Trauma and Resilience among Migrant Children from Mexico and the Northern Triangle Eroute to the United States

Georgina Sanchez-Garcia

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TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE AMONG MIGRANT CHILDREN FROM MEXICO AND THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE ENROUTE TO THE UNITED STATES

GEORGINA SANCHEZ GARCIA
Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences

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Dean of the Graduate School
Dedication

To the courageous children on the move who entrusted me to make their voices heard.
TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE AMONG MIGRANT CHILDREN FROM MEXICO AND THE
NORTHERN TRIANGLE ENROUTE TO THE UNITED STATES

by

GEORGINA SANCHEZ GARCIA

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
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for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Ph.D.
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
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Thanks to my husband for his love and patience because living with a doctoral student is not an easy task. To my daughters for their continuous feedback and for helping me choose the adequate toys and candies and prepare the participants' sandwiches, but above all, thank you for telling me that people should know what migrant children are going through.

In a way, this research is also yours. Thank you all.
Abstract

Children who experience the phenomenon of migration from the Northern Triangle region and Mexico en route to the United States face pressing problems with psychosocial consequences that ostensibly affect them and are reflected in the violation of their human rights. We studied trauma and resilience among migrant children from Mexico and the Northern Triangle nations – Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras– who are uprooted from their communities to undertake the dangerous overland journey to the United States (Lusk & Sanchez-Garcia, 2021; Rodriguez, 2020; UNICEF, 2018). The experience of such migration for children can be fraught with hardship, and it may have a severe adverse impact on child well-being with long-term consequences on their developmental milestones and psychological health (Uddin et al., 2021; Bartlett & Sacks, 2019).

We explored factors that protect migrant children and promote their resiliency and well-being through inductive coding and thematic analysis. The research leveraged the phenomenological multi-method approach to explore the experience of migrating children from their own perspectives and voice. First, we addressed the qualitative component through the risk and resilience model (Jenson and Fraser, 2016) and the socio-ecological model (Ungar, 2012; Bronfenbrenner, 1994) to explain the thematic analysis of interviews and drawings. Second, in a psychosocial assessment component, we used descriptive statistics to report the results of the demographic questionnaire and standardized measures of trauma and resilience (Llistosella et al., 2019; Bustos et al., 2009). The core of this research on child migration was grounded in children's right to be protected and have their opinions heard and considered, as established by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2019).
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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The United States is the leading recipient country of Mexican and Central American emigration. (Figure 1). Pull factors influencing migration from Mexico and the Northern Triangle region of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) include factors such as safety from crime and extortion, employment opportunities, better housing, and higher living standards. Pull factors also include social elements such as education, better health care, and family reunification (Urbanski, 2022).

Figure 1. The United States Main Destination for Mexican and Northern Triangle Migrants

Data on migration from Mexico and Central America does not explain whether people come because of push or pull factors (Table 1) but recent increases suggest new motivations for migration. While the number of migrants attempting to cross the southern border between ports of entry has remained relatively stable over the past ten years, the demographic composition of those migrants has changed considerably, incorporating a large number of children (Gramlich, 2021).

On average, 407,000 people left the Northern Triangle region annually from fiscal year (FY) 2018 to 2020. However, in FY2021, U.S. Border Patrol encountered nearly 684,000 foreign nationals from the Northern Triangle at the U.S. Southwest border; including 309,000 Hondurans, 279,000 Guatemalans, and 96,000 Salvadorans. In FY 2020, Mexicans’ number of encounters or apprehensions on the US-Mexico border reached levels not seen since 2013. There were 253,118 such encounters, 52% more than the 166,458 the previous year (Gramlich & Scheller, 2021).

<table>
<thead>
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Created by Georgina Sanchez-Garcia (2022) based on (Lusk et al., 2019).
Historically, economic power in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries have been concentrated in the hands of a small group of elites, leaving a legacy of extreme inequality and widespread multigenerational poverty and have been a significant push factor (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

In 2020, Mexico had a poverty index of 43.9% (Consejo Nacional para la Evaluación del Desarrollo Social, 2021). According to the World Bank data set (2022), in 2020, El Salvador's poverty index reached 30.7%; Honduras, 48.3%; and Guatemala, 52.4%. (Figure 2). However, these figures contain a disturbing consideration: the poverty rate among children can be significantly higher than that of adults (Tommasi, 2018), as we will show later in this chapter.

![Figure 2. 2020 Poverty Rate in Mexico and the Northern Triangle](image)

Many of the region's economic problems stem from deep-seated violence. Decades of civil war and political instability sowed the seeds of the complex criminal ecosystem plaguing the region today, including drug and kidnapping cartels and transnational gangs such as the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Barrio 18 (M-18). Extortion and forced recruitment of children for criminal groups are widespread practices.
The government in these countries contributes to the exercise of violence, either because it practices it, by conspiracy, by inefficiency to contain it, or by the high levels of impunity and lack of access to justice. As a result, criminal groups wield overwhelming power in a growing number of communities. Victims not only have no incentive to report violence but fear retaliation if they do (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos [CNDH], 2018; Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2015).

Thus, the decline in public safety and the ineffective application of justice to protect families and children in their home countries has been the main generators of forced migration in the countries in this region and a major contributing factor in child migration (Lusk & Sanchez-Garcia, 2021; Hernandez, 2019; UNICEF, 2018; National Immigration Forum, 2019).

According to UNICEF (2021), in Mexico, 51% of children live in poverty. Of this percentage, 20% live in extreme poverty (around four million children). In El Salvador, the poverty rate exceeds 40%, affecting more than two million children (Rogers, 2020). In Guatemala, child poverty and malnutrition rates reach 80% (UNICEF, 2020), and severe malnutrition affects 58% of indigenous children (Banco Mundial, 2021).

![Figure 3. Rates of Child Poverty](image-url)
In 2020, much of the infrastructure in Honduras was destroyed due to hurricanes Eta and Iota, increasing poverty by 70%. (Figure 3). The preceding added to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving 33% of the population with food insecurity. Such a situation directly affects children's health, growth, education, and safety (Canahuati, 2021).

Added to the lack of economic and structural resources, children in the Northern Triangle are ten times more likely to be murdered than children in the United States (Acuña, 2018). In El Salvador and Honduras, a child is a victim of homicide every day. In Guatemala, the number of violent deaths of children per day triples (UNICEF, 2018). In Mexico, four children die daily due to violence and 30,000 children were kidnapped and coerced to actively work in organized crime from January to September 2019 (López, 2019; CNDH, 2020). Girls frequently face additional violence, abuse, and discrimination related to deep-rooted historical oppression of their gender (CNDH, 2020).

Exacerbating this situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, gangs were able to target vulnerable people more easily due to confinement (Dreifuss, 2021). Girls are often exposed to different dangers than boys and are more often victims of sexual abuse, as evidenced by records of trafficking cases from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC], 2018) where it was shown that in 72% of these cases the victims were girls (UNODC, 2018).

Despite the overwhelming female predominance among victims of trafficking and exploitation, boys are also vulnerable to trafficking, albeit of a different kind. According to the United Nations Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2018), in 65% of detected cases of trafficking for forced labor, the victims were boys.

*On the Route*

5
Exposure to danger and lack of protection continues during children's overland journey through Mexico and upon arrival in the United States (Lusk et al., 2019; Lusk & Galindo, 2017; Chavez, Lusk & Sanchez, 2015). Families and children are exposed to adversity and trauma in the form of extortion, assault, human trafficking, and more recently, exposure to COVID-19 (Rodríguez, 2020; Kandel & Seghetti, 2019).

Migrants from the Northern Triangle region, upon reaching the border between Mexico and Guatemala, run into a "wall" that prevents them from passing. This so-called wall is the National Guard of Mexico, a military body made up of members of the federal police, the Navy and the Army. In collaboration with the government of the United States, the Mexican federal government maintains a policy of curbing migratory routes to the United States (Semple, 2019). The strengthening of immigration controls in Mexico has triggered a dizzying growth in arrests, rejections, and deportations. And in turn, criminal networks, corruption and the ineffectiveness of state apparatuses in Mexico, and in other transit countries, have turned irregular migration into a very lucrative business and, therefore, increasingly dangerous. In other words, Mexico has ceased to be el pais Amigo.

Migrants from the Northern Triangle who manage to pass the barriers of the southern border of Mexico and join their tortuous pilgrimage with Mexican migrants towards the border of Mexico with the United States, encounter adversities that they usually do not foresee, such as the danger of the northern border and the implementation of policies that further restrict access to the United States (Terrazas & Lusk, 2020).

According to data obtained by John Gramlich (2021), a contributor to the Pew Research Center, the United States Border Patrol reported that the detentions of undocumented migrants at
the US-Mexico border, from May 2019 to July 2021, showed that Mexican migrants accounted for 26% and migrants from Northern Triangle countries accounted for the 45%. Of these, 38% were families traveling with children (Gramlich, 2021) (Figure 4).

![Figure 4. The Profile and Percentage of Migrant Encounters at the U.S.- Mexico Border](image)

Adapted from Pew Research Center (2021).

*Note.* Family units refer to people traveling in families with children.

The case of migrant children is part of mixed migration flows. According to the International Organization for Migration ([IOM], 2019), mixed flows are complex movements of migrant populations, including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, victims of trafficking, and other vulnerable individuals. Within this group are large numbers of children. For example, in 2019, Mexican immigration authorities registered 50,621 children from Central America, of whom more than 30,000 were under 11 years of age (Ureste, 2019).

Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of children who transit through Mexico to the United States increased ninefold during the first months of 2021 (Nuñez, 2021). However, precise figures on the number of children in transit to the United States are not possible
as many cross borders at clandestine points trying to transit without leaving a record of their passage (Kandel & Seghetti, 2019).

Children on the move are highly vulnerable due to the alteration of their social structures that would otherwise have a protective effect (Ungar, 2012). The mere fact of migrating places children in a highly vulnerable situation since it is challenging for them to know, identify, and access health and safety services when traveling through unknown and often unsafe places. Even more, they can be victims of crime or fatal accidents without anyone recognizing their existence since many of them travel surreptitiously without required legal documents (CNDH, 2018). According with the International Organization for Migration (2020) there is a lack of interest or policies on the part of transit countries to register a large number of children who are lost, abandoned or migrating through their territories.

The abuse and mistreatment to which migrants are subjected have much more pronounced effects on migrant children (Manzi, 2021). Due to their physical and psychological immaturity, they may not effectively cope with the intensity and chronicity of traumatic situations they face during the overland migration (Brom et al., 2009). These include greater exposure to violence, suffering, and hunger. Many are in a chronic state of crisis (Thompson, 2019; Lucero, 2018). As a result, their vulnerability condition worsens increasing the probability of presenting traumatic symptoms (Center on the Developing Child, 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2014).

Collectively, experts agree that traumatic experiences in childhood can have serious long-term adverse effects on a child's psychological integrity (Van der Kolk, 2015; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014; Yoshikawa, 2011). While many children are adversely affected by trauma, some show a remarkable capacity to
overcome adversity. However, and according to Cyrulnik (2011), no child can become resilient on their own. To acquire these resources, children need a protective social environment (Ungar, 2013).

Resilience fundamentally rests on relationships. Extensive research has shown that children's interaction with family and community plays an essential role in their development (Weir, 2017; Ungar, 2013, 2008). As Ungar (2012) notes, “…the resilience of individuals growing up in challenging contexts or facing significant personal adversity is dependent on the quality of the social and physical ecologies that surround them as much, and likely far more, than personality traits, cognitions or talents” (p. 1).

