

Final Project Summary Report

Resilience, Faith, and Social Supports among Migrants and Refugees from Central America and Mexico

ABSTRACT: Migrants flee violence, extortion, assault and kidnapping in Central America and Mexico to make the dangerous journey to the U.S. - Mexico border. They experience trauma and adversity at each stage of the journey – prior to departure, enroute, and upon arrival at the border. This mixed methods research project examines protective factors that mediate trauma and support quality of life among migrants. Despite high levels of post-traumatic stress, migrants score high on measures of resilience and quality of life. Participants expressed high levels of religiosity and utilize faith as a coping strategy to lend meaning to their hardship and suffering.

KEYWORDS: Migration, resilience, faith, trauma

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Migration through and from Mexico to the U.S. – Mexico border region is fraught with risks to personal safety, mental health, and well-being. Circumstances in the countries of origin, such as widespread violence, criminal activity, and socio-political instability, have led many thousands of individuals and families to make the difficult decision to leave their homes and undertake a dangerous journey toward what they believe to be a safer place because they feel that they have no alternative. Upon arrival to the border region the difficulties often persist as they may be met with unemployment, immigration detention, discrimination or deportation. As a result, many migrants are exposed to traumatic experiences including assault, kidnapping, sexual violence, human trafficking, and extortion. Despite exposure to great adversity, forced migrants display remarkable resilience, strong connections to migrant networks, and are strengthened by deeply held personal faith (Lusk, McCallister & Villalobos, 2013; Flores-Yeffal, 2013; Lusk & Galindo, 2017; Lusk & Chavez-Baray, 2017).

METHODS

This study examined protective factors that mitigate the cumulative trauma experience of migrants who have fled violence and adversity in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico. It is a mixed methods exploratory study that examines protective factors that moderate traumatic stress, including social supports (trust networks), resilience (cultural attributes, social bonding, values, and beliefs) and faith (spiritual well-being). The study is grounded in an emerging line of research on migrants that stresses the strengths perspective in mental health.

The investigators primarily relied on semi-structured interviews of 30 participants that explored the reasons for their emigration, the experiences in their home country prior to departure, events and incidents that occurred during their migration, and the sources of strength and hope that sustained them throughout the journey. Positive adaptations to traumatic stress, such as reliance on faith and religion, were explored in depth. In the interviews, participants were asked to recount their “lived experience” as migrants in order to reveal the meanings and understandings that they have used to frame their migration experience. The interviews primarily utilized open-ended questions, which permitted wide ranging reflections on the migration experience. This “emic approach” emphasized the insider perspective on migration from the standpoint of the migrant. This allowed for an assessment of migrants’ positive adaptations to traumatic stress. The goal was to center the research on the lived experience of migrants and to highlight the centrality of their experiential knowledge (Yosso, 2006).

Research questions include:

- 1) What traumatic and adverse events led to the decision to emigrate?
- 2) What is the degree of post-traumatic stress among the forced migrants?
- 3) Did migrants connect to social supports (peers, fellow travelers, strangers)?
- 4) Does faith serve as a source of resilience to mediate stress and trauma?

5) How do migrants evaluate their current quality of life?

Thirty participants were recruited in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico from agency partner Casa del Migrante. Inclusion criteria are adults, 18 years and older, male or female, who have migrated to the US-Mexico border from the interior of Mexico or from Guatemala, El Salvador, or Honduras and who have experienced trauma or severe adversity, such as criminal victimization, extortion, sexual violence, kidnapping, human trafficking, physical assault, threat of severe violence, or who have witnessed the homicide of a family member and who have chosen to migrate as a result of those experiences. To assure informed consent, the interviewers explained the research process to the participants in Spanish using a consent form. Participants had the option not to participate or to terminate the interview at any time. Individuals were not asked to reveal their surname and were assigned a number to protect their confidentiality. Each respondent was provided a cash incentive of US\$30 upon completion of the interview. The study was approved by the Institutional Review boards of the University of Texas at El Paso and the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez.

Participants were interviewed by a social worker and/or a clinical psychologist in Spanish, and were asked to narrate the circumstances that led them to leave their home, including any adversity they may have experienced during the journey to the border region. Participants summarized their experiences on the journey to the border with emphasis on people who helped them and networks of migrants to which they were connected, including people from their hometown, province, family members, and/or strangers. Semi-structured interviews determined the subjective experiences associated with traumatic exposure and migration and helped detail internal and external assets that sustained them, gave them hope, and engendered perseverance during their journey. Questions elicited both internal sources of resiliency, such as self-efficacy,

and resources in their environment beyond their personal agency that facilitated positive outcomes under stress, resistance to adversity, and adjustment.

