

# Well-Being and Family Support Among Elderly Rural Mexicans in the Context of Migration to the United States

Tonatiuh Gonzalez Vazquez, PhD Cand.

Pastor Bonilla Fernandez, MPH

Berenice Jauregui Ortiz, BA

*National Institute of Public Health, Mexico*

Thespina J. Yamanis, MPH

*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

V. Nelly Salgado de Snyder, PhD

*National Institute of Public Health, Mexico*

**Objective:** To explore perceptions of well-being, family support, and economic resources in relation to level of contact with migration to the U.S. among a sample of elderly males from rural Mexico. **Method:** The snowballing technique was used to obtain a sample of 372 participants. Four groups were created according to the level of contact with migration among older adults and their children. **Results:** Greater level of contact with migration was associated with a higher likelihood that an older adult was literate, married or living with someone, self-employed, and retired or pensioned. In addition, greater level of contact with migration to the U.S. was associated with a higher level of perceived well-being, family support, and economic security. **Discussion:** Elderly, rural Mexican men with a greater degree of contact with migration to the U.S. seem to have more security and well-being in their old age.

**Keywords:** *migration; elderly; rural; quality of life; family support*

Labor migration toward the United States is a population movement of great magnitude that splits the way of life for many Mexican families, especially those who live in the rural areas of Mexico. Currently, it is calculated that approximately 360,000 Mexicans per year cross the border to

enter the U.S. labor market. The majority of the migrants come from the Mexican West, where a great migratory tradition exists, and from recently incorporated states, such as Morelos, Guerrero, and Hidalgo (Consejo Nacional de Poblacion, 2002).

Recently, the characteristics of Mexican migration, which for many years had been very stable, have changed in various ways, such as the legal situation of the migrant, the duration of the migrant's stay in the U.S., the distribution of migrants by sex and age, the cultural and social origins of the migrants, and the geographic distributions of the migrants' places of origin and destination, among others (Durand & Massey, 2003). For instance, most migrants come from communities that are quickly developing economically, not the poorest communities in Mexico (Massey & Espinosa, 1997). In spite of this, migrants of rural Mexican origin still represent approximately one half of the those who go to the U.S. (Lozano, 2002), and the proportion of male migrants (53.9%) is still higher than that of female migrants (46.1%; Consejo Nacional de Poblacion, 2001). The migration of Mexicans to the U.S. is a dynamic and circular process, as the migrants establish and maintain routes that permit them to move frequently and continuously between the communities of origin and destination (Canales, 2001). Furthermore, remittances from the U.S. constitute the second most important source of national income in Mexico; for instance, during the 5-year period of 1995-2000, approximately 192,000 Mexican homes received economic aid from family members living in the U.S. (Consejo Nacional de Poblacion, 2002). Additionally, the Banco de Mexico reported that the remittances sent to Mexico during 2004 ascended to \$18 billion.

---

**Authors' Note:** This study was partially funded by the Fulbright New Century Scholars Program (2001-2002) and the Mexican National Institute of Social Development (INDESOL).

Parts of this work were presented at: (a) The First International Colloquium *Migration and Development: Transnationalism and new perspectives on integration*, which was held in Zacatecas, Mexico, in October 2003, organized by the International Network of Migration and Development; and (b) The Fourth Binational Forum of Health and Migration, held in León, Guanajuato, in October 2004, organized by the Secretary of Health of Mexico and the California-Mexico Health Initiative.

Please address correspondence to V. Nelly Salgado de Snyder, PhD, Director of Determinants and Challenges of the Health System, Center for Health Systems Research, National Institute of Public Health; Avenida Universidad 655; Colonia Santa María Ahuacatlán; Cuernavaca, Morelos. C.P. 62508. Mexico; tel: (01152 777) 329-3019; fax: (01152 777) 311-1156; e-mail: nsnyder@insp.mx.

The migration process involves the linkage of the communities of origin in Mexico and destination in the U.S. via social networks, established through ties of kinship, of friendship, from civil society, or from social organizations (Salgado de Snyder & Padilla, 1987). The characteristics of the networks, including density, effectiveness, bonding, and type of support exchanged, are extended and fortified, depending on the needs of the migrants and their families left behind. These bonds facilitate the departure and the journey of the migrant, as well as the adaptation to the place of destination in the U.S. Networks also reduce the economic and psychosocial costs associated with migration (Massey, Alarcon, Durand, & Gonzalez, 1991). Similarly, the binational social networks, especially the extended and nuclear family, facilitate the process of readaptation and reintegration of the migrants when, and if, they decide to return to their communities of origin (Egea & Rodriguez, 2004). In Mexico, the support provided by the family during the migratory process (planning of the journey, establishment, and/or return), especially in rural contexts, has been documented as one of the fundamental pillars that provide permanency and continuity to this process (DiGirolamo & Salgado de Snyder, in press; Salgado de Snyder & Padilla, 1987).

