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Honors Research Paper

Guatemalan Youth and Education: Family, Environment, and Dropping Out

Guatemalan education, in rural and urban areas throughout the 21st century, has gone through various fluctuations and has been studied by numerous scholars including Adelman Ainsworth, Bassi et. al, Behrman, Crane, Davis, Rogers, Tumen, and Yount who all study different aspects of education including parental investment, neighborhood life, family life, parental migration, poverty and class issues, and other interdisciplinary aspects of these issues. This project focuses on how sociocultural aspects, like family and environment, effect middle and secondary school dropout rates in both rural and urban Guatemala throughout the 21st century for children ages 13 to 18. In this sense, environment can be defined as the area in which children live, the access this area grants them, and the neighborhood mentality that comes along with the area in which children live. It is important to research and discuss these sociocultural aspects like family, including parental investment and examining the local setting where a child is raised and attends school, and how these factors impact the dropout rates of middle and secondary school aged, ages thirteen to eighteen, children. Parental investment is defined as how involved the child's family and/or parent(s) are in their scholastic progress, the educational level the family and/or parent(s) possess, the resources the family and/or parent(s) have access to in regard to the child or children's educational success, and how this familial and/or parental involvement factor influences the rate at which a child or children will drop out of middle and secondary schools in both urban and rural areas (Yount et. al,497).

Family and environment affect children in rural and urban areas greatly, but they disproportionately affect children in rural areas because large populations of indigenous people in these areas and resources that are available to them are not as advanced as urban areas' resources because of lack of resources, such as teachers, roads, and transportation, as well as less availability. It is important to distinguish the differences between urban and rural dropout rates because rural areas tend to be more heavily populated with indigenous people and tend to have less adequate teaching materials. Because of this increase in indigenous people who are less educated due to this lack of materials, finances, and supplies, it can be inferred that rural, and consequently indigenous, children receive a less adequate education than their counterparts in urban areas of Guatemala. In addition to a child's environment, research shows that education can be especially challenging for young female students as these adolescents are usually forced to take on a mother-like position at a young age in order to assist their, usually poor, families in maintaining a traditional lifestyle (Davis 2016). This research is important because it explores why the sociocultural aspects of family and environment have a significant impact on children's lives, and more importantly, questions the sociocultural stratification of access to education.

Along with the qualitative data about the influence of parental investment and environment. This project also includes quantitative accounts of dropout rates from rural and urban Guatemala. It explains how these dropout rates affect children's daily lives and therefore affect their educational opportunities. It will also tell us what the major sociocultural differences and similarities are between the two diverse areas of rural and urban. Lastly, it will reveal how traditional family units influence youth and their decision to stay in school.

Family plays an extremely large role in Guatemalan households. Various researchers have studied the effects of parental relationships on young adults' schooling. Behrman and

Rosenzweig's (2002) research compares the schooling of mothers and fathers and the intergenerational effects of increasing parents' schooling. They find that "an increase in the schooling of women would not have beneficial effects on schooling of children" (Behrman and Rosenzweig 2002, 333). This supports the argument that parental involvement, in this case parental education, can affect a child's education because it is found that mothers who were more educated do not increase a child's education level but also spend a reduced amount of time at home, which can negatively impact a child (Behrman and Rosenzweig 2002, 333). We can infer that more educated mothers would possibly be able to obtain jobs outside of the home, even going so far as to immigrate to a different country to find stable employment, which supports the idea that more educated mothers would spend a reduced amount of time in the home. This also coincides with the fact that in rural areas of Guatemala, women head 6% more households than in urban areas (Rogers and Speitzer, 71-72). If a mother's education is not influential on their children's education then investing in women living in rural areas may not be impactful in helping to raise the rate of enrollment, as well as the graduation rates of children in these areas (Rogers and Speizer 2007, 71-72). An interesting distinction that can be made in this research is to distinguish parental absence in rural or urban areas:

The data also shows that Indigenous Guatemalans, or those Guatemalans descended from the Mayan Indians, are more likely to have children who are living with their father. Indigenous people, on average, are poorer and live in more remote areas of Guatemala. Carter (2002), in her article on male involvement and maternal health in rural Guatemala, points out that unlike their Ladino counterparts (ethnically and culturally affiliated with the Spanish), indigenous couples are more gender egalitarian, and their male-female relationships are more supportive and nurturing. These gender relations may affect father involvement (Rogers and Speizer 2007, 82).

We can conclude that rural households are not only more likely to have a parent, most likely a mother at home, but also to be supportive and nurturing, which can create a more stable and open

growing environment for children. This in turn could possibly create a more educationally stimulating environment for children, but in conjunction with the fact that rural areas are poorly funded, lack adequate resources, and have trouble finding effectively trained teachers may not prevent rural students from dropping out.

Davis's (2016) work involves parental migration and explores why many Guatemalan parents migrate to the United States for work with the intention of sending home money (remittances) for the children they have left-behind (Davis 2016, 565). Davis argues there are different effects of parental migration on boys and girls but what pertains to my research is that parental migration affects children's lives negatively and in turn limits their educational prospects.

For many Guatemalan families' economic migration and remittances can facilitate opportunities for left-behind students to thrive in school. However, there are also numerous unintended consequences of economic migration (e.g. migration failure, familial abandonment, psychosocial harm and the reprioritization of schooling for boys when a culture of migration exacts its influence) that can neutralize or even harm education prospects for other left-behind children (Davis 2016, 568).