To supplement the subjective perspectives of migrants as elicited through open-ended questions, the investigators objectively assessed traumatic stress, resilience, protective factors, and quality of life by using the Spanish versions of Quality of Life Index (QLI-Sp), the Short Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Rating Interview (SPRINT), the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 25), and the Duke University Religion Scale. The CD-RISC-25 measures resilience, hope, and optimism. The Duke University Religion Index measures intrinsic religiosity and religious activity. The QLI-Sp index assesses global well-being, including emotional well-being, interpersonal functioning, and spiritual well-being. The SPINT PTSD-Sp scale provides a brief measure of post-traumatic stress. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in Spanish. The researchers validated the transcripts against the original audiotapes and review tapes for voice tones and emotions. Interviewers took field notes, which were included in the case files. Qualitative data analysis of the interviews followed Miles, Huberman and Saldaña's dynamic, recursive data analysis process, which includes data collection, reduction, coding and interpretation (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014). Emergent themes were identified and discussed by the research team in the final analysis.

Our experience with migrants and refugees has shown that they have been eager to share their stories so that people can appreciate their situation. Participating individuals were identified by the agency director using the inclusion criteria. Privacy and confidentiality was assured by conducting the interviews in a closed room at the agency.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Findings

The demographic profile of the study participants included 26 men, two women and one person who identified as transgendered. They reported an average of 6.5 years of formal education. The reported respective countries' of origin were Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala. The women study participants were from Mexico and one was from Honduras. The countries of origin for the male study participants were one man was from Guatemala, 12 from Honduras, and 14 men and one transgendered person were from Mexico. The research participants' mean age was 32.03 years with a standard deviation of 9.59 and a range of 18 to 49 years.

To explore the factors that mitigate the cumulative trauma of the study participants' four standardized measures were administered to the research participants to evaluate resilience, religiosity, post-traumatic stress disorder, and quality of life. The Short PTSD Rating Interview (Sprint) was used to assess the severity of PTSD symptoms. The mean score was 19.5 with a SD of 7.27 and a range of 0 to 32. A score of 10 indicates mild symptoms and 18 and above indicates severe symptoms. Examination of the Sprint scores found that only 2 (6.7%) participants' scores indicated no symptoms of PTSD, while 30% of study participants' scores placed them in the moderate range, and fully 63.3 % of the study participants' scores placed them in severe range. By comparison, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (2017), the life time prevalence of PTSD in the U.S. among adults is 6.8%. Migrants are a very diverse group with diverse migration experiences; however, as a group they have relatively high prevalence rates of PTSD. We found that 93% of the current study participants had moderate to severe PTSD symptoms, which is notable when compared to migrants in general (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017).

A protective factor for Latino migrants is religious affiliation and practices, which is a complex construct that includes religiosity, religious affiliations, social and familial norms, and religious experiences. To explore *religiosity*, study participants were administered the Duke University Religion Index Spanish version. This index is constructed of 3 subscales versus a summative score that provides an overall index of religion (Koenig & Bussing, 2010). The first subscale on religious attendance (ORA) has been associated with less depression, higher levels of social supports, better physical health and lower mortality. The meditation and Scripture reading subscale (NORA) has conversely been associated with poorer health, higher levels of social support and inconclusive levels of depression (Koenig & Bussing, 2010). Finally, intrinsic religiosity (IR) is measured by three questions from the index using a Likert scale. The mean score for IR among the study participants was 12.53 and the SD was 3.47 with a range of 4 to 15. Tables 1.1 – 1.3 detail the participants' responses to each subscale question on a scale from one, *never*, to six, *more than once a week/day*. Results from the ORA subscale found that 66.7 % of the study participants attended church at least “a few times a month” and 20% attended church “more than once a week”. The study participants spent different amounts of time praying, in meditation or Bible study. Eighty three 83% spent two or more times a week praying, meditating or engaged in Bible study and 63% engaged daily. Overall religiosity was high among the study participants' with a mean score of 12.53, standard deviation 3.47 and a range from 4 to 15. The highest possible score was 15 and 53.3% of the study participants rated their intrinsic religiosity above 14.

