

Unexpected Consequences of Migration to the U.S. on School Enrollment among Mexican Adolescents

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The literature on the effects of international migration in the communities of origin has focused on the impact of remittances at the household level and on the development of communities. Prior studies suggest, for example, that remittances are used to invest in children's education, among other things. According to this argument, children would delay their exit from school when their families receive remittances. Set more generally, if international migration fosters community development and improves the well-being of the families of migrants, we would expect an improvement in school enrollment among children with a greater exposure to international migration at the household or community level.

The main goal of this paper is to explore to what extent the family experiences of migration to the U.S. and the community prevalence of migration influence the school enrollment of adolescents in Mexico. For that purpose, I use nationwide representative data on educational status of children between 12 and 16 years of age in Mexico. The enrollment status of children is combined with information about the number of household members currently in the U.S. or who had worked in the U.S. and with municipal level information about the prevalence of migration and remittances.

On one hand, regarding school enrollment, in spite of the advancement in educational indicators in Mexico, more than half of the adolescents will be out of school before the completion of their secondary education (that is, 9 years of schooling). Even though most of the explanations about this accelerated process of leaving school concentrate on economic arguments—that is, that adolescents leave school because they need to work—census data indicate that “lack of interest in school” is the main reason, as reported by adolescents, for their dropout from school (INEGI 2000). This recent result points to the need of understanding processes such as the construction of expectations

regarding education and the possible competition between life careers such as the early entrance into the labor market or migration to the U.S.

On the other hand, international migration has been a long lasting process in Mexico and it has an impact on families and communities in urban and rural zones all along the country. In around 10% of the households with adolescents, at least one member of the household have lived or currently lives in the U.S. (INEGI 1997). In spite of the importance of this migration process, we know little about the impact on the population and communities that stay in Mexico, for example, about how cultural practices, expectations and consumptions patterns change as a result of a circular and widespread migration to the North.

This work is a preliminary effort to think about how migration to the U.S. is having, or not, an impact on the lives of adolescents who—most probably—have not migrated to the U.S., but still are exposed to the influence of the migration process through their families or their communities. To explore this issue, I looked at the enrollment status of Mexican children between 12 and 16 years of age. These children should have finished elementary school and should complete their secondary education within this period; however, as mentioned earlier, most of them will leave school before they turn 17. Because the process of dropping out is closely related to the entry into the labor force, this study explores jointly the enrollment and labor status of adolescents. The individual information is combined with data about the number of household members currently in the U.S. or who had worked in the U.S. and with municipal level information about the prevalence of migration and remittances. The analysis is conducted through the estimation of multinomial logistic models predicting the enrollment and labor status of children.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ADOLESCENT'S ENROLLMENT

Table 1 shows the enrollment and labor status of adolescent boys and girls by household migration condition. The chi-square statistic suggests that there is a significant association between both variables. The table shows that enrollment rates are considerably lower when there has been exposition to international migration at the

household level. The difference in enrollment is about ten percent points for both, boys and girls. The results regarding prevalence of migration in table 2 point in the same direction; boys and girls living in high prevalence communities have higher chances of living school before finishing their middle education.

Table 1. School enrollment and labor status of children 12 to 16 years of age by sex and by household migration status. Mexico, 1997 (percent)

Variable	Enrolled	Not enrolled and working	Not enrolled and not working	Total
Boys:				
No migration to the U.S. in the HH	76.6	17.2	6.2	100.0 (16,971)
Migration to the U.S. in the HH	65.8	24.9	9.3	100.0 (1,981)
Girls:				
No migration to the U.S. in the HH	73.1	9.7	17.3	100.0 (16,361)
Migration to the U.S. in the HH	61.9	12.4	25.8	100.0 (1,914)

Source: Author's calculations based on data from *Encuesta Nacional de Dinámica Demográfica*, 1997 (INEGI 1997).

Table 2. School enrollment and labor status of children 12 to 16 years of age by sex and by prevalence of migration at the community level. Mexico, 1997 (percent)

Variable	Enrolled	Not enrolled and working	Not enrolled and not working	Total
Boys:				
Low prevalence	78.1	16.1	5.8	100.0
Medium prevalence	73.4	19.0	7.7	100.0
High prevalence	63.2	28.5	8.3	100.0
Girls:				
Low prevalence	74.5	9.3	16.1	100.0
Medium prevalence	70.2	10.2	19.5	100.0
High prevalence	59.2	13.4	27.4	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on data from *Encuesta Nacional de Dinámica Demográfica*, 1997 (INEGI 1997).

This result may be reflecting a certain selectivity of migrant households by socioeconomic status and by size of the location. To isolate the impact of migration from other aspects, I estimated multinomial logit models predicting the enrollment and labor status of adolescents (results not shown). The model can be seen as a construction of the determinants of school attendance and working condition of Mexican adolescents. It includes individual, household and community variables and was estimated separately for boys and girls.

The multinomial logit models suggest that even after controlling for diverse individual, household and community variables, there is a remaining negative impact of international migration on school enrollment among Mexican adolescents. This effect is stronger among boys than for girls and it is interesting to note that being exposed to migration increases mainly the probabilities of not working and not studying, specially among adolescent boys.

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

To a certain extent, these results are unexpected from the point of view of the potential positive effects of remittances on community development and household well-being. The results also suggest the need of exploring the effect of international migration on aspects such as the expected roles and aspirations of adolescents. To a certain extent, studying and migrating may be seen as competing choices. If a greater exposure to migration increases adolescents' expectations of following this path, there may be a disincentive to stay in school. Furthermore, the low expected returns from education among migrants may also discourage them from studying beyond compulsory education.