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The Migration Experience of the Women Who Stay Behind

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Abstract

This article explores the challenges that migration poses to the families' relationship and to the women who stay behind in their homeland. Such challenges are presented differently within each type of family since the bonds established in a married couple vary from the ones established in divorced couples. For years, research on migration processes has mainly focused on analyzing the relationship between migrant parents and stayers in the home country. Yet, there are scarce studies referring to how migration shapes the relationship between couples and especially, how migration is perceived from the perspective of the women who stay behind. Thus, the study presents the results of a thorough examination on how male migration is seen from the left-behind women's perspective. The main findings show that from the women's perspective separation is seen as a challenge since it forces them to take on new responsibilities within their households, without abandoning their traditional task as caregivers.

Keywords: Transnational Families, Divorced Families, Migrant Parent, Stayers, Children, Left-Behind Women.

Introduction

A man has decided to go abroad. He knows how hard it could be to start afresh in a new country and to be far away from his wife and children, but he will leave with the hope that this separation will bring benefits to the whole family. In the homeland, his wife experiences a mixed feeling of satisfaction and concerned. While the economic situation of the family has made a turn to the better, she now faces new challenges concerning care giving and household responsibilities. The situation of this couple I met during my fieldwork is an expression of a phenomenon common to current social dynamics: the changes in family dynamics due to transnationalism.

According to Thomas Faist (2006), transnationalism refers to processes that transcend international borders. By transnational spaces he means relatively stable, lasting and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across borders of sovereign states. Transnational spaces comprise combinations of ties and their substance, positions within networks and organizations and networks of organizations that cut across the borders of at least two national states (Baubock & Faist, 2010). In another study, (Faist, 2006) points out that transnational families conceive themselves as both an economic unit and a unit of solidarity and who keep, besides the main house, a kind of shadow household in another country. Economic assets are mostly transferred from abroad to those who continue to run the household back home (Faist, 2006).

Nowadays many scholars have focused their attention on the process of international migration (Guendell Rojas, Saab, & Taylor, 2013) as a livelihood strategy and its impact on poverty reduction. But apart from studying the impact of remittances on poverty reduction and the

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migrants' integration in their new context other important issues should call the attention of researchers when studying migration, such as the effect of migration on family members who stay behind in the homeland, since families are providers not only of material things, but also of emotional support (Sănduleasa & Matei, 2015). Then, speaking about families nowadays implies speaking about the interpersonal relationships existing among its members, since these relationships are a key factor for the development of children in a family. It is a common knowledge that families accompany children and adolescents' evolution in the process of education, and they are the spaces to provide them with the emotional stability they need to establish affective bonds with the rest of the family members, and the society they live in. The presence of the father in a family constitutes a significant factor to promote and reinforce values and sentiments in children. That is why belonging to a family where the father is absent may cause serious effects in children and the woman who stay behind. (Archambault, 2010).

At the same time migration brings benefits, such as economic advantages, it often brings about the separation of families, which puts relationships under stress and anxiety and drives those who stay behind to take on new roles and responsibilities. When a parent migrates to another country, (Guendell Rojas, Saab, & Taylor, 2013) a whole range of functions, from caregiving to managing the household budget, must be assumed by others within the family, often the other parent, but also frequently by older children, grandparents or other members of the extended family. While important decisions may be taken jointly, often they are not. Mediated by gender and power relations, these decisions may adversely affect those most vulnerable within families, such as children and adolescents, as well as women and the elderly.

For years, research on migration has neglected many unexplored realities such as the situation of women that stayed behind in the country of origin, that is: wives, daughters, mothers, sisters, and mothers-in-law. These women, in the best of cases, become the receptors and the managers of the money sent from abroad by the men who have migrated. However, there are few studies on the cases of those women who are abandoned by their male counterparts (Núñez Vera, 2009). All of them, this investigator points out, experience the effects of migration and then they are bound to develop new resilience strategies to better adjust themselves to their new situation.

Research has shown, however, that not all consequences of male migration are negative for their counterpart that stay behind. Migration can also enhance their welfare (Chant & Radcliffe, 1992). For a lot of women, the fact that their husband has migrated gives them more authority within the household, since in the new context they are in charge of the money remittances and they decide what to do with the family resources (Núñez Vera, 2009). At the same time, this investigator points out, the women who stay behind obtain a better presence in the public spaces, because due to the absence of their husband they have to represent their family in many social, legal, or economic processes.

While most of the literature regarding transnational families refers to studies focusing on the perspective of the parent who migrates, only few studies are related to the points of view of the parents who stay in their home countries (Marchietti, 2012). For many years, scholars have discussed the fact that migration research has neglected women. The young male migrant in search of labor opportunities has been the main target for demographic, economic, and sociological studies about migration (Archambault, 2010). Besides that, there have been some researches focusing on mothers' migration, and how they care about their children from abroad. The main aspects presented refer to mothers' feelings towards leaving their children behind in their home country (Douglas-Harrison, 2014), and how they maintain communication with their

children despite the distance, becoming in some cases providers for their families in other countries. The findings of some of these studies, however, still show that in spite of these efforts, children still feel lonely and abandoned (Sănduleasa & Matei, 2015).

