

## **Left Behind: The Impact of Parental Migration on Salvadoran and Mexican Children**

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### **Abstract**

According to the Department of Homeland Security, there are over 11 million undocumented workers living in the United States. Many of them are parents of children who were left behind in their country of origin. Jordan and Graham (2011) state that most researchers have been focusing on the adults/parent(s) well being rather than on the children left behind. Therefore, I ask how do children of families who seek work in another country, adjust to life growing up without a parent(s)? What are the obstacles and/or challenges left behind children face while in the care of a family member? How do they overcome those obstacles/challenges? This paper argues that children of transnational families are easy prey for exploitation, recruitment into criminal activity (including gangs, and/or cartels) because their parents are not present to guide, protect, and educate them. The argument is supported with evidence collected through interviews with adults who were left behind as children in Mexico and El Salvador. The goal of this study is to show what adults endured as left behind children and continue to endure even now. And if as adults they continue to struggle then they are not productive global citizens.

**Keywords:** Migration, Left Behind, Children

### **1. Introduction**

According to the Department of Homeland Security, there are over 11 million undocumented adults living and working in the United States. Many of them are parents of children who were left behind in their country of origin to be raised by a relative or close friend of the family. This means that there are millions of children in developing countries growing up in the absence of their parent(s). China, for example, has over 58 million children left behind, Indonesia over 1 million, the Philippines 6 to 9 million, and an estimated 350,000 children in Romania (18). Countries all over the world are experiencing a mass outflow of migration, and an increase in the number of children being left behind by their parent(s). Sternberg (2011) states that migration is driven by the parents' strong desire to escape poverty, and to improve the life of their children. However, this strong desire has actually left their children at the mercy of others. Most researchers have been focusing on the parent's well being rather than on the children left-behind. Comparable work on the psychological well-being of children left behind is underdeveloped, as there is no established theoretical framework to guide the analysis. And even fewer studies have examined the social and psychological costs of living in a transnational family. Hence, there is an urgent need for a better understanding of the impacts of family separation on the health and well-being of children left-behind (15). Given this information the researcher asks; how do children of families who seek work in another country, adjust to life growing up without a parent(s)? What are the obstacles and/or challenges children who are left behind face on a daily basis? How do they overcome those obstacles/challenges? This paper argues that children who grow up in the absence of their parents are easy prey for exploitation, recruitment into criminal activity (including gangs, and/or cartels) because their parents are not present

to guide, protect, and educate them. The goal of this study is to show what adults endured as left behind children and continue to endure even now. And if as adults they continue to struggle then they are not productive global citizens.

This is a comparative, qualitative study of left behind children from Mexico and El Salvador. The researcher employed seven one on one interviews with adults that lived in a transnational family as children, and that currently live in the Bay Area (Sonoma, and Solano County). The interviews are conducted in English. However, a few words are translated from Spanish to English, as Spanish is the subjects' primary language. The researcher also employs the Self Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20) developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The researcher utilizes the findings from the interviews to shed light on this phenomenon that effects millions of children in developing countries, and yet not enough attention is geared toward it.

This paper analyzes migration as the main reason for leaving a child behind. The researcher concentrates on the deprivation of parental care and guidance on children, and how this affects their daily activities leading them to possibly being exploited and/or recruited into criminal activity. First, she reviews the literature. Second, she explains the logic behind her argument, and why she chose El Salvador and Mexico as the two cases of studies. Third, she explains the methods used in collecting the data, and the findings pertaining to this research project. Lastly, she concludes with what is learned from carrying out this study.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

The researcher start this review by looking at the main reasons a parent has for leaving a child behind based on the writings of scholars who have researched this topic. Second, she discusses who is appointed or placed as the surrogate parent(s) of the child. Usually this person is appointed by the parent(s) of the child before migrating. Third, she covers the dangers and pathways left behind children face on a daily basis in their country of origin. Including drug use, recruitment into criminal activity, child labor, exploitation and lack of school attendance. Lastly, she considers the potential psychological, and social damage of abandonment.

