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Migration Decision-Making among Mexican Youth: Individual, Family, and Community Influences

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Abstract

We explored migration decisions using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with male and female youth ages 14 to 24 (n=47) from two Mexican communities, one with high and one with low U.S. migration density. Half were return migrants and half were non-migrants with relatives in the U.S. Migrant and non-migrant youth expressed different preferences, especially in terms of education and their ability to wait for financial gain. Reasons for migration were mostly similar across the two communities; however, the perceived risk of the migration journey was higher in the low density migration community while perceived opportunities in Mexico were higher in the high density migration community. Reasons for return were related to youths' initial social and economic motivations for migration. A greater understanding of factors influencing migration decisions may provide insight into the vulnerability of immigrant youth along the journey, their adaptation process in the U.S., and their reintegration in Mexico.

Keywords

migration; youth; Mexico; United States; decision-making

INTRODUCTION

As of March 2010, the undocumented population in the United States was estimated at 11.2 million (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Mexican migrants make up the largest portion (58%) of the U.S. undocumented population (Passel & Cohn, 2011), of which youth are a fast growing segment (Passel & Cohn, 2008). The immigrant flow from Mexico to the U.S. has a high

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proportion of youth; 40% of the immigrant flow in 2001 and 2002 was made up of youth ages 12 to 24 (McKenzie, 2008). Similarly, for return migrants to Mexico, a Mexican Population Council survey indicated that approximately 30% were between ages 15 and 24 (CONAPO, 2002).

Young temporary migrants have less formal education, are less likely to have migrated before, and are more likely to enter the U.S. without legal authorization compared to older adult temporary migrants (CONAPO, 2002; World Bank, 2006). Due to their young age, undocumented youth are more vulnerable to dangers along the journey (Eschbach, Hagan, Rodriguez, Hernandez-Leon, & Bailey, 1999; Urrutia-Rojas & Rodriguez, 1997; World Bank, 2006) and to a host of negative outcomes in the U.S. including low educational attainment and living in poverty (Fry, 2003; Passel & Cohn, 2009). Significantly less is known about the trajectories of migrant youth once they return to Mexico after having resided in the U.S.

Despite the large number of youth migrating between the U.S. and Mexico, we know little about this understudied population. Most research on immigrant youth has focused on immigration and assimilation processes in the U.S., while largely ignoring the reasons that brought them to the U.S. in the first place. Contextual factors in youths' communities of origin, aspects of their family life, and individual characteristics and attitudes toward migration likely influence youths' decision to migrate and may have a lasting impact on youths' immigration and adaptation experiences in the U.S. (Cabassa, 2003). Likewise, these same factors may influence youths' decisions to return to Mexico and their reintegration into their home communities (Cassarino, 2004);(Cerese, 1974; Ghosh, 2000; Gmelch, 1980; King, 1977). Yet, we are aware of no studies that have examined these issues among youth.

In the present study we aim to fill this gap by examining migration decision-making among Mexican youth. Our main objective was to explore qualitatively the role of individual and family characteristics in the migration decision among youth ages 15 to 24 by comparing youth who have migrated to the U.S. and returned to Mexico to youth in Mexico who have not migrated. A second aim was to contrast these findings between two Mexican communities with differing migration densities to explore the influence of community-level factors on youth migration decisions. Comparing decision-making between return migrants and non-migrants and across two communities enabled us to evaluate individual, family, and community factors that may influence migration behavior. A better understanding of what differentiates migrant youth from non-migrants in their country of origin is an important first step in assessing the impact of migration on youth. Findings from this exploratory qualitative study can inform how youths' adaptive experiences in the U.S. and their decisions to return home might be shaped by factors prior to migration (Tienda, Taylor, & Moghan, 2007).

Migration decision-making

Migration theory has focused predominantly on economic, social, and cultural motivations for international migration (Massey et al., 1993). Microeconomic models state that migrants weigh their education, experience, and expectations of income differentials in both countries against the perceived costs of migration (Borjas, 1989; Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969) and their decisions often reflect a larger household strategy to minimize risk (Stark & Bloom, 1985). Implicit in the microeconomic model is a level of uncertainty in the perceived costs and benefits of migration (De Jong & Gardner, 1981). In the face of this uncertainty, individuals who choose to migrate likely have a higher risk-taking propensity than those who, in similar contexts, choose not to migrate (De Jong & Gardner, 1981; Jasso, Massey, Rosenzweig, & Smith, 2004). Risk preferences may be particularly relevant for youth

migration given that adolescence is a time of increased participation in risky behaviors (Arnett, 1994; O'Donoghue & Rabin, 2000; Steinberg, 2008; Yaqub, 2009).

