

**CHILDREN
ON THE
MOVE**

CHILDREN WHO STAY BEHIND

in Latin America and the Caribbean
While Parents Migrate



Brief: Children who stay behind in Latin America and the Caribbean while parents migrate

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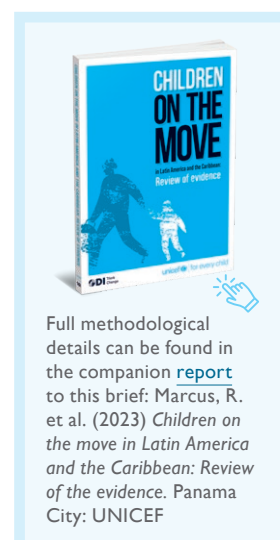
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Key Points



Although data is somewhat out of date, studies show that up to 21 per cent of children in Latin America and the Caribbean are living without one or both parents as a result of migration – to North America, Europe, other countries within the region, or another part of the country.



Most studies find that mothers migrate more or as often as fathers, both internally and internationally. However, in some countries (El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico), fathers migrate more frequently than mothers. Some studies from the 2000s and 2010s found that parents migrated for several years (between 5 and 15 years), returning to their country every two to three years to visit their children. However, following increased difficulties crossing the United States–Mexican border, more parents have attempted to bring their children to the United States.



Compared to the rest of the region, there is more evidence, including studies from the last decade, from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, and, to a lesser extent, Bolivia and Ecuador. In the late 1990s and 2000s, a number of studies highlighted the effects on children of parental absence due to migration in Anglophone Caribbean countries, such as Jamaica. However, few recent studies from this subregion were found.



Evidence from Latin America and the Caribbean is mixed, but shows a less favourable picture than that of other regions; studies from other parts of the world often find that, when parents migrate for work, increased resources from remittances enhance the health, nutrition, living conditions and education of children. The literature reviewed from Latin America and the Caribbean found some similar evidence but also some studies finding negative effects, such as increased obesity among children of migrant parents.



Literature from Latin American and the Caribbean emphasises (more strongly than studies elsewhere) the negative psychological effects of separation from families. Despite these widely recognised negative psychological effects, there appear to be few mental health and psychosocial well-being initiatives that support this group of children.





1 | Introduction

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Academic and policy concerns about the effects of parental migration on children who remained in the care of relatives in the Caribbean seems to have peaked in the late 2000s and declined over the subsequent decade.

This brief summarizes evidence from Latin America and the Caribbean on the effects of parental migration on children who ‘stay behind’. It is based on studies in English and Spanish found as part of a review of recent literature on children’s experiences of migration in the region.¹ It is important to note that this focus emerged from a wider literature review. This brief is not based on an exhaustive review but seeks to draw out key themes emerging from the literature.

With the exceptions discussed in this brief, the majority of studies of this topic in Latin America and the Caribbean are from the 2000s, sometimes drawing on data collected in the late 1990s. Academic and policy concerns about the effects of parental migration on children who remained in the care of relatives in the Caribbean seems to have peaked in the late 2000s and declined over the subsequent decade. For example, D’Emilio et al. (2007) conducted a literature review on this issue focused on the Latin America and Caribbean region and, five years later, Dillon and Walsh (2012) undertook a systematic review focusing on children in the Caribbean. However, little later literature was found.

1.1 | Patterns of parental migration without children

Historically, and to the present day, the region has seen high levels of parental migration, to the United States of America and Canada, Europe, neighbouring countries, or within countries, in search of better livelihood opportunities (Migration Data Portal 2021;

¹ Full details of the searches can be found in the companion [report](#) to this brief: Marcus, R. et al. (2023) *Children on the move in Latin America and the Caribbean: Review of the evidence*. Panama City: UNICEF