Many researchers agree that the attraction to a higher standard of living and greater pay for work are the main reasons why people emigrate to the U.S. (Gastelum-Gaxiola, 1991); however, it has also been recognized that there are other important motivations, such as plans for social, family, and personal activities (Salgado de Snyder et al., 1999). Arizpe (1978) proposes a framework for examining the diversity and complexity of the causes that influence the decision to emigrate, using four levels of reasons: macrosocial, regional and local, family, and individual. Castillo (1995) arrives at a similar conclusion by recognizing the structural, family, and personal roots of migration. Massey and Zenteno (1999) propose the cumulative causation theory to explain how social networks of migrants contribute to a vigorous, increasing flow of migrants across the borders, and suggest that these social networks contribute more to the persistence of Mexico–U.S. migration than monetary incentives. In sum, the factors that determine the migration of Mexicans to the U.S. are many, ranging from structural issues, such as economic asymmetries between the two countries, to subjective and individual motivations like the intention to improve the quality of family and personal life (Wong, 2001).

According to the World Health Organization, *quality of life* is defined as an individual's perception of his or her situation in life, given the cultural context and values by which he or she lives, and in relation to his or her objectives, expectations, standards, worries, and interests (Hubanks & Kuy Ken, 1994).

The most important indicators of quality of life are people's perception of their own social, mental, and physical well-being, and the satisfaction experienced from family relations, work, and home (Rapley, 2003). The extent of a person's well-being is strongly subjective, because it is perceived for the most part in relation to one's own daily experience (Bowling, 2003). For example, among older adults, the evaluation of quality of life tends to incorporate an analysis of the state of their health, predictions about when they will become incapacitated, and the weighing of risk factors, in addition to more typical indicators like the perception of well-being and satisfaction with life (Montenegro & Laguna-Perez, 1997). However, the majority of quality of life indicators are intimately connected with access to goods and services, which are generally determined by the individual's economic resources (Hubanks & Kuy Ken, 1994).

Many Mexicans migrate to the U.S. with the purpose of working hard and increasing their incomes substantially, thus contributing to the elevation of their quality of life and that of their relatives in Mexico. However, often the life the migrants lead in the U.S. does not completely fulfill their goals, because of the many problems they face, such as solitude, isolation, discrimination, health problems, excessive labor demands, and conditions of inadequate housing, among others (Cervantes & Castro, 1985; Cervantes, Padilla, & Salgado de Snyder, 1990). For this reason, Mexican migrants commonly have high expectations associated with returning to their communities of origin, associating those communities with tranquility, liberty, and having a satisfactory social and family life. The return to their communities in Mexico is a permanent goal in the imaginary collective of numerous migrants working in the U.S., although not all migrants achieve this goal (Espinosa, 1998).

A great number of migrants who return to Mexico are older adults who wish to live their final years in their own country and with their own people. Many of the return migrants are men that participated in the Bracero Program (1942–1964), through which more than 4.5 million Mexicans entered the U.S. with permission to work and an even greater number of Mexicans entered without documents (Gastelum-Gaxiola, 1991). When the Bracero Program officially ended in 1963, some migrants decided to remain in the U.S. permanently, whereas others opted to return to their communities of origin to enjoy their family and friends, seek public recognition for their efforts and achievements, and to “to die well in their land” (Espinosa, 1998). Massey et al. (1991) report that when the migrants approach old age, the probability increases that they will return to their community of origin. Other factors that influence the migrants' return include the possession of

property in Mexico, having legal residency in the U.S., family conflict, and their health status (Massey et al., 1991).

Some researchers have suggested that people who migrate are a self-selected group who has better physical and psychological health than their counterparts who stay behind. For instance, Padilla (2003) advanced the position that migrants have great initiative and capacity for performing their work; have strong motivation; are risk-takers, enterprising, and resilient; and worry about improving the quality of life of themselves and their families. Moreover, Latinos who migrate to the U.S. for work have lower mortality than Whites living in the U.S. (Arias, Anderson, Kung, Murphy, & Kochanek, 2003; Abraido-Lanza, Dohrenwend, Ng-Mak, & Turner, 1999). Some have found evidence for a selection bias among older, male Mexican migrants, whereby the migrants are selected for their good health, and that this is the reason for the disparity in the mortality rates (Markides & Eschbach, 2005). Other research indicates that mortality and prevalence rates for chronic illnesses are heterogeneous for Latinos and differ based on cultural heritage, country of origin, socioeconomic status, and psychosocial factors such as acculturation (Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales, & Hayes Bautista, 2005; Abraido-Lanza et al., 1999). So far, however, there has been little research on the health status of non-U.S. born migrants who return to their countries of origin.

The health status of returning Mexican migrants, especially the elderly, is a problem that has not been adequately addressed by researchers and health service providers. Years of laboring in the U.S. undoubtedly result in an accumulation of negative health effects, both psychologically and physically, which also affects the returning migrants' lifestyles, perceptions of well-being, and daily lives. The health problems associated with work and exposure to health hazards in the U.S. are frequently not evident until the migrants are older and reestablished in their community of origin in Mexico (Espinosa, 1998). In spite of the importance of this issue, we were not able to find in the published literature documents that examined quality of life among the elderly in the context of return migration.

The objective of the study was to analyze some of the key indicators of quality of life among elderly migrants who returned to their communities of origin in rural Mexico, and to compare them with elders in the same towns who did not emigrate. Our sample consisted of elderly men who lived in the rural areas of the Mexican states of Morelos, Guerrero, and Jalisco, and who had varying degrees of contact with migration to the U.S. (their own migration patterns and those of their children). The variables studied include: (a) sociodemographic characteristics, (b) perception of well-being, (c) family support, and (d) economic resources.