Davis shows here that children whose parents migrate for economic reasons can be subject to educational decline because of the issues that can come out of migration. The children can feel as though they are being abandoned and some may reprioritize school, especially boys, because they are thrust into a culture of migration that they will one day want to assume.

Álvarez Díaz (2010) discusses parental migration as well but references how it affects the culture, since familial traditions and working traditions change with migration, and lives of parents and children in rural indigenous towns of Guatemala. By referencing indigenous culture and family styles that differ from that of Ladino and urban families, this research suggests that parental involvement makes a difference but so does a rural and indigenous background. This

difference in family type and culture can mean that each family type has a different influence on a child's education and dropout potential.

This research also explores the influence of environment on children's education. Adelman et. al (2017) argues that a young adults' environment can be an important factor that influences their future educational prospects and potential career paths. Data provided by the World Bank includes statistics on dropout rates in Guatemala, it also discusses the implementation of a new administrative information system that was introduced in 2009 and was based on student-level records and "Specifically, schools provide a list of all students who are enrolled in each grade, with their unique identifiers, and the Ministry centralizes and consolidates this information in a database that contains the annual enrollment status of all students (nearly 4 million each year) from 2011 to 2016" (Adelman et.al,8). This new system is currently helping researchers track dropout rates and how the environment of students effects the individual dropout rates in Guatemala. With these resources, they can create early warning systems that can predict which students will dropout, which can help lead to early intervention for at risk students and can prevent rates of dropping out from getting higher (Adelman et. Al. 2017).

The actual neighborhoods that young adults live in also have an impact on their educational and future occupational prospects and goals. "Many researchers have found significant associations of neighborhood poverty with children's poor academic achievement (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Crane 1991; Harding 2003; Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000), although here again the magnitudes of these associations have varied, perhaps in part for methodological reasons" (Yount et. al 2013, 500). Yount et. Al. (2013) confirms that if children in Guatemala are from poorer neighborhoods, they are more likely to achieve less academically

in school. “If youth living in disadvantaged neighborhoods perceive no difference in the occupational prospects of their older peers who completed high school and those who dropped out, they are likely to become discouraged and stop demonstrating academic effort” (Ainsworth 2002, 121). This supports the idea that a students’ environment, including the other children that also inhabit that environment, can have a negative effect on a child’s educational goals, which in turn can lead to more potential for dropping out. Crane (1991) argues in his research that “ghettos are communities that have experienced epidemics of social problems” (1226). This work on ghettos shows how neighborhoods can affect rates of dropouts in young adults. It also represents that a neighborhood, or environment in this case, can impact a students’ educational aspirations and can force them to conform to the Guatemalan standard, especially in poorer urban ghettos (Crane 1991). Cranes’ work does conflict with the argument of this project as he stated that dropout rates were higher “in the worst neighborhoods in large cities” (Crane 1991, 1228). Larger cities in Guatemala tend to be the more urban areas in which schools are more established and there are more resources, which leads us to believe that the dropout rates would be lower, yet Crane’s (1991) research says otherwise.

Access to education is a key factor of education in Latin America. Improved access and resources allocated to certain areas of Latin America encourage children to stay in school as this was especially proven in rural areas (Bassi et. Al. 2015). However, another aspect that increases the dropout rates in Guatemala is the prevalence of the informal economy, or an economy in which is not regulated by the government. For example, criminal activities and undocumented work. Tumen (2015) argues that informal jobs decrease the willingness of children to complete or even attend school because they know that they do not need an education to obtain a job, which entails a source income, in the informal economy. The prevalence of these unskilled jobs

tempts students away from formal education, which in turn decreases graduation rates and increases dropout rates (Tumen 2015).

This project is different than the previous research because it compares urban and rural areas of Guatemala. There is a difference in education in these areas as rural areas have less access and more negative environmental aspects that prevent students from obtaining the same education as urban areas, and to help us understand why these differences occur. An increase in parental involvement and advances in environmental standards as well as resources can help to alleviate dropout rates. The goal of this project is to understand the difference in dropout rates between rural and urban areas of Guatemala and how these differences, if any, relate to aspects of family and environment. Family and environment *do* affect children's dropout rates and influence their behavior and determination to get an education. I also argue the environment can in fact have a negative impact on a child's potential to gain an equal education. We as a research community can use this information to continue to study these effects and in turn try to change the effects to positive more education encouraging ones. This research is needed and necessary because it is distinguishing how different rural and urban schooling in Guatemala is and how sociocultural aspects, in this projects' case family and environment, affect the rate at which students ages 13-18 in the last seventeen years are dropping out. It is important for not only other scholars but everyone to be educated on this topic as Latin America is a large player in the world and children in Latin America are just as much future leaders as children in America, they deserve the chance to obtain the same education in all areas of Guatemala. This project will help uncover what areas of Guatemala are in most need of educational, familial, and environmental reforms and can give insight on how to make positive and impactful improvements these aspects to decrease the rate in dropouts. There are many parental and environmental aspects that come

into play when discussing children's schooling potential, this project builds upon those resources in the context of Guatemala in order to not only better understand Guatemalan student's potential but to also find different results than that of previous research. The results of this continued research will influence other works in the future by providing more comparative research of rural and urban areas in Guatemala while also comparing quantitative data throughout these areas as well.

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