Social theories on migration point to the important role of family and community norms on migration decisions (Massey, Alcaron, Durand, & Gonzalez, 1987; Massey, et al., 1993). Kinship and family ties form an important source of social capital, providing information and support to prospective migrants that reduce the costs of migration and settlement. As the prevalence of migration increases, the population with access to networks becomes less selective and the migration process becomes self-perpetuating. In communities with high rates and a long tradition of migration, a “culture of migration” emerges in which international migration becomes normative (Cerrutti & Massey, 2001; Cohen, 2004; Kandel & Massey, 2002). The decision to migrate then becomes an accepted path toward economic well-being and the values associated with migration become ingrained in the sending community (Kandel & Massey, 2002).

These same economic and social theories also have been applied to the phenomenon of return migration. These theories suggest that individuals with fewer economic investments in the U.S. or those that are less successful may be more likely to return home (Borjas, 1989; Stark & Bloom, 1985; Todaro, 1969). Other migrants may plan to return home once a target amount of remittances or savings are earned (Constant & Massey, 2002; Piore, 1980). Individuals who are less socially integrated in the receiving country while maintaining strong ties to kin in the sending country may be more likely to migrate home (Constant & Massey, 2002; Van Hook & Zhang, 2011).

Though these models have been developed and applied to the experiences of unmarried males and families primarily, they suggest factors that may be relevant to youth migration decisions, namely educational and occupational expectations, attitudes toward risk and uncertainty, family and kinship migration experience, and community migration norms (De Jong & Gardner, 1981; Durand & Massey, 1992; Jasso, et al., 2004; Kandel & Massey, 2002; Massey, et al., 1987; Massey, et al., 1993). The present study attempts to enhance our understanding of the factors influencing youths' migration by comparing migration decisions between return migrant and non-migrant youth. Following a classic study design by (Mines & Massey, 1985), we also compared findings in two sending towns in Mexico to gain insight into the role of the community context on youth migration decisions.

METHODS

This analysis was part of a larger qualitative study on migration and reproductive health among Mexican adolescents. The target population for this qualitative study was male and female youth ages 15 to 24 who had migrated to the U.S. and returned to Mexico, and, for comparison, an equal number of youth who had no migration history but lived in households in which a family member had migrated to the U.S. (i.e., sibling, parent, spouse or cousin). We recruited only non-migrant youth who had at least one family member in the U.S. to control for lack of family ties as a reason for not migrating. In order to capture a broad range of migration experiences among youth, we recruited youth who self-identified as having migrated to the U.S. without any restriction based on length of stay in the U.S., reasons for migration, years passed since having migrated or returned to Mexico, or legal documentation status.

Study participants from two communities in Mexico, one with a high and one with a low density of U.S. migration, were identified from community venues and through snowball sampling. These methods of recruitment enabled us to reach a broad range of youth, including both in- and out-of-school youth. To permit comparison between communities of

differing migration densities, we chose communities from two states: Puebla and Michoacán. These two communities provide for a strong comparison because of their similarities on a number of economic indicators including per capita income, unemployment, and percent of youth attending school (Anzaldo & Prado, 2005; Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Geografía, 2008). At the same time, these regions have differing migration densities and histories. Puebla has a more recent history of migration whereas Michoacán is considered a traditional sending state (Cota, 2006). Tehuacán, Puebla, is a low-density migration municipality in which 1.9% of families receive remittances (CONAPO, 2000). Jiquilpan, Michoacán, is a high migration density municipality with 16.6% of households receiving remittances (CONAPO, 2000). The majority of empirical studies on migration in Mexico occur in traditional sending states, thus the inclusion of Puebla allows for a more diverse view of how these factors may vary by community-level migration context and tradition.

Formative work was conducted to pilot-test study instruments and to interview key informants (e.g., church leaders, health workers, and youth) about community-specific migration dynamics. Community informants also guided our selection of recruitment locations, which included schools, church youth groups, stores and plazas. Data collection took place in October through November 2006 and was conducted by two bilingual females, a medical anthropologist from the National Institute of Public Health, Mexico (INSP) and a public health professional from the University of California San Francisco, USA (UCSF). We conducted purposive sampling to maximize variation according to high and low density migration areas and by the gender, age, and migration history of participants. Half of the participants were migrants and half were non-migrants with relatives in the U.S. (n=47; 24 from Tehuacán and 23 from Jiquilpan). Sampling continued until informational redundancy and representation from each age, gender, community and migration history categories were reached.