### **2.1 Reasons for leaving a child behind**

There are many reasons for leaving a child behind, including: not having any emotional attachment toward the child, migration, death of a parent, and divorce. All of the reasons for leaving a child behind are important for analysis, however the researcher focuses primarily on migration.

### **2.2 Migration**

There are multiple forms of migration. There is domestic migration from rural to urban, urban to rural, and international migration. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), domestic migration is the most common type of migration, but the lack of cross-national measures make it difficult to determine the exact number of domestic migrants. International migration on the other hand account for 3% of the worlds population. And as most parent(s) who decide to migrate from a developing country internationally migrate to other developed states, like the United States or Western Europe. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) (2011) reported that 214 million individuals are international migrants. Countries like the Philippines, China, Moldova, Morocco, Angola, and the Caribbean just to name a few, experience a massive outflow of migration.

#### ***2.2.1 economic and political reasons for migration***

Economic challenges or despair is by far the primary reason for international migration. Sternberg (2011) states that parents see migration as their only way to escape poverty, and provide a better life for their loved ones. Migration gives parents hope in providing a better future for their children. Osaki (2003) states that the majority of individuals migrate to improve the economic condition of their household by sending remittances, rather than for self-aspiration. Remittances are the most valuable source of income for family members in country of origin. In addition, remittances contribute to the well being of children, and provide a better opportunity for them to attend school. Osaki (2003) states that remittances are also used for acquiring land and home improvements. Families in the developing world tend to see migration as a necessary means for survival.

Political insecurity within one's own country is another important motive for international migration. Civil wars, ethnic and/or religious conflicts leave millions of individuals displaced, desperate, and vulnerable to exploitation. The civil war in Syria that began in 2012 for example, has nearly 2.5 million refugees in neighboring countries, and 6.8 million individuals have been displaced within Syria. Mahler (2001) estimates that over one million Salvadorans, one-sixth of the entire population fled the conflict between the military and revolutionary forces of FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and fled to the United States in the 1980s. Fleeing the civil war in one's own country or migrating to improve the life of loved ones, individuals risk their lives in hopes for a better tomorrow.

Central and South Americans looking for a better future in the United States face a more daunting reality, the "reality of crossing Mexico, where they were frequently robbed, beaten, and raped as they attempt to cross into the U.S." (27). For migrant parents to leave a child behind is one of the hardest decisions they will ever have to make (27). Parents who decide to migrate and leave a child behind are risking losing the love and affection of that child. Migration will forever change the family's relationship with each other. Regardless of the consequences parents decide to migrate in the hope that their sacrifice will be appreciated and beneficial to their children.

### *2.2.2 surrogate parent(s) as caregiver*

Jokhan (2007) states that it is often the case where one parent migrates first, leaving the children in the care of a spouse (the other parent). Or both parents migrate and leave the children in the care of relatives or family friends, promising either to send for them or return to them soon. According to Boehm (2008) parents aim to secure the care for their children through preference with both parents, the mother, or extended female relatives, typically the maternal grandmother or a maternal aunt. Mummert (2009); Chang and Hayter (2011) state that grandparents and family members agree to become a surrogate parent because of their cultural beliefs and feel obligated to care for their relatives while their parents are absent. Orellana et al. (2001) states that children that are left behind depend on the willingness of the relative to provide for them financially and emotionally. Sending remittances to the caretakers become the parent's foremost obligation (30). When monetary issues come into play, family relationships may change significantly.

Pottinger and Williams (2006) state that most parents will attempt to put a surrogate parenting system in place to try and minimize the disruption to their child's life after they have migrated. But putting a surrogate parent in place may not always be the best thing to do, as "there are many children who receive little or no physical or emotional nurturance from surrogate caregivers and experience a sense of abandonment by their parents' prolonged absence" (19). Pottinger and Williams (2006) state that children of migrant parents are under protected, or inadequately supervised, resulting in them being exposed to harmful consequences such as sexual abuse.