Tienda and Sanchez 2013). The numbers of children affected are large. For example, Dillon and Walsh's (2012) review quotes estimates of 10–20 per cent of children in some Caribbean countries having at least one migrant parent.² Comparing data from eight Latin American and Caribbean countries (collected between 1998 and 2013), DeWaard, Nobles and Donato (2018) found that the proportion of children with a parent absent due to migration ranged from 7 per cent (in Peru) to 21 per cent (in the Dominican Republic). In a study of 800 migrant households in Venezuela, 15 per cent of adults migrating in 2020 reported leaving a child behind. Although this percentage has nearly halved since 2018, Centro Comunitario de Aprendizaje³ (CECODAP 2020) estimates that there are still over 800,000 children and adolescents living without at least one parent in Venezuela. Data from El Salvador's 2016 Household Survey show that around 7 per cent have an absent migrant parent; just under 4 per cent have an absent migrant father, just under 2 per cent have an absent migrant mother, and for just under 1 per cent of children, both parents have migrated (Rubio 2022).

Two main patterns are apparent. In the first pattern, one or both parents migrate without their children and send for them once established in a new country. For example, studies from Chile highlight Peruvian mothers migrating alone and starting processes of family reunification after an average of five years, during which time children remained under the care of female relatives in Peru (Pavez Soto 2010, 2012, 2013). Studies of the Venezuelan crisis have observed one or both parents moving and mainly leaving children either with grandparents (51 per cent) or with their mothers (41 per cent), while a smaller percentage of children remain under the care of uncles and aunts (10 per cent) or older siblings (2 per cent) (CECODAP 2020). Around 62 per cent of these families have plans for family reunification, either through the parent(s) returning to Venezuela to bring their children once settled, or through arranging for a family member or friend to travel with them. However, it is also estimated that over 2 per cent of Venezuelan children and adolescents who have stayed behind since 2015 have eventually migrated without their parents (Guerrero 2020).

There are several reasons for parents migrating first. For example, a study by the UN Refugee Agency (UNCHR) (2021) with 136 Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Bolivia found that, out of the 71 per cent of families that left children with relatives, nearly 17 per cent did so for budget reasons, and over 5 per cent lacked documentation to ensure regular migration for the whole family. In some cases, families had already suffered a previous deportation (2 per cent) or denial of asylum (20 per cent), or were previously separated by border authorities (11 per cent), and thus believed that it was safer for children to stay with relatives. In addition, for nearly 7 per cent of families, separation was a strategy to ensure the provision of care for an older family member who could not endure travel. Anecdotal evidence suggests that families with multiple children tend to travel with the youngest and leave the oldest behind (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes 2021), a pattern that is consistent with growing numbers of Venezuelan adolescents travelling alone to reunite with family (Universidade de Brasilia and Defensoria Pública da União 2021).

In the first pattern, one or both parents migrate without their children and send for them once established. The second is that parents take up long-term residence in another country and send remittances and visit.



2 Note: All percentages in this study are rounded to a whole number.

3 Communal Centre of Learning

Another main pattern of migration without children involves parents taking up long-term residence in another country, sending remittances and visiting from time to time, but not attempting to bring family members to their new country of residence. This pattern is more evident in studies from the Anglophone Caribbean and among migrants to Europe; it is also evident in some studies from Mexico, Central America and Venezuela. Indeed, the ability to provide remittances is often a central motivation for parental migration from Venezuela: in a survey with 500 adult Venezuelan migrants residing in different countries 87 per cent of respondents reported sending money to support their children (CECODAP 2020).

Most studies found that mothers are migrating more or as often as fathers.

Abrego and LaRossa (2009), in El Salvador, and Dreby (2006), in Mexico, found that both mothers and fathers often stay for extended periods of time in the United States (between 5 and 15 years), with children staying in the care of their grandmothers. Some studies have found that parents returned to their country every two to three years to visit their children (Dreby 2010), but following difficulties crossing the United States–Mexican border, other parents have attempted to bring their children to the United States (Anastario et al. 2015).