## Method

This was a descriptive, cross-sectional study, conducted between February and October of 2002, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative part was carried out with a purposive sample of 604 elders residing in rural localities (defined as having less than 15,000 inhabitants) of the Mexican states of Guerrero, Morelos, and Jalisco—these are three of the seven Mexican states identified by the Mexican Population Council (Consejo Nacional de Poblacion, 2002) as having “high” and “very high” migratory intensity.

The qualitative data were generated through in-depth interviews with a subsample ( $n = 38$ ) of the surveyed elderly. Partial results of the qualitative and quantitative data have been analyzed from a gender perspective and reported elsewhere (Salgado de Snyder, 2003).

Inclusion criteria for the study were the following: being 60 years old or older and, for those elders with migratory experience, to have worked in the U.S. for at least 1 year. The criteria of exclusion were adults who lived in a rest home or nursing home and demonstrated cognitive deterioration and/or hearing problems.

For this article we exclusively analyzed the quantitative data of the participating males who reported having offspring ( $N = 372$ ), some of whom had migratory experience to the U.S. ( $n = 232$ ), and some of whom did not ( $n = 140$ ). The number of female elders with migratory experience was very small ( $n = 40$ ), so female data were not used for these analyses.

It must be noted that the initial sample for the study called for an equal number of elderly migrant and nonmigrant males and females older than 60. We were unable to obtain our quota of women because elderly women in general did not migrate to the U.S. in their younger years, particularly from rural Mexico, where gender roles are extremely traditional and preclude women from going north like their male counterparts. Given this situation, we decided to complete the quota of migrant women with migrant men. As a consequence, our data base has a larger number of migrant men than non-migrant men.

## Procedure

The participants were selected using a snowballing technique. During the initial contact with participants, the interviewers explained the objective of the study and the protections for participants' confidentiality and anonymity. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to give their informed consent.

Interviewers had a minimum of a bachelor's degree and, prior to data collection, received training through a 40 hr course on the management and administration of the instrument.

## **Instrument**

The questionnaire included a total of 127 questions that were categorized into 10 sections, such as sociodemographics, well-being, migration history, family support, mental and physical health, and social and financial resources, among others. The present article reports the findings of the following sections: sociodemographic characteristics, migratory experience to the U.S., perception of well-being, family support, and economic resources.

The questions about migratory experience included the number of years lived and worked in the U.S., total number of trips to that country, and the years of the first and last migration. As for well-being, this variable was assessed using a scale formed by 10 items derived from conceptual work on quality of life and well-being (Hubanks & Kuy Ken, 1994; Rapley, 2003; Bowling, 2003). All items had face validity and explored the participant's perception of their own well-being (i.e., "Do you feel that your life is interesting?"; "... feel satisfied with the present?"; "... feel calm about the future?"). This scale was used in a previous study with return immigrants in Mexico (Lopez & Salgado de Snyder, 2001). The range of the scale was 10–30, where lower scores suggest a lower degree of well-being. The Cronbach's alpha obtained with the current sample was .71 and the factorial analyses drew a three-factor solution with eigenvalues higher than 1, explaining 52% of the variance of the scale. The family support scale had 6 items with face validity that were responded on a 3-point Likert-type scale (i.e. "Counting all members in your family, to what extent do they pay attention to you?"; "How much do they appreciate you?"). The alpha obtained was .90 and the factorial analyses drew a one-factor solution explaining 66.5% of the variance. Higher scores suggested higher perception of social support. Finally, questions about economic resources explored the participant's perception of his ability to obtain a large quantity of money, and whether he received economic aid from family or social institutions from Mexico or the U.S.

## **Analysis of Data**

We created four categories in which we placed the participants based on their degree of contact with migration. Their placement depended on two

factors: (a) if they worked in the U.S. for at least 1 year during their life and (b) if they had at least 1 son or daughter living in the U.S. at the time of the interview. The categorization was made after data were collected, thus, the migratory status of the offspring was not a selection criterion. The four categories are described below, in order of decreasing contact with migration:

1. Group 1 FmCm (father migrant, child migrant): Consisted of older adult males with migratory experience who also had either a son or daughter living in the U.S. ( $n = 162$ ). This group had the greatest contact with migration.
2. Group 2 FmCnm (father migrant, child nonmigrant): Consisted of older adult males with migratory experience who did not have a son or daughter living in the U.S. ( $n = 70$ ).
3. Group 3 FnmCm (father nonmigrant, child migrant): Consisted of older adult males without migratory experience who had either a son or daughter living in the U.S. ( $n = 68$ ).
4. Group 4 FnmCnm (father nonmigrant, child nonmigrant): Consisted of older adult males without personal migratory experience who did not have a son or daughter living in the U.S. ( $n = 72$ ). This group did not have any contact with migration.

The characteristics of these groups were contrasted using individual responses to questions in the following five sections: (a) sociodemographic characteristics, (b) migratory history, (c) perception of well-being, (d) family support, and (e) economic resources.

We used the statistical programs STATA v. 7 and SPSS v. 12.0 to conduct an exploratory analysis of the data. Descriptive analyses of the sociodemographic and economic resource variables included calculation of central tendencies, dispersion, and simple frequencies. Statistical analyses included Pearson  $\chi^2$  and ANOVA to compare the four groups in relation to well-being and family support. Statistical significance testing used a confidence interval of 95%. Post hoc analyses were conducted using the Bonferroni test to assess the magnitude of differences between the groups.

