Polo del Conocimiento

Transnational fatherhood, parenting practices among immigrants from three communities in Ecuador

Paternidad transnacional, prácticas parentales entre inmigrantes de tres comunidades en Ecuador

Parentalidade transnacional, práticas parentais entre imigrantes de três comunidades no Equador

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Abstract

Nowadays is common migration from one country to another due to several reasons: to escape from poverty and enhance the economy of the household, to get a better job, to study, etc. For many people, migrate is not an option, their lives in their original countries are difficult, some of them -especially from third world- do not have access to legal documents required in destination countries. This work is about the transnational fatherhood and parenting practices among immigrants from three communities in Ecuador. The results of this work identify different parenting styles adopted for migrant parents and effects in their families, from the point of view of left-behind children through the use of a descriptive and qualitative approach.

Keywords: Ecuador; transnational fatherhood; parenting practices; immigrant.

Resumen

Hoy en día es común la migración de un país a otro debido a varias razones: escapar de la pobreza y mejorar la economía del hogar, conseguir un mejor trabajo, estudiar, etc. Para muchas personas, migrar no es una opción, sus vidas en sus países de origen son difíciles, algunos de ellos, especialmente del tercer mundo, no tienen acceso a los documentos legales requeridos en los países de destino. Este trabajo trata sobre las prácticas transnacionales de paternidad y crianza entre inmigrantes de tres comunidades en Ecuador. Los resultados de este trabajo identifican diferentes estilos de crianza adoptados para los padres migrantes y los efectos en sus familias, desde el punto de vista de los niños abandonados mediante el uso de un enfoque descriptivo y cualitativo.

Palabras claves: Ecuador, paternidad transnacional, prácticas de crianza, inmigrante.

Resumo

Hoje em dia é comum a migração de um país para outro devido a várias razões: para escapar da pobreza e melhorar a economia da casa, conseguir um emprego melhor, estudar, etc. Para muitas pessoas, migrar não é uma opção, suas vidas em seus países de origem são difíceis, alguns deles - principalmente do terceiro mundo - não têm acesso aos documentos legais exigidos nos países de destino. Este trabalho trata da paternidade transnacional e das práticas parentais entre imigrantes de três comunidades no Equador. Os resultados deste trabalho identificam diferentes estilos parentais adotados para pais e efeitos migrantes em

suas famílias, do ponto de vista dos filhos deixados para trás através do uso de uma abordagem descritiva e qualitativa.

Palavras-chave: Equador, paternidade transnacional, práticas parentais, imigrante.

Introduction

Transnational families have been aborded in many researches in the last years. Some authors that have written about the situation of those left-behind are Puyana & Rojas (2011); Vacas (2016); Toyota, Yeoh & Nguyen (2007); Wildsmith (2005); Zentgraph & Stoltz (2012); Zentgraf,& Chinchilla (2012); Suárez & Cuenca (2012); Gibson, Emiliano (2007); Iqbal, Iqbal & Mozmi (2014); Smith, Lalonde & Johnson (2004); Mazzucato & Schans (2011); among many others. In Ecuador, the number of transnational families is increasing, but the papers about this topic is still small. Present work is focused on immigrant parents from three communities in Ecuador: Sígsig (Azuay province), Biblián (Cañar province) and Calderón (a parish in the Pichincha province) and the effects on their left behind families. The main objectives of this paper are to identify the different parenting styles adopted for migrant parents and effects on their left behind families, specially the children. The paper is structured as follows: Transnational families in Ecuador, Parenting practices among immigrant parents, Effects of the separation of the parents on their families, Conclusions and References.

People migrate looking for better opportunities (mainly in the economical ground) for their families and themselves, but in an almost organic fashion various factors come into play once they have migrated changing their family's configuration. Changes they did not prevent from the start. The aim of this study is precisely focused in the consequences of migration of the father into the lives of his children that remain at the country of origin and how the parenting style of the physically distant father affect the lives of those left-behind children.

Body

Transnational families in Ecuador

According to statistics from Ecuadorian government in the country the 33% of parents do not live with their children, the number of them migrants is not known. Statistics also reveal that 49% of the parents living with their children have a secondary or superior degree (Redacción web, 2019).

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Ecuadorian parents usually spent less time with their children than the mothers. Some characteristics associated to Ecuadorian fatherhood are hard worker (90% of the parents belongs to the economic active population), emotional closeness, monitoring, the absence of neglect and permissiveness. Migrant parents usually try to maintain the contact with their families through regular communication using telephone, social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.), in the case of undocumented parents contacts would be less frequent due to save money. It is usual that undocumented parents live with resettlement challenges (financial, housing, employment, access to services), some of them could be consumed by work in order to provide for their families, discrimination, exclusion, humiliation, and the risk of exploitive and poor working conditions are present but depends of several factors such as the education of the migrant and destination country (INEC, s. f.).