Most studies found that mothers are migrating more or as often as fathers; evidence of this is available from El Salvador (Abrego and LaRossa 2009), Mexico (Donato and Duncan 2011; Dreby 2010) and Bolivia (Santibáñez and Calle n.d). Using nationally representative census and survey data in eight Latin American countries and Puerto Rico and exploring both domestic and international migration, DeWaard, Nobles and Donato (2018) found that in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Peru and Puerto Rico, children's migrant parents tend to be mothers; in Peru, this is particularly the case for internal migration. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico, children's migrant parents were more likely to be fathers, who had moved internationally.





2 | Effects on Children

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2.1 | Economic well-being

Two studies report on the general economic well-being of children who stay behind when their parents migrate. DeWaard, Nobles and Donato (2018) found that parental migration was associated with children living in households with more assets (e.g., residential property, housing materials, housing size, electricity, running water, radios and televisions) than those with non-migrant parents. In El Salvador, Abrego and LaRossa (2009) observed that children's economic well-being is typically greater when mothers migrate, compared to when fathers do, because mothers feel a greater sense of obligation towards their children, sending remittances more often and with larger monetary value compared to fathers.

2.2 | Education

Overall, the greatest number of studies examine the effects of parental migration on children's education; one of these was a synthesis, bringing together evidence from throughout the region over the past 15 years. Caarls et al.'s (2021) review of research from the Latin American and Caribbean region suggests that findings about the impacts of parental migration on education are mixed and inconclusive. Their review points to studies showing negative educational effects. For example, Davis (2018) shows that

the migration of Nicaraguan parents to Costa Rica is associated with reduced school enrolment among children who stay in Nicaragua. Family members' migration also had a negative effect on educational transitions from lower secondary (middle or junior high school) to secondary school (high school) among non-migrant youth in Mexico (Halpern-Manners 2011). Lahaie et al. (2009) found that Mexican households with one migrant caregiver were more likely to have at least one child with academic, behaviour or emotional problems than non-migrant households in high emigration communities.

However, Caarls et al. (2021) also highlight a number of studies from the region conducted in the early 2000s that have found positive effects of parental migration on the educational outcomes of children who stayed in their usual place of residence, including in Haiti (Bredl 2011), El Salvador (Edwards and Ureta 2003; Intemann and Katz 2014), Mexico (Alcaraz, Chiquiar and Salcedo 2012; Kandel and Kao 2001; Nobles 2011) and Guatemala (Adams and Cuecuecha 2010). These studies found that remittances allow households to invest more resources towards education, which translates into increased school enrolment, attendance and attainment, higher academic performance, reduced grade repetition and reduced drop-out.

Additionally, more recent studies examined for this review also found mixed effects on education, skewing more towards negative effects. Carranza's (2021) study with children of migrant parents in El Salvador and Nicaragua found a decrease in educational attendance and performance. The study attributes these effects to the lack of guidance from parents, feelings of abandonment, anger and sadness, or children experiencing sexual abuse and maltreatment in their households.

Rubio (2020, 2022), using data from El Salvador's Household Surveys between 2011 and 2019, found that children with at least one migrant parent have a lower probability of attending school, particularly among older boys aged 13–17, who were at increased risk of dropping out to work. This reflected the fact that remittances received were not large or consistent enough to reduce the need for work. Rubio's study found that parental migration does not affect girls' school attendance, but it does increase girls' likelihood of neither studying nor working, which may mean they are carrying out more domestic work and/or preparing to migrate themselves. Having a migrant parent increases both the likelihood of children migrating in the future to reunite with their

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family, and the ease of this migration. Overall, Rubio found no significant effects of parental migration on children falling behind in school.

One study from Bolivia attributes negative impacts on adolescents' (12- to 17-year-olds) education to the fact that caregivers were mostly illiterate and unable to support children with their homework or to provide general guidance regarding their education (Santibáñez and Calle n.d). Caregivers (especially grandparents) also noted that local authorities did not provide them with any support to help children with their education, and most children had to work to fulfil the needs of the household.

