

'Becoming Somebody': Youth Transitions through Education and Migration – Evidence from Young Lives, Peru

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Young people migrate for a number of different reasons, including poverty and economic deprivation. The relation between migration and poverty is complex. Migration is sometimes seen as a threat to local ways of life, but it is also seen as a source of positive change for individuals and communities. Migration-for-education is a growing trend, as many young people turn to education as a hope for escaping poverty. This paper looks at the relationship between migration and education among young people growing up in poverty in Peru. The analysis is based on Young Lives data on children in Peru who were eight years old when the study began in 2002, and were 12 years old during the first qualitative study in 2007. The findings show that young people and their caregivers connect migration with 'becoming somebody in life'.

Background

While Peru's economic and policy context has recently become more favourable for children, inequalities between groups still exist. Evidence shows that rural and ethnic minority children are more likely to experience poor nutrition and education outcomes. These persistent economic and social inequalities drive migration, both within Peru and internationally. Internal migration is most often from rural to urban areas, particularly to coastal areas that are seen as having better work opportunities and access to higher and technical education.

Methodology

This paper relates migration to other youth transitions. Recent research shows how poverty greatly influences young peoples' transitions and aspirations for the future. Two case studies presented here show the ways in which children's migration is linked with anticipated changes around school and work. These case studies also show the growing importance of education in understandings of what it takes to transition into adulthood and out of poverty. For both young people and their caregivers, education promises the pathway to a better life and to 'becoming somebody' of value. The paper focuses on four dimensions of this promise: 1) that education brings

literacy; 2) that education allows a person to become a 'professional'; 3) that educated young people can become 'different' from older generations; and 4) that mobility and migration is seen as integral to the process of 'becoming somebody' through education and work.

The analysis is based on individual interviews with young people, their carers, and their teachers, as well as some creative methods such as life-course timelines and drawings on 'well-being'. Findings from Young Lives research show that, particularly in rural communities, higher education requires mobility. Neither young people nor their caregivers embrace the idea of long-distance, permanent migration, but many view migration as inevitable.

Findings

The findings from this analysis reveal a number of points about young people's aspirations. Because of recent economic growth in Peru, young people today have different opportunities, and therefore different expectations, from their parents. But evidence suggests that these expectations may be inflated, given the persistent problems of poverty and inequality. Evidence also shows that young people's expectations and aspirations are often closely tied to their family relationships. Even if they move away, both they and their caregivers expect that they will remain active members of the household. Furthermore, while young people in Peru are 'aiming high' in their aspirations, they and their caregivers often have more than one strategy to help them into adulthood and out of poverty. Many children in rural areas learn agricultural and pastoral skills, which are valued even if they are not seen as the ideal form of work for the future.

There is growing evidence in Peru that education is highly valued, even in poor areas and households. Education is seen as essential in preventing young people from suffering the same poverty as their parents. The findings show that, at age 12, most young people in this study still believe that they can 'become somebody' in life, but sometimes they may have to move 'someplace else' to do so.