Fresnoza (2014) argues that the adjustments in children's care in the transnational families depends on who is the person who migrated. In case of the migrant being the father, the mother assumes all the household functions, the care of the children and the economic responsibility. When the person who migrates is the mother, this does not happen the same way, since the father often delegates' children care to other family members, usually other women in the family.

The migration of a family member, whether the mother or the father, brings about a redefinition and change in the roles and responsibilities taken by the family members. The migration of a man or a woman, however, has different implications on the children who stay in the home country (D'Emilio, 2007). This last issue stems from the fact that fathers and mothers are expected to play different roles in society. If a father migrates, he usually leaves another family member with a household. On the other hand, when a mother migrates she tends to feel insecure because she leaves a family behind, and in many cases, upon her return she has to face all the problems that came up after her migration. In order to accomplish the main aim, the study presents as research question: How does separation is perceived from the perspective of women who stay behind?

Literature Review

The theory related to transnational migration is a topic that investigators have studied for approximately the past twenty five years. In early 1990s, American researchers found out that transnational migration and conventional practices on this field were two different aspects (Levitt & Nyberg-Sorensen, 2004). According to (Kearney, 1991), these theorists argued that traditional migration theory treated migrants as individuals who either departed from or arrived to one country. One of these theorists, Wielandt (2006) states that conventional international migration is a multidirectional and fluid flow of people around the world, while transnational migration refers to the move of a population from one country to another. This author also argues that transnational migration is transcendentally crossing the borders of conventional migrations in both internal and external aspects.

The transnational migration perspective is nowadays getting more attention from many points of view, including the investigative approach. The reason of this turn in research lies in the vast theoretical potential lying in apprehending the bonds among the economic, social, cultural, and political practices that many immigrants establish with their partners (wife or husband) in their country of origin. Thus, transnational family life challenges relationships between the parent who migrates and the children who stay in the home country. Though this challenges are also faced by families who are separated due to divorce. In these cases, there is also a disruption of the parent-child relationship, especially with the non-residential parent (Graham & Jordan, 2011).

Couples who are separated by borders experience challenges in transnational communication. In the same way, family practices across borders are ignored or assumed to be impossible (Baldassar & Baldock, 1999; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011) and transnational families have been treated as a temporary phenomenon, with family reunification in the host society as the preferred outcome for all family members (Landolt & Da, 2005). However, according to Jokish (2014), literature still refer to the fact that parents continue to leave their home countries paradoxically

expressing that their migration is in the best interest of their children.

Millazo and van de Walle (2017) describe a situation in which hundreds of women in the world are involved, and are responsible for the household. The term used by these researchers is that of "female-headed households (FHH)" and this expression refers to women who are responsible for the maintenance of the household, which represent a growing number at the global level that is increasing in developing countries due to the upsurge of male migration and divorce; The authors demonstrated that there has been an increase in the number of female-headed households in Africa, a fact associated to the demographic changes experienced by society due to the migration of men seeking for better opportunities, or due to civil wars and the AIDS pandemic, which affects many households in that continent. The truth is that in households headed by women, the purchasing power is lower than in the male-headed households (Toyota, Yeoh, & Nguyen, 2007; Iqbal, Iqbal, & Mozmi, 2014; Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006). But this is still a controversial issue, as it has also been said that the children of women who lead the household are generally more educated and well-off than in male-headed households (Dushanbieva, 2014; Gibson, McKenzie, & Stillman, 2009). Women can become household leaders for various causes. Most of them are widows, divorced women, separated women, abandoned women, women married to imprisoned men or with migrant men, (who are the focus of this research) (Milazzo & Van de Walle, 2017).

This study has concluded that in the households headed by women of migrant men, there has been a reduction of the poverty, although in many occasions this is not related to the economic aid received from their husbands or ex-husbands, since a dissolution is described gradual of the couple bonds, which in some cases only persists for social reasons. Thus, women left behind are forced to self-overcome and seek the economic independence of their migrant husbands, to maintain the home, which has become a stimulus for female empowerment in society (Calleros Alarcon, 2012; Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006; Antman, 2010).

As stated above, transnational families struggle to keep the affective bonds through time. The construction and establishment of those bonds go beyond the traditional limits settled for families in terms of communication, which are known as "co-residence" and "presence" of all the family members. This implies that both migrants and 'left behinds' (namely stayers in this research) experience new affective situations while playing the role of a father or a mother. Thus, there is a redefinition not only of the parental roles, but also of the relationships established between the migrant mother and the children who stay in the home country.