All youth participants provided written informed consent; parental consent was obtained for minors. Interviews took place in a private location of the participant's choice, including homes, plazas, cafes, and schools and lasted one hour. Semi-structured interviews elicited information on youths' personal and family histories, their decision to migrate or not migrate, migration experiences, attitudes toward risk and uncertainty, return migration, and future expectations. Interviews were digitally recorded and participants were compensated with a gift equivalent to \$10. All study procedures received approval from the institutional review boards at both UCSF and INSP.

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed in Spanish using ATLAS.ti (Version Win 5.0, Scientific Software Development, 2005). Transcripts were coded thematically by the two data collectors who developed a codebook based on themes that emerged from independently coding the first three interviews. All interviews were coded independently by the two researchers and regular meetings were held to discuss any new codes or discrepancies and changes to existing codes and meanings. For this analysis, quotes coded under migration decision, personal preferences, reasons for return, and future expectations, were outputted and stratified by migration history and community of origin to compare between return migrants and non-migrants. Memos and field observations were recorded and shared between the two data analysts and included in the analysis.

RESULTS

A demographic profile of the sample comparing return migrants to non-migrants is available in Table 1. The majority of youth interviewed was single and studying in high school at the time of the interview. Non-migrants were slightly younger on average and fewer had

partners or children than return migrants. Non-migrants were typically among the younger siblings in their families and all were in school at the time of the interview.

Among the 24 return migrants, age at migration ranged from 5 to 21, with a median of 14.4 years (Table 2). Only a few (all from Jiquilpan) had legal permission to enter and work in the U.S. One-third of migrants were considered involuntary migrants, meaning that their parents made the decision to migrate for their children. Nearly half of all migrant youth travelled with their parents.

The majority of return migrants had migrated one time with the exception of six youth from Jiquilpan who made multiple trips to the U.S. (data not shown). Time spent in the U.S. ranged from as little for two months for one youth who was caught by border patrol and admitted into a detention facility until a relative paid her bail so she could return to Mexico. The longest stay in the U.S. reported was 13 years for one participant who was taken to the U.S. by her parents when she was 7 years old. She was so accustomed to life in the U.S. that she did not realize that she was not a U.S. citizen until she applied for college. Almost all migrants traveled to California, though some resided in Arizona, New York, and Nevada.

Time since returning from the U.S. varied from one month to six years. More than half of return migrants had been back in Mexico less than one year. A third of return migrants were studying at the time of the interview (Table 2). The remaining youth reported that they were working or looking for work, caring for children or grandparents, visiting relatives, “hanging out”, and/or awaiting legal documents. Seven of the return migrant youth had plans to migrate to the U.S. in the future, while two said they would probably return, though their plans were less definitive.

Reasons for and against migration, as well as reasons for returning to Mexico, are listed in Table 3. Below we present in more detail the reasons for and against migration according to individual, family, and community level factors. We then discuss the primary reasons for return migration.

Individual level factors

The most common reason for migration echoed amongst almost all migrant youth was financial need and lack of local employment opportunities in their home communities. Migrant youth viewed the higher wages in the U.S. as a means to finance future schooling, build a house, start a business, and support their parents and younger siblings. As one male migrant from Tehuacán explained:

The problem is that here you cannot do anything, buy a house or anything, and there [in the U.S.] you can. Why? Because ... here you go to work a whole day and they give you 100 pesos [\$10], which is what you would make over there in 1 hour.

For males particularly, migration was a way to finance their own house in order for them to become independent from their parents and to form their own families.

Migrant youth also were influenced by their peers who had returned to Mexico with tangible successes from abroad, prompting them to want the same material items and experiences. As one 17 year old migrant male from Jiquilpan expressed, “many here live with few resources and things, and so, seeing those people return in December with their new cars and all that, I think it impels them to go.”

Non-migrants, on the other hand, often did not face as much need to migrate; their jobs or remittances from family enabled them to continue living in Mexico. Unlike their migrant

siblings, they envisioned opportunities for themselves in Mexico. As expressed by one female non-migrant from Jiquilpan:

I did not leave because I was interested in continuing high school ... I like my job and I like being in my country, and I'm not doing too poorly with my salary, and so for me, it is not this grand thing to go to the U.S.

For non-migrants, migration decisions were intertwined with educational goals, especially for younger participants who expressed a strong preference to postpone migration until they completed school. Though non-migrants sometimes expressed that they desired similar material items as their migrant relatives, they expressed a willingness to wait. When asked under which circumstances they would migrate, non-migrants sometimes replied only if they were no longer attending school or if they performed poorly. Instead, they preferred to study and work in Mexico or wait until they could migrate legally. Comments from a non-migrant in Tehuacán clearly captured the differences between migrant and non-migrant siblings:

I do not know what [my brother's] intentions were in going. He said he wanted money, a car, like he saw some of his friends with cars ... I also [want a car], but its *tranquilo*, everything comes in time.

