

TITLE: Remittances and Household Composition: New Evidence on Mexican Transnational Fathers

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Transnational fathers have been largely neglected in the study of transnational families. However, recent research is reconsidering the complexity of the phenomenon, highlighting the attempts of migrant fathers to be present parents and care for their children in their country of origin. Empirical evidence on distant fathering is scarce. Using data from the Mexican Migration Project (1982-2019) and a sample of 951 Mexican transnational fathers living in the United States, this article addresses two research questions. First, it seeks to explore the family configuration on both sides of the border when the father is absent due to international migration, an issue that has not yet been documented. Second, our study examines the behaviour of fathers' remittances according to the transnational family structure. While remittances have been addressed in previous research, transnational fathers have not been the focus of these studies and it is unclear what conditions enable transnational fathers to better support their children economically in their home country. Preliminary findings suggest that the location of the migrant's spouse plays an important role in determining the amount of remittances. If the wife lives with the children in Mexico, they are more likely to receive money from their fathers. In addition, migrants send less to their families back home as they become more integrated in the US.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

One of the consequences of international migration is a radical change in family forms and functioning, notably through the formation of transnational households. As a matter of fact, many migrants leave their children, partners, and parents in their country of origin and settle abroad. For a long time, social scientists have focused primarily on the long-distance care that migrant women provide for their children left behind, i.e., the topic of transnational mothers (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). However, there are other relevant actors within transnational households that have received considerably less attention: migrant family members in the country of origin and, above all, transnational fathers. Although previous research has attempted to estimate the prevalence of transnational fathers among Mexican and Latin American migrants in the United States (DeWaard et al., 2018), empirical evidence on household composition when fathers migrate is lacking. Similarly, little is known about the patterns of contact - remittances, long-distance communication - that transnational fathers maintain with their children in the country of origin. Using data from the Mexican Migration Project (1982-2019), this article aims to shed light on cross-border family relations and, more specifically, the remittance behaviour of Mexican migrant fathers living in the United States.

This paper is based on two research questions. First, it seeks to explore the family configuration on both sides of the border when the father is absent due to international migration. Who do the children live with in Mexico? Who do fathers live with in the United States? How often do mother and father migrate together, possibly taking one of the children with them to the United States? This first set of questions provides a first picture of transnational family relations. The second question concerns the relationship between transnational fathers and their children in Mexico. What conditions favour the sending of remittances? Whether and how does the transnational family structure - in particular the relationship between father and mother - affect the economic support that migrants provide to their children in the country of origin? These questions allow us not only to better understand the behaviours and dynamics that characterise transnational fatherhood, but also the bond that (non-cohabiting) fathers have with their children. More generally, this article attempts to identify the barriers as well as the resources - family-related but also contextual (e.g., reception in the host country) - that enable fathers to be actively involved in the care and life of their children, assuming that for fathers, similarly to mothers, being a present parent is a potential element to be sought after.

TRANSNATIONAL FATHERS

Men have long been overlooked in research on transnational parenthood, even though, at least as far as Mexican migrants in North America are concerned, fathers are still more likely than mothers to leave their children at home or to wait longer times before reunification (Nobles, 2013). When fathers have been addressed, they have often been portrayed as distant and uncaring (Dreby, 2006; Parreñas, 2008). However, recent studies are reconsidering the complexity of the phenomenon: the care given by fathers, the emotional challenges that separation entails for them (Parker & Cookstone, 2021). Fathers, in brief, are entitled to a focus on their own, a specific attention that leads to the deconstruction of "male migrants as independent and non-relational, at a time when...there is intense advocacy to recognise the connectedness of men in general to family-life" (Kilkey et al., 2014: 179). Despite recent progress, much remains to be done to develop a comprehensive understanding of the different aspects and practices of distant fathering. Moreover, existing studies are almost exclusively based on ethnographies and in-depth interviews, which have limited replicability. The scarce quantitative research on the topic has the major shortcoming of considering small and/or non-representative samples (e.g., Haagsman et al.).

