

Migrantes luchar por la vida por los hijos (Migrants fight for the lives of their children).
—Sinai mother and wife to a migrant currently working in the U.S.

¿Educación o Desintegración? The Ramifications of Parental Migration and Remittances on Children's Education in Western Guatemala

Abstract

A small but growing body of literature addresses the largely positive impacts—from a national quantitative perspective—of international migration and remittances on the educational attainment of children. This paper offers a more nuanced view of the situation from the household and community-level that addresses both the positive remittance-related benefits to children's educational attainment and the negative repercussions of parental absences on children's general attitudes toward schooling. A mixed-methods approach was used for this study that included participant observation, document analysis, and field interviews of educators, parents, elected officials, and community elders from five western Guatemalan communities. Results indicate that remittances improved basic living conditions which allowed many children to access a more comfortable and substantive education. However, a lack of parental role models and disciplinarians in the home contributed to the disruption of childhood education for many other children.

1. Introduction

A handful of national remittance studies have quantitatively analyzed the influence of remittances on school attendance (Lu and Treiman, 2007), dropout rates (Edwards and Ureta, 2003), performance (Kandel and Kao, 2001), and the overall percentage of household expenditures devoted to education (Yang, 2004; Adams, 2005; Suarez and Avellaneda, 2007). While pioneering important research on remittance effects on education, these investigations may be enhanced by local-level qualitative assessments of both the positive and negative influences of remittances and parental absences on recipient children's educational attainment. This study used a mixed-methods approach that included participant observation, document analysis, and field interviews of a patchwork of informants from five western Guatemalan communities to achieve such an outcome.

Over the past 30 years, there has been a lively debate concerning the value of remittance transfers to emergent nation development (Reichert, 1981; Appleyard, 1989; Durand et al., 1996; Taylor and Wyatt, 1996; Taylor, 1999), poverty reduction (Adams, 2004; Adams and Page, 2005), and land-use change (Jokisch, 2002; Klooster, 2003; Hecht and Saatchi, 2007; Gray, 2009). While the range of conclusions regarding remittance effects on various aspects of the sending-community have actively swung back and forth over the years, most investigators now agree that remittances have both an upside and a downside. Such countervailing remittance influences also appear to hold when it comes to the educational attainment of children from migrant-sending households and communities. *Prima facie*, one might expect that an infusion of wealth to a migrant-sending household would rapidly translate into increased childhood scholarship. Remittance income can be used to purchase school supplies, pay for tuition, and in some cases fund the cost of private and advanced education and their ancillary costs. At a more rudimentary level, remittances can be used to improve the wellbeing of poorer households and their children through improvements in basic infrastructure including access to electricity, clean water and sewage systems. Additionally, while many subsistence farming households can be harmed by severe weather events (droughts, hurricanes, floods), remittances can ameliorate

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negative income shocks attributable to a meager harvest—ensuring proper nutrition throughout the year. Lastly, remittance income can free younger children from having to assist their fathers in the grain fields and their mothers in the kitchen during the school year—removing a structural barrier to accessing a formal education. This investigation contextualizes these benefits by also describing some of the harms associated with long-term parental absences and other negatives associated with migration.

The disruptive consequences of parental absences—both from a psychological and structural perspective—belies the belief that remittances only provide positive contributions toward human capital formation. While remittances have greatly improved household conditions for many, associated migration events have fractured the nuclear family for others (Frank and Wildsmith, 2005) with counterproductive ramifications for children’s educational achievement (Aguilera-Guzman et al., 2004). The long-term absence of one or both parents during a child’s development years can lead to depression and rebellion (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002; Biao, 2007) that are not remedied by an increase in household income. These psychological effects can translate in childhood truancy, behavioral problems in school, and a general lack of motivation to complete school work (Adams, 2000).

The main impetus for this paper is to describe the local effect of international migration and remittances on educational attainment. Toward this goal, the background section summarizes the relevant literature—largely quantitative—on general non-remittance income effects as well as remittance-specific income effects on children’s education. This is followed by an analysis of case study data that addresses the disruptive potential that international migration can have on migrant-sending families. Five case-studies are then presented that qualitatively characterize the range of positive and negative ramifications of international migration and remittance flows to childhood educational development in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. Finally, a discussion of the more nuanced nature of international migration and remittances on migrant-sending household and community educational attainment is presented.

