

Funding a Family Member's Migration Trip: A Strategy to Ensure Future Care for Older Parents?

Introduction

A recurring theme in the migration literature is that the process of international migration is inherently a family driven process that involves the transfer of familial resources between migrants and non-migrants (Morawska 1990; Blank 1998). In sending communities, individuals may decide to migrate to improve their family's economic and social position. At the same time, families may facilitate their family member's migration by financing the migration trip and providing access to networks in receiving communities that may help with housing, employment, and legal matters (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Singer & Massey 1997). In exchange for the earlier transfers, migrants may send remittances home or accumulate the capital necessary to improve the economic position of themselves and their families (Massey et al. 1997; Stark 2005).

Previous work on intra-family exchanges during migration assumes that all migrants receive economic support from their family of origin when they migrate (Vanwey 2004). On the basis of this assumption, many analysts claim that migrants make transfers to their family of origin to repay the earlier support provided by families (Hoddinott 1994; Lucas and Stark 1985; Vanwey 2004; Osli 2006). However, there are substantial variations in the way migrants fund their migration trips. In fact, our analysis of the Mexican Health and Aging Studies shows that the majority of migrants do not receive any financial help from their families of origin¹. Knowing whether migrants received help from their families when they migrated is crucial to accurately describing the nature of the intra-family exchange. Second, these studies only consider intra-family exchanges that take place while the migrant is in the U.S., ignoring long-term exchanges that may occur between the migrant and the non-migrant members. This is despite the fact that one way migrants may repay the earlier support from their families of origin is by caring their older parents. Furthermore, the few studies that examine the impact of migration on the living arrangements of the elderly focus on between-family differences. More specifically, these studies examine differences in the living arrangements between the elderly

¹ Only 15% of respondents in MHAS reported having received financial help from their families of origin when they planned their first migration trip.

who have children who have migrated to the U.S. and those whose children are non-migrants (Kanaiaupuni 1996).

This paper studies whether families finance a family member's migration trip to the U.S. in order to ensure care for their older parents. Using hierarchical multinomial logistic regression models, I ascertain whether receiving financial support from parents and/or siblings to go to the U.S. increases the likelihood of caring for their parents during old age by sharing a home ("co-residence"). To do so, I use data from the Mexican Health and Aging Study (MHAS), a rich source of data on intra-family exchanges including those that take place within the context of migration. MHAS collects information on every child that the respondent and/or their spouse. The MHAS also asks respondents to identify the people that helped their children move out of the parental home for the first time and where each child set up their first household when they first moved out of the parental home.

The issues addressed in this paper are important for several reasons. The elderly population is rapidly expanding in the Mexico. Although only 4.5% of the population was 60 years and older in 1997, 16% of the population is expected to be 60 years and older in 2030 (Wong & Parker 1990). The care of the elderly will become a serious social problem in Mexico because the number of people who need care are out-growing the number of people. This problem will be further exasperated by Mexican migration to the U.S. that disproportionately removes the young from sending communities (Frank & Wildsmith 2005). The size and the composition of the migration flow to the U.S. will have serious implications for the care of the rapidly growing elderly population in Mexico because it alters the availability of those who can provide care. Third, this paper extends the literature by painting a more accurate picture on the intra-family exchanges that place within migration through the use of newly available data with detailed information about intra-family exchanges.

Sample

The analysis in this paper is conducted using a sample of adult children (i.e. children ages 18 and older). I restrict my sample to include adult children who have at least one parent 50+ years and living in Mexico in 2001. In the process of doing so, I limit the scope of my analysis to biological relations and exclude all step and foster children. More specifically, to be included in

our sample, the adult child had to be either (1) the biological/adoptive child of the sampled individual and/or spouse/partner or (2) the biological/adoptive child of a widowed parent. I also restrict my sample to individuals who have ever migrated to the U.S. I include those who are currently residing in the U.S. because one way to avoid family responsibilities is by prolonging one's stay in the U.S. This yields a final sample of 5,587 adult children living in 1,053 families.

For ease of presentation, the sampled individual and/or their spouses will be referred to as the parents and the children of the sampled individual and/or their spouses will be referred to as the adult child.

Preliminary Results

Migrants who receive help from their siblings are least likely and migrants who received help from both parents and siblings are most likely to be currently living in the U.S. Conditional on having returned to Mexico, migrants who did not receive any help from their family of origin are least likely and those who received help from *siblings only* and *parents and siblings* are most likely to co-reside with their parents.

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