Evidence from rural Mexico shows that living in a household with at least one migrant parent decreases the likelihood of boys completing junior high school by 22 per cent, and of boys and girls completing high school by 13 per cent and 15 per cent (respectively), due to increased migration of boys and increased housework for girls (McKenzie and Rapoport 2011). Antman (2011) found similar patterns. By contrast, Tucker et al.'s (2013) study of Mexican adolescents and young people aged 14–24 years old, in households with at least one migrant member, found that younger members felt less need to migrate; their jobs or remittances from family members in the United States enabled them to continue living and studying in Mexico. Their decisions about whether or not to migrate were intertwined with educational goals, especially for younger participants, who expressed a strong preference to postpone migration until they completed school. They also preferred to study and work in Mexico or wait until they could migrate legally.

2.3 | Health and nutrition

Fewer of the studies examined for this review considered the effects of parental migration on children's health. The studies reviewed had mixed findings.

Using data from the late 1990s, two studies in Dillon and Walsh's (2012) review, both carried out in Mexico, examined the effects on children's health. Schmeer (2009) found that, in households where fathers were absent due to migration, children aged 5 and under were more likely to report illness and to have suffered diarrhoea than in households with fathers present. Frank and Hummer (2002) found that infants in migrant households were less likely to have low birth weight than those in non-migrant households. Dillon and Walsh (2012) do not discuss the likely explanations for these findings.

Using 2005 and 2009 data from the Mexican Family Life Survey, Vilar-Compte et al. (2021) found that children who stay in Mexico while relatives migrate to the United States are at greater risk of becoming overweight or obese compared to those who have no migration networks in the United States. Although the study does not provide an explanation, the authors suggest the higher risk of this group of children becoming overweight or obese could be driven by the additional income from remittances or social dietary habits exported from the United States.

Fouratt and Voorend's (2018) study of Nicaraguan children with parents in Costa Rica observed that carers used remittances to pay for children's health care in private clinics, given the long wait and low quality of public health services. When migrants were unable to send remittances, this significantly affected children's access to health care. Given the high costs of private health services and the general unreliability of remittances, families often combine basic care in the public sector with the purchase of medication or specialist appointments or examinations in the private sector.

“ Me and my brothers have our basic needs covered. My parents send us what we need, but the money and things do not compensate for the loneliness and the lack of affection that we endure every day”

(Carranza 2021, 12).



2.4 | Mental health and psychosocial well-being

There is a consensus across (almost) all the 10 studies that reported on psychosocial well-being (one of which was a systematic review bringing together evidence from a further 20 studies) that there are negative effects on children's mental health and psychosocial well-being when one or both of their parents migrate. Carranza (2021) explored the challenges faced by 21 adolescents (aged 13–18) in El Salvador and Nicaragua whose parents had migrated to the United States. Although study participants agreed that the financial situation of their families had improved, they experienced loneliness. As one adolescent boy explained: “Me and my brothers have our basic needs covered. My parents send us what we need, but the money and things do not compensate for the loneliness and the lack of affection that we endure every day” (Carranza 2021, 12).

Participants felt the impact of maternal migration deeply, struggling emotionally in the absence of emotional security and day-to-day affection. Even if caregivers (usually grandparents, family friends and older siblings) provided care, participants considered that “it was not the same” as having their mothers physically with them. Older children had to resolve their own grief while trying to provide care for their younger siblings. As one adolescent girl said:



It was very difficult at the beginning. My mom left leaving my younger brothers and sisters with me. I was only 13 or 14 [years old]. I didn't have any experience being a mom. Like my youngest brother grew up calling me mom. But when he grew up the other kids told him that I was not his mother...that he didn't have to listen to me 'cause I was not his mom...One day, he asked me...I told him the truth...like I didn't want to lie to him. But, I also told him that I loved him like he was my own son. I still do. I think he was the most affected of all of us...I see it in his eyes...like he's broken, missing something inside...