Shih (2016) mentions a lot of patterns and agreements that emerge in transnational families, which in addition to the difficulties faced by all families, must be able to survive the separation and the difficulties that this brings to the functioning of the home. The intimacy between the transnational couples has also had to be subjected to changes, because the physical contact stops to leave everything in the hands of the technologies for the communication. Many marriages dissolve for this reason, while others come to a tacit agreement to maintain the appearance, while the woman takes care of the children and maintains the home, the father has to submit remittances.

According to Dankyi, Mazzucato, & Manuh (2015), there are several studies related to transnational families showing how migrants care for those they leave behind, especially through remittances. Other studies, like the one conducted by Caarls and Mazzucato (2016), refer that the relationship between migrants and stayers has been shaped by return visits, and long-distance communication. In both cases, migrant parents care for their children's welfare from

the host country, and try to provide caregivers who are left behind with the financial support they need to raise the children. The opposite yet happens when some caregivers in the origin country have to provide remittances to migrants in the host country in a form of reverse remittances (Mazzucato&Schans, 2011). Caregivers influence on how children feel about having a migrant parent, whether the mother or father; so explaining to the children that the migrant parent left to provide them with the means necessary to meet their needs helps the staying children develop affection and concern towards the absent parent.

In addition to the stated above, the extent to which parent's migration can affect a child also depends on the traditions and perspectives of the country of origin. Very often migration takes place in the context of already existing problems at home, such as the father being unemployed, which usually leads to alcoholism and often to family break up. This is, at the same time, linked to the impact on welfare state in the home countries. Given the fact that many women are the main caregivers in the family, if they are the ones migrating the impact on social cohesion is even stronger. From this last perspective, the migration of the fathers and their physical absence seem to be less dramatic than mothers' migration. When a migrant mother lives in a transnational family, the society starts to question up to what extend she is a good mother when she leaves her children behind (Hondagneu Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

In a study conducted by Hughes (2011), this author stated that there are three different tendencies emerging from the experiences women have when they are stayers. The first trend refers to the fact that those women take on new roles and they are bound to become not just caregivers but also economic providers in a transnational or divorced family. These roles come along with new responsibilities added to the ones those women already had and may include, among others, handling finances and taking care of various issues that men usually did in the house, without stopping their traditional roles and responsibilities in raising their children.

The second tendency, on the other hand, has to do with the increased control or surveillance women get under by the migrant/divorced husband or by any in-law relative that is always paying attention to the women's behavior, independence, and authority over household matters. According to the findings of the study conducted by (Hughes, 2011), when stayers (mainly women) are talking to their migrant/divorced couples on the phone, the migrant/divorced tends to tell them what to do with the remittance money and how to handle it. In this same sense, women usually inform the migrant/divorced men about household-related issues they had been taken. In addition to that, there are some cases in which women do not have control over the remittance since in-law relatives control the money and decide when to give it to the stayer as well as tell them what to do with it. Finally, another aspect related to the change of roles of stayers refers to the restrictions on stayers' mobility. That is, the control migrant/divorced partners keep on the stayers' lives.

The presence of all the above mentioned aspects varies from one context to another, and the norms stated in the migrant's country of origin are important when trying to understand the choices around transnational families, and how the roles of the stayers change (Caarls & Mazucatto, 2015). They also argue that these context-specific norms are not usually considered in demographic studies concerning couple migration; and consequently, transnational family life is frequently seen as a stressful and challenging option.

They mention that migration is a stressful event that is a strong predictor of separation or divorce; so couples separated by migration make agreements on how they will handle their relationship after migration. This phenomenon is not equally conceived by men and women, who often

experience a freedom that they never had before their partner migration and decide to accept and defend that status. Sometimes, family reunification is not possible, so couples choose to live a transnational marriage. In other cases, they maintain only the formal bonds, leaving a marriage only in appearances, supported by agreements between the spouses. According to the results of this research, transnational marriages in which the woman joined the husband later, the probability of divorce decreases, while in cases where the wife stays in the country of origin taking care of the children and the family, the relationship can survive, as an agreement between the parties, including the acceptance on the part of the woman of her husband having new relationships, as long as he takes care of the economic support of the home.

According to the opinion of Marchetti (2012) the women who remain in the country of origin many times feel that they were not taken into account by their spouse to make the decision to migrate, they are said to have experienced a reaction of surprise and shock when they learned the news. The emotions they feel range from anger, fear, surprise, even jealousy, to the separation of their partner. Migration is viewed by women who remain as a great loss, which is exacerbated when the migrant husband does not maintain communication for various reasons, leading to the eventual dissolution of the marriage.