Present work analyzes information from students at 6 different schools in 2015: 3 from Sígsig, 2 from Biblián and 1 from Calderón. For inclusion criteria children living with their mothers after father's migration were selected, with ages between 14 and 18 years. Eligible participants were selected from the Problems, Expectations and Aspirations of Children (PEACH) questionnaire, a larger survey implemented in 2012 and 2013 as part of the 'International Migration and Local Development' research project. The sample was selected considering that the child was living at the time of the study with the mother, and the father lived abroad in the destination country. Although several students met the requirements for this study, 38 were selected as a representative sample.

Table 1: Number of children by age at separation and length of separation

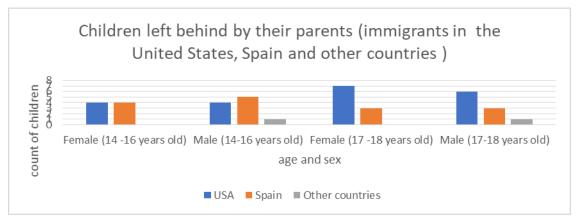| Type of family	Children's age at separation	Length of separation (in years)			Total
		0-5	**06-10**	**11-15**	
Father abroad	0-5		3	15	18
	6-10		14	5	19
	>10	1			1
Total		1	17	20	**38**

Source: Author, 2020

Table 2: Number of children according to sex, city, marital status from their parents, and type of population

Type	Sígsig	Biblián	Quito
Male	6	6	8
Female	6	6	6
Parents divorced	8	9	12
Parents not divorced	4	3	2
Urban	4	3	0
Rural	8	9	14

Source: Author, 2020

Data about children and parents are presented in charts in figures 1-2.

Figure 1: Demographics of the sample: Children left behind by their parents (undocumented immigrants in the United States, Spain and other countries)

Source: Author, 2020

Figure 1 shows that most of sampled left behind children were between 17 -18 years old. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show USA and Spain as the two main destination countries selected by parents.
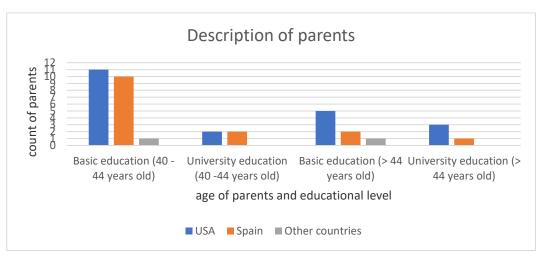
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Figure 2: Age and educational level description of undocumented migrant parents within the selected sample

Most of migrant parents are between 40 and 44 years old, a few of them have university-level education. Despite of restrictive immigration laws in USA in comparison with Spain or other countries or even the difference of language and culture the 55% choose this country.

Migrant parents often hope that once they earn enough money to enable their children to attend a good school or be able to live comfortably in the country of origin, they can return home (Bryceson & Vuorella, 2002), or at least, they intend to do so. However, these goals, which are established beforehand, are often not met in the intended time period, if at all, or new goals are set (Haagsman, 2015). Therefore, although parents often migrate intending the separation with their children to last only a short time, they typically are separated for longer than anticipated (Dreby, 2006). Analyzed data from interviews to children and its relatives that live with them show that in almost every case the parents left the house when his child was very young, even a few months of life. After that parents have been living several years apart from their families in Ecuador as is shown in Table 1.

Parenting practices among immigrant parents

The relationship between parents and children has a deep impact on the lives of the latter. The styles of parenting that the mother and the father adopt shapes the way in which children experience the world that surround them and how they perceive themselves and other people (Sartaj & Aslam, 2010). About parenting practices developed by parents they can be classified such as: negligent parents, authoritative parents, authoritarian parents, permissive parents,

according to the typology developed in (Baumrind, 1967, 1978, 1991) that emerged as the standard for research (Pellerin, 2005).

Authoritarian parenting practices include directiveness, strictness, punitiveness, and constraining the expression of negative emotions. Authoritarian parenting style is expected in traditional families and can be different between mothers and parents, usually with parents making decisions, directing the family, and requiring obedience and respect of the child and mothers (Trifan et al., 2014). Several studies refer to negative effects of authoritarian parenting style in children. In (Sartaj & Aslam, 2010) the results were that authoritarian parents have negative relationship with home, health and emotional adjustment in adolescents. Furthermore, authoritarian pattern, high in demandingness and low in parental responsiveness could affect in different forms to girls or boys. In children of 8-9 years old. It appears that girls with authoritarian parents were more assertive in their social relations than boys in authoritarian families. In the case of both boys and girls, intrusive-directiveness has been connected to lower indexes of cognitive competence (Dornbusch et al., 1987). Other study (King et al., 2016) reports different effects associated to depression among girls and boys whose parents used authoritarian parenting practices.