2. Background

2.1. Income effects and education in the developing world

Research to date illustrates that an increase in both endogenous (pay raise) and exogenous (cash transfer) income to income-poor households are associated with increased investment in children’s education in developing economies. From the endogenous side, Behrman and Knowles (1997) summarize much of this research through their meta-analysis of 42 studies spanning 21 countries. They found small but significantly positive associations between household income and children’s education, indicating that households generally expend more money on their children’s education when overall household income rises. When the boost in income is exogenous, for instance a conditional cash transfer program where households receive cash payments for children who maintain school enrollment, the results are similar. Indeed, in the case of Mexico’s Progresa program, de Janvry et al. (2006) found that conditional cash transfers fully mitigated the negative effects of an income shock attributable to parental unemployment, illness, or the occurrence of a natural calamity. Instead of pulling children out of school to work during difficult economic times, families that received conditional cash transfers chose to keep their children in school and continue to receive regular cash payments. However, the positive income effect of a cash transfer did not absolve children from increasing their

participation in the workforce during after-school hours in response to a negative income shock. This finding is corroborated by a more far reaching study of 15 African countries which concluded through simulation modeling that a substantial cash transfer program equivalent to 2-8% of a country's GDP would achieve minimal improvements in school attendance (Kakwani et al. 2006).

These studies illustrate that both endogenous salary increases and exogenous cash-transfer payments used to entice parents to send their children to school are largely effective at increasing children's school attendance. However, what is less known is how remittances, an income source that is not purely endogenous or exogenous, will effect children's academic attainment. A few studies that address this phenomenon are summarized below.

2.2. Remittances and educational achievement

It is difficult to characterize remittances as purely endogenous or exogenous sources of income because while they often constitute a raise in an individual's personal income, they are usually temporary and external to a household's long-term income stream. However, one study by Yang (2004) considered their effect on educational spending from an exogenous income perspective. This study analyzed changes in international exchange rates on remittance income that flowed to Filipino households and the propensity of these households to adjust their spending on household maintenance and education expenses accordingly. Yang concluded that a positive exchange rate shock, a situation where the value of money sent from abroad to Filipino households increased due to a positive change in foreign exchange rates, led to increased expenditures on education, while consumption of food and other family maintenance products remained stable. Additional studies reinforce the conclusions found in the Philippines study. Adams (2005) found that remittance-receiving households spend more remittance income on investment goods including education with very little going toward increased consumption of food in Guatemala while Edwards and Ureta (2003) found profound income effects on the dropout rates of El Salvadoran children in households that received remittances. In the latter study, households that received the median amount of remittances, approximately 100 dollars in 1998, had lower hazards for dropping out of school—54% lower for urban first through sixth graders, 27% lower for urban children beyond the sixth grade, and 25% lower for all rural children.

These remittance-specific studies largely mirror the positive relationships reported within the general body of literature that covers income growth and educational achievement. While remittances appear to provide recipient households with the economic security to invest in their children's education, these studies do not account for migrant-sending households who do not receive remittances for reasons that may include an unsuccessful migration attempt, an inability to find gainful employment, or the migrant's abandonment of his/her family. The following section describes some of the negative attributes that international migration can have on education attainment of sending-households.

2.3. Family disruption and other barriers to education attributable to migration

In contrast to the largely positive effects that a remittance income stream might have on indicators of student achievement, one must also consider the negative ramifications of parental absences on children's attitudes toward schooling to truly gauge the overall impact of

international migration and remittance on student achievement. The long-term absence of parents from households has led to numerous instances of infidelity and familial abandonment. Frank and Wildsmith (2005), for instance, used the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) dataset to test whether longer trips to the U.S. by Mexican males correlated with higher rates of family dissolution. Their results show that migrants that spend above average lengths of time abroad were twice as likely to split with their partners as non-migrants. They also found that the presence of minors in the home and the ownership of property back in Mexico substantially lowered the odds of union dissolution. The physical separation of husbands from wives that accompanies migration can also be very taxing on a relationship. Salgado de Snyder (1993) reports that left behind Mexican women suffer from high levels of stress, depression and fear of abandonment when their husband's leave for extended period of time.

While migration is generally disruptive to household cohesiveness, the few studies that have analyzed both the negatives of parental absences with the positives of remittance infusions suggest an overall positive benefit to children's education. Hanson and Woodruff (2003) compared years of schooling in migrant versus non-migrant sending households and found a small (~0.1 additional years), positive correlation in their Mexican sample between having a parent abroad and years of schooling. They concluded that although disruptive when one or both parents are away and not actively nurturing their children, remittance income provides the economic flexibility to allow these children to spend more time in school rather than in the workforce. A study of black South African remittance receiving households found their children to be twice as likely to regularly attend school compared to children from a non-remittance receiving household even accounting for the disruptive effects of not having one or both parents at home raising the child. Analogous to the above studies, Kandel and Kao (2001) looked at how temporary Mexican labor migration and remittances influenced student grade levels and aspirations for seeking a secondary education. Their findings showed that student academic performance, as measured by standardized grades, was higher in temporary migrant households than nonmigrant households. However, aspirations for attending college were significantly lower. The authors proffered two possible explanations for this lack of college attendance: (1) children of migrants are exposed to an economic opportunity (international migration) that rivals college and (2) an economic hardship that precipitated the migration trips may preclude a student from affording a college education.