[Carranza 2021, 16]

Key informants in the same study observed that the consequences of parental absence included misbehaviour, low academic performance, school drop-out and early pregnancies, drug use and a heightened risk of trafficking. In Bolivia, Santibáñez and Calle (n.d) also found that maternal migration caused distress to participants of their study. “I miss my mum so much,” “I miss her caring” and “I feel lonely without my mum” were common expressions among children (Santibáñez and Calle n.d., 31).⁴ Nevertheless, girls had an easier time expressing their feelings about absence, while boys, more often than girls, described getting used to the absence of one or both of their parents. Furthermore, girls left behind were usually in charge of caring for younger siblings along with their grandmothers. This implied not only a physical and emotional toll of providing care, but also sometimes a requirement to give up their education, personal growth and free time.

4 Quotes translated from Spanish by report authors.

Several studies have examined the emotional effects of parental migration on children in Ecuador. Jerves et al. (2020) document the development of less secure attachment styles by children with an absent parent, while Ron (2010) documents the association between lower self-esteem and feelings of abandonment, sadness and loneliness in children who stayed behind in Cuenca. Verdezoto and Llanes's (2020) study of migrant father-child relationships in three cities with substantial levels of emigration – Biblián, Sígisig and Calderón – also echoes these findings. Verdezoto and Llanes report that most children in their sample had not seen their fathers in eight years or more, that most had had no contact with their fathers since they emigrated, and that those who remained in contact felt their fathers were not attuned to their emotional needs. Feelings of abandonment and estrangement were common among the children interviewed, for example:

The few times I talk to my dad, we just make small talk. We never discuss deep stuff. It's as if he just doesn't care about me. He never asks how I do at school or if I have a girlfriend...He doesn't know and doesn't make any effort to know anything about me

(Hugo, fourteen years old) ...

My mom tells me that he left for the U.S. and abandoned her. He never told her that he was leaving. One day he just left and called her the next day from the U.S. My mom was expecting me then when this happened

(Joel, fifteen years old). (Verdezoto and Llanes 2020, 435).

Parents' difficulties in maintaining contact with their children may reflect the distance they migrate: The top three destinations for Ecuadorian migrants in 2020 were Spain, the United States and Italy (United Nations Children's Fund 2021). In Venezuela, where parents are more likely to migrate to neighbouring countries, 63 per cent of families maintain daily communication via social media (CECODAP 2020).

Eleven studies discussed in Dillon and Walsh's (2012) review also found negative effects on children's emotional well-being. Elliot-Hart, Avery and Rehner (2006) found that secondary school children in Jamaica whose primary caregivers were absent for six months or longer were more likely to experience depression, but no more likely to use drugs. Pottinger's (2005) study of 9- and 10-year-olds in Jamaica found a significant relationship between children's reaction to their parents' migration and psychological difficulties, including depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. Compared to a control group, the children of migrant parents had poorer school performance, greater expressed feelings of abandonment, anger and loneliness, and more somatic complaints. Jones, Sogren and Sharpe's (2004) study of 13- to 16-year-olds in Trinidad and Tobago found that approximately one third of children with a migrant parent experienced significant levels of depression and interpersonal difficulties and were twice as likely as children in a control group to have experienced feelings of anger, fear, anxiety, loss, rejection and abandonment. Boys were more likely to have problems in interpersonal relationships, and girls were more likely to have experienced negative moods and low self-esteem. Though the balance of findings is clearly negative, Dillon and Walsh (2012) caution that many of the studies they reviewed were based on small sample sizes and, in the case of secondary analyses, were restricted in the availability of variables.



*“I miss my mum so much,”
“I miss her caring”
and “I feel lonely
without my mum”
were common
expressions
among children*

[Santibáñez and Calle n.d., 31].



Dillon and Walsh (2012) also considered gender dimensions but conclude that there is insufficient evidence concerning the relative effects of mothers' and fathers' absence. Other factors, such as the nature of children's relationships with grandparents and other carers, had an important influence on children's well-being, a conclusion reinforced by reviews by DeWaard, Nobles and Donato (2018) and Caarls et al. (2021).

Domínguez Jiménez, Iglesias and León's (2016) qualitative study of 6- to 11-year-old Cuban children with at least one migrant parent, who had attended a psychological clinic, found that they showed feelings of anger, sadness, anxiety, longing, sorrow and abandonment, and fears about whether the migrant parent would return.

