

Exploring the inter-generational transmission of human wellbeing: The case of Latin American migrant mothers and their daughters in London, UK.

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Introduction

This study examined the inter-generational transmission of human wellbeing amongst Latin American mothers and their daughters based in deprived areas of London. It comprised a total of 50 semi-structured interviews and a set of focus groups and was financed by the University of East London. The objective of this research was: (i) To go beyond study of material endowments to explore the wider psychosocial aspects of wellbeing (norms, values, attitudes and behaviours) and how these are transferred inter-generationally; (ii) To examine the gendered nature of these transfers; (iii) To explore the processes through which this occurs in the context of international migration; (iii) To reveal the factors that enhance intergenerational transfer of human wellbeing using the case of Latin American migrant mothers and their daughters in the UK. The research questions included: (i) What norms, values, behaviours and beliefs are transferred?; (ii) How are they transmitted inter-generationally from mothers to daughters?; and (iii) How does this take place over the life course (during childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle age and beyond)?

Preliminary analysis of interview transcripts reveals several important findings. Firstly, many daughters had interrupted their formal education as part of the international migration process. Formal education was acquired variously in Latin America, Spain and the UK but often only partially completed in each country curtailing progression. Language difficulties (coupled with lack of understanding of the UK school system by parents) compounded this problem with daughters at school in the UK being encouraged into subjects with less focus on formal writing such as beauty therapy. Often this meant that children and adolescents were missing the opportunity to gain qualifications needed to be fast-tracked into more highly skilled or lucrative employment or post 16 education options including university.

The evidence also suggested that daughters were subject to a range of psychosocial pressures, undermining children and teenagers' ability to channel their efforts into formal education. Lack of positive affective ties and networks of love, support and care were important here. Many daughters spoke of the extent of the solitude experienced and the lack of trust they felt with their mothers, fathers and step-parents. Typical responses included: "there are things that I can't tell her [my mother] that build up inside me". In the case of mothers and daughters specifically, long periods of separation (with mothers working in the host country navigating bureaucracies to claim legal entitlements whilst daughters are raised in Latin America), often led to feelings of estrangement on both sides. Once daughters had joined their mothers in the UK, heavy workloads assumed by their migrant mothers meant that this physical distance is maintained and regular contact with daughters often lacking, reinforcing earlier difficulties in bonding. Additionally, many mothers had remarried in Spain or the UK since migrating (due in part to gendered material vulnerabilities and acute loneliness) and were subsequently managing difficult relationships/separations, often witnessed at close range by daughters due to cramped living conditions. As part of this, some daughters felt that their mothers were overly emotionally reliant on them (due to mothers' relationship breakdowns with spouses/partners) and also feared them

becoming a financial burden later. In the case of stepfathers, though there were cases of positive attachment between stepfathers and stepdaughters, this was generally lacking. Given the extent of the difficulties they face, daughters often found release from these pressures in London nightlife, though were mindful of the very real risks of friends “leading them astray”. Many daughters suggested that if they were themselves to have daughters in the future one key value they intended to transmit was related to “the importance of choosing your friends”. Given the extent of the pressures they face related including (i) interruptions in formal education due to international migration complicating their socialization and progression through school; (ii) poor relationships with mothers and step parents ; (iii) natural curiosity/desire for independence linked to their life stage as adolescents, many daughters rebelled strongly from their parents seeking refuge in male partners from other relatively deprived population groups living in London. Some became pregnant curtailing opportunities for educational progression due to childcare responsibilities and lack of social provision for childcare; or trapped in dysfunctional relationships, also affecting their psychosocial wellbeing and life chances over the long-term.

This preliminary evidence suggests 5 areas that are particularly important.

1. Keeping Daughters in post 16 Education
2. Intermediate and advanced English language Learning to support skills acquisition to fast track them into post 16 education/ skilled employment.
3. Lobbying for funding for and access to adult education to be offered in more flexible ways to support opportunities for entry into skilled employment.
4. Workshops with daughters aimed at: (i) enhancing their self esteem; (ii) fostering better relationships with mothers and stepparents; (iii) strategies for developing positive relationships with friends and partners (iv) skills development in information gathering for example at local libraries to maximize opportunities and life chances.
5. Workshops with mothers (i) to encourage better understanding of the UK school system and what is needed for acquisition of formal qualifications for skilled employment; (ii) to facilitate their navigation of UK institutions including local libraries to become better at seizing opportunities available within and outside school to promote their daughters wellbeing outcomes and life chances; (iii) to promote positive parenting styles to help them develop closer relationships with their daughters; (iv) strategies for preserving good contact with/ protection of their daughters whilst at work and exposure to dysfunctional relationships; (v) strategies for managing their daughters need for independence whilst keeping them on track and in school.