## Results

The results will be presented according to the study variables in the following order: (a) sociodemographic characteristics, (b) migratory experience, (c) perception of well-being, (d) family support, and (e) economic resources.

## Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic data. The sample was predominantly rural, as a large percentage of older adults (89%) indicated that they had lived the majority of their life in a small town or village. There were significant differences when we analyzed family composition in relation to extent of contact with migration. Men with more children more often reported having at least one child living in the U.S. (groups FmCm and FnmCm), whereas men with fewer offspring tended to not have children living in the U.S. (groups FmCnm and FnmCnm). There were not significant differences in formal education levels among the four groups. However, when we analyzed the group with the greatest migratory contact to the U.S. (group FmCm) in relation to the other three groups (groups FmCnm, FnmCm, and FnmCnm), we found a significant difference in knowledge of how to read and write. The group with the greatest migratory contact had the highest capacity for reading and writing. It is important to note that this tendency appeared for several of the sociodemographic characteristics. A significantly higher proportion of the elders in group FmCm, compared to the other three groups, were married, self-employed, and pensioned or retired.

## Migratory Experience

According to our results, the majority of the older adults with migratory experience (65.5%;  $n = 158$ ) went to work in the U.S. for the first time in 1963 or earlier. The range of years lived in the U.S. was from 1 to 56 years, with an average of 7.9 years ( $SD = 9.6$ ). More than half (59.7%) of the participants with migratory experience reported having worked in the U.S. for a period of 1 to 5 years. Only five men worked more than 36 years in the U.S.

## Perception of Well-Being

As indicated in Table 2, the older adults of the group FmCm reported the highest levels of well-being, as demonstrated by the following indicators: (a) considered their life "interesting," (b) perceived that they enjoyed a high standard of living, (c) were satisfied with their successful achievements in life, (d) were happy with their current living situation, (e) felt secure and able to resolve future problems, (f) felt positive about relations with their children, (g) trusted that their relatives would take care of them in case of illness, (h) lead an entertaining life, (i) had a sense of tranquility about the

**Table 1**  
**Sociodemographic Data by Groups Based on Extent of Migratory Contact With the U.S.**

Characteristic	Group 1 FmCm <sup>a</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 162)	Group 2 FmCm <sup>b</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 70)	Group 3 FmCm <sup>c</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 68)	Group 4 FmCm <sup>d</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 72)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 372)	Group Differences	<i>p</i> Value
Age (mean) <sup>e</sup>	70.1	72.3	71.0	71.8	71.0		<i>ns</i>
Literacy and formal education							
Able to read (%)	46.6	20.1	18.2	15.1	71.0	1-2 (26%) 1-3 (28%) 1-4 (31%)	.000 .000 .000
Able to write (%)	46.6	19.9	19.1	14.4	63.4	1-2 (27%) 1-3 (27%) 1-4 (32%)	.000 .000 .000
Years of schooling (mean)	1.9	1.9	2.2	1.8	1.9		<i>ns</i>
Type community lived in for most of life (%)							
Small town/village	43.2	17.8	19.0	19.9	89.0	1-2 (25%) 1-3 (24%) 1-4 (23%)	.000 .000 .000
City	47.5	25.0	12.5	15.0	11.0	1-2 (22%) 1-3 (35%) 1-4 (32%)	.018 .000 .000
Marital status (%)							
Married/living with someone else	48.0	17.0	18.8	16.2	74.7	1-2 (31%) 1-3 (29%) 1-4 (32%)	.000 .000 .000

(continued)

**Table 1 (continued)**

Characteristic	Group 1 FmCm <sup>a</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 162)	Group 2 FmCm <sup>b</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 70)	Group 3 FmCm <sup>c</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 68)	Group 4 FmCm <sup>d</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 72)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 372)	Group Differences	<i>p</i> Value
Widowed	31.0	25.3	16.9	26.8	19.0	1-3 (14%)	.025
Other (single, divorced, separated)	30.4	21.7	13.0	34.8	6.3		<i>ns</i>
Number of children (mean)	7	5	7	5	6	1-2 (1.7) 1-4 (1.5) 2-3 (1.6)	.000 .003 .010
Work condition (%)							
Wage earner	25.9	0.4	14.8	22.2	7.3	2-3 (22%)	.000
Self-employed	46.0	18.0	18.6	16.7	56.5	1-2 (28%) 1-3 (28%) 1-4 (30%) 1-2 (47%) 1-3 (40%) 1-4 (32%)	.000 .000 .000 .000 .000
Retired/pensioned	55.0	7.5	15.0	22.5	10.8	2-4 (15%) 1-2 (19%) 1-3 (18%)	.030 .004 .006
Unemployed	36.7	17.7	19.0	26.6	21.2		
Other (e.g., pensioned and working)	40.0	33.0	26.6	0.0	4.2		<i>ns</i>

a. Group 1 FmCm: older adult males with migratory experience who had at least one son or daughter living in the U.S.

b. Group 2 FmCm: older adult males with migratory experience who did not have any children living in the U.S.

c. Group 3 FmCm: older adult males without migratory experience who had at least one son or daughter living in the U.S.

d. Group 4 FmCm: older adult males without migratory experience who did not have any children living in the U.S.