## **2.3 Children left behind**

Parents migrate and leave their children behind despite the enormous emotional suffering it causes on both the parents and child (27). When migrant parents leave their children behind, the four most common outcomes for the children are: involvement in criminal activity; dropping out of school; psychological and emotional issues; and exploitation (including human trafficking, forced labor, and sexual exploitation).

### *2.3.1 recruitment into criminal activity and drug use*

Harris-McKoy & Cui (2013) point out that the lack of parental control was associated with higher levels of delinquent behavior in adolescents. Therefore, parental guidance is essential in assuring the well-being of the children in his/her care. Moran-Taylor (2008) state that migration affects boys negatively when they become involved in gangs, drugs, and juvenile delinquency. Harris-McKoy & Cui (2013) also add that male adolescents are more likely than female adolescents to be involved in delinquent behavior. They also propose that little parental control during adolescence will be positively associated with criminal behavior in young adulthood. Smith (2006) found that Mexican youth who felt extremely resentful toward migrant parents who left them behind, were often the most violent and aggressive members of Mexican gangs. Maclure & Sotelo (2004) state that many youth join a gang to fill the psychological and social void that their family and school experiences have left on their lives. They also claim that gangs function as surrogate families that alleviate youthful feelings of powerlessness and fulfill their needs for personal reassurance. Seery (2014) finds that the young people in El Salvador are coerced into gang affiliation, and are presented with a simple choice: join the gang, be tortured, or worse, get killed. Gangs have essentially become the death squads of the

twenty-first century. In addition to joining gangs, youth are also exposed to drug use and drug distribution as a mean for survival.

According to Casa Columbia, the risk factors associated with drug use and addiction include: psychological factors (stress, depression, anxiety), environmental influences (exposure to abuse or trauma, substance use among family or friends, and exposure to popular culture referencing the use of the substance), and substance abuse at an early age. Casa Columbia estimates that 90% of drug addicts started smoking, drinking, or using other drugs before their 18th birthday. Nguyen (2006) shows that left-behind children have a higher rate of drug use and heroin addiction, and suffer more from emotional disruption, stress and sadness, loneliness and abandonment. Left behind children are more vulnerable to drug use because they are under-supervised, and most feel a sense of abandonment by their parent(s) absence.

### *2.3.2 school dropout*

Booth & Tamura (2009) state that their findings provide no evidence of any impact of parental absence on school attendance. Whereas McKenzie & Ropoport (2010) argue that parental absence as a result of migration may translate into less parental input into the education of the youth. Overall, living in a transnational family has a negative effect on the youth and school attendance. Dreby (2007) states that boys have a greater propensity to drop out of school than male children of non-migrants. Pottinger (2005) shows that school work is affected, possibly as a result of the emotional turmoil migration has on children left behind. Many youth adopt a “waiting to migrate” mentality and therefore lose focus on their school work. Many boys and girls no longer desire to attend school or study, simply because they know they can earn a better living by migrating to the United States (29). Despite the efforts of migrant parents to provide a better future for their children, most youth do not attend school because they lack strong parental guidance. In addition, psychological and emotional issues arise due to the loneliness and the sense of abandonment from parents.

### *2.3.3. psychological and emotional issues*

Suarez-Orozco (2010) states that the results from the general linear model (GLM) analyses indicate that children who were separated from their parents were more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression in the initial years after migrating than children who had not been separated. Children of migrant mothers are predicted to experience emotional problems, and may feel they lack intimacy, and affection (11, 15). The most common psychological problems of left behind children are: feelings of abandonment, sadness, lack of trust, anger, and low self esteem (18). Children who suffer from abandonment sometimes spend their entire lives struggling with feelings of rejection and loss from their parent(s). The loss of a parent leaves a child feeling off-balance because he/she looked to his/her mother or father for a sense of security and stability. Fiorini and Mullen (2006) state that the grief and loss experiences of children and adolescents are often demonstrated emotionally. In addition, researchers indicated that children separated from parents because of migration were more than twice as likely to have emotional problems, which was even after their economic situation had improved. Dreby (2007) writes that the least powerful family member is the child who was left behind, and therefore experiences unnecessary emotional issues that can possibly affect him/her in the long run.

Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie (2002) say that attachment theorists maintain that the disruption in affectional bonds with parental figures have a profound psychological and developmental implications on the child. While Pottinger & Brown (2006) claim that attachment theorist may argue that disruption to the parent-child bond from migration puts the child at risk not only in the short term but in the long run. Many children and adolescents do not realize they have psychological problems as “psychological symptoms may manifest later in life” (15). Symptoms such as, but not limited to: anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress. According to Dreby (2007) many children at all age levels experienced low levels of depression after their parents’ departure. Parental presence is critical for the well-being of children (21) and migration disrupts this much needed love and affection because it interrupts the current parent-child attachment.

### *2.3.4 exploitation*

The 2008 UNICEF report states that left behind children are more vulnerable to exploitation, (sexual) abuse, child labor, and trafficking. In 2002, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that 1.2 million children are

being trafficked each year. Also in 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that over 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 experience forced sexual intercourse. Millions more are exploited in prostitution or pornography each year. The WHO states that most of the time young boys and girls are lured or forced into these situations through false promises. Note that the majority of children that are lured have limited knowledge about the risks to which they will be exposed.

Ugarte, Zarate, and Farley (2003) claim that every day, thousands of male tourists enter Mexico from the United States to purchase sex from women and girls in prostitution. Abandoned children, and those who have run away from an abusive home are at a high risk for prostitution and/or trafficking. As traffickers calculatedly reinforce that vulnerability of victims who have been neglected, abandoned, or previously sexually abused (41). Ugarte, Zarate, and Farley (2003) point out that across Latin America, 20% to 40% of women are raped each year, and only 1% of rapes result in criminal charges. Gender inequalities, poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and migration are all factors that contribute to prostitution and trafficking of women and children. Given that women and children are the most vulnerable to all forms of exploitation, it is crucial that governments' and society as a whole acknowledges and address this issue that affects million of individuals living in poverty.

### 3. Conceptual Framework

The researcher begins this section by explaining the logic behind her argument, followed by a discussion of why she chose Mexico and El Salvador as the case studies for this research project.

#### 3.1 Argument

This paper puts forward the argument that children who grow up in the absence of their parents are easy prey for exploitation, recruitment into criminal activity (including gangs, and/or cartels) because their parents are not present to guide, protect, and educate them. This argument is backed up by real life stories of adults that lived in a transnational family as children. The goal of this study is to show what adults endured as left behind children and continue to endure even now. And if as adults they continue to struggle then they are not productive global citizens.

The researcher's argument was derived from personal experiences living in a developing country (Mexico) as a child and seeing poverty everywhere. Children as young as six years old are on the streets begging for a *peso* or a *taco* (something to eat). Also, having personal contact with individuals who lacked parental care as children. These individuals lacked parental care did so either because of divorce, death of a parent, migration, and abandonment from one or both parents. Most of these individuals have suffered from depression. Three of the individuals have even considered suicide. Fortunately they were able to seek help from relatives and/or friends. These three individuals have been and are still on anti-depressant medication. Others individuals have turned to gangs, and illicit drugs to find comfort from the absence of their parent(s). Childhood experiences shape who one may become as a parent and as an adult.

Parents' decision to migrate and provide a better future for their children sounds appealing in theory, but in reality it is psychologically and emotionally damaging to the children left behind. Parents may make decisions that they believe is for the benefit of their children. But sometimes those decisions harm their children more than they benefit them. Children may be better off financially, but they pay the price psychologically. The researcher refer to the feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger, depression and the lack of trust toward others.

