, respectively, reported mothers making too many demands on them. The percentage of fathers making too many demands were about the same in Ghana and China (11.0%). Notably, both fathers and mothers in China were more likely to provide children with emotional support than in Ghana: 59.9% of children in the China sample

reported receiving emotional support from mothers as compared to 42.6% in Ghana, and 45.3% of Chinese children reported receiving emotional support from fathers as compared to 21.09% in Ghana.

While looking at the descriptive statistics across the four groups of children having different experiences of migration, we observed that children living with both parents and having no experience of migration reported higher levels of life satisfaction in both countries, followed by children of migrants who had experienced migration themselves. In Ghana and China, more girls than boys had not experienced migration themselves, irrespective of whether they currently lived in a migrant or non-migrant family. Interestingly, children in Ghana and China who currently resided with both parents, but had previously migrated themselves, had parents who were more educated and generally had more assets at home compared to other children. Compared to children in non-migrant families, children of migrants, regardless of their own migration experiences, reported less emotional support provided by both parents. One interesting difference was observed on how children perceived fathers making too many demands on them: in Ghana, children in non-migrant families but with a previous migration experience reported receiving more demands from fathers, while in China, this group of children was the one with the lowest reports of fathers making too many demands. However, in both Ghana and China, children in non-migrant families who had experienced migration themselves had generally higher reports on mothers making too many demands compared to other groups of children. The similarities and discrepancies may reflect the norms of parenting and childcare arrangements in the context of migration in the two sociocultural contexts.

Regression Results

For brevity, we will discuss only the results pertaining to the main variables of interest – experiences of migration and parent-child interactions. Table 2 presents the hierarchical estimates of children's life satisfaction. Results showed that children who lived with both parents and had previously migrated themselves were less likely to be satisfied with life, in both Ghana (β=-.217, p<.05) and China (β=-.088, p<.001) when compared to children living in non-migrant families with no migration experience. Similarly, children with migrant parents who had not experienced migration were also less likely to be satisfied with life, in both Ghana (β=-.155, p<.05) and China (β=-.081, p<.01). Furthermore, in China, children of migrants who had previously migrated were less likely to report higher levels of life satisfaction compared to children in non-migrant families without a migration experience (β=-.055, p<.05). When hierarchically adding clusters of indicators, the effects of these results remained significant and the coefficient values were stable. The magnitude of the coefficients was higher in Ghana than in China, which may attest to the greater vulnerability of Ghanaian children having different experiences of migration.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

The hierarchical models in Table 2 showed three additional significant results: (1) a negative relationship between fathers making too many demands and children's life satisfaction in Ghana (β=-.326, p<.001) and China (β=-.057, p<.05), though mothers making too many demands did not show such significant effects; (2) maternal emotional support was a significant positive predictor for children's life satisfaction, in both Ghana (β=.191, p<.05) and China (β=.102, p<.001); and (3) paternal emotional support was also significantly associated with higher levels of children's life satisfaction, in both Ghana (β=.122, p<.05) and China (β=.190,

p<.001). These results attest to the protective roles of parental emotional support for children's perception of life satisfaction. The final regression model presented in Table 2 explained 5.5% and 13.2% of the variance in life satisfaction for the Ghana and China samples respectively.

The next set of models looked at male and female children separately in order to find specific gender differences in children' life satisfaction (Table 3). The results showed that, in several cases, the observed associations between the two contexts remained significant and in the same direction. Specifically, girls of migrant parents without a migration experience were less likely than those living in non-migrant families without a migration experience to report higher levels of life satisfaction, in both Ghana (β=-.185, p<.05) and China (β=-.101, p<.01). Similarly, girls who perceived that fathers made too many demands on them were less likely to assess their life satisfaction more positively, in both Ghana (β=-.266, p<.05) and China (β=-.068, p<.05). At the same time, both Ghanaian and Chinese boys who reported more emotional support from their mothers were more likely to report higher levels of life satisfaction (β=.050, p<.05 and β=.140, p<.001, respectively).