e. Bonferroni test with a statistical significance level of .05. Only statistically significant and marginally significant differences are shown (*p* > .05 and *p* < .1).

future, and (j) believed that their lives were purposeful. The only variable in which the FmCm group did not attain the highest score was regarding the support of friends, for which the group FmCnm reported the highest level. As Table 2 indicates, the differences between the groups were mostly statistically significant, especially differences between the group FmCm and the groups FnmCm and FnmCnm. Regarding the question "Do you feel that your life is useful?" the groups with greater contact with migration (FmCm and FmCnm) reported statistically significant differences from the other two groups with less contact (FnmCm and FnmCnm). It is important to note that the two groups that had greater contact with migration (FmCm and FmCnm) reported greater levels of perceived well-being on almost all the indicators in this section.

## Family Support

We analyzed the four groups in relation to perceived family support. The groups that had greater contact with migration (FmCm and FmCnm) perceived greater family support in four characteristics than the groups with less contact (FnmCm and FnmCnm), and this difference was statistically significant (Table 3). Furthermore, there were statistically significant differences between the group of highest migration contact (FmCm) and the group that had no contact with migration (FnmCnm). These two extreme groups were different according to the following family support characteristics: (a) understanding ("my family understands the way I think"); (b) appreciation ("how much I am appreciated by my family"); (c) trust ("I trust that I can count on my relatives when I have serious problems"); and (d) communication ("I can talk with my relatives about my problems").

## Economic Resources

Table 4 presents the analyses of the four groups in relation to economic resources. Of the four groups, a significantly greater proportion of the older adults in the high migration contact group (FmCm), reported that they knew "where to obtain a large quantity of money" and "how to obtain a large quantity of money," and "were confident in obtaining a large quantity of money." Likewise, they reported receiving greater economic aid from Mexico and the U.S. from relatives living in those countries, and from social security institutions in Mexico and the U.S. Among all of the variables analyzed in the section regarding economic resources, as Table 4 suggests, the responses of the older adults in the group with greater contact with migration (FmCm) were

**Table 2**  
**Comparison of Perception of Well-Being Between Groups, According**  
**to Contact With Migration to the U.S.**

Characteristic	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Comparison Between Groups	
	FmCm <sup>a</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 162)	FmCm <sup>b</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 70)	FmCm <sup>c</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 68)	FmCm <sup>d</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 72)	Groups	<i>p</i> Value <sup>e</sup>
Perception of well-being (mean) <sup>f</sup>						
Your life is interesting	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.2	1 vs. 4	.022
You have the quality of life that you hoped for	2.2	2.0	2.0	2.0		<i>ns</i>
You feel satisfied with your achievements	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.2	1 vs. 4	.044
You are satisfied with your present life	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.9		<i>ns</i>
Feel confident in resolving future problems	2.0	2.0	1.8	1.9	1 vs. 3	.088
Feel good about your relationship with your children	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4		<i>ns</i>
Feel confident that your relatives would take care of you if you were very sick	2.7	2.4	2.4	2.3	1 vs. 2	.017
Feel that your life is entertaining	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.5	1 vs. 4	.000
Feel calm about the future	2.0	2.00	1.9	2.0	1 vs. 4	.054
Feel that your life is useful	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.4		<i>ns</i>
					1 vs. 3	.000
					1 vs. 4	.000
					2 vs. 3	.011
					2 vs. 4	.008

Feel you have the support you would want from your close friends	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.3	1 vs. 3 2 vs. 3	.060 .010
a. Group 1 FmCm: older adult males with migratory experience who had at least one son or daughter living in the U.S.						
b. Group 2 FmCm: older adult males with migratory experience who did not have any children living in the U.S.						
c. Group 3 FmCm: older adult males without migratory experience who had at least one son or daughter living in the U.S.						
d. Group 4 FmCm: older adult males without migratory experience who did not have any children living in the U.S.						
e. Bonferroni test with a statistical significance level of .05. Only statistically significant and marginally significant differences are shown ( $p > .05$ and $p < .1$ ).						
f. The values from which the means were calculated were based on the following responses: 1 = nothing, 2 = something, 3 = a lot.						

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of Family Support Between Groups According to Contact With Migration to the U.S.**

Characteristic	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Comparison Between Groups
	FmCm <sup>a</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 162)	FmCm <sup>b</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 70)	FmCm <sup>c</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 68)	FmCm <sup>d</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 72)	
Including all the members of your family . . . (mean) <sup>f</sup>					
. . . to what extent do they pay attention to you?	2.4	2.1	2.1	2.0	<i>ns</i>
. . . to what extent do they understand your way of thinking?	2.6	2.2	2.0	2.0	1 vs. 4 2 vs. 4 .001 .086
. . . how much do they appreciate you?	2.4	2.7	1.9	2.0	1 vs. 4 .004
. . . how confident are you that you can count on their help when you have serious problems?	2.8	2.1	2.1	2.0	1 vs. 4 .001
. . . how much confidence do you have to tell them your problems?	2.6	2.2	2.0	2.1	1 vs. 4 .040
. . . to what extent do you feel you have the same taste as them?	2.0	2.7	2.0	2.1	<i>ns</i>

a. Group 1 FmCm: older adult males with migratory experience who had at least one son or daughter living in the U.S.

b. Group 2 FmCm: older adult males with migratory experience who did not have any children living in the U.S.

c. Group 3 FmCm: older adult males without migratory experience who had at least one son or daughter living in the U.S.

d. Group 4 FmCm: older adult males without migratory experience who did not have any children living in the U.S.

e. Bonferroni test with a statistical significance level of .05. Only statistically significant and marginally significant differences are shown (*p* > .05 and *p* < .1).

f. The values from which the means were calculated were based on the following responses: 1 = nothing, 2 = something, 3 = a lot.

significantly different, in the direction of greater economic resources or confidence in obtaining them, than the other three groups. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the group FnmCm and the group FmCnm in terms of the economic aid that the elders reported to receive from relatives in the U.S., with FmCnm reporting greater economic aid.

