

Title VIII Research Scholar/Combined Research and Language Training Program

Parental Economic Migration and Children Outcomes in Moldova

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Final Report

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Funding from Title VIII Research Scholar/Combined Research and Language Training Program provided me with the opportunity to conduct research in Moldova in May - July 2009.

The goal of this study was to examine how parental economic migration impacts children and their outcomes in Moldova, and will hopefully be continued in other Eastern European countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine. Eastern European migrants represent a target group with unstudied migration patterns. The increase in the recent Eastern European migration poses new opportunities for the study of this group's adaptation to this phenomenon. The specific aims of this study on Moldovan children with migrant parents are to examine: 1. how children understand parental migration process with its opportunities and challenges and how this process impacts them; 2. if there are any differences depending on child's gender; 3. if there are differences between children who have migrant parents and those who do not.

After the fall of communism, in search of higher wages, many Eastern Europeans sought work abroad leaving their children in the care of their relatives. Due to economic migration, in Moldova about 30% of children live without one or both parents (Sarbu, 2007). At least 17% of Moldova population left the country in search of work, leaving behind an estimated 150,000 to 270,000 children without either a mother or a father, and around 40,000 being separated from both parents (Lozinski, 2006). Most of the migration policies in migrant sending countries such as Moldova focus on developing advantageous labor contracts with the receiving countries. There is not much attention paid to the psychosocial impact that migration has on children and families and the support they need to adapt to this process. Consequently, a major problem is the lack of social support programs in schools or communities for children and parents in migrant families.

Research Methods

This school-based study was conducted in Chisinau, Moldova with 388 students in 6th -8th grade. The PI had the linguistic competence to administer the surveys since Romanian is her native language and it is also the language spoken in Moldova. I found the school staff being very supportive of my research efforts. Similarly, the families and children were very responsive to the study, majority of the participants asked accepting to respond to the survey.

All survey questions were translated in Romanian language using the translation-backtranslation method (Hambleton, 1994). The majority of these measures have been administered before to international (e.g., Eastern European) populations and their published reliability and validity are good (e.g., Robila & Krishnakumar, 2005). The survey included questions and scales on demographics, satisfaction with parental migration, perceived economic pressure (Conger et al.,

1994); perceived social support from family and friends (Procidano, 1983), parental support - Child's Report of Parenting Behavior Inventory, monitoring (Small & Kerns, 1993), parent / guardian-child conflict -Issues Checklist (IC) (Robin & Foster, 1984), Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977); Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983); grade point average (GPA).

Future Plans

In the following months I plan to conduct data analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the proposed conceptual model (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996). The model will be estimated via maximum likelihood using the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS 5.0; Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). Tests of mediation will be based on Baron and Kenny's (1986) guidelines. The significance of the indirect pathways will be examined using Sobel's test (1982).

Then, the results will be disseminated through two articles in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Journal of Child and Family Studies) and two presentations at international conferences (e.g., National Council on Family Relations). In the next six months I plan to conduct data analysis; write the articles and presentations. A report will be distributed to the participating Moldovan children and schools, and to other agencies involved with migration.

Significance

This study offers implications for research, teaching, practice and policy. In terms of research, this study provides a baseline of knowledge on how Moldovan children are impacted by the migration of their parents, to be built on by future research. Since this phenomenon of parental migration and children left behind in care of relatives is not singular to Moldova but rather widespread in Eastern Europe this represents a preliminary study to be continued in other Eastern European countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine. This work contributes to teaching since the articles published from this study could be used in courses on cultural diversity and immigrant children and families. At the society level, this work promotes an understanding of Moldovan migrant families in particular and the whole migrant population, contributing to multiculturalism by increasing the acceptance of diversity.

An important contribution of this study is that it provides scholars with knowledge on children and their migrant parents in Eastern Europe, specifically in Moldova. Since there is no available data on Eastern European children and their experience of parental migration, examining children's own perspectives on the migration process and its impact on child outcomes represents an important strength of the study. This knowledge will be a base for the development of effective family-friendly migration policy. This study will be an important information source for social scientists, social service providers, community-based organizations and policy-makers. This knowledge will be a base in developing applied support strategies for these families that will help them maximize the opportunities and minimize the challenges of migration, making it a safer and more effective process. Recommendations to develop social policies and support programs for migrant parents and their children will be provided. These programs and policies will support migrants' human rights, democracy and economic prosperity which are also goals of U.S. foreign policy. Understanding how the migration process affects families in Europe is important for the United States, which is the country with the highest number of migrants. Understanding these processes allows US to be informed about how these issues are approached

in other regions and this might also prevent some of their negative consequences. It also allows US to be part of the international dialogue on migration with other governments and non-governmental organizations to discuss migration policy issues in order to explore solutions.