From a quantitative perspective, the options opened to remittance-receiving households regarding schooling generally outweigh the negatives of potential union dissolution, parental absences and other migration-related harms. However, these studies fail to address the fact that remittance receiving households are not impacted uniformly. As a group, remittance-receiving households might send their children to school more consistently than non-remittance receiving households but will these children thrive in school? The following case studies characterize the nature of educational attainment in the context of international migration and remittances.

3. Methods

During a six-month period in 2008, I conducted one group and several individual interviews in five western Guatemalan Highland communities (Figure 1) to determine the influence of international migration and remittances on numerous aspects of migrant-sending community development. Participant observation and archival analysis complemented the interview data. One component of this investigation explored how the educational potential of

children was impacted by remittances and parental absences. All five communities lie within an hour's bus ride of Guatemala's second largest city, Quetzaltenango (informally called Xela). These five communities were selected for their high rates of international circular migration to the U.S. and associated receipts of remittance income. Additionally, these communities capture a range of Western Highland community characteristics (Table 1). Two of the case study communities (Sinai and Santa Rita) represent modest, semi-isolated highland subsistence-farming communities with few paved roads, a smattering of tiendas, and no community services except their primary schools. The two largest communities (Palestina and Zunil) hold the municipal seats of government for their respective communities. They each support a police force, municipal government offices, public health clinics, and numerous restaurants and shops. The Canton of Curruchique is a quiet enclave with few public services that sits across the river from the larger community of Salcaja.

Figure 1. The Department of Quetzaltenango and Case Study Sites



	Sinai	Palestina de Los Altos	Curruchiqui	Santa Rita	Zunil
Population (approximate)	1800	15470	1200	1500	12130
Area	12 km ²	48 km ²	6 km ²	12 km ²	92 km ²
Employment Mix	Subsistence Agriculture	Subsistence Agriculture Commercial Agriculture Commercial Services	Weaving Subsistence Agriculture	Subsistence Agriculture Weaving	Commercial Agriculture Subsistence Agriculture Weaving Commercial Services
Relative Level of Development	very low	low	low	very low	low
Rural/Urban/Suburban	rural	urban	suburban	rural	urban
Literacy Rate (above 14 yrs.)	40%	56%	90%	75%	56%
Graduate from the 6th Grade	50%	58%	90%	50%	30%
% Migrant-sending Households	60%	52%	60%	15%	40%
Ethnic Composition (Indigenous/Ladinos)	75/25	50/50	50/50	90/10	90/10
Languages Spoken	Spanish, Mam	Spanish, Mam	Spanish, Kiche	Spanish, Kiche	Spanish, Kiche
Religious Composition	60% Catholic 40% Evangelic	60% Catholic 35% Evangelic	80% Catholic 20% Evangelic	50% Catholic 50% Evangelic	100% Mayan/Catholic

The directors of five primary (K-6th grade) and one secondary (7th-9th grade) school, four teachers, eight members of local government, five community leaders, 56 parents, and one group of 15 women who regularly meet to discuss community events and women's issues were interviewed with a standardized survey instrument about their overall impressions of international migration, remittances and their ability to foster the educational development of their children. The interviews generally lasted from 15-40 minutes and probed the attitudes of these community members through consistent but informal, open-ended interview questions. Since this project was part of a larger effort to determine how lifestyles change in migrant-sending communities following migration events, only a minority of interview questions were targeted at educational attainment. A female Guatemalan research assistant accompanied the author during most of the interviews to help facilitate interactions and to ease any anxiety informants may have felt do the presence of a foreign interviewer.

Following the transcription of electronically recorded interviews, the author compiled all the responses that directly and indirectly addressed children's welfare. Individual quotations were taken from the consolidated child welfare responses that best represented the totality of the opinions voiced by the informants. Careful attention was given to ensure that the different informant groups (school administrators, teachers, government officials, and parents) were represented in the case studies reported below. In addition to attributing multiple voices to the reported case studies, interview data was supplemented with participant observations and on-line municipality documents that provided rudimentary descriptions of community demographics, economics, and history. By using multiple informants and mixed research methodologies, the case study narratives were succinctly focused to increase the validity of research conclusions.

Unlike more quantitative methods that create a skeleton of a phenomenon, defining its size, shape and intensity, a mixed methods qualitative study allows the researcher to describe the inner-workings of the situation. The in-situ individual and group interviews conducted in this investigation illuminated specific educational enhancements that were funded with remittances and many of the negative impacts suffered by children when a parent left for an extended period

of time. A range of opinions on the subject of migration, remittances and education, many similar, others different, are reflected in the five case studies described below.