Studies on resilience among adult migrants in the region indicate that migrants depend on family resources and formal and informal networks of migrants to facilitate coping and resilience (Terrazas & Lusk, 2020; Latz et al., 2019; Lusk & Rivas, 2018; Flores-Yeffal, 2013). Such resources are reinforced with cultural narratives based on faith, hope, optimism, and dignity (Lusk et al., 2019; Torres & Lusk, 2018).

However, the scarce extant literature on migrant children only includes children older than 12, focusing mainly on their adverse experiences and their vulnerability (Hernández, 2019; Thompson, 2019; Lucero, 2018). As a result, there is a void of knowledge in the study of the resilience of migrant children between the ages of eight and twelve from their own perspective and voice.

1.2. Problem Statement

As stated by Hernández (2019), countries, mainly from Central America and Mexico, tend to make migrant children invisible in order to hide the violation of their human rights with impunity. Nonetheless, as a result of adverse conditions that violate their human rights, children
are uprooted from their homes to undertake the dangerous migration through various territories that generally do not recognize or address their vulnerable social conditions and exposures to danger (UNICEF, 2018). Nor do those countries recognize migrant children's health needs and safety during a global pandemic, thus exposing them unnecessarily to traumatic situations during their journey (Manzi, 2021; Corson & Hallock, 2021; Zeid, 2020).

According to the Center on the Developing Child (2021) the interpretation of traumatic situations and the resilient response may differ from how adults process trauma, and must be viewed within a developmental and social framework. In general, the needs of children are mediated through their parents or other adults close to them. Children's feelings, strengths, and desires are already interpreted by their caregivers, thus, subjugated to the interests of those adults (Chacón, 2015).

There is a substantial absence of documents that rescue the voices and practices of children in social life and even more so in the migratory experience. Thus, there is a gap in comprehending children's needs and perspectives from their understanding and experience as expressed in their individual voices. It implies considering children as a receptacle of experiences, where they share experiences among peers and where children can transmit their own life experiences to the rest of the social group (Chacón, 2015).

1.3. Theoretical framework

*Phenomenology*

The interpretive framework of this study was phenomenology as this approach leads to the understanding of the essence of the participant's lived experiences. The utility of phenomenology lies in how it helps to perceive the reality of lived experience of participants from their own perspective (Fuster-Guillen, 2019; Neubauer, 2019).
Regardless of the diversity of socio-cultural backgrounds, adults assume a natural knowledge of recognizable objects, situations, and contexts that they consider fundamental and practical for navigating life. For children, however, such natural world can mean something else entirely. The task of phenomenology is to capture the distinctive qualities in the emerging world of a child. To achieve this goal, the researcher investigates the experience at the core of child’s concrete existence. A phenomenological study of children aims to elucidate and describe how a child perceives the world from their perspective. The wealth of children's views, which are often overlooked, provides our experiential data (Briod et al., 2005).

**The Bioecological Model**

The bioecological model articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1994), it functioned as a means of examining the interaction between individuals and their environments, as well as the resulting impact on the child's development. The author visualized the environment as a set of nested systems, each one within the next –microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem—. (Figure 5). The essential premise is that child’s development is greatly impacted by the social and cultural system (Fiore, 2011).

These environmentally related systems are described as: Microsystem is the closest to the child, and it has the most direct influence; Mesosystem is created when two or more of one’s microsystems interact; Exosystem is a system in which the individual is not present, however, it affects him, Macrosystem. This system is the blue print of any society. Comprises the larger socio-cultural context of the individual. The macrosystem also includes the political system, societal expectations. Its impact is more global rather than individual and specific, and Chronosystem. It is composed of the evolution of an individual's system and historical influences, both personal and global.
Figure 5. Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Model

Adapted from the McGraw-Hill Companies (2011).

The Social Ecology of Resilience Theory

Through the socio-ecological theory we can explain how political systems and socio-cultural contexts are the intrinsic causes that generate the forced migration of its most vulnerable population. The push factors that motivate child migration are both chronic and abrupt. These situations disrupt many aspects of development in the cognitive, emotional, and social domains (Van der Kolk, 2015). In some cases, it leads to long-term adverse mental health outcomes and the potential for dysfunctions in learning, memory, relationships, and emotional functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Michael Ungar (2012) emphasizes that to understand a child’s development in greater depth, interactions within physical and social ecologies must be considered, including risk and protective factors and elements of temporality, opportunity, and meaning. (Figure 6).
Temporality. Ungar (2012) states that behavior patterns are flexible and change over time as new horizontal and vertical stressors influence the person's ability to cope with them. The horizontal patterns are normative developmental challenges that occur throughout life. Vertical patterns are acute or chronic challenges that run through a child's development and negatively skew their growth. However, there are windows of opportunity, which, together with protective factors, reverse the effect of negative experiences and maximize the child's growth potential.

Opportunity. Just as immunity to future adversity can develop through exposure to manageable amounts of stress during an early age, the structures of opportunity that surround a child will shape the individual's ability to experience resilience. The combination of a set of social factors that are provided to the child from an early age, such as the teaching of cognitive skills, relationships with peers, parenting practices, and the quality of the community climate, explain the
functioning of the child. A change in the child's social ecology, rather than individual motivation, explains the greater variation in the child's developmental outcomes. Thus, it is within the social ecosystem where opportunities are generated by making resources available that will dramatically influence the developmental trajectory of the child (Ungar, 2018, 2012; Center of the Developing Child, 2016).

**Meaning.** On the one hand, the meaning of experiences is interpreted individually from the internal subjectivity and the objective reality of the situation (Ungar 2012; Sainz, 2003). The person tries to discriminate the experience as a facilitator or as a barrier to their survival. On the other hand, the meaning of lived experiences is derived from the belief systems and culture of the family and the community that influence the decisions people make regarding what resources they value and access and what resources the environment offers them. The meaning and sense of identity as resilient or vulnerable depends on these co-construction processes (Ungar, 2012).

**Risk and Resilience Model**

Risk and protective factors include individual, environmental, interpersonal, and social elements that affect well-being, development, and adaptation. The model consists of risk factors that increase vulnerability to hazards and their dangers and protective factors that safeguard their well-being (Jenson & Fraser, 2015; Ungar, 2010). (Table 2). To promote resilience, risk factors should be reduced and protective factors increased (Center on the Developing Child, 2020; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015).

Risk factors identified in Table 2 include lack of parent-child bonding, lack of network support, poverty, and deprivation, among others. Protective factors that mediate adversity include pro-social values, supportive networks, coping strategies, positive attitude, among others (Lusk et al., 2019; Jenson & Fraser, 2016).
Table 2. Risk and Protective Factors

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Environmental</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Opportunities for education, employment and other pro-social activities</td>
<td>- Norms favorable to antisocial behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Caring relationships with adults</td>
<td>- Poverty and economic deprivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Social support from non-family members</td>
<td>- Low economic opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Low community attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Attachment to parents</td>
<td>- Family conflict and poor communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Caring relationship with siblings</td>
<td>- Poor parent-child bonding</td>
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<td>- Low parental conflict</td>
<td>- Poor family management practices</td>
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<td>- Involvement in conventional activities</td>
<td>- Family drug use</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Believe in pro-social norms and values</td>
<td>- School failure</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Rejection by conforming peer groups</td>
<td>- Association with antisocial peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Social and problem-solving skills</td>
<td>- Family history of alcoholism</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Positive attitude</td>
<td>- Sensation-seeking orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Low childhood stress</td>
<td>- Poor impulse control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Attention deficits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Hyperactivity</td>
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Adapted from Janson & Fraser (2016).

**Risk Factors.** There are several elements associated with an adverse situation that act synergistically beyond the strength resources of the individual (Ungar, 2013). In the case of migrant children, in addition to experiencing the impact of being uprooted from their home and the journey, they often have experiences of racism and discrimination. According to Van Der Kolk (2015) inter-relational violence is more harmful to child's psyche, than traumatic natural events, such as hurricanes.

Fraser & Terzian describe the risk factors (as cited by Jenson & Fraser, 2016) as any
experience or condition that increases the probability that a problem will emerge, be maintained, and become exacerbated, such as poor attachment with parents, poor academic performance, attention deficits, and interactions with the juvenile justice system, among others (Jenson & Fraser, 2016). This concept asserts that the presence of one or more risk factors during childhood can increase the probability that problem behaviors will develop later in life. Girls may tend to manifest it with post-traumatic symptoms related to a process called internalization. Boys may express it with problems of a cognitive and behavioral nature known as externalization (Brom, 2009).

**Protective Factors.** According to Jenson and Fraser (2016), protective factors prevent or impede the development of situations that threaten child well-being and they operate in three ways:

1) reducing the impact of risk,
2) interrupting the chain of risks, and
3) preventing the onset of potential risk

Common protective factors include social support from family, emotional self-regulation, positive adult role models, an optimistic attitude, cultural practices that enhance identity, stable neighborhoods, self-efficacy, and the ability to make friends to meet children’s need for connectedness.

However, the most significant protective resource a child can have in the face of a critical situation is their parent or trusted adult. Proximity to an attuned and competent caregiver (usually the mother) is an innate means for affect regulation that calms the child. Fear or flight tendencies are not as overwhelming knowing that another will be present and responsive (Brom, 2009). Supporting the previous investigations, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2015) reports that when faced with adverse events, children adapt and respond with a repertoire of behaviors acquired with the support of parents. Therefore, it is inferred that secure relationships
with the child's parents or caregivers can be a sufficiently powerful protective factor for the migrant child and contribute to the child's appropriate milestone.

Furthermore, the close relationship between the child and their caregiver promotes the child to learn to regulate and organize their emotional experiences, this being a predictor of self-acceptance and resilience (Brom et al., 2009). Thus, family, culture, and social capital are positive and crucial factors to protect and promote a children's ability to overcome traumatic stress during migration (Lusk et al., 2019; Jenson & Fraser, 2016).

**The Social Ecological Model of Risk and Resilience in Child Migration**

Based on the risk and resilience model of Jenson & Fraser (2016), the socio-ecological theory of Ungar (2012), and the findings of the present investigation we sought to understand how the migrant children give meaning to their migratory experience in the context of their immediate social ecology. We considered the analysis starting from the social system since more change can be accounted for by social-level variation than by individual factors (Ungar, 2011). Figure 7 illustrates the protective and risk factors that affect migrant children. The migration of children has its origin in the risk factors found in their home country. Yet, at the same time, child migrants are located in a social ecology of protective factors that mediate trauma by promoting resilience.

Risk factors include violence, stigma, lack of network support, poverty, hopelessness, among others. Protective factors that mediate adversity include pro-social values, supportive networks, coping strategies, faith, among others (Lusk et al., 2019; Jenson & Fraser, 2016).

As Figure 7 illustrates, protective and risk factors function in a contextual ecology that includes relational, community, social, and temporal systems. The **relational** context includes the family, peer groups, migrant caravan, and shelters. These social networks of migrants, also called
migrant trust networks, are configured in the current migratory scenario are the closest relational groups of children (Flores-Yeffal, 2015).

**Figure 7.** The Social Ecological Model of Risk and Resilience in Child Migration

Created by Georgina Sanchez-Garcia (2022) based on Jenson & Fraser (2016) and Ungar (2012).

In the ecological environment of the **community**, the child is situated among peers, trusted adults, and fellow migrants. In the context of migration, the community can be situated in
temporary parental jobs, family social networks, and temporary community contexts as the customs of daily life in places, such as shelters where they may wait for extended periods of time.

The **social** context includes the political system, immigration enforcement entities, the police, criminal organizations, shelters and strangers who provide assistance and support. The social context influences the transit safety of the migrant child since it is in this system where international treaties, public policies, discourses of xenophobia, discrimination, and others can be found.