Table 1.1 Duke ORA Sub-Scale Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1.00	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
3.00	8	26.7	26.7	33.3
4.00	6	20.0	20.0	53.3
5.00	8	26.7	26.7	80.0
6.00	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.2 Duke NORA Sub-Scale Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1.00	3	10.0	10.0	10.0
2.00	19	63.3	63.3	73.3
3.00	3	10.0	10.0	83.3
4.00	1	3.3	3.3	86.7
5.00	3	10.0	10.0	96.7
6.00	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.3 Duke IR Sub-Scale Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 4.00	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
5.00	2	6.7	6.7	10.0
6.00	1	3.3	3.3	13.3
9.00	1	3.3	3.3	16.7
10.00	2	6.7	6.7	23.3
12.00	4	13.3	13.3	36.7
13.00	1	3.3	3.3	40.0
14.00	4	13.3	13.3	53.3
15.00	14	46.7	46.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

The Multicultural Quality of Life Index was used to assess the study participants overall quality of life and 3 specific items of the index were examined to explore specific features of their quality of life: *personal fulfillment*, *spiritual fulfillment* and *global perception* of quality of life. The total mean score for the study participants was 74.23, SD 14.72 and a range of 48 to 98. Upon further exploration of the specific items of the index we found a mean score of 7.23, standard deviation 3.52, range 1 to 10, on the item that asked participants about their *personal fulfillment*, “experiencing a sense of balance, dignity and solidarity.” A large portion of the study participants (63.3%) rated themselves 8 and above on this item and 53.5% rated themselves at 9 or 10.

The Spiritual Fulfillment feature of the Quality of Life Index was operationalized as “experiencing faith, religiousness, and transcendence beyond ordinary material life.” All of the study participants scored themselves 7 or above on a 10 point scale, 80% scored themselves 9 or above, and 70% scored themselves as a 10. These scores suggest that the participants in this study had a high level of spiritual fulfillment. The final item we examined was Global Perception of Quality of Life that is “feeling satisfied and happy with life in general”. A significant portion (66.7%) of the study participants scored themselves as 8 or above on this item and 56.7% rated themselves at a 10. These scores suggest that a majority of study participants perceived their quality of life as very high.

An important conceptual aspect of this study is the resilience of migrants and who have faced significant challenges in the form of physical and psychological/emotional harm. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was used to explore the study participants’ resilience. The interpretation of the scores is complex and reflects the sampled demographic and psychosocial characteristics. For instance, the mean score of the general U.S. population is 80.7 and for PTSD samples 52.8 (Connor & Davidson, 2001). Based on the findings from administering the SPRINT among the participants in this study, we decided to use the norming parameters for PTSD samples since most of the study participants’ scores indicated PTSD symptomology. The mean score of the participants of this study was 79.8, SD 12.83 with a range from 51 to 98. The mean scores suggest moderate to high levels of resilience among 73.33 % of the study participants.

These findings may not appear to be remarkable; however, the result from the standardized measures are important when compared to their experiences during their migration and lives in their home countries. The study participants reported strong religiosity based on the

Duke Religion Index and the Multicultural Quality of Life Index. In the analysis of their personal lived experiences research participants frequently spoke about their spiritual beliefs as central to their ability to endure extreme physical, emotional and psychological hardships. Also the vast majority of the study participants scored in the range of remarkable PTSD symptomology and comparably they also appeared to be very resilient based on their scores on CD-RISC-25. Additionally, the study participants' reported positive perceptions about their quality of life even though many of them presented with mild to severe PTSD symptoms.

Qualitative Results

Serial Trauma

In-depth interviews with participants elicited the centrality of the experience of trauma and adversity. Traumatic experiences were often serial in nature, including those that occurred in country that compelled them to leave, traumatic experiences endured on the journey, and adverse experiences that migrants survived upon arrival in the border region. Serial trauma was experienced in three stages.

As forced migrants the first set of traumas were those factors that made them leave their home, their jobs and their country – a decision not undertaken lightly. These included the threat of kidnapping, extortion with the threat of violence, murder of a family member, confiscation of homes and property, forced conscription into organized crime such as Mara 13 (a large and pervasive international gang), sexual violence, and assault. A forced migrants' decision to leave is often also influenced by local authorities' incapacity or unwillingness to protect them from crime (De León, 2015).