## Discussion

This study classified rural, older men according to the extent of their contact with migration to the U.S. based on their own migratory experiences and those of their children, and related the level of contact to several psychosocial and sociodemographic variables. Our results indicate that older rural men's own migration and whether one of their children has immigrated to the U.S. is related to their perceptions of well-being. In general, we found that the group with the greatest contact with migration (FmCnm) enjoyed the highest levels of several characteristics, such as to know how to read and to write, to be married or living with someone, to be self-employed, and to be retired or pensioned, as well as the highest levels of perceived well-being, family support, and economic resources, which are all vital elements to quality of life.

Our data suggest that if an offspring continues with the migratory tradition of the father, it will predict an increase in the perception of well-being on behalf of the father during old age. We expected, based on prior literature on migrants' self-selection, that those Mexicans who left to the U.S. for work probably already had access to a certain higher level of resources before they migrated (Chiswick, 2000). Although we cannot know whether our participants had more resources than others prior to leaving their country, our results support Padilla's (2003) description of the hearty and resourceful migrant, in that those Mexicans who had migrated to the U.S. had greater economic resources later in life.

Migration to the U.S. only by the father (FmCnm) also resulted in a higher level of well-being of the older men. This level was only augmented when both the father and the son had migrated to the U.S., such that there was also a concomitant increase in the perception of well-being on behalf of the father during old age. Both of the migrant groups had higher levels of well-being than the nonmigrant group (FnmCnm), which in turn had the lowest levels of well-being out of all the groups.

Our findings concur with those reported by Wong (2001) who, using data from the National Survey of the Demographic Dynamics in Mexico of 1997, analyzed whether people who had emigrated to the U.S. had better socioeconomic conditions during old age. Wong's study found that there

**Table 4**  
**Economic Resources of Older Adults, According to Contact With Migration to the U.S.**

Characteristic	Group 1 FmCm <sup>a</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 162)	Group 2 FmCm <sup>b</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 70)	Group 3 FmCm <sup>c</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 68)	Group 4 FmCm <sup>d</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 72)	Comparison Between Groups		
					Groups (%)	<i>p</i> Value	
If you needed a large quantity of money . . .							
Would you know where to obtain it? (% yes)	49.2	15.8	18.6	16.4	1 vs. 2 (33.33)	.000	
					1 vs. 3 (30.60)	.000	
					1 vs. 4 (32.78)	.000	
Would you know how to obtain it? (% yes)	52.3	14.0	18.1	15.5	1 vs. 2 (38.34)	.000	
					1 vs. 3 (34.19)	.000	
					1 vs. 4 (36.78)	.000	
Would you have confidence in your ability to obtain it? (% yes)	52.6	14.1	18.8	14.6	1 vs. 2 (38.54)	.000	
					1 vs. 3 (33.85)	.000	
					1 vs. 4 (38.02)	.000	
Do you receive economic aid, a pension, or retirement from Mexico or the U.S.? (% yes)	48.9	20.3	15.0	15.9	1 vs. 2 (28.63)	.000	
					1 vs. 3 (33.92)	.000	
					1 vs. 4 (33.03)	.000	
Do you receive economic aid from family in Mexico? (% yes)	41.8	23.9	13.4	20.9	1 vs. 2 (17.91)	.014	
					1 vs. 3 (28.35)	.000	
					1 vs. 4 (20.89)	.005	

Do you receive economic aid from family in the U.S.? (% yes)	79.2	1.9	15.1	3.8	1 vs. 2 (77.35)	.000
					1 vs. 3 (64.15)	.000
					1 vs. 4 (75.47)	.000
					2 vs. 3 (13.20)	.007
Do you receive economic aid from social security institutions in Mexico? (% yes)	47.2	13.2	15.1	24.5	1 vs. 2 (33.96)	.000
					1 vs. 3 (32.07)	.000
					1 vs. 4 (22.64)	.007
Do you receive economic aid from social security institutions in the U.S.? (% yes)	51.4	19.6	14.7	14.2	1 vs. 2 (31.75)	.000
					1 vs. 3 (36.48)	.000
					1 vs. 4 (37.16)	.000

- a. Group 1 FmCm: older adult males with migratory experience who had at least one son or daughter living in the U.S.  
b. Group 2 FmCmm: older adult males with migratory experience who did not have any children living in the U.S.  
c. Group 3 FmmCm: older adult males without migratory experience who had at least one son or daughter living in the U.S.  
d. Group 4 FmmCmm: older adult males without migratory experience who did not have any children living in the U.S.

was an association between prior migration to the U.S. and old age socio-economic benefits.