Neglectful parenting practices occurs when the parents are low in warmth and control and generally are not involved in their child's life, are disengaged, undemanding, low in responsiveness and do not set limits (Arora & Ramdeobaba, 2014). In (Slicker, 1998) a significant positive correlation was found between neglectful parenting and children's negative behavioural adjustment.

Permissive parenting is characterized by tolerant parents that uses as many punishments as possible and make few demands for mature behaviour. In permissive parenting the parents allow considerable self-regulation by the child. Some studies found that children of permissive parents were immature, lacked impulse control and self-reliance, lacked social responsibility and independence, and with low cognitive competence (Dornbusch et al., 1987). According to Pellerin (2005) children that are raised by permissive parents show high social skills and better levels of self-esteem, but lower cognitive competence with inferior academic achievements at school, and in the worst of cases adolescents from permissive parents are prone to show behavioural issues and drug use.

Authoritative parenting is characterized by high demandingness and responsiveness. Some aspects that can define the authoritative parenting are an expectation of mature behaviour from the child and clear setting of standards by the parents; firm enforcement of rules and standards, using commands and sanctions when necessary; encouragement of the child's independence and individuality; open communication between parents and children; and recognition of the rights of both parents and children (Dornbusch et al., 1987). Children from authoritative parents have been shown to have higher social and cognitive competence, higher aspirations, and better grades, psychological well-being and behaviour (Pellerin, 2005).

In order to recognize the parenting style from immigrant parents the Parent Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) developed in (Buri, 1991) was performed. The PAQ has been used to asses parenting styles in terms of authoritarianism or permissiveness. It has been successfully applied to male and female participants, young adults or adolescents (Buri, 1991). Results from applying the PAQ are displayed in Figure 3.
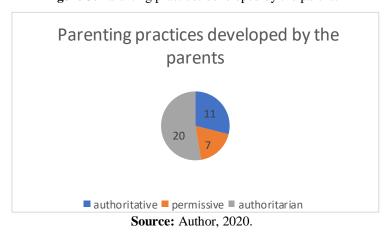
Figure 3: Parenting practices developed by the parents

Source: Author, 2020.

Previous figure shows that most of the parents developed an authoritarian parenting style. Data from interviews revealed that parents that send money are more prone to develop an authoritarian parenting style. This parenting style appears to be ineffective because the parents are far, and they do not have much contact with their children. From the sample and interviews it appears that the authoritarian parenting style of parents is stricter with girls. Some parents do not approve from them to have boyfriends. The authoritarian parenting style developed by the parents is predominant when the communication with their left behind families is frequent and if the father

maintains the relationship with the mother of the child. By the other hand, negligent and permissive parenting styles are predominating in cases where the father does not contact frequently with his child.

As for qualitative analysis of interviews, several statements from children highlight the presence of one or another of the aforementioned parenting styles. The case of Gabriela, a sixteen-year-old, is a good example of authoritative parenting style developed at distance from the side of the migrant father. She shared during the interviews that her father left when she had seven, but he is always pressuring her to not have a boyfriend and to behave in a certain way: "My dad tells me that I should not have boyfriend until I'm in the age of getting married. He's always telling me what to do and his family is always meddling in my life and telling him stories and he always fights with me and mistreat me. He believes I am not smart enough to understand anything. I am really tired and want to grow old and leave the house and his rules. Even if he's abroad, he controls me and my mom".

While the testimony of Hugo, a fifteen-year-old serves as an example of neglecting parenting style. He stated about his father: "He never asks how I do at school or if I have a girlfriend (…) He doesn't know and doesn't care to know anything about me, we're more like strangers". Or the case of Luke, a sixteen-year-old with a pregnant girlfriend who misses the advice and guidance from a male figure, but has a father that shows a neglecting permissive parenting style: "Sometimes I do need a father figure that can give me man-to-man advice, especially now that my girlfriend is pregnant (…) truth is I cannot count on him".

