

**The Impact of Transnational Migration and Remittances  
on Quality-of-Life in Chalchihuites, Zacatecas**

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## **The Impact of Transnational Migration and Remittances on Quality-of-Life in Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, Mexico**

### **Introduction**

In 1942 the bilaterally approved Bracero Program invited citizens from Mexico the opportunity to supplement the diminished U.S. workforce. Over the next 22 years an estimated five million *braceros* (workers) entered the U.S. under legal contracts and an equal number of Mexican laborers came illegally to fill vacant jobs in the agriculture and railroad industries (del Pinal and Singer 1997; Martin and Midgley 2006). By most accounts this program unwittingly ushered in the beginning of large scale illegal immigration. Equally significant, however, is that since the program's inception a considerable remittance stream between the two countries has developed.

With an estimated 20 million Mexican-born people living in the U.S. (both legally and illegally) (Migration Information Source 2005; Martin and Midgley 2006; The Economist 2007), the flow of remittance money to Mexico has increased dramatically over the past decade (Figure 1). Currently, remittances rank second behind Petroleum as the leading source of foreign currency in Mexico (The Economist 2005). In 2005, Mexicans sent just over US\$20 billion home and a year later the amount slightly exceeded US\$23 billion (Bank of Mexico 2007). This ranks Mexico as the second

largest recipient of remittances in the world after India and ahead of China (World Bank 2006).

Since the beginning of mass emigration from Mexico to the U.S., five states in Mexico's central highlands have traditionally sent a disproportionate number of migrants to the U.S.: Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas (Figure 2). Households in these five states have also received an overwhelming share of the total remittances sent to Mexico. In recent years, however, U.S. immigrants from Mexico have originated from all stretches of the country. Today, 18% of all adults in Mexico receive remittances (Suro 2003; Gonzalez Amador 2005) and the average amount sent home on a monthly basis has remained constant over the past decade at about US\$335 (Figure 1) (Bank of Mexico 2007).

The past five years have witnessed an increasing number of studies sponsored by such international organizations as the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Multilateral Investment Fund seeking to better understand the economic impact that remittances are having on growth and development for various countries. Conclusions reached by these reports suggest that remittances: 1) are an important source of foreign currency, 2) provide five times more money to citizens in need of development assistance than international aid (Williams 2006), and 3) effectively alleviate extreme poverty (IADB 2006). Yet for all their benefits, remittances lead to surprisingly little economic development or long-term investment and growth (Fajnzylber and Lopez 2006).

Significantly fewer studies have considered the affect of transnational migration

and remittances at the household level. Most of this work that has reached print has taken one of two main approaches (McKenzie 2006). The most common has been to identify who receives the money and how it is used. With a large percentage of men working in the U.S. and absent from village life, these studies have found that most of the money is sent to women, especially wives and mothers (Suro 2003; Bank of Mexico 2005). Moreover, 85% of remittances sent home to Mexico are used to meet basic household needs and everyday living expenses, including education and health care (Figure 3) (Suro 2003). Sadly, less than 10% of the money is used for land investment, construction costs, or business development (IADB 2004). The three principle reasons why so little money is invested in land or business development are: 1) little money is left over after bills and household expenses are paid, 2) rural households tend to lack skills needed for such economic development, and 3) Mexico's banking infrastructure has not adequately provided investment opportunities to the country's rural, lesser affluent households (Bank of Mexico 2005; Massey 2005).

The second major approach to examining the impact of transnational migration and remittances at the household level compares families that receive remittances with those that do not. These studies typically look at the extent of poverty, level of education, health care among children, and business investment. The overall conclusion is that remittances help: 1) even out excessive household income fluctuations, 2) improve the overall level of education and health within the family, and 3) mitigate against abject poverty among households (Jones 1998; Lizarzaburu 2004).

The research highlighted above provides classic examples of quantitative

approaches to understanding what affect transnational migration and remittances have at both the country and household levels. Few studies, however, have field tested or ground-truthed these conclusions using a qualitative approach *vis-a-vis* talking with local residents about how their lives are being impacted. Peggy Levitt (1998) provides one such rare glimpse in her study of *social remittances* (the ideas, behaviors, identities and social capital that are carried home with migrants). Her work examines flows in both directions between Boston, Massachusetts and Miraflores, Dominican Republic.

Despite the fact that Mexico is both the leading emigrant sending and top remittance receiving country in the Western Hemisphere, there are a dearth of studies that examine the impact the streams of people and money are having on rural village culture within the country (Valdez 2006). Furthermore, the literature is equally silent on how the lives of women in rural Mexico are being affected by these forces. The principle aim of this paper is to help fill the gap by sharing the results of my fieldwork conducted in the village of Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, Mexico. I organize my results by identifying three different types of transnational migrants and explore how they and the dollars being send home are impacting the quality-of-life of women in the village.

### **Study Area and Methods**

The town of Chalchihuites is situated in the northwestern part of the state of Zacatecas approximately 225 kilometers (140 miles) north of the capital city (Figure 4). According to the 2000 census, Chalchihuites has a population of 3,999 people (INEGI

2000). The town has seen a substantial share of its population (ca. 45%) emigrate to the U.S. for employment reasons. That percentage is most likely much higher due to incomplete data collection by the government and the cyclical nature of the migration process. The most popular U.S. destination for Chalchihuites emigrants is the greater Vail-Beaver Creek-Avon area in western Colorado.

In 2006, Chalchihuites had eight money transfer businesses with the most popular being Western Union, and Prodira. A conversation with Betty Tavizon (2006) at Prodira revealed that an average of US\$1,000 pass through the building each day into the hands of relatives still living in Chalchihuites. During the month of December, however, the average amount increases to US\$3,000 per day. Consistent with results reported at the national level, the majority of the recipients who receive money in Chalchihuites are women. Even to a casual observer who walks down any street in town one sees the extent to which transnational migration and remittances are impacting village life. House after house have at least one family member who is gone from the town. This reminds me of stories about all the men in the U.S. who left their hometowns during World War II.