The **temporality** environment consists of all the environmental changes that occur throughout life and influence the child's development. It can include normal life transitions, such as starting school, and non-normative life transitions, such as migration and the preservation and transmission of language, culture, and spiritual wisdom to the next generation, which are the foundation for self-construction. Therefore, the temporality environment is also composed of historical influences, both local and global.

**1.4. Purpose of the study**

The objective of this study is to explore trauma and resilience among migrant children from Mexico and the Northern Triangle who leave their communities to undertake the overland journey to the United States (Lusk & Sanchez-Garcia, 2021; Nuñez, 2021; Rodríguez, 2020; Thompson, 2019; Lucero, 2019). We approached this study from the vantage of the socio-ecological theory of Michael Ungar (2011) and the risk and resilience model of Jenson & Fraser (2016).

The socio-ecological approach emphasizes that the child's development is greatly affected by the social system. Therefore, the course of child development depends on the degree to which the environment provides resources for the child's needs and the facilitating role that each system offers within the environment (Ungar, 2011; Fiore, 2011).
The risk and resilience model has the central premise that the social ecology of the individual, the family, and the community interact to generate resiliency. This vision converges with the perspectives of Ungar (2013) and Cyrulnik (2011) where they contend that resilience does not develop individually, but is a quality of the social environment. Ungar also emphasizes the relevance of "navigation" for young people to show resilience (Ungar, 2008). That is, how children use self-efficacy to access the resources they need to be successful in facing challenges.

1.5. Definition of terms

Children on the Move

Migrant children are commonly known as "children on the move," a phrase that has the advantage of distinguishing the child who is on the route from the one who is already in the destination country (IOM, 2020).

Childhood Trauma

It is the child’s response to an impactful experience that overwhelms the child's ability to regulate emotions (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2021). Traumatic experiences can trigger strong emotions and physical reactions that can persist long after the event (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014).

Forced Migration

Although the causes can be diverse, a migratory movement may involve force, compulsion, or coercion (IOM, 2019). More commonly, forced migration includes those who migrate because there is no viable alternative. This may be as a consequence of natural disaster, criminal victimization, threat of abduction or murder, arson, forced conscription into organized crime, civil unrest, human trafficking, or ethnic genocide – all of which are present to varying degrees in Mexico and the northern nations of Central America (Lusk et al., 2019).
**Migrant**

A migrant is an individual who moves from their usual residence, either within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for various reasons. It is a general term not defined by international law that reflects common understanding (IOM, 2019).

**Migration**

Migration is the movement of persons away from their usual residence, either across an international border or within a nation, state, or region (IOM, 2019).

**Net Migration Flow**

Migration flow is the net number of international migrants arriving in a country (immigrants) minus the number of international migrants departing from a country (emigrants) throughout a specific period (IOM, 2019).

**Migrant in Vulnerable Situation**

This term refers to migrants whose human rights are violated. Consequently, they are at increased risk of victimization and abuse. Accordingly, under international law, they are entitled to protection and a heightened duty of care (IOM, 2019).

**Psychological Trauma**

Trauma is a severe adverse experience or series of experiences resulting in a physical or mental injury that can affect neurophysiological, psychological, and cognitive functioning (American Psychological Association, 2013). It represents a threat to personal safety and integrity.

**Resilience**

For our purposes, we define resilience as the capacity of individuals, in the context of their immediate social ecology, to respond positively to stress and adversity through coping associated with the social context, cultural assets and human capital. In the face of significant adversity,
resilient individuals can navigate their path to the resources that maintain health and well-being. It is expressed through individual behavior and is interpreted as an interactive process that involves the individual’s social capital and the interpersonal resources that the person can access (Ungar, 2013; 2012; 2008).

**Resilient Child**

This term includes children who experience adversity and psychological trauma and who utilize social and cultural resources to enhance their coping and self-efficacy to maintain well-being and progress on a normal developmental path (Fiore, 2011, p.179).

1.6. **Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

**Overarching question** – *How do children make sense of their migratory experience?* By this, we mean how children subjectively understand and derive meaning from the migration experience – notably the experience of adversity and trauma.

**Specific Questions**

1 – *What traumatic events have children experienced in their country of origin, during their migration, and at the US/Mexico border?* This question includes push factors such as victimization, inequality, poverty, violence, and environmental calamities in their places of origin. In addition, these events include the adversities that migrant children have faced during their journey to the United States.

2 – *To what extent do traumatic situations related to migration affect children?* It is important to note that trauma is subjective and depends on temporality. Although traumatic symptoms may appear sometime later in life, they usually manifest themselves immediately. The
Child PTSD Symptom Scale (CPSS) measures detectable signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

3 – *What individual, social, and cultural resources do migrant children use as a source of resilience?* Through this question, we will identify the prevalence of protective factors that promote resilience.

1.7. Significance

The decisions to emigrate are diverse and complex. One certainty is that the journey to the United States is characterized by intense and adverse experiences, especially for those who travel by land and have to cross various borders (UNICEF, 2018). Although exposure to an adverse experience is necessary but insufficient to produce trauma, numerous other psychosocial and biological risks and protective factors can mitigate or exacerbate the risk of developing a psychiatric disorder following trauma exposure (Jenson & Fraser, 2016).

Children, like adults, suffer the impact of adversity during migration in conditions of vulnerability (Lusk et al., 2019). However, consequences to children are potentially much more detrimental (Magruder et al., 2017; Brom et al., 2009). Children may not have yet developed the appropriate self-preservation skills, communication skills, or judgment to seek help when they need it in dangerous situations, putting them at even higher risk of harm (Bartenfeld et al., 2014). As a result, children are in a context of more vulnerability to traumatic events associated with at least four factors (Uddin et al., 2021; Bartlett & Sacks, 2019):

1. Children are dependent on the care of adults. They are permeable to much of what happens around them, especially during the migratory journey where there is no certainty, and they are aware of their caregiver's ordeal.
2. For children, traumatic experiences acquire a cumulative or dose-response character, generating a greater probability of continuing and experiencing the consequences of trauma in adulthood (long-term impact).

3. Stressful events at this life cycle stage, such as experiencing the intensity of migration under conditions of vulnerability, can have irreversible effects. For example, it is impossible to reverse many of the effects of malnutrition and recover the time of deprivation that reduced growth and development. In addition, traumatic events can alter brain and structural chemistry. For example, neurons involved in memory and learning reduce their activity, while the activity of neurons involved in fear and anxiety increases. Such cortisol levels decrease the hippocampus, corpus callosum, left neocortex, and amygdala.

4. In the psychological domain, sequelae could adversely affect cognition, attachment, self-concept, and regulation. The above factors contribute to the unique needs of children on the move and place them at the forefront of populations needing assistance and intervention response services designed specifically for this population.

Exploring and discovering what individual, social, and cultural resources migrant children can access and how they use these assets to navigate the journey from their community to the United States-Mexico border can help us better understand the potential development of their resilience and the importance of the role of family and community. Also essential is the need to recognize the child as a subject of protection with full rights of expression and social status regardless of the territory or nation (UNICEF, 2019) to guide public policies and practices related to migrant children. The plight of children, the most vulnerable among migrants, is not only a scientific concern, but also a matter of the fundamental human rights of children.
1.8. Assumptions

The findings may inform preventive and treatment programs that foster the well-being of children at risk and their capacity to overcome the impacts of traumatic events. In addition, implications may be drawn for the educational programs and policies that address children on the move. As child migration is a growing global phenomenon, the research may have implications outside the project’s geographic region.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

To better understand the phenomenon of migrant children, the risk and protective factors, and the dimensions common to the ecological model, we did a systematic review of the literature. First, we conducted the literature search in various databases such as PsicoINFO-UNAM; MinerQuest; REDYLAC; EBSCO; MEDLINE, BIREME (SCIELO, LILACS, IB ECS), and Web of Science (ISI). We utilized a Thesaurus language including the following keywords: migration, middle childhood, resilience, traumatic situation, psychological trauma, vulnerability, risk factors, protective factors, ecological model, phenomenology, and qualitative design. Finally, a manual review of bibliographic references completed the search.

We identified more than 200 qualitative and quantitative investigations published in English or Spanish from 1973 to 2022. The studies included migration processes and trends from Mexico and Central America, implications of traumatic experiences on children, and resilient processes in the context of adversity or trauma.

2.1. Background

The United Nations (2019) predicts that the number of migrants, now 270 million people, will double in the next 20 years, constituting the so-called sixth continent, the mobile continent. In the Americas, the borders of the transit countries from Central America to the North and between Mexico and the United States are practically closed, which lays the groundwork for irregular settlements and the search for more dangerous clandestine routes that significantly affect migrant children (Thompson, 2019; UNICEF, 2018).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2019) states that the situations of vulnerability faced by migrants can arise from a series of push factors, predominantly violence, and poverty, that coexist simultaneously and exacerbate each other, causing a person to leave their
country of origin. For example, people that have been suffering the ravages of poverty, if they also have to face the consequences of a hurricane, their survival becomes unsustainable since they do not have access to resources in the face of environmental calamities (Uddin et al., 2021; Corson & Hallock, 2021).

We present the following historical context to briefly explain the underlying *push factors* that motivate the uprooting of children in the region studied. We do this on the premise that development always occurs in a context that comprises all the contexts the developing child experiences (Osher et al., 2020).

High levels of violence have made Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries one of the most dangerous regions in the world. Transgenerational cultural attitudes towards populations such as children, women, and the LGBTQ+ community have made these groups more susceptible to abuse and violence (Leutert, 2020). The governments of these countries have failed to reduce the high rates of impunity, thus generating conditions of greater vulnerability for their inhabitants (Kandel & Seghetti, 2019).

The region is analogous to a war zone concerning violence, insecurity, and lack of effective law enforcement (Tol et al., 2009). Although these countries have similar characteristics, each faces specific challenges that drive outward migration.

**Mexico**

Mexico has suffered decades of political corruption, widening the socioeconomic gap between its inhabitants. As a result, vulnerability became the dominant social trait, observing an increase in the defenselessness of people and the lack of opportunities to get out of poverty (Rios, 2020). Thus, inequality, corruption, and poverty have been the elements for establishing organized crime that has taken over several regions of the country (CNDH, 2020).
The apparent collusion of local authorities and drug cartels resulted in the creation of community self-defense groups. However, far from resolving the state of insecurity, the violence spread even further. Criminal and community self-defense groups recruit children as young as six into their ranks (Linthicum, 2020; Rojas, 2020). The high probability that a child will be kidnapped to become a soldier forces families to flee their communities in terms of an exodus. For example, in 2021, in Ermita, Zacatecas, 90% of its population left due to attacks by organized crime (Arista, 2021; CNDH, 2020). Thus, exposing the fragility of the Mexican state.

**Guatemala**

According to Leutert (2020), from 1960 to 1996, Guatemala endured a ruthless civil war. The army launched a major counter-insurgency campaign against the indigenous populations. More than 200,000 Mayans were killed or disappeared during the war, and another million Mayans were displaced to Mexico and the United States. The violence committed against the indigenous Mayans during the civil war in Guatemala triggered greater dynamics of emigration that continue to this day, especially given the country's high impunity rates. Local governments and police are unable or unwilling to hold perpetrators accountable. The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala reported that Guatemala's impunity rate was 97.6 percent in 2018 (Leutert, 2020).

**El Salvador**

The civil war in El Salvador (1979 to 1992) initiated a lasting dynamic of emigration. The war was between the guerrilla Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front and the government. The guerrilla was backed by the Soviet Union, while the Salvadoran government received military and economic support from the U.S. government. By the 1980s, approximately 500,000 Salvadorans had arrived in the United States (Leutert, 2020).
The civil war led to the establishment of the country’s now powerful gangs, such as MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang. As a result, many children and adolescents flee to avoid being recruited by gangs. Boys were recruited as members, and girls were recruited as gang girlfriends (novias). If they refused to be members or girlfriends, the children were at risk of being beaten, raped, or killed (Leutert, 2020; Kandel & Seghetti, 2019). This fear of violence led entire families to flee the country.