A less common motivation for migration was curiosity; though this was more common for males than females. Stories from peers and family members abroad created a sense of curiosity among migrants to see the U.S. and to verify firsthand whether stories they heard were true. A 17 year old male migrant youth described his town in Mexico as dull compared to the U.S. where he imagined he would have a car and could drive around having fun. A female migrant from the high-density migration community, though she expressed fear about migrating without papers, explained how she decided to join her uncle in the U.S. because all her cousins were there and she wanted to experience what her cousins had seen.

In contrast, fear was a frequently named reason for not migrating, especially for females. A common saying among non-migrants was that they would rather risk staying in their country even if it meant eating beans everyday than risking their lives to go north. Non-migrant youth sometimes gave the impression that their migrant siblings were different from themselves. For instance, one female non-migrant youth described how her brother "thinks extravagantly" and how he "just does things" whereas she thinks about things before acting. Another 18 year old non-migrant male from the high density migration community remarked about his migrant brother, "my brother comes and goes and many people ask him if he has papers and he doesn't; he says he likes to take risks."

Many non-migrants intentionally chose to stay expressing little or no desire to '*conocer*' (know) the U.S. They expressed a deep connection to their towns and indifference, and in a few cases, distaste for what they imagined or had heard life was like in the U.S. A female non-migrant who had five brothers working in the U.S. said if she migrated someday, she would only go for vacation but not to live because of the way they discriminate against Mexicans in the U.S. Several other non-migrant females echoed this, saying that they would only go for vacation or to study, but not to work or live permanently in the U.S.

Family influence

For almost one-third of the migrant youth, the decision to migrate was not their own and was made by their parents. Younger participants were especially likely to have migrated with their parents who, from the youths' perspective, were seeking a better life and better educational opportunities for their children. Migrating as a family unit was more common in Jiquilpan where there was more access to fake or borrowed documents and legal means of crossing.

The remaining two-thirds of youth made the migration decision on their own or did so in conjunction or with permission from their parents. One female migrated to be reunited with her husband who was working in the U.S.; however, nearly one-third of female migrants decided to migrate on their own. None had children at the time of migration.

Having relatives in the U.S. was another draw for youth to migrate. Once one family member migrated, it became easier for others as a non-migrant from Jiquilpan explained: “My older sister marries her husband who resides in the U.S. and he takes her. Two years after, she takes my brother. Then another brother doesn’t want to study anymore, and so he says, « Well, I’m going to the U.S. ».” Many youth decided to migrate with short notice upon invitation from an uncle. A male migrant from the high density migration community captured this phenomenon in his remark: “The majority that go, they go because, it is tradition that one goes, their cousins go, their uncles go, and then the uncles pull the nephews and the nephews pull their friends.”

Though less commonly mentioned, changes in family circumstances or escaping family problems resulted in the migration of a few youth. One female migrant from Tehuacán never planned to migrate but, at the urging of her mother following her parents’ divorce, dropped out of school and migrated eight days later with her uncle to finance her university studies. A male migrant, whose uncle came through on his way north, decided to join him because he was angry with his father. Another youth from Jiquilpan described how her dad never sent remittances. With four siblings in school and tired of seeing her mom suffer, she migrated with her uncle.

Having relatives in the U.S. dissuaded some, especially those that were the younger siblings in their family, from migrating. Parents and siblings’ migration sometimes made youths’ own migration unnecessary, especially those who were the younger siblings in the family and received financial support from older siblings in the U.S. to continue their schooling. Others recalled their siblings’ struggles in the U.S., which made them less apt to migrate. Several non-migrant youth shared that their parents and older siblings convinced them to stay in Mexico. They heeded advice from their parents to wait until they were older because it was too dangerous or to remain in Mexico to finish school. One male non-migrant’s mother explained that he would make money once he finished school. His impression of migrant youth was that “many do not understand this, they just want money already and they think that over there they can get it in an instant.”

Several youth stayed behind to care for family members including their parents. Though they acknowledged that they could make more money in the U.S., it would not be the same to live without their family. While it was common for male youth to migrate to form their own families, there was a parallel norm for females with children to stay behind since migration was perceived to be too dangerous for young children.