#### 3.2 Mexico And El Salvador As Case Studies

Mexico is located in North America, bordering the north of Central America (Guatemala). Mexico is the only land route in direct connection to the United States. Mexico shares 45 borders, and 330 ports of entry with the U.S., making it an ideal location for the exportation of narcotics, and trafficking of women and children. El Salvador is located in Central America, bordering the north of the Pacific Ocean, west of Guatemala and North-East of Honduras.

El Salvador is the smallest, and most densely populated country in the Americas. El Salvador's population is currently at 6,108,590, and 28.9% of it is within the age group of 0-14 years. Gangs go after this specific age group to recruit new members because this age group is the easiest to manipulate. Mexico's population is currently at 118,818,228, and 27.4% of the population are within the age group of 0-14 years. Also, over 1.9 million underprivileged and streets children live in Mexico City, 240 thousand of these are abandoned children. Therefore, as the largest age group in Mexico, the youth is most vulnerable to exploitation and drug use.

Mexico and El Salvador are notorious for violence, corruption, gangs or cartels, and lack of rights for children. *La Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13), for example, *Mara* meaning gang, *Salvatrucha* is slang for Salvadoran army ant, the number 13 refers to their association with *La Eme* (The Mexican Mafia). Also *la eme* (M) is the 13th letter of the Spanish alphabet. The *Mara*'s have an estimated "30,000 to 50,000 members and weaponry that includes assault-style rifles and grenades, the gangs are virtual armies that have the power to affect the security of the entire region" (3). *Mara* members are mainly from the United States and Central America. Not all members are Salvadoran, some are Mexican, Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, Honduran etc... MS-13 is considered to be the most dangerous and ruthless gang of the 21st century. The gangs ruthlessness comes from the 1980s guerilla warfare training that leaders of the gangs experienced during the 1980s civil war. The gang's ruthlessness and disregard for human life has made "El Salvador the most violent country in the Americas" (3). Seery (2014) estimates that between 10,500 and 30,000 residents of El Salvador are member of the *Maras*. Salvadoran authorities have reported that of all the homicides in the state each year, 80% are attributed to the gangs. The Salvadoran Government has been unable to protect civilians' rights to life at the hands of the gang members.

The Mexican Government has also been unable to protect the lives of civilians in the crossfire with the cartels. The Mexican drug war has taken the lives of at least 60 thousand individuals since it began in 2006, plus thousands more that are missing (3). In addition, violence and mass massacres have spread like wildfire all over the Mexican territory. Families are easily making the conscious decision of migrating to a safe state that can protect them from the violence in their country of origin. Most Latin Americans' migrate north to the United States, others decide to take a longer journey and migrate to Western Europe.

Mexico and El Salvador have the highest migration rate from Latin America, meaning there are more children being abandoned by their parents' because of emigration. The *Red Latinoamericana de Acogimiento Familiar* (Latin American Network for Family Assistance), estimated that 1.6 million Mexican children are orphaned and/or abandoned by their parents. In El Salvador, there are over 900 thousand children who are living on the streets without parental presence in the country. This represents a total of 50% of total youth population living on the streets of El Salvador. Gordon Jonathan Lewis, the UNICEF representative in El Salvador called these children "*La Generacion Perdida*" (The Lost Generation). Lewis claims "gangs look for these types of children to lure them into joining their gang because they are vulnerable and easily manipulated." Castellanos affirms that the primary cause for child abandonment in El Salvador is migration. He states that about 300 individuals emigrate daily from El Salvador. According to Mahler (2001) El Salvador is affected by migration more than any other country in Central America Table 2, shows the total net migration and emigration from different countries. Countries were chosen randomly from the CIA World Factbook website. Migration refers to the excess of persons entering a country, the net migration will show as positive (e.g., 3.27). Emigration refers to an excess of persons leaving a country, the net emigration will show as a negative (e.g., -7.46).