**Honduras**

A series of military leaders have governed Honduras (Leutert, 2020). Although there have been attempts to counteract the model left behind by the dictatorship, Honduras continues to be dominated by privileged groups with necrophilia tendencies against those who seek democracy, directly related to the barbarism in the streets (Jorgic, 2021).

By 2011, Honduras was the most violent country in the world outside of active war zones. The transnational street gangs MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang are primarily behind the violence. Migrants fleeing Honduras often report gang threats and extortion as the main push factor for leaving their communities (Lusk et al., 2019). In a survey conducted in 2021 by the World Justice Project, 49% of Hondurans want to emigrate internationally, and 18% plan to do so within a year (Resendiz, 2022).

**Leaving the Country of Origen**

When families decide to migrate, they place uncertainty, fear, and the risk of even losing their lives along the route on one side of the scale. On the other side of the scale, they have nothing to place but two powerful desires: first, to survive, and second to live with dignity. Moreover, during transit or at the destination, migrants generally encounter other risk factors such as
extortion, robbery, and human trafficking, among others (Lusk & Chaparro, 2019; Torres & Lusk, 2018; Lusk & Galindo, 2017, 2012; Lusk & McCallister, 2015; Lusk et al., 2013).

The International Organization of Migration (2020) emphasizes that migrants are not inherently vulnerable or lack resilience. Instead, their human rights are violated, resulting from multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination, inequality, and structural dynamics that lead to diminished and unequal levels of power and legal rights.

The migration literature includes several key terms. An important term to highlight is migration flows, a dynamic measure that counts the number of people who bi-directionally cross international borders during a given time (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2012, p. 3). Other terms are often used in the media to describe a sudden arrival of foreigners in large numbers, such as influx, surge, or wave. The United Nations advises against using these terms due to the negative perception and alarmist attitudes regarding migration (IOM, 2020). This may motivate xenophobia, a recurring term in the subject of migration and potentially a precursor of trauma in migrant children, as Yoshikawa (2011) emphasizes: "words matter."

2.2. Child Migration

According to the United Nations (2021), more than 35 million children worldwide were forcibly displaced outside their country during 2020. In 2022, this number increased considerably due to the internal displacement or emigration of more than 3.6 million child refugees that have been forced to flee the war in Ukraine (UNICEF, 2022). This situation has created greater awareness of the global phenomenon of forced migration and child exile.

In the last decade, the irregular migration of children from the Northern Triangle and Mexico to the United States has been affected by harsh migration policies (Lusk & Sanchez-Garcia, 2021). In 2016, a growing number of Central American families joined the so-called
migratory flows. That year, Mexican authorities detained more than 21,000 children migrating with their families. Subsequently, migration and migrant apprehensions decreased in 2017, mainly due to the change in the perception of migrants about the tightening of U.S. immigration policy after the start of the Trump administration (Selee et al., 2021). Since 2018, the most notable trend has been the increase in the frequency, size, and visibility of families migrating with children and seeking access to humanitarian protection in Mexico or the United States (Gramlich, 2021). (Figure 8).

**Figure 8.** Trends in Child Migration from the Northern Triangle and Mexico

Created by Georgina Sanchez-Garcia (2022).

Of the 187,000 arrests in 2019 by Mexican authorities, 54,000 were of children traveling with their families. In 2020, the child migration trend continued to increase (Gramlich, 2021), and
according to Nunez (2021), this increase during 2021 was more than 460,000 children migrating to the United State. These figures show that the reasons why people migrate are no longer just economic. That is, the families are fleeing (Lusk et al., 2019). The central debate has been that the transit and destination states consider this population more as migrants than as children (Hernández, 2019). Therefore, it is critical to recognize children's rights within the migration phenomenon, not as migrants, but first as children (UNICEF, 2018).

Ungar (2013) states that an adverse environment can affect the child's development with various transient or chronic physical, psychological, and behavioral health problems. Migrant children are deprived of the secure base of their home and they can respond in the form of irritability, sleep disturbances, separation anxiety, and emotional lability (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019; American Association of Psychiatry, 2013). The plight of children, the most vulnerable among migrants, is not only a scientific concern, but also a matter of the fundamental human rights of children.

2.3. Middle Childhood

Most scholars define middle childhood as the age group 8 to 12 years old (Tomonari, 2021; Rojas, 2018). During this stage, children go from being dependent children to young people with an active role in their family and community structures. Children's thinking at this stage becomes more abstract, their behaviors and emotions are more regulated, and their decisions are more independent (Osher et al., 2020; Echavarría, 2012).

During middle childhood, children become more consolidated with respect to cognition, language, and social skills. Thus, it is important to consider gender and age distinctions within this developmental segment (Papalia & Martorell, 2017; Mah & Ford-Jones, 2012). In addition, as
children self-regulate, relationships with adults are increasingly characterized by reciprocity and a balance of power (Li & Julian, 2012).

The nature of the developmental relationship between the child and the caregiver changes from proximity to availability (Osher et al., 2020). Although all human beings are born with a capacity to seek proximity, security, and help with the regulation of negative emotions in times of need, significant individual variations arise in close relationships that affect psychological and social functioning. When the child's trusted adult is available and sensitive to the child's needs, the child feels safe and can develop positive expectations about the availability and responsiveness of others (Simpson & Rhole, 2012). This emerging sense of security allows children to explore the physical and social environment with curiosity, learn various skills, develop cognitively and emotionally, and approach life's challenges confidently. In other words, to develop resilience.

Children have increasing opportunities to learn and practice new critical skills through interactions with members of their relational context (Ungar, 2012). Empathy, emotional expressiveness, interpersonal negotiation strategies, and cooperation with the rules have a significant role. These competencies become more sophisticated as children develop social skills and knowledge through friendships and skills for social perspective-taking (Osher et al., 2020).

Feedback gaps between the child and the social environment can negatively affect development during this period helping to explain the divergence in development trajectories that occur during these years (Mah & Ford-Jones, 2012). For example, research on the adverse effects of punitive, reactive, and segregating interventions suggests that poor long-term outcomes may be, in part, the product of developmentally inappropriate adult responses to problem behavior during these years (Osher, 2020).

2.4. Mental Health
Before addressing the concepts related to trauma, it may be pertinent to ascertain the concept of mental health, which, like mental disorders, is determined by various psychological, biological, and social factors (World Health Organization ([WHO], 2004). WHO (2019) has proposed that mental health is, "A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, copes with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community."

Based on the WHO definition, we would leave out the moments in which the individual may feel uncomfortable, scared, sad, or in pain, among other mental and physical states. Thus, we cannot infer that such emotions represent a lack of health. Instead, Galderisi and colleagues (2015) proposed a more holistic perspective:

"Mental health is a dynamic state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal values of society. Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express, and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationship between body and mind represent important components of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium" (pp. 231, 232).

In this definition, the authors include the reality that mentally healthy people can experience natural human emotions and at the same time possess sufficient resilience restore the dynamic state of internal balance (Galderesi et al., 2015).

2.5. Fear

Carlos Martín Beristain (2008), a psychiatrist and psychologist with experience in psychosocial care for victim’s states that after suffering a new and intense traumatic event, such
as family separation, children face indeterminate fears that generate uncertainty and anxiety. Moreover, those fears are difficult to recognize because children do not know where the danger is coming from. As a result, they may not have enough elements to defend themselves from a threatening situation (Porges, 2022; Beristain, 2008).

For example, the fear of something known, "there is a dog that bites, and I have to go through there, so I have to see how to deal with it." This fear may be easier to face "I can carry a stick in my hand and use it like a pole." That is, one can find a way to deal with the stressor.

Many children who migrate from Mexico and the Northern Triangle region have lived experiences of violence with criminal groups. The violence was in the street, was a very evident fear. They learned provisional ways to cope – routes, accompaniment, and surveillance, among other strategies. Such strategies contribute to making that fear more manageable. In the case of migration, children travel unknown paths and societies; therefore, the threat is unknown. Children do not know what will happen and may perceive themselves as vulnerable in the face of a shocking situation, resulting in a constant state of crisis without recognizing valid safety cues (Porges, 2022).

2.6. Emotional Impact

The migrant child will be impacted by the experience of a stressful situation depending on previous experiences and living conditions that have affected the child, such as poverty and violence. Such situations have different degrees of affectation according to the co-constructed belief system of the child and their ecology (Ungar, 2012).

The emotional impact could be defined as an influx of excessive emotions from an event characterized by its intensity, threatening the person's psychic integrity (Giacamonte & Mejia, 1997). Sainz (2003) describes the emotional impact as an intense affective state with a short development (emotion). (Figure 9). The significant situation that triggers such emotion involves
biopsychosocial factors and has manifestations at cognitive, subjective, neurophysiological, and interactional levels.

**Figure 9. Emotional Impact Process**

Created by Georgina Sanchez-Garcia (2022) based on Sainz (2003).

*Note: the emotional impact is a synthesis between: the situation = objective reality; external world, and lived experience = subjective record of that objective reality in the internal world.*

Since the experience comprises the factual component, one cannot speak of emotional impact without the situation. The meaning is in the threatening features of the situation. That is, from the environment to the person and the individual's perception. Therefore, the significance of the situation will measure its pathogenic potential for the person, either because it is over-signified or because, on the contrary, the situation loses its significance quality (Sainz, 2003).

2.7. Trauma

Trauma is not the event. It is the individual's response to the situation. Traumatic stress arises when a significant experience overwhelms the person's stress-related physiological systems -nervous, endocrine, and immune- compromising physical and mental health (Ungar & Perry, 2012) resulting in a mental injury impairing neurophysiological, psychological, and cognitive functioning (Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, 2020). According to the psychiatric classifications of the World Health Organization (2018) and the Diagnostic and
Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition, a traumatic event is defined as the exposure to death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence (American Psychological Association, 2013).

We can evaluate the impact of traumatic experiences through symptoms and their frequencies, which allows for identifying indicators of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), among other possible disorders. However, as the Slovenian psychiatrist, Dr. Anica Mikus Kos, states, sadness is not the same as being sick (as cited in Beristain, 2008, p. 45).

On the one hand, many of the emotional processes that occur in a significantly adverse situation are normal reactions to abnormal experiences. The symptoms manifest a traumatic experience and indicate more suffering than a disorder (Beristain, 2008). On the other hand, saying that such emotional expressions are normal reactions to abnormal experiences does not have to lead us to minimize the impact and suffering of the child (Lusk & Sanchez, 2021).

Not psychiatrizing the traumatic event helps to better understand suffering within an atypical context, but it cannot become a way of minimizing the importance of specific reactions, which may indicate that a pathological condition is emerging (Lusk, 2021; Beristain, 2008).

It is important to consider that there is limited generalizability of the effects of trauma. Not everyone feels the same impact, nor will they show the same effects. However, some critical events, such as forced migration, have a significant psychological impact on the person, of such magnitude that their traumatic responses could be generalized to other similar populations (Patton, 1994).

Also, crucial to consider are the manifold circumstances surrounding a traumatic event. For example, in Armero, Colombia, there was a volcanic catastrophe in 1985, and 25,000 of the
40,000 inhabitants died. Psychiatrists who conducted PTSD evaluations found that 50% of those affected had symptoms consistent with PTSD five months after the catastrophe. Eighteen months later, 67% and 70% had PTSD symptoms for two years later. Such data contradicts the evolution of natural history, according to which the traumatic impact should decrease with time (Beristain, 2008). The explanation given by the team of psychiatrists who carried out the evaluations was that the conditions of victims' lack of autonomy in shelters and, in general, lack of intimacy and forced social coexistence became significant impact factors – similar to the situation of displaced people. Thus, we cannot have a decontextualized vision focused on the traumatic experience as if the other circumstances did not exist (Beristain, 2008).