Community level factors

Though the reasons for and against migrating were similar across study sites (Table 3), youth’s decisions reflected their communities’ migration dynamics. In the high migration density community, Jiquilpan, all migrants had parents and/or grandparents who had migrated before them and benefited from their remittances (Table 2). Jiquilpan youth had higher levels of education, more possibilities of migrating legally, and more social networks in the U.S. due to Michoacán’s longer migratory history. Youth in Jiquilpan had easier access to ‘coyotes’ (smugglers), who were often relatives or well-known and trusted in their communities. Many youth in Jiquilpan had access to fake or borrowed documents and were thus able to cross the border more easily through Tijuana.

These decreased costs of migration in Jiquilpan enabled some youth to migrate for reasons unrelated to economic gains including for vacation, to visit relatives, to process immigration documents or because they had nothing better to do in Mexico. A few youth in the high-density migration community migrated for more capricious reasons, such as attending a cousin's wedding in the U.S., as a *quinciñera* (15th birthday) gift from relatives residing in the U.S., and to spend Christmas with relatives.

The expansiveness of migrant networks in Jiquilpan made migration all the more inevitable. One youth who had never imagined migrating explained that she and many of her friends fell in love and married migrants whose lives were in the U.S., so they had no choice but to migrate. A few youth were expected by their parents to migrate in order to visit relatives. As one female youth from Jiquilpan explained, her mother did not know how to read or write so she dropped out of school to guide her mother to the U.S.

In the high-density migration community of Jiquilpan, both migrant and non-migrant youth expressed a less romanticized impression of life in the U.S. Their reasons for not migrating focused on not wanting to live in the U.S., rather than on the dangers of the journey. For example, one male migrant from Jiquilpan stated that he preferred Mexico where he had his own bedroom than the U.S. where he had to share a room with his mother. Though he migrated regularly for work, he contended that he never wants to live in the U.S. permanently.

In the low migration density community of Tehuacán, only half of the migrants had either a parent or grandparent who had ever migrated (Table 2). They did not benefit from remittances of earlier generations and faced more pressure to migrate themselves to support single mothers and younger siblings. Fewer resources (networks, knowledge, and money) were available, thereby increasing the uncertainty and perceived risk of migration. All but two youth in Tehuacán crossed through more dangerous routes in the desert or river.

Fear of the journey itself, including death, concerned youth in Tehuacán whereas fear of physical and emotional suffering was absent in discourses from Jiquilpan. Tehuacán non-migrants had a saying that migrants went to “suffer on the other side.” One male non-migrant from Tehuacán shared, “I wouldn't risk my life ... What happened with the guy [my brother's friend] who died scared me, and I said to myself, it's better not to go, or if I can pass normally [legally], it's better than to die there.”

Return migration

A summary of the primary reasons for return migration are listed in Table 3. Reasons for returning were similar between the two communities and were often related to the initial decisions to migrate to the U.S., primarily economic and social motivations. About half of the youth who went because of financial need gave the impression that they had achieved their goals in the U.S. and were ready to come home. One 19 year old male from Tehuacán whose main motivation for migrating was to make money so that he could marry his girlfriend, returned to Mexico after two years because he was tired of working, had little time off, and missed his girlfriend. Six months after returning from California, where he resided with his parents and twenty members from his indigenous community, he was working in a factory and was engaged to get married. Another male migrant from Tehuacán also returned having achieved his migration objectives. While in the U.S., he had made \$1300 weekly, of which he sent \$1000 to his wife who used it to build their house. He described: “I went [to the U.S.] to build a house so I could live with my wife and child alone, apart from our family, and thanks to God, I built our house and bought land.”

In contrast to these success stories, a similar number of youth who migrated primarily for financial reasons returned home because they were not able to attain their goals. One young woman from Tehuacán travelled to the U.S. with her uncle and boyfriend with hopes of saving enough money to attend college in Mexico. Once she arrived in the U.S., she received little support from her relatives and became homeless. She moved in with a man who was a drug user so that she had a place to live and she soon became pregnant. She did not want her child to grow up in the poverty and drugs that surrounded her in the U.S., and chose instead to raise her child as a single parent in Mexico where she would have help from her mother. Two other female youth came back to Mexico to give birth so that they would have more family support to raise their children than they did in the U.S.

Through comparison of the stories of youth who achieved their goals in the U.S. and those who did not, the importance of supportive social networks in the U.S. emerged as key to youths' success. For those reporting limited or no success in the U.S., support in the U.S. was frequently lacking and marred by drug use. This was especially true for youth who resided in the U.S. without their parents which was mostly youth from the low density migration community.

