MIGRATION AND THE FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES OF CHILDREN:
MEXICAN-ORIGIN CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

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Although there are some indications that migration has ebbed somewhat with the current world financial crisis, migration between Mexico and the United States has become institutionalized over the past several decades. A series of immigration reforms and border control policies have resulted in changes that have amplified the effect of immigration on the U.S. population. For example, provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) two decades ago provided undocumented migrants with the opportunity to legalize their status. In so doing, it also increased the likelihood of "permanent migration" because legalization offered the opportunity to bring family members to the United States under the family reunification provisions of U.S. immigration law. As a consequence, many migrants sent for their wives and children. This change was accompanied by efforts to tighten control of the border to prevent illegal entry. Ironically, this had the effect of "sealing" undocumented migrants in and discouraging return migration to avoid problems with re-entry (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2000).

The increasing institutionalization of the U.S.-Mexican migration system is of interest for many reasons, but one of the most important is its implications for the future incorporation of the Mexican-origin population. As noted by many immigration scholars, what lies ahead for this population rests on the circumstances and outcomes of the children of today's immigrants. Moreover, the implications of migration for Mexican-origin children are important from the vantage points of both the United States and Mexico. The number of U.S. resident children ages 0-17 who were born in Mexico increased from approximately 700,000 in 1990 to 1.35 million in 2000 (Ruggles et al. 2009). Importantly, these estimates understate the number of children who are affected by immigration because they exclude U.S.-born children of immigrants as well as Mexico-resident children of U.S. immigrants. Immigration affects the lives of these groups of children in multiple ways, but perhaps the most consequential is through changes in their family environments. Children of immigrants may experience multiple family disruptions due to their own or their parents' migration experience. Those who live in the United States are also exposed to a rapidly changing family system that is characterized by fewer and less stable marriages and a corresponding growth of single parent families and non-marital fertility among all social groups (Landale and Oropesa 2008).

Migration to the United States also has the potential to exacerbate family changes that are currently underway in Mexico. The literature typically portrays Mexico as a country in which "the family" is the central organizing institution, supported by a collectivist ideology that deemphasizes the needs of the individual. However, in both Latin America generally and in Mexico, the family has been changing rapidly in recent years. In Mexico, the last several decades have brought impressive declines in early childbearing and total fertility rates (from 6.5 in 1970 to 2.5 in 2005), an increase in consensual unions, and a mean age at marriage that has increased modestly from 21.2 to 22.7 in 2000. These changes have occurred alongside the maintenance of rather low divorce rates (Fussell and Palloni 2004; Rosero-Bixby, Castro-Martín, and Martín-García 2009; United Nations 2006). At the same time, family researchers emphasize the extent to which family change and the causes of family change (e.g., economic uncertainty versus ideational change) are more characteristic of some social strata than others. The kinds of ideational changes, for example, that are thought to underlie the second demographic transition in more developed countries are often more prevalent among the highly educated population.

The intersection of these changes in the family with migration processes—and the implications for children--are poorly understood. The purpose of the proposed paper is to explore this issue. Specifically, we will use the Mexican Family Life Survey and the birth cohort of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study to address two questions: (1) How does migration from Mexico to the United States influence the family circumstances of children of immigrants (both Mexican children living in the United States and children living in Mexico)? (2) What are the socioeconomic and familial trajectories of the children of Mexican immigrants in the United States?

Significance

Whether they were themselves born in the United States or Mexico, the children of Mexican immigrants are a growing share of the U.S. population. Children of immigrants make up about two-thirds of the Mexican-origin population in the United States. This suggests that understanding the changes that families experience as part of the migration process and how those changes impact children is of utmost importance. The importance is amplified by the fact that the family is the primary environment within which young children develop. The structure and resources of children's families therefore have important implications for their life chances. Unraveling the linkages between migration, family change, and socioeconomic change is of crucial importance in efforts to understand the implications of migration for the long-term outlook of future generations.