The second set of traumatic experiences were endured on the journey, indeed the trip itself was often as traumatic as the circumstances from which they fled. These included being robbed, sexual assault, getting sick, witnessing violence against others, seeing people falling from the train (migrants often rode on the train *La Bestia*, an infamously dangerous cargo train), being arrested or harassed by Mexican immigration authorities, and being taken in, abused, and robbed by their smuggler (*pollero*) or turned in to authorities. Finally, a third set of traumas was experienced upon arrival in the United States where they were often arrested, interrogated, detained at length, treated harshly, and then deported.

A common theme was kidnapping (*secuestro*) a threat that has been present for many of the migrants as they are easy to spot when traveling, can be identified at train stations, bus stations, and parks. We heard stories of migrants being kidnapped and then forced to work for organized crime or held against their will until families sent money by wire. Money is sent from families in Honduras or Central America or families in the United States. Some of the participants were locked in hotel rooms or in other dwellings and were not allowed to leave. The kidnapping entailed a threat to kill the migrant which was communicated to the relatives. In fact, one participant had been kidnapped in El Paso. In addition the human smugglers sometimes tip off the kidnappers or help them in other ways. One participant escaped from a dwelling in El Paso where he had been held and he was able to get away.

Organized crime is present along all of the routes from Central America and southern Mexico to the border. It is not clear to migrants which cartels their abductors belonged, either *La Nueva Generacion* or *La Linea*. A number of young men are leaving Central America to avoid being recruited to the Mara 13 or because they are fleeing assaults, shootouts, and forced conscription.

During the course of this research we observed a change in the pattern of migration due to the zero-tolerance policy of the Trump administration. Now it is common to see deportees moving through the borders southward after they have been deported. For example, the staff at the Casa del Migrante where we conducted interviews, sees upward of 50 to 60 deportees a week.

Conditions in the detention centers in the United States were at times abusive. Detainees reported that they were frequently hungry or were fed frozen food or spoiled food. They reported that they wore ankle bracelets that were put on very tight causing pain. They were stripped of all of their belongings when they were in detention. As undocumented migrants, they were not afforded court-appointed lawyers or legal representation, filling their lives with great uncertainty about the future. A number of the participants who had been in detention in the United States reported that they were humiliated by the experience. Most of the participants cried when they talked about being jailed in detention centers because they did not see themselves as criminals and could not understand why they were being detained. Many of those who were deported had been originally arrested by local police and sheriffs, not by US federal agents reflecting a change in enforcement patterns in the United States. Some who were deported to Mexico said that they were planning to go back to the United States, whatever the risk, due to the circumstances in their home countries.

There is a sense of constant victimization in their stories. At every stage people felt that they were at risk. They experienced wage theft when they worked, there was danger at every stage - the threat of kidnapping, extortion, and yet at each stage they coped.

One man from Mexico recounts his crossing. "My most difficult experience was when we were crossing the mountains into Southern California, we were walking and as I looked around

there were women and children who could no longer continue to walk and who were weeping. I wanted to help them but I couldn't because to stay with them, I would have been left behind with the rest of them who couldn't make it, staying there in the mountain among the rattlesnakes and scorpions. One of the travelers was bitten by a snake and could not continue to walk and the coyote (smuggler) just left her there stranded." A young Honduran woman noted, "We suffered along the way. We suffered greatly because we had to sleep on the moving train, we slept in the streets and on the highways, we endured hunger and we endured unrelenting cold."

Resiliency

Despite the great adversities that participants reported at each stage of their journeys northward, we repeatedly heard a seemingly endless series of hopeful, optimistic, and positive statements that stood in stark contrast to the harshness of their witnessed experiences.

Paradoxically, migrants framed their experiences as pilgrimages of hope, undertaken at great risk and with significant suffering, to reach a place of safety and peace. It is as if their journeys, filled though they may be with hardship and suffering, were infused with meaning. Their reflections on their journeys were infused with the significance derived from faith, family, and strength (*la Fe, la familia y la fuerza*).

On the matter **faith**, they maintained a constancy of faith in the face of multiple traumas. Prayer was used as a form of solace. In many cases individuals reported that they prayed together as well as alone. They would stop at churches along the way. Others had religious experiences while they were traveling. Some participants reported that back home in their country of origin they had been faithful, but not active in the church or engaged in religious activities. But under stress and in situations of trauma, they turned to faith and it came out more strongly. They did not abandon hope. At each stage they were reminded of their faith and the challenges and

hardships made them more faithful. In their words, what was happening to them was understood in relation to the divine and their suffering had meaning. In some form, all of the participants said that God accompanied them along the journey and watched over them.