Furthermore, in places like Ecuador and other Latin American countries, there are three main causes related to migration. One of them is the socio-economic reason, which has to do mainly with low salaries, adverse working conditions, unemployment, and ideal constructions about the host country. Secondly, political causes with a direct relation to stability or instability in both the origin and the host country; and finally, cultural causes related to the myths about the host countries, and the misconceptions existing around them in the origin country, which can be seen both positively and negatively (Conejo, 2008)

According to (Massey, et al., 1998), even if there is not a big difference in the salaries paid in both the origin and the host country, looking for better payments is one of the most common migration causes. These authors also state that there is as well a probability that international migrations are associated to the migrants' conduct around family and friends in the origin country, or the possibility that they look at migration as a way out of the real situation they face at home. Besides that, another factor to take into account is that living in a place with a very high migration rate increases the possibility of migration in the community, since the experiences of family or friends who have gone abroad influence the decision of others to migrate.

The causes and effects in regard to affection in a left behind family usually mean a lot to the culture of the origin country. Thus, radical changes happen in terms of social and family organization, eating habits, way of dressing, stayers' behavior, musical preferences, etc. When there are extreme situations in the affective relationship between the left behind family and the migrated parent, these families experience both psychological and cultural break ups (Solís, 2011)

(Duque, 2011), on the other hand, argues that there is no consensus among researchers on whether there are negative impacts when a parent migrates, especially if it is not the mother who leaves the family behind. For (Archambault, 2010; Smith & Johnson, 2011), parental migration is a common way to disintegrate a family for those stayers in developing countries. According to some psychological studies, this situation subsequently leads to negative consequences in parent children relationships, and affects the self-esteem of them all.

Additionally, Caarls & Mazucatto (2015) consider that migrant parent-children relationship is also determined by the family arrangements. Thus, some of the important elements stayers and migrants should take into account to shape migrant-children relationships are related to the mediating role caregivers should play, the availability of contact in the family, and the avoidance of emotional suffering in staying children.

Context

In Ecuador, family as an institution is protected by legal basements like the Constitution. In its Article 67 (Constitución del Ecuador, 2008), it recognizes different types of families and establishes its constitution by judicial links or de facto relationships based on the equality of rights and opportunities for each member. The Law also establishes that marriage is the union between a man and a woman founded in the free agreement of the contracting persons and on the equality of rights and obligations, as well as legal capability.

Though the family dynamic in Ecuador has significantly varied due to the demographical changes and economic crisis, in the country the model of the nuclear family is still predominant. The family life often consists of a husband who financially supports the family and makes most major decisions, a wife who is generally responsible for raising the children and taking care of household chores and children; most families in Ecuador have two or three children. Today this dynamic is ever-changing as many more women are working. What isn't changing is the importance of family in Ecuador and the role the family plays in the country's culture.

As Paul L. Schvaneveld (Schvaneveldt, 2013) points out, at present Ecuador is experiencing many changes that are impacting parenting and family life. Gender roles are slowly changing, families often live in extended intergenerational households, many experience separation from family members due to emigration patterns, and divorce and single parenthood are becoming more common.

One important feature in transnational families' lives is that when fathers migrate, mothers are commonly observed to continue in their socially inscribed role of careers and nurturers of their children while maintaining the existing nuclear family structure (Children's Geographies, 2014). Though there are seemingly fewer ostensible changes in caring arrangements, taking over the tasks traditionally performed by men adds to women's physical, economic and emotional stress, and may compromise the quality of care left-behind mothers provide. While children appreciate and acknowledge the extension of their migrant fathers' breadwinning role overseas, they too may experience negative outcomes not only because of the poorer quality of care they received, but also because in some cases they have to shoulder the burden of assuming extra agricultural/household tasks in their father's absence.

In Ecuador, in the last fifty years, a lot of changes happened in the structure and functioning of families, experiencing early separation of their members, a new independence was seen in each of the components of the family kernel, because each member of the family sought their economic independence, leaving in the background the excessive affectivity of the family for the weekends. In spite of this, the father and / or grandfather remain the maximum authority of the home. The sexual revolution of the 1960s, the possibility for women to enter university and certain places of work in a society led by men in which the consumer society became more and more imperative, caused the mother to have to leave to work to cover the economic needs and to think about the need for family planning.

In the 80's and 90's, the constitution of the traditional family was affected to give way to the

modern and postmodern family, formed by both parents and a smaller number of children than the traditional family, the same as by policies neoliberal and corrupt acts such as the dramatic banking holiday - fueled by economic groups and seconded by ex-President Jamil Mahuad, many families cracked and became disrupted because one of the heads of families or both had to emigrate to Europe or the United States United, leaving the grandparents or the uncles to take care of the children (Villaroel, 2015).

The traditional and extended family has been changing and evolving since the time of industrialization, the boom of communication and new technologies. At the beginning of this century, the idea of forming a family at an early age was disrupted by the desire of young people to become professionalized, although there is a high percentage of adolescent mothers who have had to leave their studies or in most cases only the mother is responsible.