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Beyond these similarities, the relationships were not uniform when considering the relationships between children's experiences with migration, parent-child interactions and observed outcomes. Ghanaian boys (β=-.327, p<.05) and Chinese girls (β=-.126, p<.001) in non-migrant families who previously had a migration experience were less likely to be satisfied with life compared to their peers in non-migrant families who did not have a migration experience. Notably, girls in China, irrespective of their experiences of migration, consistently reported lower levels of life satisfaction than their counterparts in non-migrant families without a migration experience. In addition, Chinese girls who reported too many demands from their

parents, particularly mothers, were also less likely to be satisfied with life. In Ghana, fathers making too many demands was a negative predictor for the life satisfaction of both girls and boys. On a positive note, Chinese girls (β=.232, p<.001) and boys (β=.154, p<.001) who received more emotional support from fathers were more likely to report higher levels of life satisfaction. In Ghana, paternal emotional support did not show significant effects on the life satisfaction of boys and girls.

The life satisfaction of children can also be understood in the context of other confounders. Among the demographic variables, age was a significant negative predictor of children's life satisfaction in Ghana and China. Furthermore, children living in families with more assets tended to report higher levels of life satisfaction. Finally, in China, having more siblings was associated with more negative reports of life satisfaction among children.

Discussion

This is the first study, to our knowledge, that comparatively examines the relationships between children's migration experiences, parental migration status and children's satisfaction with life in the geographical contexts of Ghana and China. The results revealed both common patterns across the two countries and unique processes tied to each particular context. Below, we discuss major findings of this study that contribute evidence to transnational family research.

First, it is important to distinguish between forms of parental migration in relation to children's own patterns of migration because these forms of living nuance the way children experience their satisfaction with life, in both Ghana and China. Common across these two countries is that two particular groups of children appear to be less satisfied with life: (1) those who are living with both parents and have a previous experience of migration and (2) those who

currently have a parent away and have not experienced migration themselves. In addition, in China, we found that children currently staying behind, regardless of previous migration experience, are generally less likely to rate their life satisfaction more positively. This echoes an emotional vulnerability to migration found by previous transnational family studies in China (Hu, Lu, & Huang, 2014; Wen & Lin, 2012; Wu et al., 2015), Ghana (Bledsoe & Sow, 2011; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2017) and elsewhere (Dreby, 2007; Jordan & Graham, 2012; Vanore, 2015). Recent evidence shows that emotional vulnerability of children in transnational families is likely to persist as children progress into adulthood (Eremenko & Bennet, 2018). Thus, the context of separation due to migration is worthy of further consideration as it is likely to affect youths in different stages of their life cycle.

These findings are not surprising, but for different reasons in the two settings. The negative effect (on children's life satisfaction) of having a personal migration experience but currently staying behind might be attributed to the sharp contrast of living conditions and lifestyles between the origin and destination, as well as to the fact that migrating between different destinations may be a forced or a compromised decision rather than a voluntary choice. The migration and return of children is often due to reasons such as harsh living costs at the destination, the inability to access public/social welfare or disciplinary problems (Arthur, 2008; Koo, 2014). Children are thus the passive recipients of their parents' decisions to stay or to move back. Having experienced a different lifestyle at the destination, children might be more reluctant to leave and re-adapt to living in the place of origin, and they would suffer emotionally from the gap between the two environments. Furthermore, staying behind is often difficult for children because of different expectations regarding parent-child reunification (Poeze & Mazzucato,

2014). The difficult situations at the destination may often lead to unmet expectations, which may negatively affect children's life assessments.

However, for children in the Ghana sample, the experience of staying behind after a previous migration experience did not significantly affect life satisfaction. Many Ghanaian migrant parents prefer having their children in the place of origin to receive a quality education and to be closer to their ancestral roots (Arthur, 2008; Bledsoe & Sow, 2011). These children also may have improved living conditions and often have a secure footing abroad and may ultimately be reunited with their parents at the destination. These conditions may offset the negative effects of migration that affect the life satisfaction of children living in similar care arrangements in China.