Table 2: Country Comparison: Population and Migration/Emigration Rates

Country	Population	Population Below Poverty Line	Net Migration/Emigration Rate /1000 population (est. 2013)
India	1,220,800,359	29.8% (est. 2010)	-0.05
<b>El Salvador</b>	<b>6,108,590</b>	<b>36.5% (est. 2010)</b>	<b>-8.61</b>
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>118,818,228</b>	<b>52.3% (est. 2010)</b>	<b>-2.99</b>
Nepal	30,430,267	25.2% (est. 2011)	3.3
New Zealand	4,365,113	N/A (est. 2010)	2.24
Switzerland	7,996,026	7.9% (est. 2010)	6.14

"The net migration rate does not distinguish between economic migrants, refugees, and other types of migrants nor does it distinguish between lawful migrants and undocumented migrants. National estimates of the percentage of the population falling below the poverty line are based on surveys of sub-groups, with the results weighted by the number of people in each group.

Definitions of poverty varies considerably among nations. For example, rich nations generally employ more generous standards of poverty than poor nations.”

Source: CIA World Factbook

El Salvador has a population of 6,108,590 while India has a population of 1,220,800,359. India’s population is about 200 times larger than that of El Salvador’s, and yet the emigration rate from El Salvador is -8.61, while India’s emigration rate is only at -0.05. Mexico ranks second on this table, emigration at -2.99.

Gordon Jonathan Lewis, the UNICEF representative in El Salvador, estimates that 188,343 children between the ages of five and seventeen work in different sectors to support their families. The agricultural sector has over 51% of all child labor in El Salvador (1). Agricultural labor is commonly not viewed as a sector for child labor because agriculture is closely tied to families cultures, traditions, and way of life. Children in this sector are considered or viewed only as *ayudantes* (helpers) to the well being of the entire family (1). The second form of child labor is in the service sector, composed mainly by young girls. Girls make up 95% of the service sector, mainly in domestic duties. Gordon Jonathan Lewis, states that girls are the most vulnerable, as they are raped, beaten and sometimes forced into prostitution. Regardless of the risks, both boys and girls who have the obligation to support their family will overlook the dangers for the well being of his or her siblings and parents. Food, shelter, clothing and medication is of primary concern. Children that work to support themselves and their families are willing to work in any sector including becoming street children.

It is estimated that 3.5 million children work on the streets of Mexico (42). Young girls make up 60% of the street labor force in Mexico. The majority of children who work on the streets do not attend school because they have to work to support their families. Children who run away from home usually work on the streets selling goods, such as: candy, fruit, food, and toys, others wash windshields in the middle of the road. These children risk their lives everyday as they clean the windshields while the cars are stopped on a red light. These children have to work fast and work well to get one to five *pesos*. These kids put their lives at risk for less than \$.50 US dollars. Note that twelve *pesos* is roughly \$1 US Dollar. The hidden nature of street children makes accurate statistics difficult to gather; however, UNICEF estimates there are approximately 100 million street children worldwide with that number constantly growing. There are up to 40 million street children in Latin America, and 18 million in India. Youth in developing countries tend to experience the negativity of globalization and poverty more than any other age group.

## 4. Data Collection

This is a comparative, qualitative study focusing on children that were left behind in Mexico and El Salvador. The researcher describes the instruments used in collecting the data.

### 4.1 Instruments For Collecting Data

Two different instruments were used in collecting data. Primary method were face to face interviews, utilizing the snowball sampling took to construct the sample. The second instrument used is the SRQ-20 questionnaire, which is used to measure commonly applied mental disorders such as depression and anxiety disorder in developing countries. Through descriptive statistics this instrument will demonstrate if being left behind as a child has a negative impact on their adult lives. As Jordan & Graham (2011) state psychological issues arise later in life, and not necessarily as children because they are not fully capable of grasping the impact being left behind has on their lives.

### 4.2 Interviews

The researcher chose to interview adults rather than children because a child would not be able to respond with honesty how he or she feels about his/her parent(s) decision to migrate and leave him or her behind, especially if the guardian is near by or possibly listening to the interview. In addition, the researcher did not want to negatively impact or hurt the child with the interview questions. Therefore, she realized that in order not to traumatize a child and yet obtain the information needed, she decided to focus on the reflections of adults on his/her experience as a child.