This has produced a visible loss of values, from the authority of parents towards children, and it has been seen that the heads of families delegate their function to schools and colleges, which has caused that in most cases young people no longer seek a personal relationship lasting or transcending. They enter relations of passage, in which nothing is taken too seriously, and children spend most of their time alone in spaces of virtual socialization such as social networks, the internet, television or electronic games; parents for reasons of work, divorce or migration most of the time are absent from the family environment.

One way to experience this parents' absence is the lack of communication between the migrated father and the children left behind. In the case of transnational families, it is difficult to arrange a visit system to the children, which is possible to do when they are separated due to divorce but live in the same country. However, while divorced, many fathers stop communicating and giving care to their children.

A study conducted by (UNICEF, 2009) dealing with the impact of paternal and maternal migration on the lives of adolescents and their families, throws light to the issue that migration in Ecuador has been a very complex process over the last 60 years. This same study reports that there are different variables involved in this migration process, which are of economic, social, cultural and psychological implication.

Acosta, López, & Villamar (2006) highlight two stages of migration practices in Ecuador. The first one refers to a period before 1998, with the United States being the primary destination; and the second one after 1998, which marked the beginning of a wave of migration to Europe, mainly to Spain and Italy. It should be noted, however, that the role of the family in the migration process has been different during each stage. Particularly after 1998, the second wave of migration has developed into a family survival strategy (UNICEF, 2009).

Despite the fact that Ecuador is a small country compared to others in the area, it accounts for the largest Latin American nationality in Spain, the second largest in Italy, and one of the largest immigrant groups in New York (Jokish, 2014). Since mid-2000s, however, migration has slowed down considerably, and the migration waves that marked the late 1990s started to be replaced by a steady flow of Ecuadorians who leave to reunite with their relatives abroad, especially in Spain.

However, despite the second migration flow were caused mainly by family reunification, the level of disruption of transnational families in Quito were similar to that in the high lands area. The Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion in Ecuador (MIES, by its acronym in Spanish) estimates that around 284,027 staying children and adolescents have been affected by migration

until 2009. This situation has caused crisis in families from both social and personal perspectives. Such circumstances cause a hindrance to the principles of family as the foundation of society, which needs to be reinforced as well as the role of marriage. Some of the main impacts determined by (UNICEF, 2009) refer to social stigma, self-control and maturity, accountability and maternal and/or paternal roles forcefully and prematurely, incidence in construction of identities and life projects, greater vulnerability, abuse and violence, and emotional impacts in general (Camacho & Hernández, 2008)

Besides, there is a change in the way stayers are perceived by others and the relationships the members of the communities develop with transnational families. Consequently, and in correspondence with what UNICEF found out in the study conducted in 2009, the main impacts on staying children in Sigsig at that time were associated to psychological, affective and educative issues, as well as family-related, economic, and social stigmatization issues. These aspects were corroborated through the present study, and are discussed in a coming section.

A similar situation is described in Quito and Biblián, the latter being one of the five municipalities with the higher rates of migrants in the province of Cañar, Ecuador (Chungata & Romero 2012).

Methods and Data Collection

The data collected in this research was used to examine the dynamics of wife-husband relationships, and its influence in the women left behind in transnational or divorced families, in order to see how the impact this relationship has on the staying children and how it shapes the children-parent relationship. In-depth interviews, informal conversations, and observation were carried out, providing the research a qualitative status. The participants in the study were 20 caregivers living in Sigsig and Biblián in Ecuador; whose consent to be interviewed was obtained before the research process.

The research was carried out in 2015 and 2022, and the instruments were applied in a period of over 9 months during the study. The selection of the mothers who took part in the study was based on the Problems, Expectations and Aspirations of Children (PEACH) survey, which was administered to the children, parents and teachers in Sigsig in 2013, in Biblián in 2015. The sampling parents living in Sigsig and Biblián represent the 80 per cent of the total sample of children living in the areas, so the responses obtained from the interviews carried out in these two places are significant to the results presented in this study.

Cities implied in this research are also characterized by a high migration percentage of parents who leave families behind at the household of the other parent, whether the mother or the father.

Interviews were made to parents who are either stayers because of the migration of a partner, or are divorced parents in non-migrant families. That is, the interviews were administered to parents who are divorced and caregivers who somehow still have a relationship with the migrant parent.

In both cases, the interviews aimed at distinguishing the children welfare in transnational families and non-migration families in which the parents are divorced, since the impact of the absent parent in children of transnational families is different of that of a non-migration family, even if the parents get divorced. In families in which divorce occurs, but neither parent has migrated, the child-visitation regime can be negotiated, but in transnational families this is taken for granted. Although a large part of the families divorces without migrating, in these cases, there is a decrease in the relationships and communication of the father, who leaves the home

The qualitative analysis derived from the data collection is presented in the results section of this article. Observation and informal conversations were used to collect information related to how families deal with the relationship migrant parent-children in a transnational family and the impact the migration of a parent has on the children who stay in the home country.