Considering the previous, Ungar (2013) states that an adverse environment can affect the child's development with various transient or chronic physical, psychological, and behavioral health problems. Migrant children are deprived of the secure base of their home, and they can respond in the form of irritability, sleep disturbances, separation anxiety, and emotional lability (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019; American Association of Psychiatry, 2013).

Traumatic situations can affect the neurological development of the child, specifically in the pruning of the synaptic connections of the central and autonomous nervous system, impacting the structure, function, and coupling of the hippocampus, the amygdala, and the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (McLaughlin et al., 2014). Younger children may lose recently gained milestones such as bladder control and even language (The National Child Traumatic Network, 2021).

Van der Kolk (2015) indicates that exposure to trauma is especially detrimental in childhood, disrupting many aspects of development in the cognitive, emotional, and social domains. In some cases, it leads to long-term adverse mental health outcomes, potentially for
learning and memory, relationships, emotional functioning, revictimization, and psychiatric disorders (American Psychological Association, 2013).

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2014), the younger the child, the greater the emotional damage due to the impact of trauma. However, children at this stage of development have an innate learning potential that leads them towards growth and cognitive and affective acquisitions. This learning potential could represent a significant advantage over adults in developing their resilience, which could lessen the adverse effects of a stressful event (Echavarría, 2012).

Therefore, trauma can be seen as a lack of opportunities for children to learn to protect themselves. The inhibited learning potential could leave the child vulnerable to trauma-related disorders and further exposure to danger in the future. The early detection of trauma symptoms constitutes the first crucial step in addressing and ameliorating the risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder requiring adequate screening and diagnostic tools (Foa, 2001).

2.8. Resilience

Childhood is a crucial stage for understanding and promoting resilience. During these years, the roots of self-efficacy settle and many of the essential protective systems for human development emerge. Middle childhood is a crucial stage to prevent and reduce risk, promote individual resourcefulness, and build a strong community resource base (Jenson & Fraser, 2016; Masten et al., 2013). However, there is an essential distinction, a child who develops along normative milestones may be seen as adaptable or competent, but not necessarily as resilient (Masten et al., 2013). The difference is that resilience is a dynamic process in a significantly adverse situation. There is heterogeneity in the way humans respond to environmental hazards, whether physical or psychological (Ungar, 2013; Masten et al., 2013).
According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2015), resilience can be visualized as a scale (Figure 10). On the one side, adverse experiences can result in toxic stress, such as repeated exposure to violence or poverty. On the other side of the scale are factors that can help make significant stress manageable, such as opportunities to build skills and practice managing challenges (Ungar, 2012).

![Figure 10. Resilience](image)

Even under highly adverse conditions, development can move positively if parents or trusted adults provide an assertive, consistent, and attuned response to the child. Likewise, communities provide resources and support that strengthen the capacities of families and make a broader environment of protective relationships accessible to all children.

Masten and collaborators (2013) state that resilience is a pattern over time, characterized by eventual positive adaptation despite the risk, acute stressors, or chronic adversities. Beyond a pattern of acquired resources, Lucero's (2018) research shows that resilience is a dynamic process that implies the interaction of risk and protective factors, both internal and external, which modify the effects of adverse events. The individual, social, and cultural resources allow the individual to
interact in the environment and adapt to changes in different situations positively. Therefore, the complex transaction between the two is what allows the individual to face adversity.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the protective and risk factors are constituted by the individual, dyadic, or community level variables (Jenson & Fraser, 2016). The presence of a risk factor does not guarantee that an adverse outcome will inevitably occur, but rather that it increases the probability of its occurrence. For their part, protective factors reduce or cushion the harmful effects of exposure to risks and stress.

Jenson & Fraser (2016) explain that a protective factor acts opposite to the risk factor. Therefore, we can expect a direct effect of a protective factor on an outcome. The variability of its decrease or increase over time is intrinsic to the dynamic resilience process. Such variability will depend on the interactions between the child and their environment and between protective and risk factors. Thus, an individual may be resilient at certain times and not at others, depending on situations and the relative strength of protective factors compared to risk factors at the given time.

In this regard, Santos (2012) asserts that it is essential to consider that the narratives and understanding of risk and resilience of children may not coincide with those of adults for the study of resilience. An accurate description of the meaning of the risk or protective factors is crucial to understanding how they influence children and how resilience operates. Because risks are multifaceted, it necessarily follows that resilience is multidimensional.

In another analysis dimension, Bonanno (2004) points out that resilience is more than the simple absence of psychopathology. This author makes the distinction, for example, between the state of recovery and resilience. The trajectory of recovery shows symptoms below the threshold but with distress. In contrast, resilient individuals may experience transient disturbances in everyday functioning (for example, sporadic worry or restless sleep) but generally exhibit a stable
trajectory of healthy functioning over time and the capacity for positive experiences and emotions. Essential to consider is that resilience never implies a return to a state before the traumatic event. Nothing is the same anymore. Prototypical resilience and recovery trajectories and chronic and delayed interruptions in functioning are illustrated in Figure 11.

![Figure 11. Disruption Patterns in Normal Functioning Across Time After a Traumatic Event](image)

Adapted from Bonanno (2004).

For his part, Beristain (2006) states that some of the effects and consequences of traumatic experiences are mediated by different resilient resources with personal and cultural variables and the degree of social support. Concerning personal resources, Beristain notes that there are ways of coping with traumatic events in different cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and even spiritual modes. The cognitive way of coping with the traumatic event may include making plans to solve it, searching for meaning, limiting it, or denying it. Emotionally, the person can learn to relax, share their feelings with others, or suppress them. Behaviorally, the person might seek information,
seek instrumental help, or sit still and wait. Essentially, the individual faces the adverse situation by managing their emotions and trying to solve the problems caused by the traumatic event.

Culturally, some people resort to their spiritual structures where the soul transcends the material dimensions and, therefore, survives the body's pain (Artigas, 2005). Regarding social support, the person can better face the traumatic event by perceiving that this network works and serves as support. From the perception of social support, the person gives meaning to the experience, feels more secure in mobilizing their resources, and has more control of the situation (Beristain, 2006).

Thus, the degree of resilience varies according to the person's perception and individual resources. However, it significantly depends on its ecological context. In this sense, we infer that resilience is woven. It is not internal, nor in the environment, but between the two, because it continually ties a process with the social environment. This process removes the notion of strength or weakness from the individual.

In the same line of thought, Lee et al., (2013) note that the point of view of resilience as a fixed and individual attribute falls short because adaptation stems from the interaction between the individual and the environment. As Seccombe (2002) states:

The widely held view of resilience as an individual disposition, family trait, or community phenomenon is insufficient (…) resiliency cannot be understood or improved in significant ways by merely focusing on these individual-level factors. Instead, careful attention must be paid to structural deficiencies in our society and social policies that families need in order to become stronger, more competent, and better functioning in adverse situations (p. 385).
2.9. The Social Ecology of Resilience

Despite the various definitions of resilience, most authors agree that resilience is a dynamic process to withstand from significant challenges (Lucero, 2018; Jenson & Fraser, 2016; Masten et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2013; Santos, 2012; Beristain, 2008; Bonnano, 2004; Seccombe, 2002). Under this premise, Michael Ungar (2008) proposed the following:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is the capacity of individuals to navigate their ways to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their wellbeing and their capacity individually and in groups to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways. (p. 228)

Ungar (2013, 2011, 2008) not only explores individual capacities and protective and risk factors but also includes the different levels of the context and reflects the construction of resilience within its cultural diversities. Ungar highlights the transcendence of the environment and proposes a social-ecological understanding of resilience (Ungar, 2013).

Ungar explains that the subject-centered approach means that responsibility for resilience is wrongly assigned to the victim of toxic environments, framing change as the child's ability to take advantage of environmental resources (Ungar, 2011). By decentering the child, it can be distinguished that the child's development of resilience lies not only in the child or in the environment but in the processes through which the environment provides resources for the child to use (Ungar, 2011). For example, it is not enough that there are social programs but that these resources are within reach of the child and his community.

When a child makes a positive change at a tipping point, it is often a change in the social ecology around them. Consequently, the resources or lack of resources within the social ecology can liberate or restrict a child's options. Therefore, Ungar (2008) suggests that communities should
create pathways that facilitate access to resources by paying attention to those who control the resources rather than censure the child for lack of resilience (Ungar & Teram, 2005).

Therefore, resilience is understood through its dynamic process with significant adversity; it is expressed through individual behavior and is interpreted as an interactive process involving the community's presence. Hence, the development of resilience will depend on the opportunities available and accessible to individuals, their families, and communities (Cyrulnik, 2011; Ungar, 2008; Lusk, 2019).

In the light of previous literature review and for the purpose of this research, we have defined resilience as the capacity of individuals, in the context of their immediate social ecology, to respond effectively to stress and adversity through coping associated with the social context, cultural assets, and human capital.
Chapter 3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This exploratory and multi-method research design used qualitative interviews and psychosocial assessments to investigate trauma and resilience among migrant children (Fuster-Guillen, 2019; Hunter & Brewer, 2015). The research explored how children made sense of their migratory experiences and examined the role of resilience in mediating their trauma. The study incorporated two psychometric scales, a semi-structured interview, and a free drawing.

The qualitative approach allowed us to explore the conceptual world of the participants and understand the meaning that the children developed about their migratory experience. This approach enabled open-ended questions to evoke genuine, meaningful, and culturally relevant answers for the participant from their perspective of values and interests (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The inductive nature of the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to reformulate the conceptual contexts and report in a way that was adjusted to the problem under investigation (Izcara, 2014).

The psychosocial assessments provided indicators of the areas susceptible to PTSD symptoms and the areas that promoted resilience in children in a vulnerable context of migration. In addition, the instruments were easy for the children to understand, easy to score, and can be used as a reasonable indicator for clinical and educational analysis (Listosella et al., 2019; Nixon et al., 2013; Bustos et al., 2009).

3.2. Participants

The participants included 76 migrant children from Mexico and the Northern Triangle (38 on the Guatemalan/Mexican border and 38 on the Mexican/United States border). Since migrant
children are a hard-to-reach population, we used a convenience sample and stratified for country, age, and gender (Shaghaghi et al., 2011).

Within the convenience sampling technique, we applied a critical cases strategy. The logic that guides this technique - and the one that determines its potency - ensures that the selected cases provide the most significant wealth of content possible to analyze the research question in depth (Glen, 2015; Martínez-Salgado, 2012; Patton, 1994). For example, the participants in this study not only migrate, but also do so by land, with limited economic resources. Before trying to enter the United States, they must cross more than 5,000 kilometers of an unknown Mexico. The critical cases technique allowed us to obtain relevant evidence for similar populations. As Patton (1990, p. 174) stated, "If it can happen there, it can happen anywhere."

Recruitment took place in migrant shelters in Chiapas and Chihuahua (southern and northern borders of Mexico). Staff at each shelter identified children migrating with at least one parent and asked them privately if they wanted to participate in the study. We assured the family that their refusal would not affect the relationship between them and the shelter (please see the ethical considerations section).