4. Case Study Results

When asked, “What are the most important uses of remittances in migrant-sending households?,” the universal response was to build a *casita* (small house). However, the second most common response voiced by over half of interviewees was to improve the wellbeing of their children. This question, along with many others, was asked of a patchwork of informants in five western Guatemalan Highland communities to determine how international migration and the resultant remittances influence local human capital formation. The informant interviews were supplemented with participant observation and document analysis. The view and opinions expressed by the numerous informants and case study communities varied widely and are summarized in Table 2.

	Sinaí	Palestina de Los Altos	Curruchiqui	Santa Rita	Zunil
Positives of Remittances					
Improve children's hygiene	x	x			x
Modernize homes	x	x	x	x	x
Improve children's nutrition	x	x	x		x
Allow children to attend school in lieu of household chores	x		x	x	x
Improve school attendance and performance	x		x		
Fund advanced education			x	x	x
Fund private schools			x	x	x
Fund school uniform and supply purchases			x	x	x
Fund computer purchases			x		
Negatives of Migration and Parental Absences					
Contribute to disciplinary problems at home		x	x	x	x
Lead to truancy		x		x	
Result in classroom disruption		x		x	x
Children discount education in favor of future plans to migrate		x	x	x	
Cause depression in children				x	
Lead to infidelity, parental separation and family abandonment		x	x	x	x
Undereducated mother's unable to guide their children*		x			x
* This highly controversial topic is addressed in the discussion section below.					

4.1. Remittance benefits to education

4.1.1. Parent perspectives

In response to a question about the difference between remittance and non-remittance receiving households and children's education, Doña Lily, a Sinaí community elder and mother, explained that families in Sinaí who do not receive remittances need their children to work in the fields. However, all Sinaí families who receive remittances send their children to school for some amount of time. Doña Lily's daughter-in-law has visions of sending her daughter to university with the money she receives from her migrant husband while Curruchiqui's auxiliary mayor mentioned using remittances to supplement a scholarship to send his daughter to study medicine in Cuba. Other parents in Sinaí responded to my questions about remittances and education not by citing school attendance or the purchase of material possessions as a principle use of remittances but rather they are used to provide *alimentación* (nourishment) and a *techo* (roof).

One mother went so far to state that migrants from her community—including her husband—traveled to the U.S. to *luchar por la vida por los hijos* (fight for the lives of their children).

A father of two, Henry, talked about the hardships he suffered growing up in Curruchiqui during the Guatemalan Civil War. “There was not much food or work during the war. My father owned a couple of cows, so we were better off than most, but during hard times we would sell cow’s milk and rely on small portions of corn tortillas and beans.” Henry left the area when he was 17 and worked for 6 years in New Jersey where he saved a sizeable sum of money. Upon returning to Curruchiqui, he married and says he and his family eat well, “eggs three times a week.” His children get a full lunch in contrast to the few tortillas he would take to school. He is also able to afford private school tuition for both of his children.

Linda, a migrant mother of three from Curruchiqui whose father spent 12 years in the U.S. while she was a child reported that prior to her father’s leaving they lived in a house with one bedroom, a living room, and a tiny kitchen. Later, the family used money sent from the U.S. to add two bedrooms, a dining room, patio, and an area to weave huipiles. With the money she made in the U.S., she purchased a computer for her children and is able to send them to private school in Quetzaltenango.

4.1.2. Administrator and teacher perspectives

The teachers from Sinaí, Curruchiqui and Zunil conveyed largely positive opinions of remittances. Sinaí’s primary school teacher stressed that remittances have greatly improved the hygiene and dress of Sinaí’s schoolchildren. Prior to receiving remittances, many of Sinaí’s children would come to school dirty, wearing ratty, soiled clothes. For many of these children, remittances have allowed their families to purchase new clothes and to install modern plumbing and laundry tables—an advanced version of the washing board. This, in addition to attaching their homes to the community’s electricity grid, has indirectly led to more frequent bathing and an enormous improvement in personal hygiene, which in turn has increased both student attendance and performance.

The director of Curruchiqui’s school, Jorge Herrera, describes how many of the school’s children have *padrinos* (godparents) who send money to both the child’s family and directly to his school to pay for tuition and school uniforms. According to Mr. Herrera, approximately 90% of his students receive some money from the U.S. to assist with their education while the remaining 10% have parents who own businesses. He has great confidence that all of his children will finish the 6th grade and projects that roughly 25% of his students will attend university. Curruchiqui’s secondary school director contends that kids who have migrant parents that regularly remit have better attendance and perform at higher levels than other children.

Zunil’s school director, Garcia Yak, described similar remittance-related educational outcomes to the other schools visited. Namely, remittances provide a level of assistance to improve basic living conditions in Zunil. They increase nutrition and allow some children to afford the ancillary costs of public schools (books, transportation and uniforms), while also permitting other children to attend more academically rigorous private schools, which was a big advantage due to the government’s poor record of funding public schools.