Contribution

Several features of the proposed study will enhance its contribution to the literature. Most importantly, it will employ an origin-destination design to illustrate the possible mechanisms through which migration may influence family circumstances. By and large, the bulk of studies employ a destination-only research design. While this is understandable given data constraints, such designs do not adequately permit the effects of selective migration to be distinguished from the effects of exposure to the destination on outcomes of interest. Our analysis will employ two longitudinal datasets that allow us to overcome the limitations of cross-sectional studies by documenting the familial and socioeconomic trajectories of Mexican-origin children during their childhood years.

Data and Methods

Source of Data

As noted, our analysis will be based on both the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) and the Mexican Family Life Survey (MxFLS). The ECLS-B is a survey that was administered to the parents of 14,000 children who were sampled from birth certificates in 2001. Of these children, approximately 800 were the U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants and 700 were the U.S.-born children of US-born Mexican Americans. The parents were surveyed when the focal child was 9 months (2001-02), 2 years (2003-04), 4 years (2005-06) and 6 years (2007-08) of age. It should also be noted that this is a high-quality dataset: the weighted overall response rate for the first wave was 74.1% and over 90% of the parents responded in each subsequent wave.

The Mexican Family Life Survey is a longitudinal survey that was administered to a representative sample of Mexican households that was generated using multi-stage probability sampling methods. Specifically, over 35 thousand persons in nearly 8.5 thousand households spread across 150 urban and rural communities were surveyed in 2002 and over 40,000 were surveyed in 2005-6. In this data set, there is information on over 4,000 children age 0-5 in Wave I, which roughly corresponds to the age group covered by the ECLS-B. In Wave II, there is information on 3,614 children age 0-5 and 3,844 children age 3-8 (the latter age group corresponds to the ages in 2005 of children 0-5 in the 2002 wave). This dataset is also of high quality, with response rates ranging from 85% to 95% depending on the question module.

<u>Measurement</u>

Comparison Groups: These datasets provide the opportunity to compare the family circumstances of several groups of children. The groups that can be identified from the two data sources are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison Groups

I. ECLS – B	Time Points of Observation
Universe: US Resident Children of Mexicans	
A. US-Born children of Mexican immigrants	4
B. US-Born children of US-Born Mexican Americans	4
II. MxFLS	
Universe: Mexico Resident Children	
A. Mexican children of current US migrant parents	2
B. Mexican children of return migrants	2
C. Mexican children of non-migrants	2

Note: In the MxFLS, The number of children age 0-5 in Mexico in Wave I who moved to the US in Wave II is small (N=68). However, some effort will be made to exploit the ability to track children in the US by expanding the age range.

Key Family-Related Characteristics: These datasets permit at least two dimensions of family context to be measured: *structure* and *family relationships*. Structure refers to both the size and composition of families. We will be able to measure transitions into and out of various types of structural arrangements over time, including married couple, single parent, and extended family arrangements. Family structure can be measured at every time point for every dataset. The surveys also permit *family-based social capital* to be assessed for several time points. For example, the ECLS-B asked who parents turned to for social support.

Family-Based Socioeconomic Resources: Both surveys include various measures of the economic resources at the disposal of the family (e.g., household income).

Family-Sociocultural Context: The sociocultural environment of the family is also of interest. This is most relevant to the parents of children in the U.S. sample. For migrant parents, it is possible to ascertain language use in the home as well as the citizenship status of immigrant parents.

Additional Socio-demographic Covariates: Both datasets permit numerous socio-demographic covariates to be included, such as age, education, etc.

<u>Analyses</u>

We will perform two types of analyses. The first analyses will be descriptive; that is, they will document the socioeconomic (e.g., poverty) and familial characteristics (e.g., single parenthood, extended family) of children living in the United States and Mexico who are the offspring of migrants from Mexico to the United States, non-migrants (in both the United States and Mexico), and return migrants (in the case of Mexico). This descriptive analysis will also exploit the longitudinal capabilities of the data to describe the extent to which children's family circumstances are stable or unstable over time. The second set of analyses will focus on multivariate associations. Specifically, we will examine the interrelationships between migration-related transitions in family circumstances and migration-related changes in socioeconomic circumstances.