Chalchihuites was selected for analysis for three major reasons. First, the village is located in one of the leading “sending” states for migrants from Mexico and a leading receiver state for remittance money (Jones 1998; IADB 2004). The conclusions gleaned about quality-of-life in Chalchihuites should, therefore, prove applicable to other rural villages in Mexico with high emigration and remittance receiving rates. Second, the pueblo is small enough to be manageable in size, yet it serves as the seat of

government for the *municipio* (county). Consequently, demographic and economic data are more readily available in Chalchihuites than might be for other rural villages. Third, very few scholars have turned their attention to the impact that transnational migration and the flow of remittances are having on this village. As a result, there are fewer pre-established conclusions or prejudices that can influence my outcomes. Moreover, because the village has not been the subject of intense previous research, local residents have not been inundated with questions about their family history and financial situation. Therefore, they tend to be less guarded and more forthcoming with valuable information.

With the goal of understanding changes in quality-of-life for women in a rural Mexican village, I spent the better part of the summer 2006 collecting background information from published data and secondary literature as well as conducting personal field work in Chalchihuites. Data collected for this paper originated primarily from an analysis of the built environment (village material culture) and interaction with local residents. I conducted open-ended, guided interviews with key community leaders (e.g. government officials, local priest, social workers, health officials, business persons) and long-time village residents. The majority of my primary data, however, originated from one-on-one conversations as well as focus group discussions with women in the village. These lengthy interactions (sometimes two hours or more) focused on changes in their lives as a result of transnational migration and remittances. I documented my findings with detailed, daily field notes and over 775 digital photos.

## Background Discussion

The hearth of Mexican emigration has traditionally rested in a handful of states in the country's central highlands. Therefore the impact that emigration and the flow of remittances had in Mexico was very concentrated. In recent decades, however, the place of origin for Mexican emigrants has become more diffuse. Soon after the turn of the twenty-first century, people from every state in the country started coming to the U.S. and today over 90% of all *municipios* in Mexico have at least one household with international migration experience (Villasenor and Moreno-Mena 2006). Even some of the formerly poorer states (e.g. Chiapas, Guerrerro, Oaxaca, Veracruz) where families have commonly had limited financial resources to cover the costs of emigration are now sending substantial numbers of people abroad for employment reasons (Figure 2).

At the same time the distribution of remittance money within Mexico has also changed in recent years. The states of Michoacan, Guanajuato, and Jalisco still lead in overall monies received, but the State of Mexico and the Federal District are also now listed among the leading receiving states (Table 1) (Bank of Mexico 2007).

In an attempt to advance our understanding of the impact that transnational migration and remittances are having on communities in Mexico, sociologist Douglas Massey and geographer Richard Jones have provided two seminal works that spearhead this thrust in research. In 1994 Douglas Massey, Luin Goldring, and Jorge Durand found that the most important consideration to understanding the impact of transnational migration on village life is the *migration prevalence ratio* (the proportion of

the population within a village that has emigrated). Massey et al. then compared prevalence ratios between towns to identify five different stages based on the percentage of villagers absent. Their work concludes by indicating that towns with low migration prevalence ratios are characterized by having a small percentage of adults who have emigrated to the U.S., most (ca. 93%) of the migrants are male, and on average they spend less than one year in the U.S. (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994). At the other end of the migration ratio continuum are villages that have become fully immersed in the emigration process. A much higher percentage (ca. 40% or higher) of adults have gone to the U.S. (roughly 80% of males and 30% of females) and the average length of time spent abroad is approximately seven years (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994). Clearly, villages with high migration prevalence ratios have seen a greater cross section of their population emigrate to the U.S., including women.

Somewhat imbedded within the text the authors note, almost in passing, that within villages there are different types of migrants whose goals and ambitions differ depending on household circumstances. For most migrants, the decision to emigrate is based largely on personal, family, or household conditions that are mainly economic in nature. According to Massey et al. (2002), the act of emigrating is a logical economic response to fulfill particular financial needs or wants. Massey et al. (1994) identify two types of migrants. The first group are the “target earners” who are driven to emigrate to the U.S. to meet some particular financial goal or earn a set amount of money. The other group mentioned by Massey et al. are those who engage in *persistent migration*.

They explain that: “[A]s migrants earn high wages and alter their consumption patterns, they adopt new lifestyles and local economic pursuits become less attractive” (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994: 1498).

In 1998 Richard Jones provided a follow-up to the work by Massey et al. (1994). His research further emphasizes the importance that *stage of migration* plays in understanding the entire process. Using data from 17 towns in central and southern Zacatecas, he identifies three different community stages (Figure 5). In the *innovator stage* a village sees only a small fraction of its total population emigrate because “costs” are prohibitively high and limited information exists about opportunities and conditions in the U.S. Therefore, in this stage only households with above average income can afford to overcome these obstacles and send family members abroad. In classic chain migration fashion, as time passes information is shared throughout the community and the “costs” of emigrating decrease because new emigrants can easily find assistance at the destination. Thus, during the *early adopter stage* a wider swath of the population now sends family members to the U.S. Finally in the *late adopter stage* nearly every household sends family members to the U.S. and the economic impact of transnational migration and remittances is fairly ubiquitous.

Because of these two studies and numerous others (e.g. Conway and Cohen 1998; Delgado Wise and Rodriguez Ramirez 2001; Cohen 2002; Orozco 2002; Goldring 2004; Garcia Zamora 2005; Mora and Taylor 2006), our understanding of the economic impact that the flows of people and money are having on village life has expanded greatly. These works have increased our appreciation for: what motivates

people to emigrate to the U.S., who among the resident population is most likely to emigrate, and the economic and demographic differences between villages involved in the migration process.

Most importantly for this paper, however, is the fact that these studies have identified different stages that villages pass through. At the earliest stage only households with an above-average income can afford to send family members abroad. By comparison, villages at the middle and later stages in the process tend to send individuals from a wide cross section of households to the U.S. because the costs (both financial and social) have been reduced and abundant information is available about the migration process and how to find employment. Furthermore, in these later stages one sees a wider variety of individuals who possess differing motives for emigrating.