Manuel Orozco prepared a paper that addresses remittance effects on several Latin American communities (Orozco, 2006), including the rural town of Salcaja—a commercial town that lies adjacent to Curruchiqui and Santa Rita. In his paper, Orozco notes that test scores in Salcaja rose modestly between 1996 and 2001—a time period that corresponds with an increase

in remittance receipts to the community. He also notes that many remittance recipients send their children to private schools either in Salcaja or Quetzaltenango.

4.2. Migration disruption to education

4.2.1. Parent perspectives

Parents from many of the communities visited expressed very strong opinions on the ills of migration and remittances. Augusto, a Santa Rita parent, had this to say, “When a husband travels to the U.S., he will provide a good house for his family but he will ultimately find another woman there. He will feel guilt for having left his children. To ameliorate this guilt many *padres mandan unos cuantos dólares y le tapan la boca con ese dinero al hijo* (fathers send a few dollars to cover their son’s mouth). There is also a strong likelihood that many of these children will enter gangs and refuse to work because their father’s have abandoned them.” Augusto described a family destroyed by migration due to a father’s abandonment. In this case, a mother now “toils alone” and cannot allow her children to attend school because they need to work to help pay the father’s debts.

Another story told by a Santa Rita parent, Meri, was of a boy whose father was in the U.S. According to Meri, when the boy’s mother asked him to help her sell shoes, he responded by saying, “I don’t have to help you because my dad is sending me money, so I don’t have to work.” Meri also voiced the opinion that some remittance receiving children squandered their remittance money—“they hangout, eat” or “smoke and drink alcohol.”

A few of Curruchiqui’s mothers also detailed some of migration’s negatives. Linda, a recent migrant returnee, confessed that her marriage ended in divorce following migration, with her husband remaining in the U.S. while she returned to Curruchiqui to raise the children. Linda’s cousin Ana, also a migrant, interjected that it was not uncommon for migrant men to develop relationships with other women that lead to a father needing to provide for multiple families. In these circumstances, all the children suffer because the man cannot provide for all of his children.

Nelson, a 25-year old recent deportee who was forced to leave his two children and “American” wife in Nebraska, indirectly argued against many of the negative assertions expressed by other parents and community members about U.S. economic migration. He said he migrated to the U.S. to seek better educational opportunities for his children so they would not have to migrate. Nelson’s story gets more convoluted, however, when he divulges that he was married to a Guatemalan and had a son prior to migrating—which he abandoned to marry his American wife. So, while Nelson had good intentions when he left Guatemala, those intentions changed after spending time in the U.S. A second Palestina deportee who spent 4 years in the U.S. prior to being removed, stated that the only reason his children were going to school was to learn English so they could go to the U.S. to make money.

4.2.2. School administrator, teacher and community leader perspectives

When we first approached the director of Escuela Rafael Landivar in Palestina and described the purposes of our study, to characterize the benefits and detriments of international migration and remittances on migrant sending household lifestyles, he shrugged with undirected disdain. He explained that children with parents abroad were well provided for, have better nutrition, live in better houses, and wear nicer clothes than their non-remittance receiving counterparts. However, their scholarship on balance was poor. Many children with parents

abroad receive gifts and other privileges that others in the community do not, including video games, access to the internet and cable television. The use of handheld video games at school has led to many classroom disruptions, while the internet and cable have taken the place of homework for many children.

The Director's principal argument was that a split family with a father living abroad does not adequately discipline its children. He went on to explain that many children in migrant-sending households regularly miss school and do not pay attention when they do attend. He believes that many of these children have developed a mindset that international migration is the key to their economic future, thus school is a waste of time. This is reinforced, according to the director, by the fact that many of these children follow in their father's footsteps by leaving for the U.S. *mojados* (without documents) when they reach 15, 16 or 17 years of age.

Other school administrator's largely echoed the views held by Palestina's primary school director. Curruchiqui's, Santa Rita's and Zunil's primary school directors complain about not having both parents in the home to discipline their children. They express concern that many of their students are being raised by their grandparents, while their parents are in the U.S. In many instances, the children lack the motivation to study and often perform poorly in class. Father's absences, according to Santa Rita's director, have also led to behavior problems at school, including an increase in poor manners and a general lack of respect for teachers. "Sometimes these kids want to work, other times they don't." Zunil's director mentions that his teachers have great success teaching children when both parents are at home, "they work, pay attention and learn." Children from split families need constant discipline to keep them on task. Santa Rita's director states that many children from fatherless homes choose not to attend the school's afternoon sessions. He describes one girl's experience whose father left for the U.S. a while back and was soon followed by her mother, leaving her in her grandparent's care. Following her mother's exit, this girl refused to attend school and the grandparents seemed to lack the authority to compel her to return. In this case, the girl was well clothed and given many toys, but without the presence of her father to enforce the rules, she was learning bad habits and forgoing educational opportunities.