Effects of the separation of parents on their families

A body from the field of transnational families has shown that parent-child separation can have negative consequences for the well-being of left behind children (Boccagni, 2012; Parreñas, 2008). The migration of a man or a woman has different implications for the children who stay in the home country (Emilio, 2007). Fresnoza (2014) argues that the adjustments in children's care in the transnational families depends on who is the person who migrated. When the person who migrates is the mother, regularly the father delegate's children care to other family members, usually other women in the family; but the absence is felt by children in a more acute manner causing them psychological and emotional troubles due to her absence.

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In case of the migrant being the father (which is the case in which this investigation is focused), habitually the mother assumes the household functions, the care of the children and general responsibility. For children who are separated from their parents the effects may be varied (depressive symptoms, indifference, stress, anxiety, frustration and behavioral problems, lower academic scores than classmates) depending on several factors such as the age at separation, the quality of the relationship prior and the frequency of contact. Some effects of the separation in children were obtained from questions that are displayed in figures 4-6.
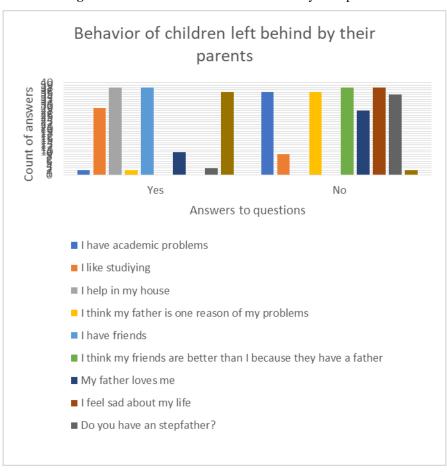
Figure 4: Behaviour of children left behind by their parents

Figure 4 shows that children within the sample did not experiment significative behaviour problems despite of growing up physically distant from their parents. The results displayed in Figure 4 were obtained after analysing answers from children and their relatives. In some cases, the children expressed sadness due to the separation from their parents, although particularly

children who did not have contact with them or who did not have good father-child relationships said they did not need them or did not want to live together again.

• "I miss having his constant support. I wish I could live with him again and have his constant support. The most beautiful memory I have of him is when we were building our house and he was there helping us." (Bryan, male, 16 years old, Sígsig, personal interview, May 18, 2015)

• "I surely need my father living with me. I miss him. I remember when we played football together. He was very good at it" (Kevin, male, 18 years old, Biblián, personal interview, July 20, 2015)

• "I don't miss my father. To be honest, having my mother is enough. We no longer have problems. We are fine. I haven`t good memories with him" (Daniel, male, 19 years old, Sígsig, personal interview, March 25, 2015)

• "I don't miss my father. He left a long time ago and I don't know what it's like to have a father" (Gerardo, male, 15 years old, Calderón, personal interview, October 4, 2015)

From the interviews, it became clear that the gender had an important role in how children perceived father-child separation. Hence, although the literature stresses that the parents' role is seen as peripheral (Parreñas, 2005), it was noted that emotional care work was also expected from the physically-absent parents. In particular, the boys expressed that the caregiver was sometimes an incomplete substitute for the emotional and disciplinary figure that was requested from the father.

• "Sometimes I do need a father figure that can give me man-to-man advice, especially now that my girlfriend is pregnant" (Bryan, male, 16 years old, Sígsig, personal interview, May 10, 2015)

When children become adolescents, the mother becomes a model of woman's role and the father in a model of man's role (Gežová, 2015) and for that reason the girls were able to handle the separation from their parents better.

• "It does not make me that unhappy to know that my father is there, because I have my mother here by my side. She is always looking for me" (Samantha, female, 13 years old, Sígsig, personal interview, May 19, 2015)

An interesting but expected result was that children whose parents have started a new family felt sad or even angry because the parents did not spend more time or resources with them. In families in which only one parent migrates, reality changes resulting in family breakdown, marital dissolution and abandonment of children by parents (García, 2008; Pedone, 2006). From 38 parents analyzed 23 of them started a new family, these parents also maintain less communication with its families in Ecuador.

•   "When I think that I have stepbrothers and that they live with my father, I get angry. My father introduced me to my stepbrothers through Facebook, they go to good schools and take courses and have opportunities that I have not had" (Hugo, male, 14 years old, Sígsig, personal interview, May 20, 2015)
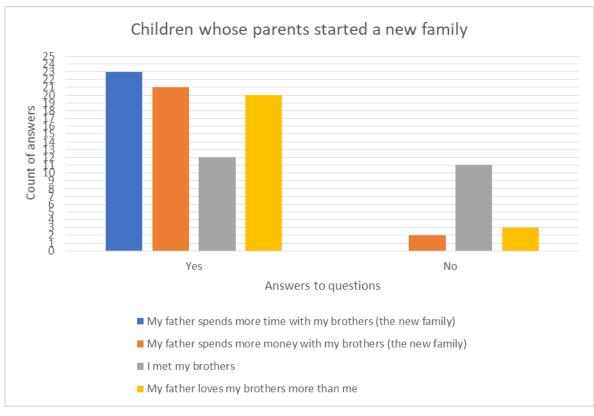
Figure 5: Children whose parents started a new family

