



WHEN MIGRANT HUSBANDS RETURN JOBLESS: WIVES BEAR THE MENTAL BURDEN

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Introduction

170 million rural workers migrate to cities, leaving spouses behind, most often wives.

These left-behind partners run the rural economy: Farming, childcare, elderly care

In 2008, the **Global Financial Crisis** hit, millions lost their jobs and returned home.

We ask: **does spousal work-migration affect mental health of the spouses left behind?**

Method

Difference-in-Difference
Two waves: **2008,2009**

Analysis 1: Spouse Returns

2007 Spouse away in city

GFC hits → factories close

Treatment Spouse returns home

Control Spouse stayed away

Measures: separation + unemployment

n = 131 treatment, 293 control

Analysis 2: Spouse Departs

2007 Both partners home

Economic opportunity

Treatment Spouse left for work

Control Both stayed home

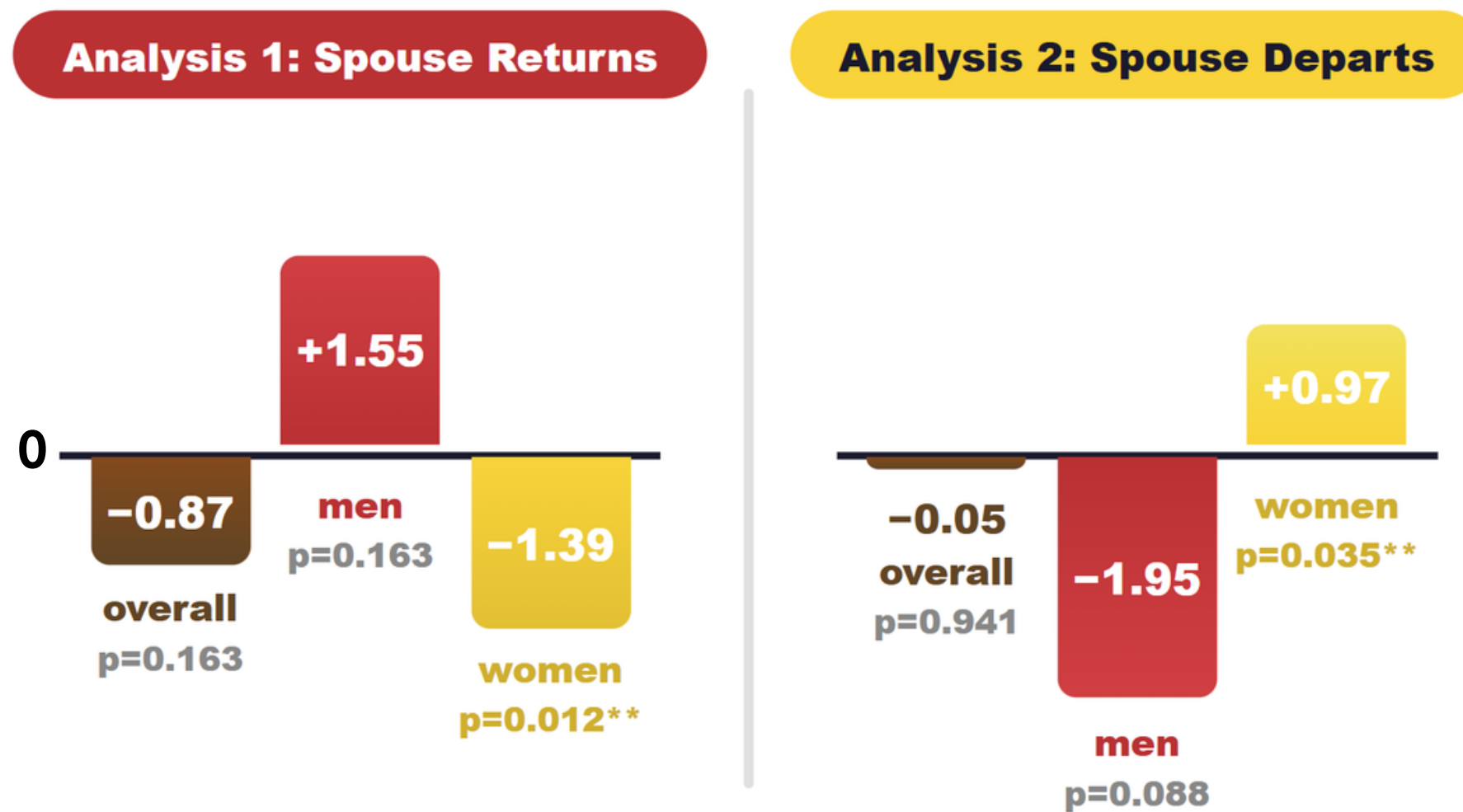
Measures: separation only

n = 81 treatment, 6,357 control

Outcome: **mental distress**

Results

Figure 1: DiD effect overall and by gender on mental distress



Limitations

- Cannot test parallel trends
- Small groups limit power
- Cannot isolate unemployment as mechanism
- Effects may be temporary

Policy advice

- 1 Bundle mental health **screening** with routine clinic visits
- 2 Target women as a **risk group**
- 3 Focus on **decision-making support and financial planning**
- 4 **Prepare** for upcoming economic shocks

Figure 2: Effect on individual dimensions of mental distress for females when spouse returns