3.3. Inclusion criteria

Migrant children between 8 and 12 years old, who speak Spanish, have no apparent cognitive impairment, are from Mexico or the Northern Triangle and migrate to the United States with at least one of their parents or a legal guardian. The justification for selecting this age range was because the children have reached a thought process that has logical consistency (Fiore, 2011; Huit & Hummel, 2003). At this developmental stage, the child can process hierarchical relationships and strategic alliances, social arrangements, and cooperative relationships. In
addition, social awareness allows the child to attribute the mental states of other individuals, allowing them to predict and prevent future situations (Quintanilla et al., 2014).

3.4. Context

The children of the Northern Triangle converge in Tapachula, Chiapas (southern border of Mexico) because it is the location of the immigration station that grants transit visas through Mexico. Mexicans who come from neighboring regions also converge in the same place, looking for support and information on safe routes and material resources (clothing, footwear, food) that the shelter usually provides for free. We also obtained data from Ciudad Juárez because it is the second most important port of entry from Mexico to the United States (Greenberg, 2019). Generally, migrants look for shelter, and shelters give priority to families with children. Hence it was convenient to find eligible participants in migrant shelters at these two strategic borders.

Tapachula, Chiapas

The migrant shelter is located on the outskirts of the city. Inside the shelter, a classroom was identified as a safe well-ventilated space suited to interview children. The temperature inside the room ranged from 30 to 33 degrees Celsius and the humidity is usually ~100%. Concerning COVID-19 precautions, the space had two large screened windows, two crossover doors, and a large standing fan. The interviewer and participants observed social distancing and used facemasks.

Next to the interview room were two concrete benches where parents waited for their children while their interview occurred. As the space was ample, the door was kept open without disturbing the privacy of the interview. In addition, the shelter staff were very courteous and cooperative and took care that there were no interruptions.
Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua

The shelter is in a four-story building in apparent disrepair as it is not painted and has broken windows. The researcher was located on the property’s ground floor corner next to a small patio. The room had a window and an open door, allowing cross ventilation. Thus, they did not impede listening within that space despite external sounds. The indoor temperature oscillated around 30 degrees Celsius, however, the humidity was low. The shelter staff was warm and cooperative. The interviewer and participants observed social distancing and used facemasks.

3. 5. Instrumentation

Qualitative Component

The researcher used a semi-structured interview as the primary data collection technique. The interview was based on a psychosocial perspective that allowed knowing how the migration experience has favored or hindered the development of children. The interview included demographics and questions about the participant's experiences during their migratory route (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Kvale, 2014) (See Appendix X). The interview explored the children’s culture and individual perspectives to obtain a better context and the most significant situations, including their strategies to overcome adverse events and continue on their way to the U.S. – Mexico border region. In addition, we included questions about the children’s experiences with COVID as the research was conducted during the first phases of the pandemic (Appendix 1).

The study also used the free drawing technique. Sondegaard & Reventlow (2019) have noted that if the child actively draws, the conversation about complicated and sensitive topics is facilitated. They added that, by drawing, the participants externalize their thoughts and feelings, generating a sense of "community" between the child and the researcher.
In the same line of thought, Farokhi & Hashemi (2011) adds that although the drawing can be a personal and subjective expression, it can also be a tool for communication and rapport with the researcher. For example, in adverse contexts, the drawing tends to tell the researcher much more than the language. Therefore, in this study, the drawings were a complementary tool for the analysis and provided elements to enrich the emerging themes derived from the interviews.

**Psychosocial Assessment Component**

To obtain indicators of traumatic symptoms, we used the Childhood Post-Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale (CPSS), a revised instrument that has been validated in Spanish. It contains 17 items that provide a score for PTSD symptoms and the degree of severity. It contains a balanced five-point Likert response format (1= "never" to 5= "nine times or more").

The scale's psychometric properties indicate adequate levels of reliability, presenting a total Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.89 which is considered very good (DeVellis, 2017, p. 145). The internal consistency of the subscales is "re-experimentation" (\( \alpha = 0.89 \)), "avoidance" (\( \alpha = 0.81 \)) and "activation" (\( \alpha = 0.78 \)) (Bustos et al., 2009).

To learn about the resiliency resources of the child from a cultural and contextual perspective, we used the Child & Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), revised in Spanish. It contains a balanced three-point Likert response format ("no," "more or less," and "yes"). The total alpha Cronbach coefficient is very good (\( \alpha = 0.87 \)) and the subscales show adequate internal consistency (DeVellis, 2017, p. 145), “family interaction” (\( \alpha = 0.79 \)), “interaction with others” (\( \alpha = 0.72 \)) and “individual skills” (\( \alpha = 0.78 \)) (Llistosella et al., 2019).

**3.6. Procedure of Data Collection**

We secured written authorization from two shelters in Tapachula, Chiapas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico to interview children. In addition, the Institutional Review Board of the University
of Texas at El Paso approved the project, which was funded by the Programa de Investigación de Migración y Salud (PIMSA) at the University of California at Berkeley, under the direction of Professor Mark Lusk, Project Principal Investigator. Parents and children who voluntarily elected to participate were asked to sign a parental permission format and an assent form (please see ethical considerations section). We conducted the interviews in Spanish.

As compensation for their time, each participant received a modest amount of US $30 and a bag of articles (two facemasks, antibacterial gel, one soap, fruit, a sandwich, and treats). PIMSA financed the funds for the incentives. We kept a financial record of incentives.

**Psychosocial Assessment Component**

A total of 76 children were interviewed (38 in Chiapas and 38 in Ciudad Juárez). The interview included a demographic questionnaire and open questions about the COVID pandemic. Additionally, we used two standardized psychometric tests, reviewed for children and validated in Spanish. This segment of the interview took approximately 45 minutes.

**Qualitative Component**

We conducted qualitative interviews with the same 76 participants. The guided conversation (Appendix A) included questions about adversity and trauma in their home countries and along their migration route. Children were also asked about their resilient resources (individual, relational, and cultural). They were also invited to make a free drawing during the interview. Some children opted to drew (45 participants), and others focused on the conversation. This segment of the interview took approximately 30 minutes.

Among the *quality criteria* was to carry out the interview individually, and the researcher read aloud all the questions contained in the scales and in the questionnaire so that the child did not doubt the meaning of a word. In addition, the researcher tried to use a similar tone of voice and
speed in all interviews. The researcher also tried to maintain a similar attitude with each participant. Finally, the same investigator conducted the interviews at both locations.

3.7. Data Analysis

**Qualitative Component**

Once we transcribed the interviews, we conducted the inductive coding and thematic analysis of the narratives and graphics of the participants (Nowell et al., 2017; Kvale, 2014, pp. 137-143) (Figure 12). The investigator informed the parents and children of the possibility of reporting to the appropriate authorities any suspicion of child abuse or neglect that might arise during the interview and if the child was in a position of imminent harm to themselves or others. The researcher informed the limits of confidentiality/anonymity as straightforwardly as possible for the parent and child to decide whether or not the child would participate in the research. The children were not asked their names and if their name was mentioned, it was not recorded.

![Figure 12. Thematic Analysis](image)

Adapted from Nowell et al. (2017).

First, we used open coding adapted from Nowell et al., 2017 to identify initial codes. Second, we used focused coding to analyze and theorize the codes (derived from the theoretical premises, then, we discussed the deductive analysis of the researchers), and thus generated the themes. In the third phase we identified connections and patterns between the emerging themes.
with the groups of themes derived from the literature and the interview questionnaire (Figure 13; appendix A). The last phase was dedicated to grouping the themes according to conceptual similarities and give each group a name to write the results (Nowell et al., 2017).

**Figure 13. Questionnaire Derived from Literature and Emerging Themes**

Created by Georgina Sanchez-Garcia (2022).

**Psychosocial Assessment Component**

The purpose of the psychosocial assessment was to present indicators that account for the general panorama of trauma and resilience and we used descriptive statistics for all measures. As a cross-sectional study, it was logistically impossible to analyze variance by pairs of migrant children in two sites. There was no feasible way to track the same participants during the trip from the Guatemalan border to the United States border. In addition to considering the ethical principle of confidentiality established for populations in contexts of vulnerability.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

We asked the participant's parents or legal guardians for parental consent. We also asked the children for their assent. The documents' information was given to them both in writing and
verbally in Spanish. It detailed the risks, benefits, and general intent of the study and emphasized that their participation was voluntary.

The researcher used developmentally appropriate language for the children’s age to ask questions and fully understand the purpose of the research or the reasons for their participation. Finally, the researcher allowed enough time for the children to think about their participation before accepting.

This investigation was approved by the University of Texas at El Paso IRB. Approval number: 1609182-1.

**Safety plan for COVID-19 pandemic**

The researcher complied with the health and safety requirements established by the Ministry of Health of Mexico (2020) (*Secretaria de Salud* in Spanish). The guidelines were:

- Before the interview begins, those involved had their temperature taken with a digital thermometer to identify that they did not have a temperature greater than 100° F
- The interviewer and child were at least six feet away from each other.
- The interview was conducted in a ventilated space with open windows and fans if the weather is too warm. No more than three people were in the room.
- The interviewer used an N-95 face mask. The child received a face mask suitable for children and was shown the proper way to wear it.
- The interviewer had enough child face masks to replace it if needed
- The interviewer had antibacterial gel on site at all times

**Interview limitations**

- The risk of COVID-19 infection generated some level of fear for the researcher affecting rapport.
• The context was not free of sounds or interruptions.
• The ambient temperature, together with the protective equipment against COVID-19, caused some discomfort.
• The interview brought back sad memories for the child.

During the interview, the researcher continually assessed the child's window of tolerance (James & Gilliland, 2017). When the interviewer noted some emotional discomfort in the child, the researcher used time out, breathing exercises, cognitive-behavioral or mindfulness techniques, or eye movement desensitization techniques as appropriate ((Jarero & Artigas, 2021; Knipe, 2018).

The limits of confidentiality

Information linking a participant to a specific village or location was not collected. We informed participants that they could opt-out of the interview at any time and without consequences. We also informed them that they could receive their incentive despite withdrawing from the interview prematurely.

The researcher informed the parents and children of the possibility of reporting to the appropriate authorities any suspicion of child abuse or neglect that might arise during the interview and if the child was in a position of imminent harm to themselves or others. The researcher informed the limits of confidentiality as straightforward as possible for the parent and child to decide whether or not the child would participate in the research.
Chapter 4. Findings

In this chapter we present the research results of the traumatic events that migrant children have experienced and to what extent these situations affected them. Likewise, we show the results of children's individual, social, and cultural resources and resilience.

4.1. Demographics

This section contains the demographic results of the attributes of gender, age, and social characteristics such as country of origin, accompaniment during migration, and educational level. Demographic data is anonymous.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Children Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study included 76 children. Among them, 44.7% identified themselves as girls, and 55.3% as boys. It is worth noting that the participants interviewed on the border between Guatemala and Mexico (Tapachula) were 50% of each gender. Children on the border of Mexico and the United States (Ciudad Juarez) were 39.5% girls and 60.5% boys. The difference of participants between both data collection sites was 21%.

However, the girls interviewed on the last border mostly came from central and northern Mexico. Hence, the participation of migrant girls from the Northern Triangle region and southern Mexico decreased significantly, but not the boys from those regions.
Table 4. Children Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>82.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14. Children Age

The age range of the participant group was eight to twelve years old. All ages within this range were significantly represented, with eight-year-olds being the highest percentage of participants with 22.4%. In contrast, twelve-year-olds were the least represented age in this sample at 17.1%. Children of ten years were 21.1% being the average of the participants. Finally, children aged nine and eleven coincided with 19.7%.
The origin of the children was Mexico (34.2%), Guatemala (19.7%), El Salvador (22.4%), and Honduras (23.7%). Among these children, 25% were indigenous. In addition to Spanish, they spoke Maya, Tzotzil, Mam, Jakaltek, or Q'eqchi'.
Table 6: Who is Migrating with the Child?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother &amp; sibling (s)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents &amp; sibling (s)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>93.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent (s), sibling (s) &amp; grandparents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16. Who is Migrating with the Child?