A Honduran man states it simply, “Thank God who has brought me this far safely and the help of many people on the way.” A woman from Mexico said, “Some have treated me well along the way and I believe God is putting people in my path because he knows that I do no harm. I come with good intentions and he puts people in my path - angels to take care of me. If its food I need, I go to a house and ask for it and people never tell me no. They always helped me.” A man from Honduras sought comfort through prayer, “I keep going because I know he is always with me and that way I can be in constant prayer with him because he listens even more so when they are coming from the heart. And I have complete faith that I will succeed. There may be 1000 even 2000 bad people on the migration, but I will go through all of that because when you have faith, everything becomes real and I know that faith will help my family and help us move forward.” An 18-year-old woman from Guatemala who had just arrived at the Casa del Migrante on the border said, “I am happy because I know that God has helped me in everything and he keeps me going. I have my child with me and so I should be happy despite what has happened to me, my child has always been with me and beyond that what else could you ask for?” A 25-year-old man fled Honduras and was kidnapped during his journey northward. He said, “When you talk to God, the first thing you ask for is the health of your family, well-being for oneself, and that he open the doors for us to get ahead. If you just hang on, he will listen. We ask him to help us keep going. The best thing to do is pray and when something happens, for example when someone beats you up on the train or even tries to kill you, well, we are praying

because we asked the Lord to guide and protect us so that your dreams will not be shattered and you will be safe.”

Migrant faith and religiosity has both intrinsic and extrinsic features. The intrinsic elements are the private meditations and practices that support faith and which give it internal expression. Extrinsic elements are external and shared social experiences of faith such as praying together, attending services, or other social displays of faith which form an element of cultural and social capital that sustains migrant strength and resilience. Participants practiced faith privately and publicly to help cope. Consistent with previous research, we found that religiosity seems to mediate stress among Latin American migrants (Kirchner & Patiño, 2010).

Another major factor in migrant resiliency was the role of **family**, particularly children. The journey was undertaken not only for personal safety but to create a space for their children to be free of suffering, danger, hunger, and violence. A Mexican woman fled with her husband and baby. “They placed a threat on me and my child and for my child I fled because my child is still very small. I want to see him grow up and so I came here because they threatened us. They said we had to pay 10,000 pesos (~525 US\$) for the head of my child and myself.” Migrants repeatedly said that they were making sacrifices for the safety of their children. A young woman recounts her journey, “I suffered, but I knew I was going to make it no matter what. People told me, ‘give me the child. The child should not be suffering.’ But no I’m not going to give my child away because I want my family I do not want my child to go through what I went through.”

The third critical factor was **strength** (*la fuerza*), personal fortitude, courage, and tenacity. The impressive resolve of people to successfully make this journey at any cost no matter the risk was evident in their stories. A Honduran man states clearly, “For me the source of my resolve is my strength, to never be possessed by fear. This is my strength.” Similarly a

Salvadoran said, “I have to stay on the path. I’ve been through the worst part, which I’d like to forget about, but even so it stays in my mind, all that happened remains present, yet I will experience peace from now on.” A Mexican man recounts, “I have not yet reached the place I need to be, truthfully the hardest part is still ahead of me, because if I leave right now and go out into the desert I have no idea if I will be able to make it across or if I will be caught by migration authorities, or if I’ll get kidnapped or killed, these are the risks that I have to take.” A Honduran man notes, “I believe the desire to get ahead and the fear of losing one’s life is all the motivation I need because in Honduras it is horrible and the criminals are in charge.’ A young man who received death threats in Honduras laughingly says, “The truth is that last night I was dreaming that I was already in the United States!” Migrants resolve to survive and their optimism for a better future are remarkable.