Findings

The Ecuadorian family has a traditional formation, and the most scattered example is that of the Austro family, which is the most widespread in the country, despite this, there is no single form of family organization in the country. These changes in the family structure have arisen as a consequence of the changes in the economy and politics of the country. Nowadays, single-parent-families can be found, or extended families, which in spite of variations in the traditional nuclear structure can adequately fulfill their functions in society and in the education of children (Ardaya, 1995).

Women has gained a prominent role in family leadership in Ecuador, not only do they have an active role in household chores or the education of children, but also they often have all the economic, social, legal and educational responsibility within home. This female role is due to the increase in separations by migrations or divorce experienced in the 1990s, and even to modernity (Ardaya, 1995).

The female role in the poor household has been strengthened in the current situations of increasing poverty, accentuated by the crisis and adjustment. The family incomes are not enough, and women and families have developed an important capacity to generate them - many times from home - and, in this way, ensure the reproduction of the family workforce.

Children play an important role, especially in transnational families or divorced parents, in which children, from very early ages, have to take up active roles at home, help with the care of siblings, or in housework, although there are a few cases where they must work to support their mother.

According to the UNICEF report, in Ecuador, up to 20% of children live in homes where either parent is missing because of divorce, (father usually leaves home after divorce); while a 3% of children lives without one of their parents because of migration (ODNA, 2010). In this research, it was obtained that in families where the father was absent by divorce, he had less communication with his children, so relationship with children were worse in case of separation by divorce, than in case of separation by migration.

Transnational families communicated more frequently shortly after migration than divorced families who were not transnational did, but in the majority of cases the frequency of migrants' communication and remittances was diminished when longer time after migration had passed. Previous studies about the impact of parent's migration in the relationship migrant parent-children have been conducted in Ecuador. Thus, some positive and negative implications have been determined through research (UNICEF 2009; Jerves, De Haene, Enzlin and Rober 2016).

The influence a caregiver has over a staying child whether in a transnational family or a divorced context is crucial to shape the relationship between these children and the migrant parent.

The information of 20 transnational families where there was a migrant parent was collected. These families shared the common condition of separation, some due to divorce and others due to migration.

The main questions were addressed to seek information about the reasons why the migrant/divorced parent left the house, whether he/she sends remittances, how frequently they communicate with their spouse that stayed behind and what were the resilience strategies taken by the women after the male migration or abandonment. The caregivers who were willing to participate in this research asked for privacy in terms of personal data disclosure. Thus, the author of the study decided to substitute the real name of the interviewees when quoting some of the opinions they stated about certain matters, such as their role as care givers at the emotional level.

The findings show that as a general pattern, migrant parents left the family because of complex economic situations at home or seeking to provide their children with a better future and more education. Despite that reason, the data collected showed that migrant parents often send remittances for their left behind families, though some of them do not do it on a monthly base, but once or twice a year. In most of the cases, the remittances were very frequent at the beginning, and with the passing of time the migrant/absent parents started to reduce the frequency. This situation represented a great challenge for the women who stayed behind, because apart from being the only ones in charge of the care and education of the children, they had to take on new responsibilities as economic providers for the family. The example quotes of some of the interviewees provided below exemplify this issue.

After analyzing the responses, the author also concluded that despite the present advances in the communication technologies, migrant parents do not always communicate with their children who stayed behind as often as they should and could. Some of the opinions stated by the stayers in transnational families, in regard to the frequency of communication are the following:

Susana (caregiver in a transnational family): He (the migrant father) communicates when he has time, every 15 days, since sometimes we are not around (in Sigsig) he calls us at Tullupamba, where there is a landline phone, and the calls are cheaper. He used to have a monthly 100 USD-prepaid telephone plan and then he called every day, but now that his telephone plan is over, he does not call that often; besides we do not have too much to talk about (...)

Estela: (caregiver in a transnational family): (...) He (the migrant father) communicates with the children through Facebook; he talks to Daniela on the phone, too.

Catalina (caregiver in a transnational family): He (the migrant husband) called twice a week at the beginning, and then with time he started to “cut it off” a little bit. Now my child is growing old and they have communication through internet, -Facebook mainly. The father has introduced his other daughters to my child, and my kid has had a reaction towards that matter, because his father has sent him pictures of him (the father) spending time with his other children, and my son feels lonely and abandoned (...) there was a two-year period of time in which we totally lost communication, I do not know what happened, but now he calls more frequently and asks about our son, and I feel good about it because what I care about is that my son does not feel that he is lonely.