The drawback to these studies, however, is that they have primarily focused on demographic or economic variables. We still know little about the impact that transnational migration and remittances are having on village quality-of-life issues. Do the motives of migrants have differing impacts on the households from which they originate? Do these varying migrants affect the lives of women in different ways? In this paper I identify three major types of Mexican emigrants to the U.S. and discuss the impact each of them are having on the women left behind in the village of Chalchihutes.

## **Results**

The decision to emigrate to the U.S. for employment reasons is incredibly

difficult and involves much deliberation. Individuals and households must weigh a complex set of financial and personal factors when deciding the appropriate course of action. Financially, the most important considerations relate to “costs” including: 1) withdrawing from the domestic labor force, 2) the time and energy of literally migrating to the U.S., 3) the escalating price of hiring a *coyote* (guide) who facilitates crossing the border (ca. US\$1,500 to US\$2,500 per trip), and 4) living expenses that sap profits and erode the amount of money one is able to send home to family members. All of these costs are weighed against the potentially higher wages one might earn in the U.S.

Many personal considerations are combined with the array of financial factors including being separated from one’s family and friends for an extended period of time and the adjustments one must make while in the U.S. (e.g. working with strangers, sharing housing and meals with others). Having talked with numerous families who have had relatives migrate to the U.S., clearly, the decision is not taken lightly.

Household needs are a key determinant in explaining how long a person will tend to be absent from their family. Building upon ideas first mentioned by Douglas Massey et al. (1994), I have identified three categories of emigrants to the U.S. including: 1) *goal oriented migrants*, 2) *repeat migrants*, and 3) *permanent relocaters*. Each of these migrant types have a dramatic and noticeable influence on the quality-of-life within the households from which they originate. It is important to note, however, that the impacts I identify here are not discrete. In many cases, there are more similarities than differences in the affect these three types of migrants have on their families. For organizational purposes, however, I have tried to identify those responses that are more

pronounced for each type of migrant.

### **Goal Oriented Migrants**

A majority of goal oriented migrants are younger than average and commonly single. Their objective in migrating to the U.S. is to earn enough money to buy durable goods (especially a large, new pickup truck such as a Ford F-250 Lobo, Chevrolet Silverado, Toyota Tundra, or Nissan Titan). Because all of these purchases can be quite expensive (e.g. a new truck lists for well over US\$25,000), the young men are compelled to work a substantial length of time in the U.S. in order to save enough money to make the purchase.

In the process they send some money back to family members (primarily mothers or, if married, wives) because they feel at least a minimal amount of obligation to help their families financially. For the most part, however, the young men are focused only on their individual goals and wants. When these young, *goal oriented migrants* return home during the holiday season they appear “successful” displaying their newly acquired purchases. But, in the long run, they have very little to show for their time and effort working in the U.S.

For married men in this category, their main objective is to earn enough money to reach some type of financial goal. They may purchase new equipment and construction supplies to add on to their house, pay off a specific debt they have incurred, or buy land or a set of tools that will further them in their careers and ensure a higher level of financial stability. For both young men and older husbands, once they have earned

enough money to reach their goal they return to Mexico feeling generally satisfied.

Females who are partnered with *goal oriented migrants* undergo considerable stress and uncertainty. Because this tends to be the first time that many of the men have left the village, the women (girlfriends or young wives) have little or no prior experience being left alone at home (sometimes with young children). Moreover, most of these women are left uninformed as to how long the men will be gone, if they will return for the holiday season, or how much money they will be sending home to support them and the family.

Since most *goal oriented migrants* are young, single men, they tend to waste away their free time in the U.S. sightseeing, and spending their hard-earned money on clothing, jewelry, and various forms of entertainment. They appear focused more on enjoying the freedom and opportunities that come with earning “good money” in the U.S. than on their families back home. As a result of so many young, single men being absent from the village, there are fewer prospects for boyfriends for the numerous young, single women left in town. This leads to a different type of stress and emotional uncertainty for the young women including feelings of loneliness and despair. In too many cases this has led to increased consumption of addictive substances or behavior problems. According to Claudia Serrato, director for the Institute for Women in Chalchihuites, the number of girls in town who have been apprehended by the police for unlawful behavior has increased in recent years (Serrato 2006).

Yet another problem these young women face is that when the young men return to the villages after having “sown their oats”, they bring back sexually transmitted

diseases (STD). The Institute for Women has seen a significant increase in the number of young women in town infected with STD. As a result they have begun offering free health screenings as well as STD education classes for females. In general, women who are partnered with a *goal oriented migrant*, live a life full of uncertainties and stress.

### **Repeat Migrants**

*Goal oriented migrants* who had a favorable experience in the U.S., met their financial goal, and returned home successful are more likely to emigrate to the U.S. again in the near future. In fact, evidence suggests that “once a man has migrated to the United States, the odds are extremely high that he will migrate again” (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994:1498). When the decision is made to return to the U.S. on a regular basis they become members of the second type of migrant I call *repeat migrants*. These men have had a taste of the money that can be earned by working in the U.S. and appreciate the quality-of-life and financial opportunities that accompany the higher income levels than can typically be earned in rural Mexico.

*Repeat migrants* tend to be older and at a later stage in the life-cycle process than the typical *goal oriented migrant*. More often they are also married with children. These men have decided that having a home and family in Mexico is most desirable, but their main source of income is derived from working for extended periods of time in the U.S. They commonly work for about ten months each year in the U.S. and return home during the festival and holiday season of late November and December.