One of the central aspects of long-distance parenting concerns remittances: international migration is often a family-level strategy to take advantage of an international economy and to compensate for the lack of a welfare system and the high costs of reproduction in the country of origin (Massey et al., 1993). Remittances have implications for the future outcomes of children growing up in homes with an absent father and/or mother due to migration: for example, through access to education and economic stability. Although the

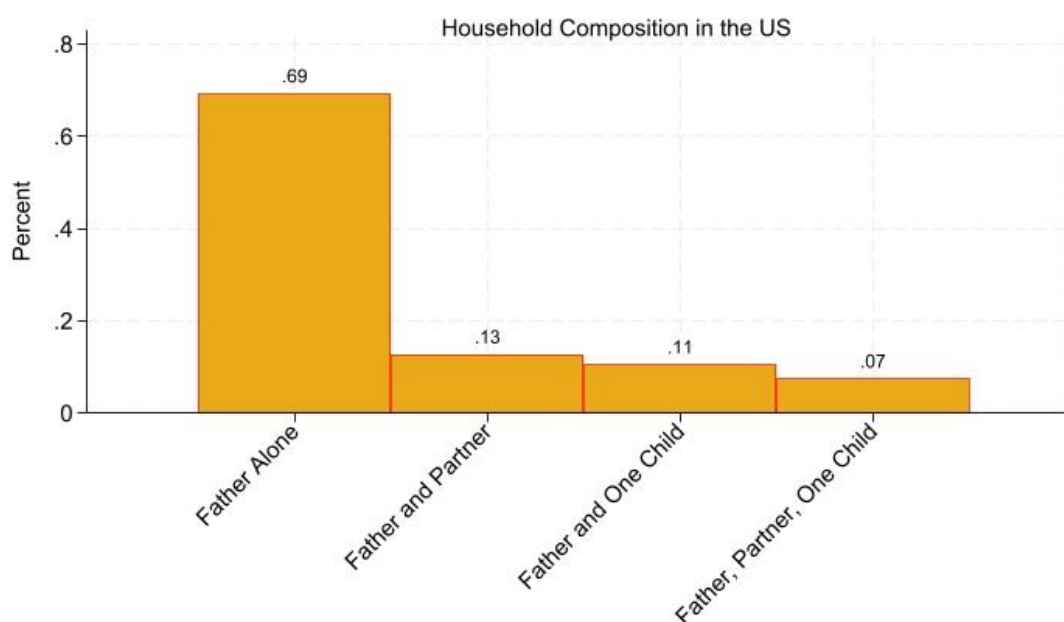
literature on remittances is extensive, much less is known about the profile of those who send them, and even less about the conditions under which migrant fathers provide (or do not provide) economic support to their children in the country of origin. Previous research on the general Mexican migrant population in the United States has highlighted some of the characteristics that favour remittances (Held, 2017; Aysa-Lastra, 2019), yet we know nothing about transnational fathers. Furthermore, it is unclear what role family composition in the United States and Mexico, the child's caregiver, and the parents' partnership status play in determining migrants' remittance behaviour.

DATA AND METHODS

This article uses data from the Mexican Migration Project from 1982 to 2019. The Mexican Migration Project surveys communities in Mexico as well as settled migrant communities in the United States. The communities in Mexico are sampled to represent a wide range of different places of origin of migrants, from rural villages to metropolitan areas, thus providing a basis for generalisation. For our analysis, we used a sub-sample of 951 observations. We selected migrant fathers who were in the United States at the time of the survey and who had at least one child under 18 years old in Mexico. Mexican fathers who completed the survey in the United States answered the questions directly. For households in Mexico, we relied on information provided by the spouse about partner currently living in the United States.