### 4.3 Self Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20)

The Self Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ) is used as a screening instrument, or more precisely, as a case-finding instrument. The SRQ-20 was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a screening tool for common mental disorders in developing countries. The SRQ-20, consists of 20 yes or no questions assesses presence of neurotic symptoms such as; anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic.

## 5. Data Analysis

This study has three main objectives. The first is to identify if parental migration had an impact on children's psychological, and emotional development. The second is to see what obstacles and/or challenges children left behind deal with on a daily basis. The third is to identify how these children cope living without their parent(s) guidance, love, and care.

### 5.1 Participants

Seven individuals were interviewed. Five of the seven participants are women, and two are men. Four of the adults that were left behind as children are from Mexico, and three are from El Salvador. Totaling seven interviews within a time period of one month.

### 5.2 Discussion

The main objective is to identify if parental migration had a negative impact on children that were left behind. Also, point out the struggles and hardships children left behind deal with on a daily basis. And how these experiences may have a negative impact on their psychological well being.

The first interview question is: do you know why your parent(s) decided to migrate? Four responded that economic reasons was the primary motive for migration. Two out of the four individuals that said economic reason was the main reason for migration, also mentioned the civil war in El Salvador but it was not a pushing force in their parent's decision to migrate. Two said the death of a parent was the motive for the other parent to leave them behind in the care of a relative. One said her mother was heart broken by her father's betrayal, and decided to migrate to get away from him. Leaving her and her younger sister in the care of a relative. When asked do you have any siblings? All seven participants said "yes," number of siblings vary from 1 to 11. With siblings in mind, the researcher asked were you all left behind? Five said yes, and two said no. I then asked were you all left behind together or in separate homes? 3 responded they were left behind together, while the other 4 were left behind in separate homes.

Three of the seven participants said they were left behind in the care of their grandparent(s), one with the father, one with the mother, one with an aunt, and one with an older sibling. Four of the seven participants claimed to have been treated with more love and care by their guardian because they were the youngest in the family. And though they claim to have been treated with more love and care they still wished for their biological parent(s) to come home. The other two participants were left in the care of the other biological parent, which is why there was no distinction between the children at home.

All seven participants attended school. Three of the participants claim self motivation was the reason they attended school. While the other four participants said they attended school because they had no other choice. Only one participant completed high school in their country of origin. Four completed middle school, and two did not get to complete elementary school. One of the two participants that did not complete elementary school, only completed the 5th grade. The other participant did not complete the 3rd grade because he had to work in the agriculture sector alongside his grandfather. Five participants claimed to have worked at the same time they attended school. The other two participants were fortunate enough to not have the obligation or responsibility to work for survival.

For the question; were there any obstacles and/or challenges you deal with on a daily basis', all seven participants said there were multiple obstacles they had to deal with as left behind children (See Table 5). The most common obstacles are; stop attending school and start working to survive. The second highest obstacle/challenge was loneliness.



Table 5: Obstacles/challenges Children Left Behind Deal with on a Daily Basis

Recruitment into criminal activity	Drug use	Physical abuse	Emotional abuse	Stop attending school	Start working to survive	Feeling lonely	Total number of participants
1	1	1	1	5	5	4	7

\*\*The results and the number of participants do not match up in this table because the participants were able to choose more than one obstacle and/or challenge they dealt with as children. Some chose two or three obstacles, while others chose only one.

When asked how did you overcome those obstacles', three participants said good guardianship is what helped them overcome these obstacles/challenges. Three others said it was self motivation to do well in school as they were not pushed or forced to go to school (See Table 6). And one said she did well in school because of the remittance she received from her mother.