While in the U.S. it is common for *repeat migrants* to share housing with

numerous other people (some family members, some not), live frugally, and send as much money home each month as their incomes and expenses allow. The men lament being separated from their wives and families for extended periods of time, but they rationalize returning to the U.S. because wages far exceed those in Mexico (ca. US\$900/month in U.S. versus ca. US\$200/month in Mexico) (IADB 2006; Rosalez Perez 2006). By having a steady, reliable source of income in the U.S. they and their family can enjoy a comfortable quality-of-life that enables them to go home during “vacation time” and enjoy the fruits of their labor. These men are quintessential examples of transnational citizens.

On average, these men tend to make purchases that have farther-reaching implications. They buy materials that allow them to make significant additions to an existing home or build a new home from the ground up. In a few cases, the *repeat migrants* have worked in the U.S. long enough and saved their earnings to invest in a new business (e.g. construction company, grocery store, ranching operation). Unfortunately, my research supports the conclusion that this tends to be the exception rather than the rule.

The women who are married to *repeat migrants* tend to spend longer periods of time separated from their spouse. The overwhelming response I heard from these women is the deep feelings of resentment and hatred toward being left alone and being depressed for so much of the year. As time passes and the flow of money arrives regularly, they eventually resign themselves to the fact that this condition of separation will likely last for the foreseeable future and make adjustments accordingly. Their lives

become fairly routine, relatively predictable, and generally stable. They spend a lot of time with extended family and friends. Many women have told me, however, that even though the remittance money provides a comfortable, stable quality-of-life, they simply would prefer to have their husbands back at home with them.

The most dramatic adjustment that women who are married to *repeat migrants* are forced to make centers on gender roles and domestic responsibilities. When the husband is away for long periods of time, not only are the wives responsible for their traditional female gender roles of cooking, cleaning, and caring for the family and house, but now they are burdened with many of the duties and responsibilities once held by the husband/father. For the first time in many cases, these women are now tasked with monitoring family finances (e.g. paying bills, covering educational expenses, paying for groceries and household supplies) as well as raising and disciplining the children alone. This can be particularly difficult and trying when a woman attempts to impress upon her taller, stronger, teenaged sons what is proper behavior for a young man. In other words, the wife is forced to become both the “woman/mother” and the “man/father” of the household.

For women who are married to a caring husband who treats them with respect and equality, the flow of remittance money can arrive on a regular schedule and becomes a dependable source of income for the family. In situations where the husband and wife are working as a team, the woman also tends to purchase many of the materials and supplies needed to add-on to, or build the family home. In some cases, the wife is even strapped with hiring a subcontractor to do some of the more

laborious work required. The husband continues to send money home to pay for the construction costs, but the wife is responsible for overseeing that the work gets done properly.

When the men return during vacation, the women assume their traditional gender roles and most express feelings of relief and contentment. This situation quickly changes when the husbands' vacation ends and they return to the U.S. Many women express frustration at the tide of emotions they experience over the course of a year. The emotional roller coaster is only made worse when a woman makes a trip to the U.S. to visit her absent husband. In these cases the wife is torn between the happiness of being with her spouse and the concern and guilt of not being with their children back home.

In too many cases, many wives who have been left at home for long periods of time are so full of loneliness and depression that they turn to alcohol and narcotics to dull their sorrow and misery. A growing concern in Chalchihuites is the increasing number of women who have resorted to alcohol and cocaine to deal with the unpleasantness in their lives (Serrato 2006). Sadly, this course of action only contributes to the downward cycle of despair and depression. By comparison, other women have set up social support groups where they can share common concerns and brainstorm solutions to the problems related to the absence of their husbands. This has the potential of being very helpful. However, when some husbands return home and discover their wife gossiping about them and finding solutions through the assistance of other women in the village, many have become upset leading to a severe breakdown in

the relationship.

### **Permanent Relocaters**

I refer to the third group of men emigrating to the U.S. as the *permanent relocaters*. These men, like the *repeat migrants*, have worked for a lengthy period of time in the U.S. and, given their limited education and skill level, the annual income they can earn “up north” is most likely greater than what they can garner in rural Mexico. More importantly, they have spent enough time in the U.S. interacting with “Americans” to the extent that they feel comfortable living within the larger host society. At some point these men decide that continuing to migrate back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. into the foreseeable future is no longer desirable; they make the decision to move permanently to the U.S.

Some of the *permanent relocaters* strive to bring their entire family (first their wife and then their children) to the U.S. The process of permanent relocation is facilitated if the couple, on a previous trip, had a baby born in the U.S. and is therefore a citizen. In other cases, the *permanent relocaters* simply decide that the ties they have to life in Mexico are not strong enough or important enough to them any longer and they sever those ties. The work of Roberto Suro (2003) supports this finding when he reports that the longer one lives abroad, the likelihood of sending money home to relatives decreases (Figure 6).

The females who share their lives with *permanent relocaters* live either very comfortable or miserable lives. For women whose husbands decide to bring the entire

family to the U.S., their quality-of-life improves appreciably. They are no longer separated from their spouse and feelings of loneliness, desperation, and uncertainty have been replaced with security and contentment. They may not have the ability to interact with U.S. culture as well as their husband, but at least they are no longer lonely and uncertain of the future.

Sadly, quite a few husbands from Chalchihuites have decided to relocate to the U.S. permanently and have simply abandoned their wives and family in favor of a new life “on the other side”. Over time the flow of remittances becomes intermittent at best and no word is given as to when the husband might return. Years can pass between visits. In the worst situations the husband quits sending money completely. Many women in this situation have discovered through others from the village that their husbands have found another girlfriend or wife in the U.S. and have decided unilaterally to end the relationship with their wife in Mexico.

Some women who have heard such rumors and anticipated this happening start looking into alternative sources of income. The Institute for Women in Chalchihuites offers business and career-training classes to help women find work as domestic cleaners for other households in town or show them how to market hand-made merchandise (e.g. embroidery, knitting, or clothing). For women in this situation the idea of having to find an alternative source of income is very distressful, especially if they have never worked outside the home before.

Women who have been abandoned are at the greatest risk of being financially destitute and have the most emotional concerns. They have significantly less income to

support themselves and, if their children no longer live at home, they have no built-in social support network within the family to care for them in older age. These women are at the most risk of turning to alcohol, drugs or even suicide.