Second, factors pertaining to parent-child interaction are influential predictors of the way children assess their satisfaction with life, in both Ghana and China. Fathers' making too many demands was negatively associated with children's life satisfaction, for both groups. These effects were not replicated for mothers making too many demands on children. Although our study does not differentiate between parental migration status (i.e., mother-only, father-only, or both), it is well-documented in the literature that father-only migration is the most common type of parental migration in both Ghana and China and that mothers are commonly engaged in the daily care of children when fathers migrate (Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016; Wen & Lin, 2012). This means that children who stay behind are more likely to be attached to mothers and more willing to accept their demands. Children may not have the same emotional bond with fathers, and the out-migration of fathers may lead to the decline of their traditional role as authority figure and disciplinarian in the family, as Dreby (2007) notes, which causes their demands or orders to be reluctantly accepted and/or negatively perceived by children.

More importantly, however, we found that the emotional support provided by mothers and fathers is a positive predictor of children's life satisfaction in Ghana and China. The emotional support of mothers in the context of migration is a well-documented covariate in relation to children's overall well-being outcomes (Bowlby, 1958; Parreñas, 2001). The positive association between paternal emotional support and children's life satisfaction is interesting and may indicate a departure from traditional gender divisions of parenting responsibilities in the two contexts. Family norms in both China and Ghana have historically been organised around patriarchal systems of power, where fathers are assumed to be stern disciplinarians who should provide for the economic needs of their children and of the family as a whole (Ho, 1987; Peil, 1995). In recent years, there is evidence that more Chinese and Ghanaian women have assumed the role of family breadwinner through migration or local labour-market participation (Cebotari et al., 2017; Dito et al., 2016; Lu, 2014). Thus, the gendered division of power in Chinese and Ghanaian migrant families may accordingly have become more egalitarian. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that fathers in transnational families are more inclined to understand the emotional needs of their children and more eager to develop emotionally warm relationships with their children (Nobles, 2011). More attention should be given in future research to the conditions under which the involvement of fathers enhances the emotional well-being of children in transnational families.

Third, gender serves as an important separating factor in the analysis of children's satisfaction with life. One troubling finding is that girls in China are less resilient in the face of different migration experiences, in relation to life satisfaction. A probable explanation for this finding is the Chinese cultural norm that favours boys over girls, especially in rural contexts, where the practice is most prominent (Lei & Pals, 2011). Given the preference towards male

children, boys usually receive more resources and support from their parents, and this does occur in the context of migration. For example, Chinese parents may invest more in boys, such as in their education, through remittances (Wong, 2005), while girls may not always enjoy the same treatment. This may explain the negative associations between Chinese girls' satisfaction with life and mothers/fathers making too many demands, and it may also explain the *absence* of these effects for Chinese boys. Living in a culture that favours males, the roles assumed by boys and girls are often different. Demands for boys might be more focused on educational achievement, while demands for girls are often instrumental, such as doing household chores as a way of contributing to the family (Hannum, Kong & Zhang, 2009). Similar observations of traditional gender practices that often disadvantage girls in transnational families have been documented in different geographical contexts (Jordan et al., 2018). As a consequence, Chinese boys may perceive parental demands as expectations while Chinese girls perceive these demands as deprivation. Presumably, the differences in the gender norms (i.e., favouring boys) led at least partly to the Chinese girls' negative assessments of life satisfaction in this study.

In Ghana, the gender effects are less prominent, but two findings are worth noting. First, boys who have been abroad but have returned and are currently living with both parents were less satisfied with life. This finding may indicate that boys have more difficulty adapting to new places when they reside in a non-migrant configuration. Second, girls staying behind who did not experience migration were also more likely to be dissatisfied with life. This may echo an emotional vulnerability of girls to parental migration, as described in Ghana (Cebotari et al., 2017) and elsewhere (Parreñas, 2001).

One gender-related finding consistent in the two contexts is that maternal emotional support is found to be positively associated with boys' life satisfaction. In general, research has

recognized that boys are particularly responsive to positive parental input in terms of non-cognitive development (Antman, 2012). Boys may also be more emotionally attached to their parents as a result of gendered norms that favour them. This field of study will benefit from further exploration of the gender-related differences in well-being outcomes in different geographical contexts.