Table 6: Overcoming those Obstacles

Remittance from parent	Good guardianship	Self motivation	Total number of participants
1	3	3	7

When asked what impact negative or positive, do you think being left behind had on your childhood experiences', five of the seven participants responded it was negative, while two said it was positive impact because they were given the love that their biological parent(s) did not provide for them as children. When asked as an adult now, do you agree with your parent(s) decision to migrate and leave you behind', three participants agree with their parent(s) decision to migrate and leave them behind. Four do not agree with their parent's decision to migrate and leave them in their country of origin because they suffered rejection, hunger and affection from the guardian. This is even though the participants' claimed to have been treated well by their guardian. Two of the seven participants stated that they are thankful that their parent(s) migrated because they were raised by good guardians that showed them love, care, affection, and it is thanks to the guardian that they are whom they are today. Four participant claim to have resentment toward their parent(s) for leaving them behind, and one claims to have neither. As she claims to have always known that she was alone and had to do things for herself. The four participants who disagreed with their parents decision to migrate were not necessarily the four who felt resentment for being left behind.

The interview findings point out that left behind children endure hardships that could have been avoided if the parent(s) would have stayed with them in their country of origin. Children who do not have anyone to protect them are more prone to physical, mental, and emotional abuse by others who take advantage of their vulnerability. The emotional and psychological impact migration has on Salvadoran and Mexican children that were left behind does not vary. The obstacles/challenges are the same in both countries. The researcher found no major distinctions between the participants. The main motive for emigration in both countries is economic reasons.

### 5.3 Self Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20) Findings

The SRQ-20, consists of 20 yes or no questions assesses presence of neurotic symptoms such as; anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic. The 20 questions are related to certain pains and problems that may have concerned or worried the participant within the last 30 days. If the participant thought the response to one of the 20 questions was yes, he/she circled or marked yes. If he/she did not have these symptoms within the last 30 days he/she circled or marked no. If a participant was unsure about the response then he/she needed to mark the best answer he/she can at the time of the survey (4). Each of the 20 items is scored 0 or 1. A score of 1 indicates the symptoms was present during the past month, a score of 0 indicates the symptom was absent. Therefore, the *maximum score* for the SRQ-20 is 20. SRQ is not intended to be either a substitute for, or equivalent to a clinical diagnosis (4).

Taking Uddhay, Girish, & Ullas's (2012) recommendation to use a cut-off score of 7 to 10, the researcher decided to see how many participants scored over the suitable cut-off score of 9 or 10. Participant one got the highest score of 14, followed by participant two with a score of 12, then participant six follows with a score of 10, and lastly participant three with a score of 9. According to the recommended cut-off score of 7 to 10, four of the seven or 57.1% of the participants are suffering from psychiatric morbidity. While the other three participants (four, five and seven) or 42.9% seem to have no psychological or mental problems. Two of the three Salvadoran participants' scored above the recommended cut-off score of 7 to 10. And two of the four Mexican participants' also scored above the cut-off score of 7 to 10. The researcher found no distinctions among the participants. Regardless the country of origin, the participants experienced similar emotional turmoil after their parent(s) migrated. This leads the researcher to conclude that children left behind in other developing countries are also experiencing the same emotional turmoil that these seven participants experienced as children left behind.

The 2008 UNICEF report states that identifying and reaching out to all children affected by migration is essential in reducing child labor, child trafficking, violence, early marriage, and conflict with the law. Children have the right to live a safe and happy life. Both Mexican and Salvadoran governments have been moving forward in protecting children's rights but lack reinforcement. Both governments seem to lack genuine interest in reducing child labor, child trafficking, and street children. The researcher believes this is because children are a source of income that is not otherwise available to families. And this substitutes the responsibility of the government to help families in need. Therefore, the researcher concludes that though policies may exist perhaps more could be done in a globalized world to help millions of children in developing countries that are living without the love, care and guidance of their parent(s). Given this information, the researcher asks; what can we do as global citizens to help alleviate this problem that affects million of children in developing countries? And is it our moral obligation to help the most vulnerable members of society?

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