## **Conclusion**

As long as the wage differential between the U.S. and Mexico continues and there is an ongoing demand for unskilled or semi-skilled workers who are willing to fill the jobs that “Americans” refuse, then Mexican citizens will continue to emigrate in large numbers. No effort made by the U.S. government’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency will stem that flow of people. Furthermore, those same workers will continue to send billions of dollars each year back to their families and relatives in Mexico.

It is commonly understood from previous work that most of the remittance money received will be used to meet basic household needs and everyday living expenses. Reports issued by international banking institutions or world economic development organizations thus far have focused solely on the financial impact and level of economic development stemming from transnational migration and remittances. Clearly, that information is vitally important to governments needing to understand how much money is being channeled into their countries and to what extent that money is being used for economic growth and development. Those same reports, however, provide an incomplete view of the overall situation; the flow of people and money is far more

complex.

By using the village of Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, Mexico as a case study, this paper provides a different perspective and helps fill some of the gaps in our understanding of how transnational migration and the flow of remittance money are influencing rural village life in Mexico. With the understanding that emigration from Mexico is largely an economic driven response to inadequate economic opportunities in one's home country (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002), this paper has shown how the motivations of three different types of migrants (*goal oriented migrants*, *repeat migrants*, and *permanent relocaters*) are impacting the quality-of-life for women.

The younger, largely self-absorbed *goal oriented migrants* are focused primarily on their own desire to acquire impressive merchandise and appear "successful". These men tend to spend most of their money enjoying their time abroad and remit little money home to support family members. By comparison, the older, married *goal oriented migrants* tend to have more noble financial aspirations that will likely benefit the entire family in the long run (e.g. paying off a debt, buying materials to add on to the house). For the women in their lives, there is considerable uncertainty, but they realize that the duration of time they are separated from their spouse is limited.

*Repeat migrants*, are men who have decided that working in the U.S. provides greater financial gain than can be earned in Mexico. Therefore, they rationalize spending most of the year working in the U.S. in order to return home during the holiday season and vacations to enjoy a better life. These men are true examples of people living in transnational or binational communities (Levitt 1998). The wives of *repeat*

*migrants* have a considerably more difficult time adjusting to being separated from their spouses. Feelings of loneliness and despair are compounded by having to assume added domestic and household responsibilities. With the husband absent they must now act as both the woman and the man of the home. For many women the steady, dependable flow of remittance money that provides a comfortable, stable quality-of-life, is less important than having their husbands at home with them.

The men who have decided to permanently relocate to the U.S. bring about the most dichotomous changes for women in the village. On the one hand, for wives who are partnered with a man who cares deeply for them, life can become fairly comfortable when they join their husband in the U.S. By comparison, there are many women whose husbands have abandoned them in favor of starting a new life with a new family in the U.S. Such men have severed all connections to their home village in Mexico and send no remittance money. Abandoned women are the most destitute, at the greatest risk of financial failure, and have the lowest quality-of-life, especially if they have no other source of income or social support network.

Based on my research in Chalchihuites, life in rural Mexico is still very male dominated. The quality-of-life for most women rests at the mercy of their husband. Many women lead a comfortable life, especially when their husbands regard them as more equal partners and treat them with respect. Unfortunately, all too often women are treated like dependents. They are commonly left uninformed about family finances and how to engage in business matters. Their husbands make nearly all of the decisions unilaterally. When such husbands leave to work in the U.S., these women

are left, for the most part, ill-equipped to handle most of the ongoing family matters once assumed to be the responsibility of the husband. Many women adjust and have varying degrees of success in dealing with such circumstances. Others, however, especially those whose husbands have abandoned them become the worst victims of transnational migration.

One of the most troubling developments related to transnational migration is that the quality-of-life for many women has recently taken a turn for the worse. With the stepped-up border patrol efforts by the U.S. government to stem the flow of illegal immigration, many men who would have otherwise returned to Mexico on a regular basis during vacation or the holiday season have now decided that the “cost” of returning home (both the risk of being caught, the price one must pay to the coyote, as well as lost wages) is too great. They simply are no longer making the journey home, but rather staying in the U.S. for longer periods of time. During the 2006 holiday season I repeatedly heard residents and business owners tell me how few men had returned for the annual celebrations. This has left many wives alone at home for an even longer period of time. I wonder if this is leading to more men making the transition from *repeat migrants* to *permanent relocaters*. Will this increase the rate of spousal abandonment? Time will tell exactly how the revised efforts of the U.S. government will affect the quality-of-life for women.