All children were accompanied by an adult family member. 3.9% of children traveled with both parents. 31.6% traveled with their parents and siblings, and 6.6% with the entire nuclear family and their grandparents.

2.6% traveled only with their father. 55.2% traveled with their mother, either only the child and the mother or also with the sibling.
Table 7: Education Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before the COVID pandemic and emigration event, all children attended formal school. The highest percentage (27.6%) attended the fourth grade of primary school. Considering that the average age was ten years, we can say that children attended the school grade corresponding to the normative of the schools of the Northern Triangle countries and Mexico. Indigenous children reported that school was as important as learning to work the land. In times of sowing or harvesting, they did not go to school to go to the fields, being the grandparents in charge of that education.
4.2. Psychosocial Assessment

All of the children we interviewed had experienced adversity and most had gone through traumatic experiences. Migrant children suffered from hunger and thirst. Many were threatened with death. Too many witnessed violence and suffered during their journey. Children typically experienced more than one traumatic event (Table 8).

Table 8. Traumatic Events in Order of Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traumatic event</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunger (both home country and on the move)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death threat</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicide witness of a family or someone from the community</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk for hours in unknown territories and the jungle and at night</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having what to drink for several hours (coupled with hunger)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extortion by Guatemalan &amp; Mexican immigration agents</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and psychological abuse by child’s father</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of family member due to COVID-19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness of beatings to one of child’s parents</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats to forced conscription into a criminal gang</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenophobia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricanes - seeing their home wrecked, losing belongings</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross the Suchiate River at night and with armed men</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping on the open</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel suffocated in trucks for several hours</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness of criminal extortion of their family</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed crossfire experience</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of attempted kidnapping</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness of the kidnapping of a family member</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in cellars with many people and locked up</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought - summers were longer and there was no harvest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake - see their home destroyed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of attempted rape</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of their belongings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volcano eruption - run for their life and see buried people</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats to belong to the communal army</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving their home unexpectedly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness the kidnapping of other migrants</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape from “polleros”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abandonment by "polleros" in the middle of the jungle  
Experience of being rejected to enter the U.S. \hspace{1cm} 2 \hspace{1cm} 2  
Kidnapping victim \hspace{1cm} 1 \hspace{1cm} 1

Created by Georgina Sanchez-Garcia, 2021.

**Trauma**

We administered the Child PTSD Symptom Scale (CPSS) validated in Spanish (Cronbach's alpha 0.916) (Bustos et al., 2009) to the 76 participants. (Table 9; Figure 18).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 10 below threshold</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15 subclinical – mild</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 20 mild</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 25 moderate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 30 moderately severe</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40 severe</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 51 extremely severe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \( n = 76 \). Mean = 22.5 (moderate). SD = 10.30

![Figure 18. Child PTSD Symptom Scale Results](image-url)
The participant’s reported scores ranged from 0 to 44. Most children were on the re-experiencing subscale, specifically, nightmares and intrusive distressing thoughts. On the hyperarousal subscale, specifically, sleep difficulties and hypervigilance. 73.7 % reported PTSD clinical symptoms, and 40.8 % were within the severe range.

**Resilience**

**Table 10:** Child and Youth Resilience Measure Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>64-73 low</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-83 moderate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-96 high</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 76. Mean = 86.51 (SD = 8.26).

**Figure 19.** Child and Youth Resilience Measure Result

We administered the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM) validated in Spanish (Cronbach's alpha 0.916) (Listosella et al., 2019) with higher scores indicating characteristics associated with resilience. Participant scores ranged from 65 to 96 with 10.5 % reporting low resilience, 14.5 % moderate resilience, and 75 % reporting high resilience (Figure 19; Table 10).
4. 3. Demographic and Psychosocial Summary

We conducted 76 interviews individually, and the researcher read aloud all the demographic questions and those contained in the scales. When a child was in doubt about the meaning of a word, the researcher provided context. There were no missing data, and the demographic questions and scales took approximately 40 minutes.

The demographic data showed that the characteristics of children in terms of gender, age, and country of origin, were sufficiently represented within this sample. Also, all children interviewed indicated they were headed overland to the United States, and accompanied by at least one of their parents.

Most of the scale scores indicated high-stress levels derived from traumatic experiences. Mostly, on the re-experiencing and hyperarousal subscales. Yet, paradoxically, they indicated high levels of resilience.

4.4. Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Overarching question: How do children make sense of their migratory experience?

From a psychosocial perspective, we present the analysis of the results derived from the emerging areas in the contents of the children's narratives and drawings of adversity and trauma. Both in their home country and on the migratory journey, as well as the resilient resources children used to keep going.

First, the interviews were transcribed and then coded using the children's words in the conversational interview and the explanations of their drawings. Then, after a deductive analysis, we obtained the emerging themes. Finally, derived from our model of risk factors (trauma and adversity) and protective factors (resilience), we structured Table 11.
Table 11: Description of Axes and Summary of Emergent and Subordinate Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis</th>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Subordinate themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk Factors (Adversity &amp; Trauma)</td>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td>Poverty, separation, malaise, xenophobia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Insecurity, fear, death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Injustice</td>
<td>Untruth, contradiction, corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>Inequality, dispossession, unheard voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Factors (Resilience)</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Mom, siblings, dad, grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Diosito, Jesus, Virgen de Guadalupe, Nature Spirits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Integrity, courage, perseverance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relational health</td>
<td>Interaction, play, camaraderie, culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Created by Georgina-Sanchez (2022).

Derived from the guided interviews, following, we present the children's views in the form of narratives, legends, graphics, and straightforward denunciations. It is important to note that some children made their drawing simultaneously as we conducted the interview, and few of them signed their work with pseudonyms.

Occasionally, the illustration had no apparent connection to their story. However, when asked about its meaning, the child explained further. Or told to the researcher a story tale related to such a drawing. It was there when their graphic expression made more sense.

**Trauma**

**Suffering**

The traumatic situations that confront the child in their concrete world generate uncertainty, anguish, and precariousness. The migratory experience is added to that accumulation of sufferings that they did not choose. The suffering of migrant children in this study includes poverty, separation, and xenophobia.
Poverty. Children exhibit the fragility of the material resources of their families and communities that were collapsed in the face of adversity, such as environmental calamities. As a result, children left their communities to continue facing the cruelest dimension of poverty, such as cold, hunger, and thirst during the migratory route. Based on the researcher’s observation, overall, the children appeared to be in the 25th percentile for height and weight relative to other children in their population.

¡Ah! es que nosotros no teníamos nada que comer, y pues usted sabe por los tiempos del huracán que pasó en Honduras y entonces todo estaba inundado. Entonces cuando había bajado un poco eso, pues nos venimos. Es muy duro pasarlo allá, por los huracanes. [Oh! We didn't have anything to eat, and you know from the times of the hurricane that happened in Honduras. Everything was flooded. So, when that had dropped a little, well, we left. It is tough to be there because of the hurricanes]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

No teníamos nada para comer. Ya eran alrededor de la media noche y teníamos mucha hambre. No habíamos comido en todo el día. Eso fue muy difícil. [We had nothing to eat. It was already around midnight and we were very hungry. We had not eaten all day. It was very difficult]. (Salvadoran girl, eleven years old).

En nuestro camino para el Norte, yo tenia mucho frio, hambre, y mucha sed. No conocíamos el lugar, ni conocíamos a nadie ¡Fue horrible! [On the way North, I was very cold, hungry, and very thirsty. We did not know the place, nor did we know anyone. It was horrible!]. (Honduran boy, eight years old).
Nosotros nos salimos pues porque ya no había trabajo, no teníamos para comer. Allá le dio Covis a una prima y se murió. Y a mí se me murió mi hermano de fiebre. La fiebre le duró tres días, y le afectó mucho y vomitaba sangre. Mis papás lo llevaron al hospital y cuando lo llevaron al hospital él ya estaba muerto. Él tenía seis años. Nos venimos así caminando, pidiendo jalón. A veces nos daban, a veces no, aguantando el calor y el agua. Bien triste. Yo sólo caminaba agarrado a mi mamá, y ya. [We left because there was no more work, and we didn't have anything to eat. Over there, a cousin got Covis, and she died. And my brother died of fever. The fever lasted three days, affecting him very much, and he vomited blood. My parents took him to the hospital; he was already dead when they took him to the hospital. My little brother was six years old. We come walking like, asking for a ride. Sometimes people gave us a lift, sometimes not, and we had to endure the heat and the rain. Very sad. I just walked holding my mom, and that's it]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

No teníamos nada para comer. Ya eran alrededor de la media noche y teníamos mucha hambre. No habíamos comido en todo el día. Eso fue muy difícil y tuvimos que dormir en la calle. [We had nothing to eat. It was already around midnight and we were very hungry. We had not eaten all day. It was very difficult and slept on the open field]. (Salvadoran girl, eleven years old).

A mí me gustaba estudiar, y mi escuela. A veces en casa no teníamos suficiente comida, y aquí tampoco. Me gusta leer porque puedo imaginar que estoy en otro lado y así se me olvida que tengo hambre. [I liked studying and my school. Sometimes at home we didn't
have enough food, and here we don't either. I like to read because I can imagine I'm
somewhere else, that way I forget I'm hungry]. (Honduran girl, nine years old).

Figure 20. Fruit Basket

Pasó el huracán Eta y nos tuvimos que ir a un albergue. Cuando regresamos mi casita
estaba destruida. Todo estaba cubierto por el agua. Vi llorar a mi mamá y a la gente.
Abaracé a mi muñeca y también lloré y le pedí a Dios que nos ayudara. En el camino no
teníamos qué comer y también teníamos mucha sed. Llevábamos algunas cosas, pero eran muy
pesadas y tuvimos que tirarlas, pero no me di cuenta y también se fue mi muñeca. Eso fue
lo que más me dolió. [Hurricane Eta passed, and we had to go to a shelter. When we got
back, my little house was destroyed. Everything was covered by water. Then, I saw my
mom and people cry. I hugged my doll, cried too, and asked God to help us. We had nothing
to eat on the way, and I was also very thirsty. We were carrying some things, but they were
cumbersome, and we had to throw them away, I didn't realize it, and my doll was also gone.
That was what hurt me the most]. (Honduran girl, eight years old).
Nos fuimos por una ruta de Guatemala hasta la frontera. Después, nos montamos en bus y de ahí nos pasamos por el río, con unas cosas que se tiran, una tirolesa ¡pero horrible! Luego, cruzamos el río caminando y estaba bien frío. Íbamos con un señor que nos iba guiando para que no nos perdiéramos, y después nos dejó ahí solas. De ahí, caminamos y encontramos un albergue, la Casa del Migrante. Después al siguiente día tomamos un bus a las 5-6 de la mañana, llegamos a la frontera y ahí migración nos dejó todo el día esperando. Llegamos a este albergue como las doce de la madrugada y teníamos un hambre horrible porque no habíamos comido en todo el día. Eso fue lo más difícil. Me cansé muchísimo. [We went along a route from Guatemala to the border. Afterward, we got on the bus. From there we went through the river, with some things thrown, a zip line, but horrible! Then we walked across the river, and it was freezing. We went with a man guiding us so we wouldn't get lost, and then he left us alone. From there, we walked and found a shelter, the Casa del Migrante. Then the next day, we took a bus at 5-6 in the morning, we arrive to the border, and there the immigration officers left us waiting all day. We arrived at this shelter around midnight and were horribly hungry because we hadn't eaten all day. That was the most difficult. I got very tired]. (Salvadoran girl, eleven years old).

