

The Impact of Migration on Family Life

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Migration clearly has an impact on family life --- and in the few minutes I have today, I just want to briefly mention a few of these impacts. My orientation is mainly to the impact of migration on immigrant families in the US, but the points I make have relevance elsewhere as well.

One thing we know is that family patterns change when people move to another country --- how this happens is shaped by the cultural beliefs and practices they bring with them but also by economic, legal, social, and cultural forces in their new environment.

We know, for example, that it's common for women's position in the family to improve in some ways with migration --- if they have more opportunity to work outside the home and to bring in higher wages than they did in the country of origin. These improvements are not inevitable -- migrant women still face many difficulties. Migration may in fact add to women's burdens. But in many groups in the US it's been reported that their households become less patriarchal and more egalitarian when migrant women gain access to social and economic resources that were previously beyond their reach.

Migration also affects intergenerational relations in the family. It's often a story of conflict: children, brought up in a new social and cultural world, often feel

constrained by their parents' old world practices and values. I've written a book, *Across Generations*, that documents this for a variety of groups in the United States. Conflicts between immigrant parents and American-born and raised children arise over a variety of issues: over discipline, over freedom to date and hang out with friends, over parental pressure to marry within the ethnic group (and, in groups with arranged marriage, to marry a particular person), over intense parental expectations for children's educational and occupational success. It's too strong to say, though, that the family is a battlefield between the generations: tensions do often develop, but children also feel deep affection and loyalty, and ties of obligation, to their parents.

Migration also often leads to transnational families ---something that is receiving more and more attention in the academic literature. In the US, increasing number of mothers and fathers who come to the United States leave children behind --- in many cases owing to legal restrictions so that not all family members can legally migrate together. A number of studies investigate the repercussions of such family separation --- resentments felt by the children whose parents have gone off to work in the US, feelings of loss and guilt experienced by migrant parents, as well as the impact of such separations on remittances and educational careers of children. Also, there is what happens when children are reunited with parents in US --- as they have to readjust and live together after separations that may have lasted years and when children have been brought up by grandparents and other kin in country of origin. It all sounds very bleak, but studies are showing that families are amazingly flexible in responding to changes, and family

members typically remain deeply committed to each other despite years of having lived apart.