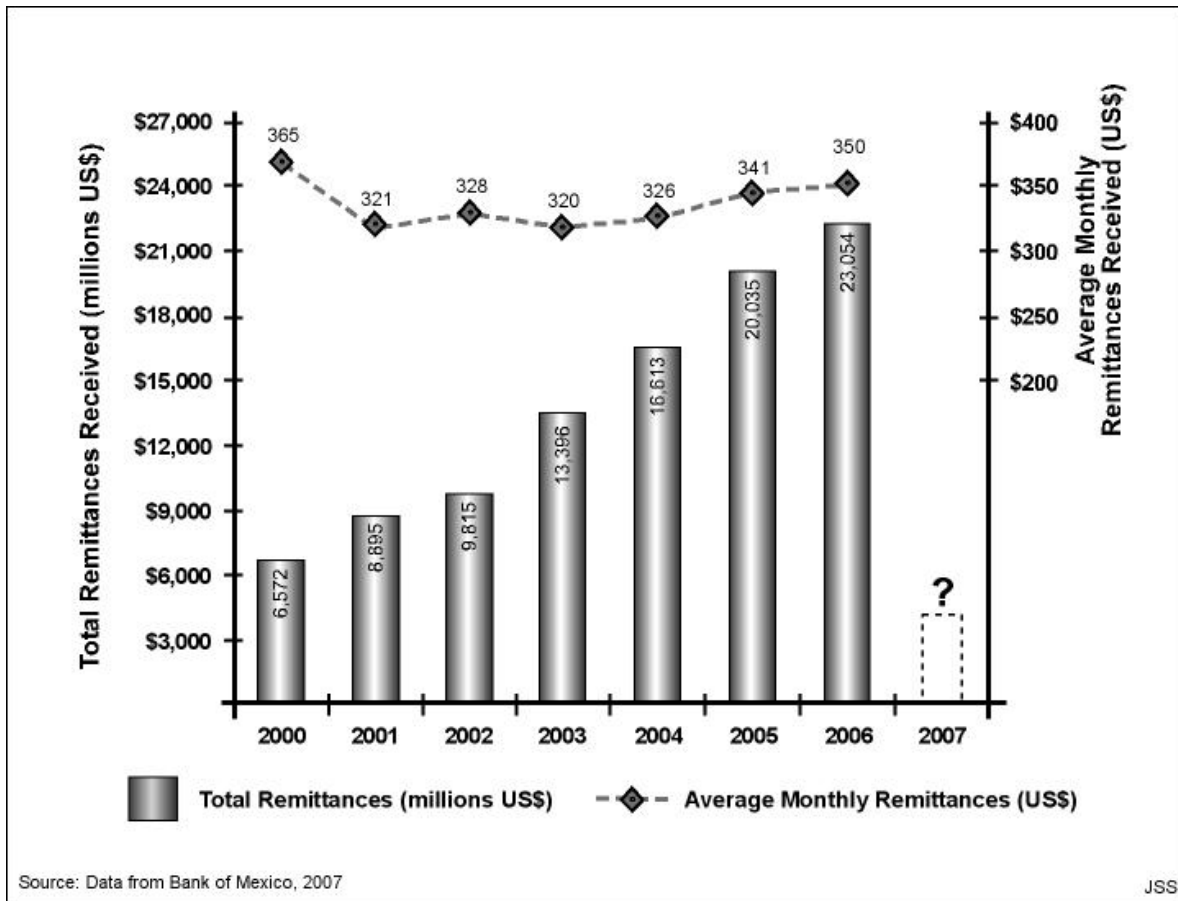


Figure 1. Total and average monthly amount of remittances to Mexico, 2000-2006.

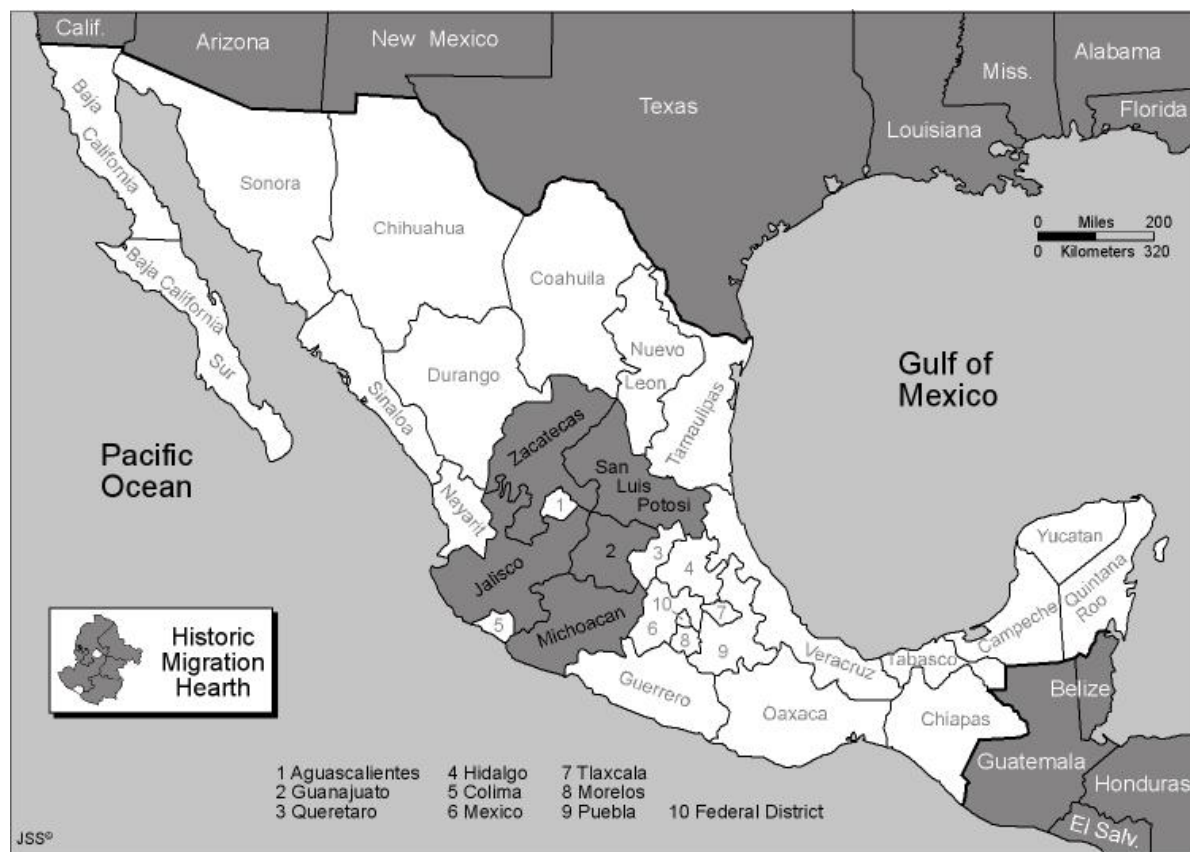


Figure 2. Historic Mexican Migration Hearth.