Ceja Cárdenas et al. (2020) also probed the situation of children who stayed behind in Venezuela when family members migrated. They often stayed with grandparents or other relatives, whom they sometimes did not know well, and where they did not always feel at ease. Several children reported that they rejoined their parents outside Venezuela as soon as they could, as they had not enjoyed the separation. The CECODAP (2020) study suggests that less than 4 per cent of children who stay behind have some kind of psychosocial support to mitigate the effects of separation. But out of those undergoing counselling, 45 per cent reported feelings of anger, abandonment and frustration related to their parents' migration.

2.5 | Child Protection

The majority of studies that examine protection-related issues focus on the impacts on child labour. Three studies – from Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador – suggest that children who live in households with an absent migrant parent are more likely to work (one study found the opposite). This is consistent with the findings of an earlier study in Haiti (Amuedo-Dorantes, Georges and Pozo 2008), discussed in Dillon and Walsh (2012), which found that, in households with an absent migrant parent, children were more likely to be working and not attending school. All studies also found nuances that qualified these findings for specific groups of children.

INVOLVEMENT IN WORK

In Guatemala, a study by Organización Internacional del Trabajo⁵ (2021), undertaken in San Pedro Sacatepéquez and based on data from the Censo de Población y Vivienda de Guatemala⁶ 2018, found that a slightly higher proportion of children aged 7–17 years old work when they live in households that receive remittances (11 per cent) and have a household member living abroad (10 per cent), compared to children who do not live in a household that receives remittances (9 per cent) or have a household member living abroad (8 per cent).

Antman (2011) found that Mexican children reduced study hours and increased work hours due to the immediate financial hardship associated with fathers' migration, before they started receiving remittances. Father's migration



⁵ International Labour Organization.

⁶ Population and Housing Census of Guatemala.

decreased both boys' and girls' probability of going to school, although the relationship was not statistically significant. There was also a large and statistically significant increase in work hours for 12- to 15-year-old boys, of around 32 hours per week, as well as an increase in work participation.

As noted in Section 2.2, 13- to 17-year-old boys in El Salvador with at least one absent migrant parent are 12 per cent more likely to be working than peers without absent migrant parents (Rubio 2020; 2022). By contrast, Cuadros-Menac, Aguirre and Borja's (2020) study of the impact of remittances on child labour and school attendance for children aged 12–18 years in Santiago de Cali (Colombia) found that children in remittance-recipient households were 11 per cent less likely to undertake any form of labour than their counterparts; this study also found no impacts on school attendance.

Finally, a study in Venezuela found that around 60 per cent of children left under the care of relatives did not have any documentation granting legal guardianship to their caregivers (CECODAP 2020). This is likely to increase the risks of child migration in future attempts of family reunification, as many countries demand these documents to allow children's regular movement with caregivers. It should be noted that 67 per cent of Venezuelan children who crossed the border to Brazil between May 2019 and March 2020 were travelling with someone who was not their legal guardian (Universidade de Brasília and Defensoria Pública da União 2021).

VULNERABILITY TO VIOLENCE

Three studies report an increased risk of victimization. Cárdenas et al.'s (2020) qualitative study highlights that being known to receive remittances can put children at risk. For example, one 16-year-old boy interviewed said that he had stayed in Venezuela to complete his studies, but after he was the victim of an attempted robbery (because it was known that his mother sent him money), he immediately left to rejoin his family in Colombia. In Bolivia, Santibáñez and Calle (n.d) found that children and adolescents with migrant parents were more vulnerable to violence than other children: sexual violence in the case of girls (both in the home and in workplaces) and physical violence in the case of boys. In El Salvador, Rubio's (2022) study suggests that older adolescent boys with absent parents are at greater risk of being recruited by gangs. As a result, some adolescents drop out of school to join gangs or alternatively migrate to escape gang violence.