This strength is also rooted in those who help them along the way. Many of the migrants noted the generosity of strangers, people in the shelters and complete strangers. A woman who fled from Mexico noted, “Well.... People help you a lot, they propel you forward and give you a hand. When they see you coming they tell you, ‘others haven’t given me a hand as well’ and they say, ‘Come on you’ll get there.’ They have kept me going.” A 28 year old man from Honduras was grateful for help he received in Mexico. “Sometimes people help by giving me money. A man gave me \$20. ‘Here, this will help you out so you can buy some clothes.’ Because I was always dirty. Another person helped me later. I don’t remember when that was, but I keep them in my mind and I’ll never forget them, wherever they are. That is my Mexico, doing good and loving Central Americans who behave.” These informal helping networks constitute a form of social capital that sustains migrants in their journey and may include fellow travelers from their

village of origin or relatives or friends. They also encounter such networks upon arrival at the US Mexico border - non-kinship structures of migrants “paying it forward” (Flores-Yeffal, 2013).

The stories of forced migrants and refugees are largely unknown outside of the world of social justice agencies, shelters, legal advocacy offices, and immigrant support organizations. To the extent to which their narratives reach the public, it is often through the lens of their suffering, the perilous journeys that they have undertaken, and the harshness with which they are treated by hosting countries and their citizens. In deep interviews with migrants where they have the opportunity to tell their stories and provide the testimonies of their lived experiences, we are able to see their unrecognized strengths and resiliency. Our encounters with migrants have repeatedly demonstrated their courage, tenacity, resolve, hope, and faith. While they have suffered immensely, they do not define themselves as victims, but rather as travelers or pilgrims in search of safety, security, freedom, and justice. They are driven by the promise of a better future for their children, are sustained by faith, and are grounded in unrelenting hope.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MIGRATION POLICY AND PRACTICE

The implications of their resilience and strength suggest that a significant shift in narrative is merited in both public policy toward migrants and refugees and how we serve the migrant in social practice.

Current immigration policy in both Mexico and the United States ranges from ambivalent to xenophobic. This has been particularly the case with migrants and refugees from Mexico and Central America. In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States implemented national security policies of hardening the border, careful security screening of immigrants, and large scale deportations of the undocumented. This process, begun under the Bush Administration, continued under former President Obama whose administration deported 5.2 million migrants

(Chishti, Pierce & Bolter, 2017). The current administration has further stepped up border enforcement by committing to add thousands of border agents, extending the border wall across the entire southern border, and a stated goal of deporting all undocumented persons residing in the country. The Trump Administration deported more than 256,000 people in 2018 (Bever & Paul, 2018). The narrative that has sustained these draconian policies toward migrants is based on a *deficits perspective* that see migrants as a liability, threat, cost, and risk to the United States.

In contrast to this narrative, we utilize an *asset-based* approach to immigration that implies value-added policies. To illustrate, much of the early work on Hispanic migrant health accentuated the hardships and stresses immigrants have encountered and tended to point to risks of injury, disease, and mental disorder. However, the extensive research on the Hispanic Health Paradox has documented that even though the socio-economic characteristics of Latino migrants would predict poorer health and mental health, the group actually has better health and mental health indicators than other racial and ethnic groups, including non-Hispanic whites (Riosema & Jochem, 2012; Alegria et. al, 2008). Similarly, despite the great hardships and trauma experienced by many immigrants which one would associate with chronic mental disorders, we have documented that they are remarkably resilient and adaptive with positive coping skills (Lusk & Chavez-Baray, 2017; Lusk, McCallister & Villalobos, 2013; Lusk & McCallister, 2015; Lusk & Galindo, 2017).

From a practice perspective, the research reveals that while migrants experience high levels of adversity and trauma, they exhibit remarkable resilience and perceive that they have an above average quality of life. It is apparent that they draw on deep reservoirs of hope and faith, which coupled with strong connections to social networks, mitigates post-traumatic stress and anxiety. Indeed, the resiliency of at risk migrants is so strong as to be paradoxical. It suggests

that a clinical model centered on deficits, dysfunction, or disorders would run counter to recognizing their obvious assets and strengths in coping with extraordinary hardship. This must be considered in formulating social service and intervention strategies that emphasize the use of social supports, access to faith traditions, and cultural beliefs as part of post-traumatic growth and recovery.

The current study adds to the line of research that reinforces the strengths orientation. It empirically demonstrates the assets of at-risk migrants as they utilize social networks and are sustained by cultural resilience and faith. Implications for practice suggest that agencies which serve this population, throughout the border region and beyond, emphasize those protective factors that sustain migrants in the design of programs and interventions. Those who work with migrants are compelled to speak and write to international and domestic audiences about an alternative narrative in which to frame one of the country's greatest assets – its immigrants.