As for the views about remittances to the children and family, and the emotional affection of the children upon the father migration or divorce, a sample opinion is the one stated by Vilma, a caregiver who lives in Quito. In most cases fathers play the role of breadwinners, since they send remittances, but they fail to play the role of the person entitled to give affection and care along with economic support to his offspring.

Vilma (caregiver in a transnational family): At the beginning he (the migrant father) used to send remittances very often, and then the frequency decreased. He quit sending the money without giving any reasons, I never knew why. He is an old-fashioned man though, he does not want our children to go to school, or anything. I spent seven years without hearing from my husband. Two years ago I had a call from the bank saying that I had to withdraw some money I had been sent, but I never knew who sent the money, I assumed it was him, but I heard no word from him (...) Now, my son communicates with him from time to time, and he sends remittances to him directly. We found out that he was jobless for some time and that is why he did not communicate or send anything.

Moreover, in general terms, parents who were part of the research added that they had to take their children to a psychologist because of the emotional disorder they experienced after the migrant parent left. Additionally, most of the caregivers who live in transnational families argued that their relationship with the migrant parent was functioning well at the time he decided to migrate. Contrary to this last point, in some cases the marital relation was very hard to deal with, and due to that situation things were so hard that the married couple usually argued in front of the children. Thus, the relationship wife-husband in such families shaped the actual relation children-parent, which is characterized by a distance in communication and emotional affections in left behind children.

Paula (caregiver in a transnational family): We were having a great relationship when he left.

Furthermore, most of the transnational families in the areas covered by the study are characterized by maintaining a husband-wife relationship that is shaped by distance and the presence of new partners even when the parents are legally married. This might stem from the fact that social recognition as to whether the couple is married or not is part of stigmatization in the highland regions in Ecuador. It is also a characteristic of the region that transnational families keep connections that are formed by remittances rather than emotional bonds.

Paula (caregiver in a transnational family): (...) We still have a good relationship, and even if he has another family in Spain, I will respect so as long as it does not affect my child's welfare. Besides, how do I explain the community here that we were abandoned? Divorce is not an option for me.

Sonia (a caregiver in a transnational family): We both were in agreement about the fact that he had to leave the country (...) being apart from each other has made us miss each other, but we had to sacrifice for our children, so that they can study and complete a career in the future. What he earned when he was here was not enough to survive and give our children the lives they deserve (...) I do not think he has another family abroad, but if he does, I would not change my children's welfare or my own welfare for that. I would continue to have the relationship we have at present.

Vilma (caregiver in a transnational family): (...) My daughters tell me that her father tells her constantly that we have to behave properly here (in Biblián), he tells her the same speech over and over, and if he gets like that when he is speaking on the phone, imagine how it is when he is here. He punishes us. It was exactly like that at the moment he left. We still married, even when I am sure he has another family abroad.

Estela (caregiver in a transnational family): I have to admit that in the years that he (the migrant husband) has been abroad we have had our arguments, but our child has never realized about that. I have no further problems in my marriage other than telephone arguments from time to

time, because we have the intention of keeping our relationship alive. He is very responsible in sending us remittances, and everything the child needs. He always cares.

On the other hand, when referring to the relationship between children and parents who left the house because of divorce, family members' appreciation interviewed were different. The main problems couples were facing at the time of divorce were related to misunderstanding, infidelity or cohabitation problems. This situation led to children misbehaviors at school in half of the interviewed cases. In addition, communication between the children and the absent parent is evidently lower than that established by children-migrant parents. In this sense, it can be noted that a small amount of the caregivers interviewed stated that their former couple still have frequent contact with the left behind children, while most of the staying children's parents hardly communicate with them.

Divorced parents who left the families behind in all cases send remittances to their children, but the frequency in which they do so varies from one family to another. The remittances frequency rate is twice a year in divorced families.

Some of the opinions collected in the study about this matter are:

Sandra (caregiver in a divorced family): (...) now he communicates with the children twice a year, and he messages them (the children) using Facebook or other social media. Besides, I bought a telephone for the children to communicate with him, so that they do not have to talk using my telephone, but even when they have private numbers, the calls are infrequent.

Stephanía (caregiver in a divorced family): My daughter feels lonely because she does not talk to her father very often.

Samantha (caregiver in a divorced family): He (the migrant husband) sends the remittances to his mother, and then she (the migrant's mother) gives them to me and our children. When my youngest child was 8 years old, however, I sued him because he sent the money when he wanted to, rather than frequently, as he should have done it. He still does the same at present though, despite the lawsuit I made against him (...). About the emotional affection my children have had after their father left, I have to say that their academic performance is low now. Their classmates sometimes do bullying to them because they argue my children do not have a father. This has led to behavioral problems of my younger child in school. I recently asked the English language teacher about my youngest child performance, and she said he has been rebellious in class.