Having guaranteed economic income during old age seems to be one of the most important determinants of well-being. The majority of the older adults who did not emigrate were self-employed and worked as small-scale farmers, bricklayers, merchants, and cattle raisers, and none received guaranteed economic income (like retirement or a pension) to accommodate their basic needs during old age. For this reason, many of the participating older adults in this study still worked to generate income or lived as dependents of their family and/or other members of their communities.

Finally, it is possible that the relation we observed between perception of well-being and contact with migration is due, among other things, to the material benefits the older adults received as a result of economic aid from their children (groups FmCm and FnmCm) or from retirement or pensions from the U.S. (groups FmCm and FmCnm). In addition, the well-being of elders with high migratory contacts may also be influenced by subjective components, such as community prestige bestowed on their families because of the benefits received from remittances sent home. In small "sending" communities, prestige is often obtained through the demonstration of success in the U.S., which is exhibited through material goods. The presence of material goods in the families of migrants generates respect and admiration, and also serves as a model emulated by the inhabitants of the community of origin (Espinosa, 1998). In well-organized communities, the migrants' remittances may also serve to strengthen community organizations and infrastructure, which supports migrants' social status, improves community resources, and facilitates contact between migrants and communities. Community-level improvements and bonding may thus also affect the well-being of returned migrants in their old age; however, this benefit may be limited to migrants who are from well-governed communities, suggesting that there may be political and social antecedents to the protective effect (VanWey, Tucker, & McConnell, 2005).

The family plays an important role in describing the subjective nature of well-being. The research literature on rural Mexico consistently reports that the family, above all, is the unifying element of the culture (DiGirolamo & Salgado de Snyder, *in press*). In the rural areas, the family is the lens through which self-perceptions and evaluations occur, while taking into account the context surrounding the individuals. This is especially true for older adults because many of them depend completely on family support and economic aid for survival. In the migratory context, it has been documented that the return to the lost family order is one of the fundamental reasons why migrants persist in their desire to return to Mexico from the U.S. (Espinosa, 1998).

This work is one of the first investigations published on the well-being of returning migrants, particularly older men returning to rural Mexico. As is evident from the introductory section, the literature on the theme is scarce and dispersed and does not permit a real understanding of the life situations of the thousands of Mexican elders who gave their productive years as migrants to the U.S. The majority of the older adults who participated in our study initiated their migratory path during the period of the Bracero Program (1942-1964). Therefore, it is possible that the legal benefits conferred to the group of migrants during the Bracero Program influence well-being later in life; these same benefits may not be conferred to migrants today who enter the U.S. in the absence of such a program.

Finally, our findings reinforce work done by Wong (2001). Both studies separately investigated the different indicators that constitute quality of life among returning migrant elders, such as level of education, socioeconomic conditions, perception of well-being, family support, and social and personal resources. The results of both studies similarly indicate that returning migrant elders enjoy better quality of life than their counterparts who did not emigrate. Nevertheless, to generalize these findings, we need to continue to research these and related issues with representative samples.

## References

- Abraido-Lanza, A. F., Dohrenwend, B. P., Ng-Mak, D. S., & Turner, J. B. (1999). The Latino mortality paradox: A test of the "salmon bias" and healthy migrant hypotheses. *American Journal of Public Health, 89*(10), 1543-1548.
- Arias, E., Anderson, R. N., Kung, H. C., Murphy, S. L., & Kochanek, K. D. (2003). Deaths, final report for 2001. *Natl. Vital Stat. Report, 52*(3), 1-48.
- Arizpe, L. (1978). *Migracion, etnicismo y cambio economico* [Migration, ethnicity and economic change]. Mexico City, Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico.
- Bowling, A. (2003). *Measuring health: A review of quality of life measurement scales*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Canales, A. I. (2001). Factores demograficos del asentamiento y la circularidad en la migracion Mexico-Estados Unidos [Demographic factors of the establishment and circularity of Mexico-United States migration]. *Notas de Poblacion, 72*, 123-158.
- Castillo, V. M. (1995). *Solo Dios y el Norte: Migracion a Estados Unidos y desarrollo en una region de Jalisco* [Only God and the North: Migration to the United States and development in a region of Jalisco]. Guadalajara, Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara.
- Cervantes, R. C., & Castro, F. (1985). Stress coping and mental health: A systematic review. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science, 7*, 1-73.
- Cervantes, R. C., Padilla A. M., & Salgado de Snyder, V. N. (1990). Reliability and validity of the Hispanic Stress Inventory. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science, 12*, 76-82.

