

# **Migration as Transformation? Latina Migrants' Empowerment in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Region**

Linda S. Stevenson and Kathleen Weber  
West Chester University of Pennsylvania

[l Stevenson@wcupa.edu](mailto:l Stevenson@wcupa.edu) [kw878191@wcupa.edu](mailto:kw878191@wcupa.edu)



# Transforming Lives and Communities



**AMERICAN IMMIGRANT**  
**“UN INMIGRANTE**  
**ES UN ESCLAVO DEL**  
**NEOLIBERALISMO”**



# Context: Global & US

- Immigration around the globe at all-time high
  - “People on the move” = 258 million (defined as people not living in their countries of birth)
  - Increase of 49% since 2000 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2017)
- Feminization of Migration
  - 48% of total migrants as of 2017
  - Not a new phenomenon: 47% in 1960
- Feminization of Migration to the US:
  - 51.4% to the US (2015)

# Research Questions

1. In what ways are different experiences in the U.S. changing immigrants' lives?
  - Not only economically, but also socially and politically?!
2. When and in what ways are immigration experiences empowering?
3. How do these empowering experiences vary for men and women?
4. In the cases of empowering experiences for women, what policies can governments implement to support these processes, and immigrants' chances of success at integration?

# Theoretical Frameworks

Intersections of:

1. International Political Economy
  - Gender and Development
  - Human Capital
  - Social Capital
2. Migrant Rights as Human Rights
  - United Nation Declaration of Human Rights
  - Lourdes Benería (2015) *Gender, Development and Globalization: Economics as if All People Mattered*

**“Empowerment: the process of enabling people to increase control over their lives, to gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives, to increase their resources and qualities and to build capacities to gain access, partners, networks, and a voice.”**

**-UN DESA, 2012**

# Hypotheses

- Through migration, from an economic perspective, it is expected that migrants will experience economic empowerment. Regarding gender, women will experience a more substantial increase of empowerment than men.
- Regarding social empowerment, it is expected that women would experience increased empowerment in household responsibilities.
- Security is expected to increase through migration to the United States depending on home country for both men and women.
- Political empowerment is expected depending on comparison to home country if the United States is more democratic than home country.



# Methods

- Intersection of qualitative and quantitative methods
- Build on relationships with local Latino organizations in Northeastern Pennsylvania (Norristown and West Chester) to conduct survey
  - Building social capital and trust to gain access
- Creation and use of WCU IRB approved survey modeled from questions from the United Nations, World Bank, and local Pew Hispanic surveys.
- Sample: 29 survey interviews (16 women, 13 men)
  - Respondents: Latin America, Africa, Central Asia, Middle East, Europe

# Economic Empowerment

---

INCOME LEVEL				
		Home Country (% of respondents)	United States (% of respondents)	% Change
>\$30,000	M	58.3%	30.8%	-27.5%
	F	100%	53.3%	-53.3%
<\$31,000	M	41.7%	69.2%	+27.5%
	F	0%	46.7%	+46.7%
+76,000	M	8.3%	30.8%	+22.5%
	F	0%	40%	+40%

Q: What was/is your approximate income level in your home country/United States?

---

# Social Empowerment

HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT				
		Home Country (% of respondents)	United States (% of respondents)	% Change
Cooking	M	23.1%	38.5%	+15.4%
	F	50%	62.5%	+12.5%
Cleaning	M	38.5%	53.8%	+15.3%
	F	43.8%	68.9%	+25.1%
Laundry	M	23.1%	46.2%	+23.1%
	F	50%	68.8%	+18.8%

**Q:** In your home country/In the United States, which chores did/do you do?

# Social Empowerment

## SECURITY

Very Safe	M	38.5%
	F	50%
Somewhat Safe	M	38.5%
	F	31.3%
Not Safe	M	23.1%
	F	18.8%

Q: To what degree do you feel more or less safe in the United States?

# Political Empowerment

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES				
		Country of Origin (%)	United States (%)	% Change
Writing	M	7.6%	46.2%	+38.6%
Letters	F	6.3%	18.8%	+12.5%
Attend	M	30.7%	30.7%	0%
Meetings	F	6.3%	25%	+18.7%
Organize	M	7.6%	7.6%	0%
Protests	F	0%	6.3%	+6.3%
Attend	M	23%	30.7%	+7.7%
Protests	F	18.8%	37.5%	+18.7%
Voting	M	38.5%	30.8%	-7.7%
	F	50%	43.8%	-6.2%

# Evolving Conclusions...

- Apply international level discussions at the local level
  - Pennsylvania policies of DACA, REAL ID, and Sanctuary Cities are part of defensive strategies of the moment
  - Migrant Women's particular issues sidelined at this time.
  - Quantitatively and *qualitative* measurements to gauge empowerment
  - Channel grassroots conversations into policy discussions
- Reframe the national comprehensive immigration reform conversation:
  - *Migrant* women's rights are human rights.
  - Feminist foreign policy → feminist *local* policy

**¡Gracias!**

# References:

American Immigration Council (2015) Immigrants in Pennsylvania.

- Ehrenreich, Barbara and Arlie Russell Hochschild, 2002. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Gaye, A and Jha, S. (2011) "Measuring Women's Empowerment through Migration", DIVERSITIES Vol. 13, No. 1, UNESCO.
- CEPAL. ECLAC Series.
- Petrozziello, A. J. (2013) Gender on the Move: Working on the migration-development nexus from a gender perspective. United Nations Women.
- Staudt, Kathleen. 2008. "Gendering Development." In Gary Goertz and Amy G. Mazur, eds. *Politics, Gender and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- United Nations (1995) Guidelines for women's empowerment. Inter-Agency Task Force on the Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action <http://www.un.org/popin/unfpa/taskforce/guide/iatfwemp.gdl.html>
- UN DESA (2017) International Migration Report 2017: A highlight. United Nations. [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017\\_Highlights.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf)
- UN Women Headquarters (2017) Women migrant workers and remittances. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/7/women-migrant-workers-and-remittances>
- Waylen, Georgina. 2013. *Gender and Development*.