In summary, the findings of this research advance our understanding of how children's different experiences of migration, and the interaction between parents and children, may relate with children's life satisfaction. However, the study has some limitations. First, participants in both Ghana and China were recruited through a school-based sampling strategy, i.e., excluding children not in school, which constrains the generalizability of the research findings to larger child populations in either country. Second, to ensure the comparability of all study variables in the Ghana and China data, we were able to assess only limited aspects of parent-child interaction. Further comparative studies would provide a more comprehensive examination of parent-child relationships, with additional variables common across different datasets. Third, data for the study were collected through cross-sectional surveys in both counties, therefore it was hard to establish causality between the predicting and outcome variables. The interpretation of research findings could only be based on associations among the study variables instead of causal relationships. Well-designed longitudinal studies are expected in the future to deal with this challenge.

Despite these limitations, this study is still a pioneering effort, shedding light on the well-being of children staying behind in two migration contexts spanning different geographical regions. This study contributes to the literature by pointing out both the shared features and the unique mechanisms across the two national and sociocultural settings in terms of how

experiences of migration and interaction with parents relate with children's satisfaction with life. The common patterns of influences, such as the positive effect of maternal emotional support and the negative effect of paternal demands, may aid the development of generalizable strategies to promote the well-being of children in the global context of migration. On the other hand, the distinct phenomenon identified in particular settings, such as the important role of paternal emotional support for children in China, will inform the design of context-specific and culturally-appropriate programs tailored to children residing in a particular environment. The study also contributes to the literature by providing evidence of the potential benefit of studying internal and international migration within one unified framework.

Acknowledgement: This study received funding from the Research Grants Council Early Career Scheme (RGC/ECS) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Grant #: CUHK 490212) and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, WOTRO Science for Development Division (WOTRO/NWO grant #: W01.65.316).

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Table 1 Descriptive statistics: means/percentages (standard deviations) of dependent and independent variables (total sample and by experience of migration)

	Ghana					China				
	Total	Non-mig, no mig exp.	Non-mig, had mig exp.	Mig. parent, no mig exp.	Mig. parent, had mig exp.	Total	Non-mig, no mig exp.	Non-mig, had mig exp.	Mig. parent, no mig exp.	Mig. parent, had mig exp.
Satisfaction with life	4.09 (0.99)	4.14 (0.95)	3.95 (1.04)	3.98 (1.05)	4.01 (1.04)	3.76 (1.44)	3.99 (1.34)	3.57 (1.54)	3.56 (1.52)	3.67 (1.41)
Child is girl (%)	52.8	54.2	49.6	51.5	46.7	48.3	48.8	42.6	51.0	43.3
Age in years	15.49 (1.96)	15.53 (1.94)	15.35 (1.95)	15.47 (2.01)	15.41 (2.08)	13.43 (1.72)	13.50 (1.69)	13.76 (1.92)	13.34 (1.72)	13.29 (1.75)
Number of siblings	5.21 (3.76)	5.44 (3.82)	4.51 (3.11)	4.84 (3.68)	4.87 (3.89)	1.05 (1.38)	0.99 (1.42)	1.24 (1.84)	1.12 (1.33)	1.01 (1.03)
Father complete secondary school	63.7	60.7	76.9	62.9	68.1	18.1	22.1	22.4	14.3	12.8
Mother complete secondary school	47.8	43.3	61.2	52.9	59.1	11.2	15.6	13.2	8.0	4.7
Household asset index	3.39 (1.04)	3.37 (1.42)	3.61 (1.19)	3.37 (1.42)	3.45 (1.39)	3.48 (1.18)	3.74 (1.18)	3.83 (1.14)	3.17 (1.12)	3.27 (1.08)
Mother making too many demands	12.39	12.22	15.70	12.04	11.43	15.9	16.4	16.7	15.4	14.8
Father making too many demands	11.0	11.3	17.4	8.4	10.5	11.0	11.4	8.7	11.1	10.2
Mother providing emotional support	42.6	45.6	45.5	34.7	36.2	59.9	63.6	60.6	56.4	55.5
Father providing emotional support	21.1	23.7	26.5	13.7	14.3	45.3	48.3	54.0	41.9	39.7
N	1622	1039	121	357	105	2171	955	152	748	316

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses.

