

## **Description of Methodology, Research on Multi-Local Transnational Latin American Families**

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June 2004

The following explains the methodology used to collect the data on Latin American families in Toronto for the project Social Cohesion and International Migration in a Globalizing Era. The general objective of the research is to understand the experience of immigrant families, particularly how they establish and maintain bonds across long distances.

Initially, the project intended to interview primary caregivers<sup>1</sup> who have immigrated to Toronto, Canada, from El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile or Colombia and who have children, younger than 18 years old in the school system either in Toronto or their home countries. However, in the early stages of recruiting families the limitations of restricting recruitment to this national origin population became evident. First, immigration from Chile to Toronto began in the early 70's therefore, by the year 2004 the majority of the families have already settled and have adult children. Interviews with these families would be largely retrospective and the context of reception including immigration policies that might have framed their family separations dramatically different from those found currently. Second, new waves of Latin American immigrants are arriving in Toronto from new source countries including Costa Rica, Mexico, Argentina (not really new), etc.. The context of exit for these cases is not marked by political violence, but rather by dramatic economic dislocation. We question drawing a

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<sup>1</sup> When two parents have different national origins, the relevant identification is that of the primary caregiver, typically the mother. The primary caregiver can also be a grandparent, although to date this has not appeared as a case.

sharp distinction between these two causes for migration. Finally, the target countries selected for the project now include Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Ecuador, and Mexico.

The principal tool that has been used to collect the data is structured interviews guided by a previously prepared questionnaire. The design of the questionnaire was developed in different stages with participation and input from all the members of the research team. An initial proposal was presented and discussed, followed by multiple revisions. The questionnaire has been tested, revised and translated into English. The questionnaire contains a combination of closed and open-ended questions on eight topics or themes including: (1) a family migratory history; (2) the ways and frequency with which the family in Toronto communicates with relatives in the home country or a third country; (3) details on the child-primary caregiver separation and strategies for long distance care giving including issues related to the children's health, education, and discipline; (4) the conjugal relationship; (5) challenges of raising children in Canada; (6) the parental support network, including resources garnered through friends, community agencies, and service provider both in Toronto and in their country of origin; (7) community participation and activism; and, (8) a brief employment history. The interviews were conducted in Spanish and their duration was between one and two hours. Informants were paid a stipend of \$30.00 for their voluntary participation.

Multiple recruitment strategies have been developed to identify families that qualify for an interview. A first point of entry has been the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) community centres that either host parenting programmes or offer immigrant settlement services. The spatial distribution of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the GTA (based on

the 1996 census) was used to identify twelve community centres that are likely to serve Latin American families. Second, several Spanish-speaking churches in the GTA have been used as points of entry. Third, the Spanish-speaking settlement workers associated with the Settlement Education Partnership in Toronto<sup>2</sup> (SEPT Program) have been asked to help identify potential informants. Fourth, following a lead from one of the faith-based contacts in Toronto, the Hamilton based Settlement and Integration Services Agency (SISO) was recruited as an additional point of entry. It was found that a group of Latin American families in Hamilton who are currently dealing with long term separation from their children have organized a mutual support and legal assistance group. This has also served to identify informants.

The Spanish speaking media has also been used to promote the research and recruit participants. The P.I.s on the project have participated in the television program “*Hispanos en Canada*” (aired July 10, 2004) to publicize the research. Articles have been written on the subject of family separation and reunification for the newspaper *El Correo Canadiense* (June 25, 2004, Year 4, #74). In conjunction with the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, the research team has organized an information session for transnational families who are having difficulties sponsoring their children (August 5, 2004).

In order to ensure consistency and comparability of the findings in spite of the small sample size (N 40), several substantive restrictions have been placed on the final selection of informants. First, reflecting in part a series of assumptions about the mother-child bond, only mothers have been interviewed as primary care givers. Fathers who

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<sup>2</sup> The SEPT program is promoted by the Toronto District School Board. Forty-eight roaming school settlement workers attend to the newcomer population in 74 schools across the city.

identify as the primary caregiver and who have been or remain separated from the child and mother because they are in the country of origin have not been included in the sample. A larger sample size would certainly allow us to include both men and women care givers in the sample. Second, while we recognize that there are many reasons why mothers and children live through periods of separation – conjugal break up, financial difficulties, etc. In this research, we have only selected cases where the cause of the separation is directly related to the process of migration; where either children or primary care giver leave the country of origin as a result of which mother and child are physically distant.

Data management has been designed to capture quantitative and qualitative findings. Open-ended questions will be transcribed and coded using the N-vivo software. The quantitative data will be processed using SPSS software. Interviews are taped, the questionnaire is completed, and post-interview field notes are being written up by each researcher. The post-interview field notes seek to capture a range of information including emotions and non-verbal communication, logistical difficulties during the interview, particularly powerful and salient themes and discussions. Post-interview notes help refine post- research data management.