Curruchiqui's secondary school director, Sra. Lopez, also mentions that two of her students with parents abroad are repeating a year due to poor performance. In some cases, grandparental guardians have a difficult time motivating and disciplining their grandchildren. She has witnessed many instances of poor behavior displayed in front of children's grandparents. Edgar, a mayoral official in Salcaja, validates the school directors' opinions by reporting that many migrant children have little motivation to study in school because they do not have role models to motivate them. "Hay perezosos! (They are lazy!)." He also states that other children follow in their parent's footsteps to migrate to the U.S., thus discounting education.

Palestina's mayor discussed additional negative ramifications of international migration for his community. According to the mayor, it was not uncommon for migrant husbands to be unfaithful to their spouses. This has resulted in fathers choosing to remain in the U.S. with a new partner—fully abandoning their families in Guatemala. He mentioned that a substantial number of migrants have been deported back to Guatemala. In many of these cases, migrant households find themselves in severe debt as they funded the cost of a *coyote* (human smuggler) with familial or institutional loans. This has resulted in higher rates of crime in the community including robberies and assaults because deportees lack employment and fail to possess sufficient educational skills to obtain a job.

Palestina's only doctor largely echoed the school director's and mayor's opinions that migration leads to family disintegration. He explained that when there is only the mother at home to guide children, children will abandon educational pursuits in favor of finding their fathers in the U.S. One reason for this is that girls in Palestina and more generally throughout Guatemala are not given the same opportunities as boys to regularly attend school. Their parents do not see the value of educating girls. Thus, in Palestina, many mothers are illiterate and cannot help their children with schoolwork and have a lower appreciation for education in general. According to the Municipality of Palestina de Los Altos' website (2009), 1396 out of 4233 (33%) of its men are illiterate, while 2356 out of 4323 (54%) of its women suffer from illiteracy. The 1998-1999 Demographic Health Survey (DHS) for Guatemala reports that 25.3% of Guatemalan women between the ages of 15 and 49 have never attended school and just under half have completed primary school (INE, 1999).

Zunil's school director finally took a more philosophical outlook on the migration/remittance/education dynamic. He believes that more important than a generic response to the question of whether a child whose family receives remittances is better off educationally than other children in the community is, "Does the child, regardless of economic condition, have the desire, vision, and drive to advance in his or her studies?" The director continues, "There are poorer children from this community that do not have economic advantages, who do their work, excel in school, and receive scholarships to advance in school. There are others who have every economic advantage that spend all their time eating. These children do not pay attention, they only eat." But the director concludes by asking rhetorically, "Some of these problem students were once very poor, so what is better—some behavior problems or poor nutrition and living conditions?"

5. Discussion

What can be taken away from these five case studies is that international migration and the flow of remittances from the U.S. has countervailing ramifications for children's education. On the one hand, for many children—especially in households that exist at the margin—the lifting of basic living standards through the provisioning of regular meals, clean clothes, electricity, and sewage systems has profoundly positive impacts on a child's ability to more comfortably access a public education. An infusion of remittances has allowed some parents to free their children to attend school rather than keeping them at home to assist with household chores and farm work. Additionally, as witnessed in Curruchiqui, many public and private schools regularly receive money directly from migrant parents to pay for children's education. This money has been used to improve school infrastructure through the purchase of computers. However, the remittance/education dynamic is complicated by the fact that absent parents are poor role models who lack the ability to motivate their children to take school seriously. Some children have a difficult time coping with the absence of a parent and seek, arguably, destructive paths to fill this void. There are other instances where families have been torn apart by international migration, with fathers or mothers taking up residence with other partners. Unfaithful migrants often continue to send money back to their families initially. But, in time, pressure from the new partner and more mouths to feed conspire to force the migrant to abandon his first family.

5.1. Community-Level Effects

At the community level, there are both positive and negative benefits of international migration and remittances related to education. On the positive side, the teaching environment is vastly improved. This is attributable to a combination of remittance-receiving children attending class with full bellies and clean clothes while the poorest families have left the community in search of better economic opportunities elsewhere. While those children who have left are not necessarily benefited, the children who remain represent a more healthy and engaged student body for an instructor to teach. Additionally, there are many instances where remittances sent directly to schools have been used to purchase computer equipment and other teaching materials that benefit all the students.

A negative side-effect, according to some parents and school directors, of migration and remittances is they cause student delinquency which leads to an uptick in gang activity in their communities. These informants argue that teenagers in households where one or both parents have migrated to the U.S. and regularly send remittances creates a situation where there are no disciplinarians in the household to force these children to attend school and the remittance money frees children from contributing to household maintenance. Therefore, truant teenagers are skipping school and getting into trouble with other idle members of the community. A more neutral observation cited by a couple of informants in Zunil was remittances had limited positive impact because their communities did not have the educational infrastructure for students to advance beyond the sixth grade unless large amounts of money were sent to allow students to travel and attend private schools in Quetzaltenango. However, given the very low primary school graduation rates for Zunil's students (30%), using remittances to enhance school attendance can be considered a great benefit.