Pablo (caregiver in a divorced family): At the beginning she (the absent mother) used to send money frequently, now he sends nothing.

Alexandra (caregiver in a divorced family): Our relationship at the time he departed was not going well. We had problems with his sisters, so he decided to leave the country. The initial idea was that we left together, but I refused to. I did not want to leave our children behind, so I stayed. I was afraid that my husband found someone else being alone in the United States, but then I told him not to forget he had some children here. I do not really care if he forgets about me, but I want him to take care of our children and have a relationship with them. I thank God because he does not forget about his children.

Despite all efforts caregivers make to maintain the relationship between their children and the absent parents, accounts in this study clearly showed that in families where the parents are divorced, children have a hard relationship with the absent parent, which usually leads to behavioral and emotional problems. This situation is well illustrated by Elena, one of my

interviewees, when she tells about her son having problems at school or by Jessica, another mother interviewed who claims that separation from his father has caused her son to lose attention in school.

Elena (caregiver in a divorced family): My son has no communication with his father, but he does not need it. (...) he has had some problems at school and the teachers have called me many times, but I can do nothing, he has no father that can guide him.

Jessica (caregiver in a divorced family): He left when the kid was really young, my kid does not remember his father. This has caused behavior problems at school. "He loses attention spam very easily", his teacher says. His father does not communicate with him.

Despite the separation, a good number of migrant parents still have a relationship with the caregiver, both parents agreed on the idea that one parent migrated to make some money so that they could open their own business upon return to Ecuador. However, his stay prolonged as the migrant parent could not accomplish his goals in the planned timeline, or since he started a new family in the host country.

Finally, the roles of the parents who are caregivers and stay in the home country change. The findings show that in most of the cases stayers have to get all responsibilities for children raising and household matters.

Gabriela (caregiver in a transnational family): (...) everything was all right and suddenly I started to think only about my son. My husband used to work a lot, he came home around midnight or 1 am, he worked at an Italian Food restaurant, and sometimes he even got home at 3 am. The incomes were good, but he worked too much. When he left I had to take over all the responsibilities at the house, so I became the provider. This situation affected me and my child; I felt I did not have time for my kid. Yet, he started sending remittances, but they were not enough.

Carla (caregiver in a divorced family): Things for me were good when he was only the provider at home, but when my ex-husband left I felt my world was upside down. I had to start taking responsibilities for the whole household and our baby. He left us when the boy was 5 years old.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has explored the new challenges that migration poses to parents' relationship and to the women who stay behind in her homeland. Such situation is presented differently in each type of family since the bonds established by the married couple are different from the ones established by the divorced parents. An analysis of what this mother-father relationship entails and the consequences in the relationship children-absent parent has also been focused on this study. The author describes the main factors associated to parent migration in transnational families and divorced families. Furthermore, the author also deals with the effect male migration has on the women who stay behind. From the responses given by the interviewed caregivers, it is clear that they still face the social stigma of separation and they experience the detachment of the emotional facts of the financial issues involved in the separation due to migration.

As the interviews show, generally speaking, women in transnational families tend to keep their marriage alive despite the distance. Even if they live almost in a divorce environment, they resort to the tacit arrangement as a way to be married in the face of social rules. The findings reveal that daily companionship is not an essential fact to maintain marriage as an institution, which is very respected by Ecuadorian laws and society (Villaroel, 2015). However, the study also shows

that even if migration improves the financial stability of many families, with the passing of time it also leads to marriage dissolution because of the emotional and psychological damage distance do to the couple relationship. (Archambault, 2010).

However, in some cases there are transnational families in which the bonds of affection between the children and the migrant parent is only established by the remittances the absent parents send rather than the affection the relationship father-children involves. This allows the author to make a clear evaluation of how this relationship is shaped in different families from different areas in Ecuador, having as a common denominator the fact that all the areas in which the research was conducted belong to the Andean region of the country, where the tendency is to maintain the marriage even if another person is emotionally involved with the absent parent, especially because of social statute. Additionally, the relationship between parents at home before migration and divorce also influence the parent-children bond, since some children tend to remember family issues lived at home before abandonment as negative aspects they would have liked to change in their family lives. This, in some cases, has also shaped the relationship between migrant/divorced parents and the stayers in the home country.

Though labor migration is often rationalized as 'for the family's sake', the absence of a parent necessarily changes the pattern of everyday life and care for those left behind. Family structures may be altered as tasks are reassigned and existing roles of remaining family members change to fill the gap left by the absent migrant (Gamburd, 2000). In most cases caregivers are mothers who try to keep the bond with the migrant parent so that communication between this last one and the children is effective and constant. This is also an asset in building the relationship father-children, even when in Ecuador the sense of unity in transnational families tend to be based more on the remittances than on the affective bonds that should characterize this relationship.

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