

The Timing and Intensity of Parental Absence and its Impact on Children's Education in Indonesia

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June 10, 2025

Motivation

- Gulf-bound labor migration has transformed South Asian households—especially among low-income women in domestic roles.
- Remittances are vital, but the cost of long-term parental absence on children's education remains unclear.
- Using panel data from Indonesia (IFLS3), we assess how absence & return visit patterns shape grade progression.

Research Questions

- Does longer parental absence reduce educational attainment?
- Do return visits offset this harm?
- Are maternal absences more disruptive than paternal?
- Is there a “tipping point” in absence duration or visit count?

Data: Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS3, 2000)

National panel across 13 provinces, 83% of population.

Book / Module	Contents
Book 3A / MG (Migration History)	Start/end dates of parental migration spells ≥ 6 months
Book 3A / SR (Circular Migration)	Return visits (< 2 months) in the past 2 years
Book K / AR (Household Roster)	Household member IDs, parental links, child sex and age
Book 5 / DLA (Child Education History)	Grade completed, repetitions, and school expenditure per child
Book 3B / BA (Transfers and Remittances)	Remittance flow and non-resident family links
Book 1 / KS (Consumption)	Total and per-capita household expenditure

Child Fixed-Effects Model:

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta \text{Grade}_{it} = & \beta_1 \Delta \text{MomMonthsAway}_{it} + \beta_2 \Delta \text{MomReturns}_{it} \\ & + \beta_3 \Delta \text{DadMonthsAway}_{it} + \beta_4 \Delta \text{DadReturns}_{it} \\ & + \mathbf{X}_{it} + \epsilon_{it}\end{aligned}$$

- Outcome: Change in highest grade completed.
- Fixed effects account for child traits (e.g., ability, parental education).
- Controls: remittances, per-capita expenditures, siblings.

Key Variables:

Variable	Description
Months Since Departure	Time since parent left
Cumulative Time Away	Total months absent
Return-Visit Frequency	Number of returns in past 2 years
Separation Categories	Type/duration of separation
Parental Migration Type	Migrant mother, father, or both
Child Education	Grade progression, repetition
Remittances	Money sent home during absence

Contributions and Next Steps

Contributions:

- Move beyond binary absence to measure timing & intensity.
- Apply U.S.-based parental involvement frameworks (Kantova 2024) to migration contexts.
- Provide scalable, nationally representative evidence to complement small-sample qualitative work.

Next Steps:

- Merge IFLS modules
- Define absence/visit thresholds
- Estimate models and test parent-specific effects