Many strong opinions were voiced on the benefits and detriments of migration and remittances to children's education. The two poorest and most similar communities (Sinaí and Santa Rita), in addition to the next two more urbanized communities (Palestina de Los Altos and Curruchiqui), had surprisingly divergent attitudes regard this dynamic, while the opinions expressed by informants within the most economically diversified community (Zunil) were largely neutral. To compound these inconsistencies, the two pairs of communities that lie in closest physical proximity to one another (Sinaí and Palestina de Los Altos, Curruchiqui and Santa Rita) also largely held opposite views on this subject. I did not get the sense, nor do the characteristics in Table 1 show, that metrics such as community wealth, labor market structure, population size, ethnic makeup, or religious composition have a direct bearing on attitudes toward international migration, remittances and educational attainment.

The differences of opinions expressed by members of Curruchiqui and Santa Rita are quite striking. These two communities lie within a 25-minute walk from one another and encompass adjacent subdistricts to the larger urban area of Salcaja. While Santa Rita is the more rural of the two areas—a heavily subsistence agricultural community—and is more removed from Salcaja, some of its members voiced strong concerns about the absence of parents leading to an increase in juvenile delinquency and the occurrence of gang violence—these concerns were not expressed in Curruchiqui. The flow of remittance money seems to compound the problem by freeing children from the need to contribute income to the household and not taking education seriously (this is further addressed below).

5.2 Affluence and Psychological Impacts

Within communities, there appears to be a strong affluence gradient to the migration/remittance/education phenomenon. Households that live close to the margin are appreciably benefited through poverty reduction and secure access to food. For more affluent remittance-receiving households, some children are sent to more expensive and academically rigorous private schools and provided with modern technologies to assist with school work. However, specific to financially stable households, an infusion of remittance income and gifts from the U.S. can retard educational achievement. Many of these children are “spoiled” with video games and “junk” food and not compelled to attend school. Perhaps due to a combination of guilt, an inability to manage multiple children when a parent is away, or a general lack of appreciation for education, many children from more financially stable households are often truant, are not properly prepared to participate in school, are more apt to act out in class, and more likely to disrespect teachers and grandparental caregivers.

Many of the behavioral reactions to the long-term absence of parents in the homes are reflected in an extensive body of literature on the educational achievement of children from single-parent households in the U.S. Mulkey et al. (1992) found U.S. high school test scores of children from single-parent households to be 0.12-0.13 standard deviations lower than from children raised by two parents when ethnicity and parental academic achievement were controlled. Other authors have documented lower rates of academic achievement, higher instances of school suspensions, and more drop-outs by children raised by single-parents (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Haveman et al., 1991; McLanahan and Wojtkiewicz, 1992; DaVanzo and Rahman, 1993; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). These results remain significant after controlling for differences in household income and parent’s education levels. Pertinent to the less permanent circumstance of migrant-sending households, Fitzgerald and Beller (1988) reported a persistent reduction in years of education the longer a child lives without two parents. In many single-parent situations, children are disadvantaged by a reduction in guidance and attention (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). There are also instances where children experience feelings of abandonment leading to rebelliousness and/or depression (Sciarra, 1999; Adams, 2000; Falacov, 2007). All of these factors, which have been voiced in many of the informant interviews for this investigation, have contributed to a general lack of interest in school.

5.3. Education or Migration?

As reflected in many interviews reported in the above described case studies, it is not uncommon for children to discount the value of education in a poorly funded public school system when they see neighbors and relatives who have achieved economic success through other avenues—namely international migration. When there are few members of one’s community who have transformed local school attendance into financial success, combined with the fact that a child’s environment is besieged with constant reminders of what international migration can produce—trophy homes, automobiles, modern appliances, electronics, and other amenities—it is difficult to imagine a child appreciating the value of education and not wishing to follow in a migrant parent’s footsteps.

This phenomenon was reported by Kandel and Kao (2001) in their comparison of Mexican migrant and nonmigrant households and their children’s propensity to choose higher education or international migration. A counterintuitive dynamic was found where children in remittance receiving households generally performed better and were more apt to attend primary and secondary school but less likely to pursue a university education than their nonmigrant

household counterparts. These authors argue that the mindset of children from migrant households is vastly different than their non-migrant household counterparts for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, the children of migrant-sending households have an existing system of U.S. social networks that were established by earlier migrating parents and relatives, from which to ease their transition into a new community and find gainful employment. Additionally, economic opportunities in the U.S. are much more lucrative than those available to college graduates remaining in Mexico. Finally, taking the above mentioned factors into account with the fact that most of the skills learned in Mexican schools are not rewarded in the U.S. economy, it makes little economic sense to continue to pursue a Mexican education when the prospect of a better paying job comes calling from the U.S.

