

Ageing and migration in Bolivia

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Justification

Ageing and migration are intrinsically linked. As the literature on paid care work in high income countries has shown, a large share of the demand for elderly care work in industrialised societies is met by migrant women (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2010). The migration of women from low income to high income countries for care work has given rise to the concept of global care chains (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003) to highlight the resulting unequal distribution of care globally. As most care across the world is provided by women, their migration gives cause for concern for those who rely on them for their wellbeing. However, most research to date has focused on the consequences of women's migration for their children, with little acknowledgement of the care needs of their elderly parents (Bastia, 2009).

In fact, very little research to date explores how care for elderly parents is rearranged as a result of the migration of their children/ main carer. What research exists focuses on migration between high income countries, such as Italy or the Netherlands and Australia, where financial resources, travel and good communication are generally accessible (Baldassar, 2001, 2007; Baldock, 2000). In low income countries, where the population is ageing rapidly (Shetty, 2012), the context is quite different, given that private and state resources in the form of pensions or public health services are largely absent (see Vullnetari and King, 2008). In these countries, most care for elderly people is provided by their children, particularly women (Varley and Blasco, 2000). We can infer that separations are likely to be very long given the restrictions imposed on the cross-border mobilities of low-income migrants. However, we know little about what happens to the elderly parents in low-income countries when their children migrate.

The aim of this project is therefore to explore how elderly people experience and deal with the lack of care resulting from the emigration of the younger generation. This will provide primary data for publication. The papers (one in English and one in Spanish) will make a contribution to the global care chain literature by highlighting the importance of including a generational perspective. They will also highlight the importance of cross-border mobility for the literature on ageing.

Context

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in Latin America with a gross national income per capita of \$2,020 (World Bank, 2012). According to Martinez (2004), senior citizens (aged 60 and over) represent 7 per cent of the Bolivian population and experience high levels of poverty (63 per cent). About a third is monolingual in one of the three official indigenous languages – Quechua, Aymara or Guaraní – which is often an indicator of social exclusion. Most continue to be economically active, often because there is little alternative option as is illustrated by the fact that only 22 percent of those who were not economically active in 2004 received a pension. Most (84 per cent) senior citizens lived with their extended family, highlighting the importance of family support, which is usually provided by women. However, women have dramatically increased their participation in cross-border migration, particularly since 2002, when migration flows shifted from Argentina to Spain (Bastia, 2012). Some estimate that up to a third of the Bolivian population lives abroad. This country of high rates of emigration and high levels of vulnerability among the elderly population provide the ideal context for exploring the relationship between migration and ageing.

Methodology

The methodology will consist of in-depth narrative interviews with senior citizens whose children are currently abroad. We will sample 20 individuals across urban and rural areas of the department of Cochabamba, which has a high rate of out-migration. The interviews will follow Wengraf's (2001) methodology for biographical narrative interviews with the aim of eliciting narratives and in-depth descriptions of the separations, specifically, the ways in which elderly people experience these separations, their consequences and the strategies they enact to deal with the separations. We will aim to interview elderly women and men and a fair representation of different living arrangements (living alone, with grandchildren, with other family members) as well as different migration destinations (Argentina, Spain, USA) given that periodic returns are mediated by different migration regimes and geographical distance. The methodology aims for depth, not statistical representation. However, sampling for a variety of migratory and living arrangements will elicit a greater variety of responses and contribute to rich data.

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