Source: Author, 2020

In some cases, the migrant parents start new families in destination countries affecting to their left behind family. The answers from the children whose parents started new families indicate that some of them feel less warmth and attention in comparison with the new brothers.
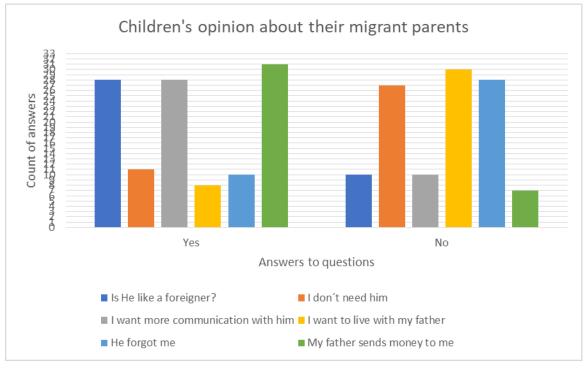
Figure 6: Children's opinion about their migrant parents

Source: Author, 2020

Figure 6 shows some of the answers about the relation between the parents and the children. Basically, children that were left behind by their parents and lost contact answered that they don´t need them in a major rate. Furthermore, children whose maintain more contact with their parents answered they wished to have more communication or even to live with their parents.

Also is an important element of consideration for a good children-father relationship, the status of the father-mother relationship within each transnational family. The literature indicates that if the child's biological mother is married to the migrant father, she is more likely to facilitate the relationship between the migrant father and his children than if this is not the case (Nobles, 2011). Similarly, parents who are divorced or separated are less likely to be involved with their children back home than parents who are in a relationship or married to the biological mother (Dreby, 2006; Nobles, 2011). As a result, they usually have less and more problematic contact with their children in the country of origin. In fact, ensuring a better future for their children was

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not the main reason for the migration and separation of parents from their children, but rather to escape from problematic situations at home, according to the ethnographic research carried out for 9 months.

Most of the children analyzed maintain contact with their parents. The contact depends on several reasons but once the children got older, usually the frequency of contact decreased or stopped altogether. Data analysis from interviews revealed that the communication father-child was more fluent and periodic when the father did not start a new family or had other children. It was common to have the general opinion shared by children of their parents as foreigners, because they did not have treasured memories with them. The parents also send more remmittances to their families according to the relationship established with their children. Sent remmittances are used mainly to pay studies, food, housing, etc. Children whose parents lost contact with them and their mothers usually showed more emotional affectation, although in some cases they tried to reestablish communication again.

Conclusions

According to the conducted study, authoritarian was the most common parenting style among immigrant parents from Sígsig, Biblián and Calderón. There were also several instances that showed the presence of neglecting and even permissive parenting styles for migrating parents within the sample.

The interviews to the children revealed the following aspects: most of students did not miss their parents because they did not have memories about their childhood with the father, some of the students had contact with their parents through social networks or telephone but thought about their parents as foreigners. The majority of interviewees expressed that they wanted their parents to be present in their lives. Answers to questions about behavior, academic results and relationships with other persons did not point to severe problems for the sample, more than emotional affectation and nostalgia.

Within our study group, factors that evidenced to shape the separation experience were the age at separation and the quality of parenting prior and after separation; the ability of the absent parent to provide financially, keep regular contact and provide emotional care; the length of the separation; the parents' marital status and perceived quality of relationship between them. It was

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noted that the effects according to the child's age at separation were varied, depending on the frequency and the perceived quality of relationship that the children reported to have with the physically-absent father before separation. The parents that had bad relationships with the mother hardly made an effort to keep regular contact with their children, either through phone calls or by providing financially, and this became more prominent as the separation lengthened. Different experiences also exist with regard to boys and girls: for boys, the father-child separation had more significant effects as they were often looking for a father figure that they could use as a role-model to follow and a friend who understood them from the male point of view. In this sense, boys showed more emotional affectation from neglecting and permissive parenting styles; while girls showed emotional affectation in the cases where their parents were authoritative figures. Even though the sample showed emotional affectation and the frequent wanting of having a 'normal family' with better relational dynamics, the questionnaires showed that they were able to adapt and function well, reporting to have friends and do well at school.

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