VULNERABILITY TO OTHER FORMS OF HARM

Carranza's (2021) study – undertaken in marginalized poor areas of El Salvador – found that children whose parents had migrated felt disconnected from their caregivers, school and community. According to participants, without parental protection, children and young people became vulnerable to trafficking and drug use; Rubio's (2022) study similarly highlights older adolescent boys' risk of recruitment by gangs. This echoes the findings of Crawford-Brown's (1999) study in Jamaica, discussed in Dillon and Walsh's (2012) review, which found that boys with an absent parent were more likely to come into conflict with the law. Cavagnoud's (2015) study of street children in La Paz and El Alto (Bolivia) mentions that parental migration without children is one contributory factor to children living on the street. Bolivia's Comité Asesor del Consejo de Derechos Humanos⁷ (n.d.) corroborates these findings.

The studies reviewed found mixed effects on children's education, with the benefits of remittances often outweighed by children needing to take on extra paid or unpaid work, particularly before they started receiving remittances, or if they only received them irregularly.

7 Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council.



3 | Conclusions

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Community-based programming in areas with high levels of parental emigration might help alleviate some of the mental distress reported.

Although some recent studies have probed the impacts on children of parental migration, 60 per cent of the studies reviewed were published before 2015. This indicates that the topic is perhaps not receiving sufficient attention and that interest has been somewhat displaced by attention to children who are moving with their families, or alone, in the region.⁸ Recent academic studies have mostly taken place in Central America, particularly in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Ecuador, with some examples from Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. The wave of studies of children 'left behind' in the Anglophone Caribbean in the 1990s and early 2000s does not appear to have been updated, though media reports do periodically cover the issue (e.g. Noel 2017, 2018). While this may reflect a shift in migration patterns, including more families moving together (particularly in Central America), family separation as a result of migration continues throughout the region.

To summarize key insights, the studies reviewed found mixed effects on children's education, with the benefits of remittances often outweighed by children needing to take on extra paid or unpaid work, particularly before they started receiving remittances, or if they only received them irregularly. Emotional difficulties related to

⁸ It may also reflect an approach to supporting this group of children that focuses on communities of origin as a whole, and psychosocial support for children in distress, rather than one that risks stigmatising this specific group of children or evoking jealousy by targeting them exclusively.

parental absence also resulted in some children being less able to learn and struggling at school. Three of the four health studies found negative effects of parental migration; in two cases this may reflect there being fewer caregivers present, and in one, the negative effects of exposure to dietary patterns common in the United States.

Of the four studies that considered the effects on child labour, three found that children were more likely to work in households with a migrant parent. In only one did remittance income reduce the need for children to work. Three studies also found increased vulnerability to violence, which they attribute to others' awareness of remittance income, and less consistent care, with three studies finding an association between parental absence and anti-social behaviour. The evidence on whether the gender of the absent parent affects the consequences for children is mixed; nor are studies clear about the types of care arrangements that are typically associated with better outcomes for children of migrant parents.

All the studies reviewed found negative effects on children's psychosocial well-being. The literature review found no examples of initiatives that attempted to provide psychosocial support to children experiencing parental separation as a result of migration, though some affected children were included in initiatives in communities that experience a high level of migration, often as part of programmes initially intended to support returnees. Though there are good reasons not to target children in particular family situations, so as not to stigmatize them, community-based programming in areas with high levels of parental emigration might help alleviate some of the mental distress reported.

It would be valuable to fill some of the key knowledge gaps related to children who stay behind when parents migrate. Strengthening regular large-scale surveys, so that they probe issues related to migration in more depth, and making greater use of data from sources such as population registries, would help provide a more complete picture of the scale of the phenomenon and its effects on children. Qualitative studies that probe patterns found in quantitative studies are an essential complement. Key gaps include: an understanding of whether the effects of mothers' and fathers' migration are different (and whether they affect boys and girls differently), factors that protect against harm, and how these factors can be supported and strengthened. Additionally, in Central America, it would also be valuable to better understand how parental absence due to migration can increase vulnerability to gang recruitment and violence, and ways these risks can be minimized.

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