- Chiswick, B. R. (2000). Are immigrants favorably self-selected? An economic analysis. In C. D. Brettell & J. F. Hollifield (Eds.), *Migration theory: Talking Across Disciplines* (pp. 61-76). New York: Routledge.
- Consejo Nacional de Poblacion. (2001). *Migrantes mexicanos en Estados Unidos. Boletín de Migración Internacional* [Mexican migrants in the United States. Bulletin of International Migration] (No. 15, 1-12). Mexico City, Mexico: Author.
- Consejo Nacional de Poblacion. (2002). *Índices de intensidad migratoria México-Estados Unidos, 2000* [Index of Mexico-United States migratory intensity]. Mexico City, Mexico: Author.
- DiGirolamo, A., & Salgado de Snyder, V. N. (in press). Women as primary caregivers in Mexico: Challenges to well-being. In N. B. Abdul Kadir, K. Ali, & L. H. Kee (Eds.), *Women and well-being*. Sarawak, Malaysia: University of Malaysia.
- Durand, J., & Massey, D. (2003). *Clandestinos: migración México-Estados Unidos en los albores del siglo XXI* [Clandestine: Mexico-United States migration at the turn of the XXI century]. Mexico City, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas/ Miguel Angel Porrua.
- Egea, C., & Rodríguez, V. (2004, April). *Tipos de retorno de los emigrantes jubilados. El caso de los emigrantes de la provincia de Jaén* [Types of return of retired immigrants. The case of immigrants from the province of Jaén]. Paper presented at the VII Congress of the Association of Historical Demographics, Granada, Spain. Retrieved February 12, 2005, from [http://www.ugr.es/~adeh/comunicaciones/Egea\\_Rodriguez.pdf](http://www.ugr.es/~adeh/comunicaciones/Egea_Rodriguez.pdf)
- Espinosa, V. M. (1998). *El dilema del retorno: Migración, género y pertenencia en un contexto transnacional* [The dilemma of return: Migration, gender and belonging in the transnational context]. Zamora, Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán.
- Gastelum-Gaxiola, M. A. (1991). *Migración de trabajadores mexicanos indocumentados a los Estados Unidos* [The migration of undocumented Mexican workers to the United States]. Mexico City, Mexico: UNAM.
- Hubanks, L., & Kuy Ken, W. (1994). *Quality of life assessment: An annotated bibliography*. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO/ MNH/ PSF.
- Lara, M., Gamboa, C., Kahramanian, M. I., Morales, L. S., & Hayes Bautista, D. E. (2005). Acculturation and Latino health in the United States: A review of the literature and its sociopolitical context. *Annual Review of Public Health, 26*, 367-97.
- Lopez, S., & Salgado de Snyder, V. N. (2001). *El funcionamiento psicosocial de los migrantes de retorno de origen rural* [The psychosocial functioning of return migrants of rural origin]. Mexico City, Mexico: UCMEXUS-CONACYT.
- Lozano, F. (2002). Migrantes de las ciudades: nuevos patrones de la migración mexicana a los Estados Unidos [Migrants from cities: new patterns of Mexican migration to the United States]. In B. García (Ed.), *Población y sociedad al inicio del siglo XXI* (pp. 241-259). Mexico City, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Markides, K. S., & Eschbach, K. (2005). Aging, migration, and mortality: Current status of research on the Hispanic paradox. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 60*(Special No. 2), 68-75.
- Massey, D., Alarcon, R., Durand, J., & Gonzalez, H. (1991). *Los Ausentes: El proceso social de la migración internacional en el occidente de México* [Absent: The social process of international migration in western Mexico]. Mexico City, Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes/Alianza Editorial.
- Massey, D., & Espinosa, K. E. (1997). What's driving Mexico-U.S. Migration? A theoretical, empirical and policy analysis. *American Journal of Sociology, 102*, 939-999.

- Massey, D., & Zenteno, R. (1999). The dynamics of mass migration. *Proceeds of the National Academy of Sciences*, 96(8), 5328-5335.
- Montenegro, O., & Laguna-Perez, A. (1997). Reflexiones sobre el envejecimiento y la calidad de vida [Reflections on aging and quality of life]. *Cultura de los cuidados: Revista de enfermería y humanidades*, 1(2), 60-63.
- Padilla, A. (2003, March). Stress, mental health, and resilience among Mexican immigrants in the United States. Paper presented at the monthly seminar of the Center for Health Systems Research, National Institute of Public Health, Cuernavaca, Mexico.
- Rapley, M. (2003). *Quality of life research: A critical introduction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Salgado de Snyder, V. N. (2003). Envejecimiento, genero y pobreza en Mexico rural [Aging, gender, and poverty in rural Mexico]. In V. N. Salgado de Snyder & R. Wong (Eds.), *Envejeciendo en la pobreza: genero, salud y calidad de vida* (pp. 37-56). Cuernavaca, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Salud Publica.
- Salgado de Snyder, V. N., Diaz, M. J., Gonzalez, T., Hernandez, P., Ponce, F., Rios, C., et al. (1999). *La emigracion a Estados Unidos: Un primer acercamiento al contexto morelense* [Immigration to the United States: An initial look at the Morelense context]. Cuernavaca, Mexico: CIDHEM/Publicaciones del Poder Ejecutivo, Gobierno del Estado de Morelos.
- Salgado de Snyder, V. N., & Padilla, A. M. (1987). Social support networks: Their availability and effectiveness. In M. Gaviria & J. D. Arana (Eds.), *Health and behavior: Research agenda for Hispanics* (Monograph No. 1, pp. 93-107). Chicago, IL: Simon Bolivar Hispanic-American Psychiatric Research and Training Program, University of Illinois, Chicago.
- VanWey, L. K., Tucker, C. M., & McConnell, E. D. (2005). Community organization, migration, and remittances in Oaxaca. *Latin American Research Review*, 40(1), 83-108.
- Wong, R. (2001). La migracion y las condiciones socioeconomicas en edades mayores [Migration and socioeconomic conditions in old age]. *DEMOS*, 14, 16-17.