Table 2 Hierarchical regression of satisfaction with life on migration experiences and parent-child interaction among children in Ghana and China

	Ghana						China					
	Model 1a		Model 2a		Model 3a		Model 1b		Model 2b		Model 3b	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Child is girl	-.041	(0.042)	-.063	(0.051)	-.056	(0.052)	.022	(.067)	.017	(.067)	.028	(.065)
Age in years	-.068***	(0.012)	-.069***	(0.012)	-.055***	(0.012)	-.093***	(.019)	-.094***	(.019)	-.079***	(.019)
Number of siblings	-.012	(0.017)	-.002	(0.013)	-.009	(0.012)	-.064**	(.037)	-.060*	(.037)	-.047*	(.035)
Father complete secondary school	.143*	(0.066)	.135	(0.073)	.123	(0.076)	.033	(.096)	0.32	(.096)	.022	(.092)
Mother complete secondary school	.036	(0.052)	.015	(0.068)	.013	(0.065)	.053*	(.119)	0.43	(.119)	.033	(.115)
Household asset	.083***	(0.025)	.067**	(0.024)	.064**	(0.022)	.174***	(.029)	.163***	(.030)	.140***	(.029)
Non-migrant, no migration experience			-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-
Non-migrant, had a migration experience			-.235*	(0.102)	-.217*	(0.10)3			-.084***	(.135)	-.088***	(.130)
Migrant parent, no migration experience			-.182**	(0.063)	-.155*	(0.064)			-.087**	(.078)	-.081**	(.075)
Migrant parent, had a migration experience			-.171	(0.106)	-.145	(0.108)			-.068**	(.102)	-.055*	(.098)
Mother making too many demands					-.052	(0.083)					-.014	(.045)
Father making too many demands					-.326***	(0.095)					-.057*	(.047)
Mother providing emotional support					.191*	(0.065)					.102***	(.072)
Father providing emotional support					.122*	(0.063)					.190***	(.072)
N	1622		1622		1622		2171		2171		2171	
adj. R^2	.042		.035		.055		.055		.065		.132	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 Gender differences in the regression of satisfaction with life among children in Ghana and China

	Ghana		China	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Age in years	-.052 (.018)**	-.057 (.0181)**	-.100 (.027)**	-.065 (.026)*
Number of siblings	.004 (.012)	-.006 (.009)	-.033 (.055)	-.053 (.047)
Father complete secondary school	.070 (.109)	.175 (.102)	-.012 (.138)	.051 (.124)
Mother complete secondary school	.051 (.085)	-.050 (.091)	.009 (.162)	.054 (.161)
Household asset	.046 (.025)*	.067 (.027)*	.195 (.042)***	.097 (.039)**
Non-migrant, no migration experience	-	-	-	-
Non-migrant, had a migration experience	-.095 (.142)	-.327 (.134)*	-.126 (.197)***	-.055 (.174)
Migrant parent, no migration experience	-.185 (.092)*	-.115 (.089)	-.101 (.106)**	-.058 (.105)
Migrant parent, had a migration experience	-.314 (.164)	.011 (.125)	-.078 (.143)*	-.035 (.134)
Mother making too many demands	-.015 (.126)	-.098 (.114)	-.102 (.064)**	.061 (.063)
Father making too many demands	-.266 (.131)*	-.375 (.131)**	-.068 (.069)*	-.051 (.065)
Mother providing emotional support	.124 (.077)	.050 (.077)*	.055 (.102)	.140 (.102)***
Father providing emotional support	.105 (.089)	.142 (.087)	.232 (.103)***	.154 (.099)***
N	856	766	1025	1096
adj. R^2	.067	.053	.180	.104

Note: Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$