While it is much easier for a Mexican national to migrate to the U.S., the economic opportunities that pull Guatemalans northward are similar and perhaps stronger in some respects. For instance, per capita annual income in Mexico (\$8,340) was over 3 times greater than in Guatemala (\$2,440) and nearly 1/20th of the U.S (\$46,040) in 2007 (World Bank, 2008). It cannot be argued that Guatemalan migrants are competing for jobs that pay average U.S. wages, however, a full time, minimum wage job in 2007 grossed over \$12,000—a vast improvement over the subsistence existences that many Guatemalan migrants lived prior to migrating. Therefore, it seems quite probable that the children of migrants discount a local education and avail themselves of the migration networks established by their parents to pursuit stronger economic opportunities in the U.S.

5.4. Maternal Illiteracy

One compelling argument that was directly and indirectly voiced by a few professional male informants concerned a single-mother's inability to facilitate her children's education. Their argument asserts that many Guatemalan women were not permitted to attend school and therefore may be less appreciative of the benefits that a formal education can bring to the future prospects of their children. Furthermore, many of these women are illiterate and unable to assist with children's schoolwork. According to the World Bank's World Development Indicators for 2002, 37% of Guatemala's adult females over the age of 14 were reported as illiterate compared with 25% of males (World Bank, 2008). These figures are more severe in rural areas where greater than 50% of the adult population is illiterate (Gorman and Pollitt, 1992). A combination of maternal illiteracy and under-appreciation for the value of education results in children not being compelled to attend school or to perform well in their studies. Whether this argument aptly describes the true situation is difficult to access. Divorcing the difficulties of caring for multiple children when a husband is away from a mother's disinterest in a child's education is wrought with numerous confounding factors. Many effectively single mothers live month to month with the uncertainty that their husbands will send a sufficient amount of money to pay for food and other subsistence needs. These women juggle a host of responsibilities including cooking, cleaning, and attending to the household's farm plots, before they can consider supervising their children's school activities. One must also consider that Guatemala's total fertility rate is 4.4 and exceeds 6 children per woman in rural areas (CDC, 2007). Therefore, it is not uncommon for women to be actively attending to both infants and the needs of older children. After all of these responsibilities have been completed, is there time to sit down with older children to assist with their homework? Mulkey et al. (1992) compared U.S. student test scores among single-parent and dual parent households and found a small but strong correlation between parent's

educational achievement and their children's performance after controlling for ethnicity and parental absence. In a second U.S. study that compared student achievement in single-mother and single-father households, Downey (1994) noted no difference between the two even though single-fathers were on average better educated than single-mothers in his sample. Given the complicated nature of this argument, further investigation is needed to reach a more definitive answer.

6. Conclusion

Previous quantitative studies have found that international migration and the concomitant transfer of remittances to migrant-sending communities have uniformly produced improvements in children's academic achievement through better test scores and improved attendance. Through a mixed methods approach, this investigation shows a more nuanced situation where the economic benefits that remittances bring to children's schooling can be disrupted by parental absences. The results of this investigation are important beyond their showing that migration and remittances differentially influence children's educational achievement. They are important to migration research because they demonstrate two additional findings: (1) that *in situ* qualitative investigations can illuminate the fine gradations of a phenomenon that are lost in the numbers of larger-scale quantitative endeavors; and (2) that international migration and remittances can have counterbalancing influences on numerous phenomena that need to be considered when carrying out such research. Few investigations have deliberately separated the differential effects of migration events from the flow of remittances; instead electing to lump the two together. This separation is important because the often beneficial aspects of remittance transfers are often negatively countered by the long-term absences of household members. Children's educational attainment provides a prime example of this dichotomy but it also applies to other phenomena including local development, land use practices and intra-household dynamics. Taking care to account for these often opposing forces will allow migration researchers to more accurately model their effects on variables of research interest in the future.

Similar in many respects to the arguments proffered in the 1980s concerning the power of remittances to effect emergent nation development, remittances have led to outstanding improvements in human capital development for some. However, the act of international migration has resulted in disruptive effects for others. There are many who use remittances as a short-term catalyst to jumpstart a household's wellbeing and to allow their children to access basic and more advanced education. There are also instances where children are psychologically harmed by the absence of parents leading to poor academic attendance and performance. Therefore, just as Garcia Yak's reflection that much of student achievement lies within the students themselves, remittances can make it easier for students to access advanced educational opportunities. But, if they do not have role models to push them to pursue such opportunities, no amount of money from the U.S. is going to make a difference in their educational achievement.

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