We used the amount of monthly remittances in dollars sent to the household in Mexico by the migrant father in the United States as the dependent variable. The variable is continuous, with responses ranging from 0 (no remittances) to 2,000 dollars. To deal with outliers, the upper 5% of the distribution was top-coded at 800 dollars. The main independent variable is transnational family structure. As Figure 1 shows, we distinguished between different household compositions in the US: migrant fathers living with no member of their nuclear family, i.e., current partner or children, (69% of all observations), fathers living with their partners (13%), fathers living with at least one of their children (11%), and fathers living with their partner and at least one of their children (7%). We also took into account whether the grandparents (parents of the migrant father) lived with the children in Mexico and the age of the youngest child back home. We included several controls: migrant age (continuous), education (years), year of the survey, legal status (*documented*, *undocumented*), length of stay in the US (*less than six months*; *from six months to two years*; *from two to five years*, *more than five years*). We performed OLS regressions explaining monthly remittances by transnational family characteristics.

Figure 1. *Transnational fathers' household composition in the United States.*



PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

As Table 1 shows, there is a significant difference in monthly remittances sent by transnational fathers to households in Mexico depending on the structure of the migrant family. Fathers living in the United States with their partners or with their partners and at least one child remit, on average, 150 dollars less than fathers living alone in the United States. On the other hand, fathers who live with at least one child (but no partner) send more remittances home: about 50 dollars more than transnational fathers who have no nuclear family member in the US. The presence of grandparents living with children in Mexico is not significant, but the coefficient suggests a possible increase in remittances when this occurs - the number of households where grandparents are present is limited. The age of the children in Mexico is not significant. In addition, being undocumented, living in the US for less than six months and having a higher level of education are associated with higher monthly remittances.

These preliminary results open the way to several considerations and interpretations. First, the location of the migrant's spouse appears to be very important in determining whether and how much money the children receive in the country of origin. Remittances increase significantly when the partner lives in the same household as her children in Mexico - this is confirmed by a robustness model in which we specifically examine this household composition. The relationship between the transnational father and his children seems to be mediated, in some way, by the presence of the mother. Second, as integration in the United States increases - time since arrival passes, migrants have some form of legal document - remittances decrease. The presence of a spouse in the United States can also be read in this key: if both parents migrated, there is a more likely intention of settlement, of permanent residence in the host country, than in the case of a lone migrant. Migrants who are more integrated into the host community may have distanced themselves from life on the other side of the border, including their own children.

We plan to build further specification models, including other measures of integration (social networks, socio-economic activities, etc.), to better address some open questions. A further aim is to examine the role of contextual conditions, considering how fathers' behaviour changes over time and according to the different immigration policies that the US has experienced over the past 40 years.

Table 1. Preliminary results of OLS regression explaining monthly remittances sent by transnational fathers in the US to children in Mexico.

	Remittances (\$)	
	Coef.	SE
Socio-demographic characteristics		
Age	-0.28	1.04
Years of education	6.80**	2.13
Transnational family characteristics		
<i>Household structure (father lives in the US alone)</i>		
Father and partner live in the US	-151.28***	21.97
Father and at least one child live in the US	47.88*	24.25
Father, partner and at least one child live in the US	-153.27***	27.65
Grandparents live with children in Mexico (ref. grandparents do not live with children)	77.10	54.95
<i>Age of youngest child in Mexico (ref. less than three y/o)</i>		
From four to eleven y/o	16.33	16.42
From twelve to eighteen y/o	2.88	25.60
Migration background		
Undocumented migrant (ref. documented)	47.98***	14.65
<i>Length of stay (ref. less than six months)</i>		
From six months to two years	-35.08+	19.93
From two to five years	-39.68*	19.74
More than five years	-37.64+	20.58
Year of survey (centered)	7.23***	0.88
Constant	227.73***	43.28
Observations	951	951
R squared	0.23	0.23

Source: Mexican Migration Project, 1982-2019. ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; +p < 0.1.

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