Several youth became disillusioned with the U.S. saying that life there was more difficult than they imagined, particularly having to pay bills and rent. In fact, several mentioned that they did not ever want to go back to the U.S. A 22 year old male from Jiquilpan returned home after a couple of years and intended never to return. Even though he was unemployed and knew he would not make as much money in Mexico, he preferred to live in Mexico, because in his words and in the words of several other youth, life in Mexico was "más tranquilo" or calmer. Likewise, a female participant from Jiquilpan accompanied her mom to visit her siblings to see what their life was like in the U.S. After six months, having experienced racism and conflict with her extended family with whom she lived in the U.S., she and her mother decided to return home where "no one was telling them what to do."

Just as several youth migrated upon short notice without planning, so did several youth return. Sometimes the return home resulted from a sudden and unexpected event that took place. For example, an earthquake caused one youth's family to become homeless, so after three years in the U.S. they returned to Mexico. Out of the seven youth who migrated due to their parents' decision, five also returned because their parents were returning. Death or illness of a family member in Mexico spurred several youth to migrate home though sometimes it was not the only reason for returning. For instance, a female youth from Tehuacán who had lived in the U.S. since the age of five said that her grandmother's illness was the impetus to return home, but she also mentioned that the house they were building in Tehuacán was almost completed. Additionally, two youth from Tehuacán returned earlier than expected because they were deported.

DISCUSSION

We conducted an in-depth exploration of the decision to migrate among youth who had migrated and returned to Mexico and youth from migrant families who had never migrated. Further, we examined reasons for returning among those with migration history. Many of youths' reasons for migration echoed previous findings among adults (Massey, et al., 1993). Economic reasons of their own or of their parents were the primary motivation for migration. This was especially true for male youth and those from the low density migration community who faced more pressure to migrate since many of their own parents had not migrated. In the high density migration community, though employment opportunities and higher wages were a strong pull, social reasons like visiting relatives were also common. These findings echo those in a literature review on unaccompanied migrant children to the

U.S., in which the top reasons stated for migration among repatriated children in Tijuana and Nogales included work and family reunification (Chavez & Menjivar, 2010).

At the same time, we observed aspects of the migration decision that may be especially pertinent to youth such as age, sibling order, educational aspirations, and risk preferences. Age and sibling order were strong determinants of migration and dictated how involved family members were in migration decisions. The strong relationship between educational aspirations and migration that emerged from youths' discourses in our study has been documented earlier (Kandel & Massey, 2002). The observed higher risk tolerance among migrants relative to non-migrants has been alluded to in the migration literature (De Jong & Gardner, 1981; Ritchey, 1976) but seldom tested (Heitmueller, 2005; Jaeger et al., 2010) and warrants further research.

To our knowledge this is the first study to explore specifically why the majority of youth do not migrate. Previous research among non-migrants is sparse but suggests that those who stay behind may be motivated by the ties with family and friends in their community of origin (Ritchey, 1976). In our study, reasons for not having migrated varied widely. Several youth did not have a financial need to migrate or were not able to migrate because they were caring for children or parents. Other non-migrant youth wanted to migrate but were postponing until they were older, could go legally, or had completed school. Others expressed never wanting to migrate out of fear, because they had no interest, or to remain close to family in their communities where they believed they could be successful.

The biggest difference observed between return migrants and non-migrants was the perceived value of education in Mexico and their willingness to wait for financial independence. According to the "culture of migration" theory, labor aspirations in the U.S. appear to compete with the desire to continue schooling in Mexico (Kandel & Massey, 2002). In our study, migrants often chose the prospect of higher U.S. wages to achieve their dreams more quickly. Meanwhile, non-migrants communicated a desire to complete their education and succeed in Mexico making short-term sacrifices, such as putting off making money for a car and clothes, for long-term investments such as buying textbooks. Non-migrants believed they could be just as or more successful in Mexico than their migrant counterparts in the U.S. Additionally, parents and older siblings' emphasis on the importance of education seemed to differ between the two groups. Non-migrants sometimes shared that they received counseling to finish school first.

Migrant youth seemed to exhibit a more risk-friendly orientation which was consistent with non-migrants' perceptions of their migrant siblings as greater risk-takers. Migrant youth expressed curiosity and adventure in their motives to migrate. Meanwhile fear and a strong desire to succeed in their communities of origin were commonly voiced by non-migrants. Our study could not determine whether these different preferences observed between migrants and non-migrants are unique to youth or whether they operate similarly among adult migrants. Particularly for youth, because of developmental changes during adolescence, risk and temporal preferences may have important implications for the migration decision and for subsequent behaviors in the U.S.