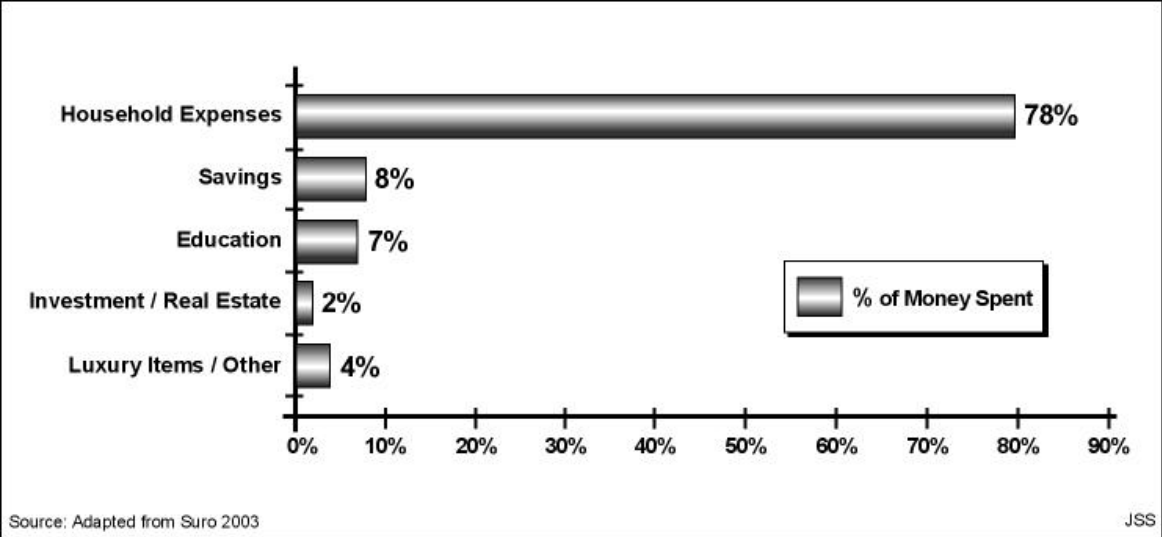


Figure 3. Where Mexican households spend remittance money, 2003.