As in previous studies conducted among adult populations in Mexico, migration discourses were highly gendered (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Kandel & Massey, 2002). Male migration was more socially acceptable and male peers and relatives, especially uncles, played an influential role guiding younger males north (Castañeda, Brindis, & Camey, 2001; Kandel & Massey, 2002). Females generally voiced fear and less desire to leave home and several did not want to work in the U.S. A few female migrants did not follow the traditional gender roles of migrating as daughters or wives (Cerrutti & Massey, 2001; Durand & Massey,

1992; Massey, et al., 1987) Instead, they were the first in their family to migrate or went to join siblings already in the U.S. and were accompanied by a sister or *comadre* (close family friend).

For many, the decision to migrate reflected differences in perceived opportunities in Mexico and the U.S. With the increased uncertainty and risk of migration in Tehuacán, we might expect youth there to be more selected such that only those that had an extremely high risk-tolerance would migrate compared to youth in Jiquilpan where the migration context was more certain. However, for many Tehuacán youth, migration was the only choice they perceived to move ahead, whereas in Jiquilpan, migration was one of several options. It was also more common for non-migrant youth in Jiquilpan to perceive less opportunity in the U.S. and to have a more realistic perception of the struggles that immigrants may encounter in the U.S. Thus the threshold for risk-taking seemed to be influenced by what alternatives were available rather than merely individual preferences. This has important implications for immigrant youth who often settle in areas within the U.S. where opportunities are limited (Portes, 2007).

Our study also documents the importance of youths' community of origin on the migration decision and journey. The differences in social capital between the two communities influenced with whom youth migrated and which routes they took. Research on acculturation points to the important role of pre-migration factors on the acculturation and health trajectories of immigrants in settlement societies (Cabassa, 2003; Jasso, et al., 2004). Studies examining adaptation among Mexican immigrants in the United States could be strengthened by including measures of pre-migration factors. A greater understanding of the context from which youth migrate (e.g. rural vs. urban, migrating with parents or unaccompanied) may provide insight into the vulnerability of immigrant youth along the journey, to their adaptation in the U.S. (Cabassa, 2003), and their decision to return home.

Reasons for return migration among youth in our study were similar to findings among adult migrant populations (Constant & Massey, 2002; King, 1977; Van Hook & Zhang, 2011) and were often linked to the initial reasons for migration (Ghosh, 2000). The same economic and social factors in their communities of origin that drove youth to migrate often influenced their decisions to return. For example, male youth returned once they had met their migration objectives to make money to buy land, build a house, or get married. Female youth who went out of curiosity to experience the life their cousins and siblings lived in the U.S., returned to Mexico once they became bored or did not get along with their relatives in the U.S. Several youth were forced to return due to family circumstances, such as when their parents decided to return or when a relative became ill or died in Mexico. Other youth were unable to 'salir adelante' (get ahead) as they had imagined and returned home. A supportive social network was a key factor in youths' ability to succeed and highlighted the particular vulnerability of unaccompanied youth and the importance of mechanisms for supporting young newly-arrived immigrants in the U.S. Reasons for return migration among youth have been neglected in the literature despite the fact that Mexican males between the ages of 25 and 29 have the highest rate of return (Masferrer, Pederzini, & Passel, 2012). More research on the reasons for return migration among youth is warranted to provide insight into the selectivity of youth who stay in the U.S., as well as on the reintegration of youth who return home to Mexico.

Recognizing the exploratory nature of this study, we are cautious in generalizing these findings because we interviewed a convenience sample of temporary migrants returning to Mexico who may differ from Mexican migrants residing in the U.S. However, a significant portion of undocumented Mexican migrants return home and do not settle permanently in the U.S. Return and cyclical migration is common and has important implications for both

sides of the border (CONAPO, 2002; Lindstrom, 1996; McKenzie, 2008; Reyes, 1997; Roberts, Frank, & Lozano-Ascencio, 1999). McKenzie, 2008 calculated that the median age of return migration from the U.S. to Mexico is 24 years, while the median time abroad for young return migrants from Mexico is three years. Due to the difficulty of recruiting representative samples of undocumented migrants in the U.S. (Cornelius, 1982), much of our knowledge of migration has come from studies that collect data from return migrants in their source community in Mexico (Mines, 1981). Thus, this study enabled access to a hard-to-reach population often excluded from studies among youth in the U.S. (McKenzie, 2008). Furthermore, because interviews were conducted in Mexico, youth could share openly about their experiences with undocumented migration.

CONCLUSION

This study provides important information on the decision to migrate or not and the decision to return from the perspective of Mexican youth, a growing and yet understudied population. Not only does this study examine the personal factors associated with migration decisions among Mexican return migrant and non-migrant youth, but it also compares them between two sending communities in two states with differing migration densities. Both the number of youth migrating back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. and the rapidly growing Latino population in the U.S. warrant further bi-national efforts to improve our understanding of youth migration.

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Biographies

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Christine Tucker received her master's degree in Public Health from the University of California, Berkeley, with a concentration in maternal and child health. She has worked in public health serving migrant farm workers and Latino immigrant families for 10 years in Oregon, California and North Carolina. Christine has conducted public health research for the Mexican National Institute of Public Health and Population Council in Mexico, and the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and the Research Triangle Institute (RTI). She is currently enrolled in the doctoral program in Maternal and Child Health with a minor in Epidemiology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and works as a predoctoral fellow at the Carolina Population Center.

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Sergio is an Associate Researcher in the Health Economics and Evaluation center at the National Institute of Public Health (INSP) in Cuernavaca, México. At INSP, Sergio also coordinates and is a faculty member of the Master in Health Economics program. Sergio Bautista is trained as a health economist. He received his BA in economics from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City and his Master of Health Economics at CIDE, also in Mexico City. His master's thesis evaluated the impact of Progresas/Oportunidades on the utilization of primary health care services in rural Mexico. Sergio's current research includes a cost-effectiveness analysis to evaluate interventions for prevention and care of HIV/AIDS in Mexico as well as impact evaluations of health and anti-poverty programs.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Mexican Youth

	Total	Return migrant	Non-migrant
Migration status			
Return migrant	24		
Non-migrant with relatives in the U.S.	23		
Community of origin			
Tehuacán, Puebla	24	12	12
Jiquilpan, Michoacán	23	12	11
Age at interview			
14 – 18	22	8	14
19 – 24	25	16	9
Gender			
Male	21	10	11
Female	26	14	12
Highest level of education achieved			
Less than primary school	3	2	1
Primary school	8	5	3
Secondary school	10	8	2
High school	22	8	14
University	3	0	3
Missing	1	1	0
School status			
Still studying	25	9	16
Dropped out	19	13	6
Graduated	2	1	1
Missing	1	1	0
Marital status			
Single	34	13	21
Married/Free union	12	10	2
Separated	1	1	0

Migration and reproductive health among Mexican adolescents study, Tehuacán and Jiquilpan, Mexico, October – November 2006, (n = 47)

Table 2

Migration Characteristics among Mexican Migrant Youth (n = 24) Returning from the U.S.

	Total	Jiquilpan	Tehuacán
Age at migration			
5	2	0	2
6	2	1	1
7	1	1	0
11	2	2	0
15	4	3	1
16	4	1	3
17	2	1	1
18	2	0	2
19	3	1	2
21	2	2	0
Documentation status			
Undocumented	19	7	12
Fake	2	2	0
Documented	3	3	0
Prior family history of migration			
Grandparents	9	7	2
Parents	9	5	4
Youth or siblings 1 st in family to migrate	6	0	6
Migration decision			
Involuntary (Parents)	7	4	3
Voluntary (Youth or joint decision with parents)	17	8	9
Migrated with			
Alone (though knew someone in U.S.)	6	3	3
Parents	11	7	4
Uncles	5	1	4
Sibling or family friend	2	1	1
Post-migration activities			
Studying	8	4	4
Working	3	1	2
Looking for work	5	2	3
Caring for baby/pregnant	1	1	0
Caring for grandparents	2	2	0
Awaiting paperwork for legal documents	2	2	0
Vacation/hanging out/visiting relatives/holidays	3	1	2

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Table 3
Reasons For and Against U.S. Migration and Reasons for Returning to Mexico Cited by Mexican Youth

Decision to migrate	Decision not to migrate	Decision to return
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial need/material items • Employment • Curiosity and adventure • Accompany relatives • Visit relatives/vacation • Change in family circumstances/family problems • Process paperwork for legal documents • Help support family financially 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack financial need • Desire to continue schooling in Mexico • Lack interest/realistic view of U.S. • Postpone till older • Lack of strong ties in the U.S. • Fear • Wait for legal authorization • Care for parents or children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic goals were met • Disillusionment with U.S./No work • Family member's death/illness in Mexico • Parents returned to Mexico • Visit relatives/vacation/holiday in Mexico • Deportation • Await paperwork for legal documents • Get married/have a baby in Mexico

Migration and reproductive health among Mexican adolescents study, Tehuacán and Jiquilpan, Mexico, 2006