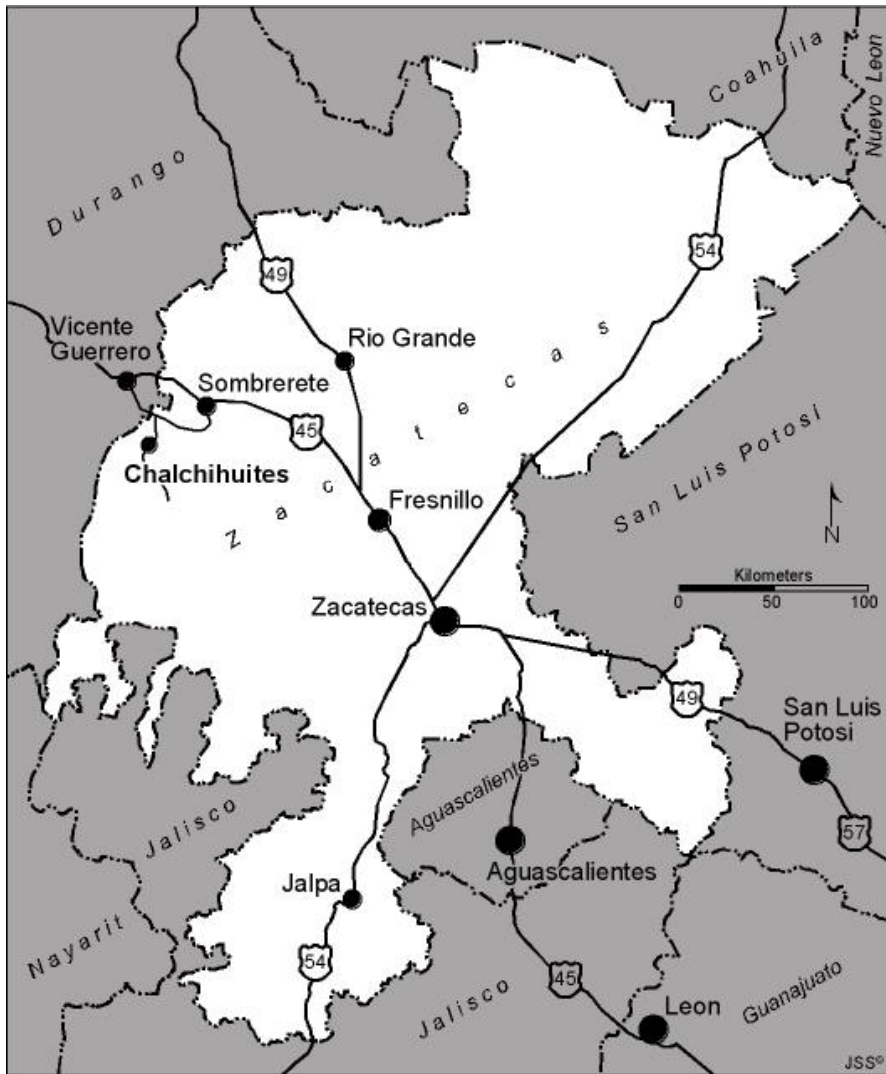


Figure 4. Map of the State of Zacatecas

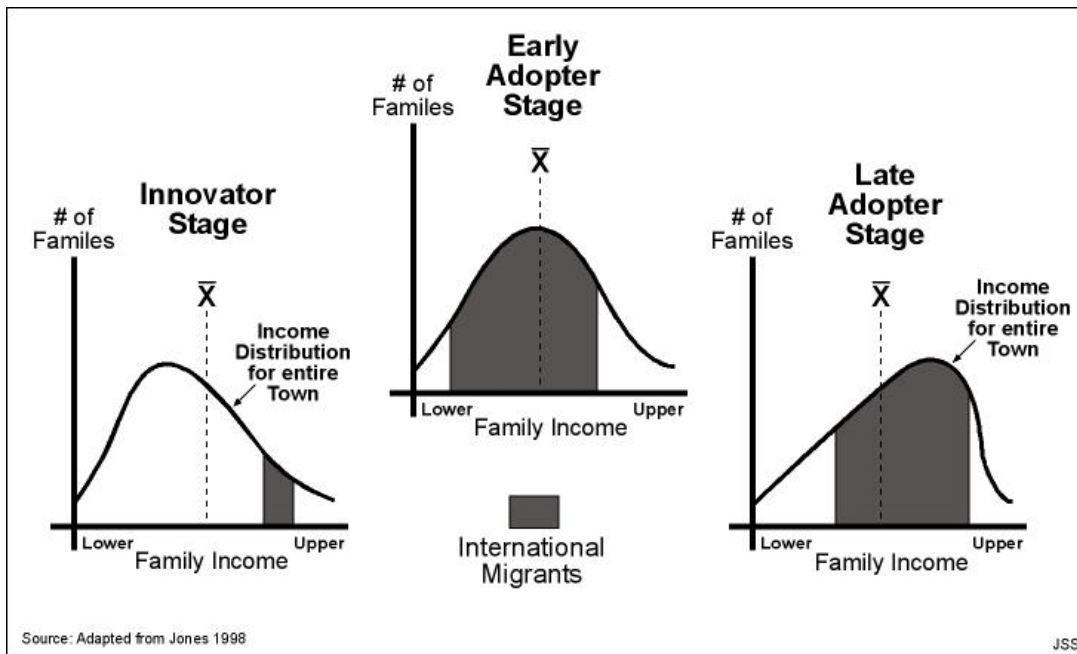


Figure 5. Prevalence of emigration and family income profile at differing stages of international migration.

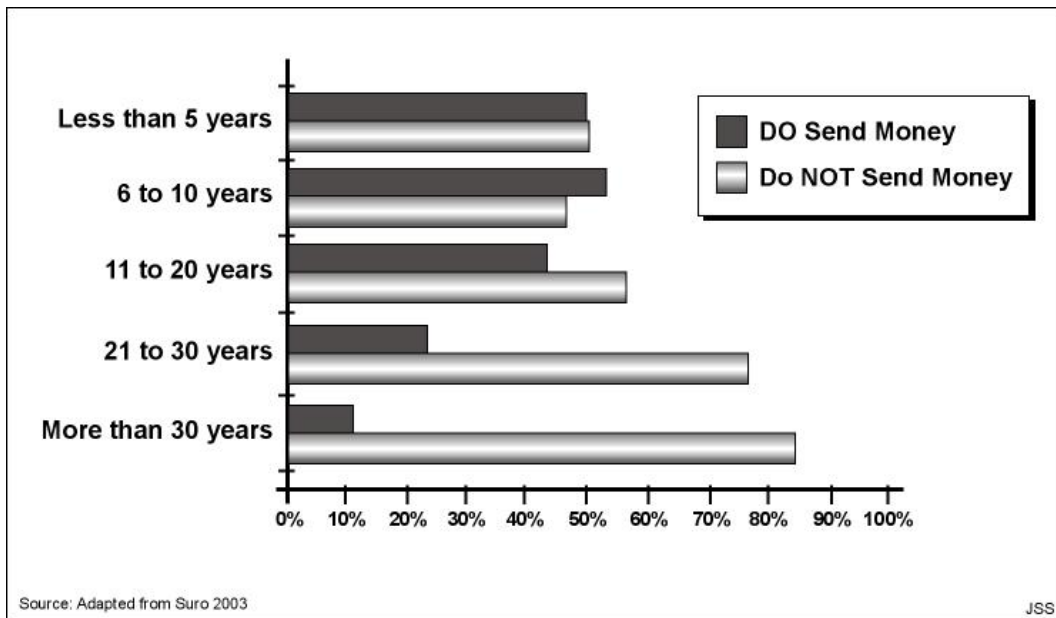


Figure 6. Percentage of Latinos in the U.S. who send remittances home, 2003.

**Table 1.** Total Remittances Received<sup>1</sup> and Percent of GSP by State in Mexico, 2006.

State:	2006 Total Remittances Received	2006 Percentage of Gross State Product <sup>2</sup>	State:
Michoacan	\$ 2,471.6	13.7	Michoacan
Guanajuato	2,054.8	9.8	Zacatecas
Jalisco	1,992.8	9.5	Oaxaca
State of Mexico	1,926.2	8.3	Guerrero
Federal District	1,551.2	8.0	Hidalgo
Veracruz	1,415.2	7.3	Nayarit
Puebla	1,386.1	6.9	Guanajuato
Oaxaca	1,198.2	5.8	Chiapas
Guerrero	1,157.4	5.4	Tlaxcala
Hidalgo	853.4	4.7	Puebla
Chiapas	807.5	4.6	Morelos
Zacatecas	610.4	4.1	Veracruz
San Luis Potosi	607.4	4.0	S. L. Potosi
Morelos	527.8	3.8	Jalisco
Queretaro	466.9	3.7	Colima
Sinaloa	420.0	3.7	Aguascalientes
Aguascalientes	378.2	3.4	Durango
Durango	370.8	3.3	Queretaro
Chihuahua	368.5	2.6	Sinaloa
Tamaulipas	356.3	2.5	State of Mexico
Nayarit	327.7	1.5	Tabasco
Nuevo Leon	285.8	1.3	Tamaulipas
Tlaxcala	257.5	1.0	Chihuahua
Baja California	232.0	1.0	Sonora
Sonora	216.4	.9	Yucatan
Coahuila	216.1	.9	Federal District
Colima	166.7	.8	Baja California
Tabasco	150.2	.8	Coahuila
Yucatan	113.6	.6	Campeche
Quintana Roo	78.7	.6	Quintana Roo
Campeche	63.3	.5	Baja Calif Sur
Baja California Sur	24.7	.5	Nuevo Leon
<b>Total for Mexico</b>	<b>\$23,053.8</b>		

<sup>1</sup> Reported in Millions of Dollars.  
Source: Bank of Mexico 2007.

<sup>2</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Data Available as of: 3 March 2007

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