En el viaje aguantábamos hambre, frío, y estar apretados, venían muchas personas en las furgonetas. A veces no nos daban comida y nos trataban feo, teníamos que aguantar. Fueron ocho días en ocho furgonetas y caminando. Extraño mucho mi casita. [On the road, we endured hunger, cold, and crowdedness; many people were in the Furgonetas. Sometimes, they didn't give us food and mistreated us, and we had to put up with it. It was
eight days in eight tricks and walking. I miss so much my home]. (Guatemalan boy, eight years old).

Figure 21. Home

Separation. In addition to hardship, distress, and turmoil, children recounted the distressing feeling of knowing that their loved ones with fewer resources, such as grandparents and pets, were left behind and in greater vulnerability. This moment was the realization of a terrifying reality.

Lo más difícil que me ha pasado es cuando me despedí de mis abuelos. Todavía no amanecía, pero mi abuelita ya tenía listo el atole. Me dijo, “bueno mijito ya se tiene que ir, que Dios los bendiga y por favor estudia y cuida a tu hermanito” Me dio su medalla de la Virgencita de Guadalupe y comenzó a llorar. Todos lloramos. Ahí me di cuenta que teníamos un problema grande, y que de veras estábamos bien jodidos. [The hardest thing that has happened to me was when I said goodbye to my grandparents. It was not yet dawn, but my grandmother already had the atole ready. She told me, well, son you must go. God bless you, and please study and take care of your little brother.” She gave me her Virgencita
de Guadalupe medal and started crying. We all cried. That's when I realized we had a big problem and were really screwed]. (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

Figure 22. We Are Really Screwed

No sé cómo lo hice. Me afectó venir, y haber dejado a mis hermanos pequeños. Cuando salí de mi casa sentí que nunca los volvería a ver. Me duele recordarlo. [I don’t know how I did it. It affected me to leave and to have left my little brothers. I felt I would never see them again when I left my home. It hurts me to remember it]. (Girl from Guatemala, ten years old).

Yo no salía a jugar a la calle o al parque con mis amigos porque mi mamá se preocupaba mucho de que los de la pandilla me fueran hacer algo, pero yo no tenía miedo y me sentía bien. Me gustaba estar en la casa con mis abuelitos y con mis primos. Sí sabía que era peligroso y cuando supe que nos íbamos a ir, estuve de acuerdo pues yo quería irme con mi mamá. Pero cuando ya nos fuimos a despedir de mi abuelita, ella me abrazó muy fuerte
y lloró. Yo le pregunté ¿Pues por cuánto tiempo nos vamos? ¿Cuándo vamos a volver a verte abuelita? Se me revolvió la barriga y el dolor de mi pancita aún sigue. Todavía me duele. [I didn't go out to play in the street or in the park with my friends because my mom was worried that the gang would do something to me, but I wasn't afraid and felt fine. I liked to be at home with my grandparents and my cousins. I knew it was dangerous and when I found out we were going to leave, I agreed because I wanted to go with my mom. But when we said goodbye to my grandmother, she hugged me very tightly and cried. I asked her, for how long are we going? When are we going to see you again, granny? My tummy turned, and I still feel the pain in my belly. It still hurts]. (Honduran boy, eleven years old).

Pues extraño a mi gato y a mi perro. El gato está bien bonito, se llama Jocudo y el perrito Chispas. Les dejé croquetas y a mi amigo le dije que lo cuidara pero no sé cómo están. [Well, I miss my cat and my dog. The cat is very pretty, his name is Jocudo, and the puppy is Chispas. I left them croquettes and told my friend to take care of them, but I don't know how they are]. (Mexican boy, eight years old).

Figure 23. Chispas
Lo más feo que me pasó fue cuando salimos de mi casa. Me siento triste porque ya no veré a mi familia, a las mariposas, a los árboles ¿A donde vamos a ir? ¿Qué nos va a pasar? [The ugliest thing that happened to me was when we left my home. I feel sad that I will no longer see my family, the butterflies, the trees. Where are we going to go? What will happen to us?] (Mexican boy, nine years old).

Me preocupan mucho mis abuelitos. Ellos no pudieron venir con nosotros. Lo que pasa es que allá hay mucha delincuencia y muchas cosas feas. [I'm very concerned about my grandparents. They could not come with us. What happens is that there is a lot of crime and many ugly things]. (Mexican girl, ten years old).

Me da miedo que me dé el Covid. No quiero estar solo en el cielo sin mi mamá y sin mi papá, y sin mi hermana. [I'm afraid I'll get Covid. I don't want to be alone in heaven without my mom, dad, and without my sister]. (Salvadoran boy, eight years old).

Figure 24. COVID
Malaise. The children reported an uncomfortable perception of the wrongness of the situation and their powerlessness to change it. Such malaise included feeling locked in, helpless, without privacy, terrified, and profoundly sad.

¡Yo me sentí aterrorizada! Lo que me pasó a mí fue muy horrible porque yo sentía que había ladrones por el lugar que pasé. Yo iba bien asustada. Me da miedo porque aquí dicen que es muy peligroso y yo vengo solita con mi mamá. Esto que nos está pasando no se siente bien. [I felt terrified! What happened to me was horrible because I felt that there were thieves in the place I passed by. I was very scared. It scares me because they say it's very dangerous here, and I travel only with my mom. What is happening to us does not feel good]. (Salvadoran girl, eleven years old).

Mucho caminar, le decía a mi papi que descansáramos, pero seguíamos un poquito más. Él me decía que cuando lleguemos un poquito más cerca de donde íbamos a llegar que ahí íbamos a descansar, pero me dolían los pies de tanto caminar. [A lot of walking, I told my daddy to rest, but we continued a little more. He told me that when we got a little closer to where we were going to arrive, we were going to rest there, but my feet hurt from walking so much]. (Honduran girl, eight years old).

Aquí (albergue) lo pero es que no hay privacidad. Hay muchas personas desconocidas. Apenas entras al baño, y ya te están tocando la puerta. Yo le diría a otro niño que tenga que viajar, así como yo, “mentalízate de que vas a sufrir, pero después vas a estar mejor. Controla tus emociones.” [The worst thing here (shelter) is that there is no privacy. There are many unknown people. They knock on the door as soon as one enters the bathroom. I
would say to another child who has to travel, like me, “mentalized that you're going to suffer, but later you'll be better. Control your emotions.” (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

![Figure 25. Mentalized that You're Going to Suffer](image)

Fue muy difícil aguantarme las ganas de llorar cuando sé que no debo hacer ruido. Por ejemplo, cuando íbamos caminando en un rancho para poder cruzar a Guate, o aquí en este lugar tan feo y tan lejos de casa. A mí como que todo esto no me gusta. [It was very hard to hold back the urge to cry when I knew I shouldn't make any noise. For example, when we were walking on a ranch to be able to cross to Guate (Guatemala), or here in this ugly place and so far from home. This doesn't feel right]. (Honduran girl, nine years old).

Los agentes de inmigración guatemaltecos no nos dejaron cruzar. Tuvimos que caminar por la selva y cruzar de noche el río Paz en una balsa. Empezó a llover, los truenos no
paraban y yo tenía mucho miedo de morir. Poco después dejó de llover y nos dimos cuenta de que durante todo ese tiempo habíamos estado al lado del muelle. Ya habíamos llegado, y no nos habíamos dado cuenta. [The Guatemalan immigration agents did not let us cross. We had to walk through the jungle and cross the Paz River on a raft at night. It started to rain, the thunders didn’t stop, and I was very afraid of dying. Shortly after the rain stopped, and we realized that during all that time we had been next to the dock. We had already arrived, and we hadn’t realized it]. (Salvadoran boy, eleven years old).

![Cartoon of two people in the rain]

**Figure 26.** Something Bad is Going to Happen

¡Yo me sentí aterrorizada! Lo que me pasó a mí fue muy horrible porque yo sentía que había ladrones por el lugar que pasé. Yo iba bien asustada. Me da miedo porque aquí dicen que es muy peligroso y yo vengo solita con mi mamá. Esto que nos está pasando no se siente bien. [I felt terrified! What happened to me was horrible because I felt that there...]

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were thieves in the place I passed by. I was very scared. It scares me because they say it's very dangerous here, and I travel only with my mom. What is happening to us does not feel good]. (Salvadoran girl, eleven years old).

Nosotras viajamos en ‘furgonetas,’ son unos camiones bien grandotes sólo migrantes van ahí. Había un señor que venía con su niño bien chiquitillo, era un bebé. En las furgonetas no hay nada de aire, uno se sentía como si se fuera a ahogar. El bebé lloraba y gritaba, y uno no tiene que hacer ruido porque nos agarra la migra. Había bastantes mujeres y bastantes hombres y venía una señora que decía que tranquilizara a su hijo porque si no, nos iba a bajar la Migra. El niño empezó a llorar y llorar otra vez. Paró el camión, y el Patrón que iba manejando regañó al señor; y una muchacha le dijo que el bebé no tenía la culpa porque estaba muy acalorado. Lo metieron hasta arriba. Y viera que cuando el papá lo llevó, el niño estaba desnudito, porque la gente le quitó la ropita. Él bebé estaba muy enfermo. Más adelante, nos agarró la migración y abrieron la cajuela y nos sacaron fotos. Le cobraron mucho dinero al Patrón. El papá del bebé le puso su mano en la boca para que no llorara. Pasó mucho tiempo y ya no lloró. Ya no lo volví a escuchar al bebé. Extraño mi casita. [We travel in furgonetas; those are huge trucks. Only migrants go there. There was a man who came with his baby. In the trucks, there is no air at all. One feels as if one were going to drown. The baby cried and screamed; one does not have to make noise because the Migra (migration agents) catches us. There were quite a few women and a few men, and a lady said to reassure his son because if not, the Migra will get us off. The boy began to cry and cry again. The truck stopped, and the driving Patron scolded the man; a
girl told him that it was not the baby's fault because he was very hot. They put it on the top. And you know, when his father took him, the baby was naked because people took his clothes off. The baby was very sick. Later, the *Migra* found us, and they opened the trunk and took pictures of us. They charged the Patron a lot of money. The baby's dad put his hand over his mouth so he wouldn't cry. A long time passed, and he no longer cried. I didn't listen to the baby again. I miss my home]. (Guatemalan girl, nine years old).

*Figure 27. I Miss my Home*

*Fue muy difícil aguantarme las ganas de llorar cuando sé que no debo hacer ruido. Por ejemplo, cuando íbamos caminando en un rancho para poder cruzar a Guate, o aquí en este lugar tan feo y tan lejos de casa. A mi como que todo esto no me gusta.* [It was very hard to hold back the urge to cry when I knew I shouldn't make any noise. For example, when we were walking on a ranch to be able to cross to Guate (Guatemala), or here in this ugly place and so far from home. This doesn't feel right]. (Honduran girl, nine years old).
En las noches escuchamos los balazos, que botaban puertas y gritos. Pensamos que los criminales habían entrado a mi casa, pero era la del vecino. Mi mamá me dijo que era mejor dejarlo todo. Irnos. Ya no me siento triste, porque ya se me olvidó. Se me olvida solito. Se olvida la tristeza con el tiempo. [At night we heard gunshots, knocking down doors, and screaming. We thought criminals had entered my home, but it was at the neighbor's house. My mom told me it was better to leave everything. Just leave. I don't feel sad anymore because I have already forgotten it. Sadness is forgotten over time]. (Mexican girl, nine years old).

Figure 28. My Country is Armed with Bombs because We are at War

Mi mamá y yo estábamos muy apretados dentro de una furgoneta, y hacía mucho calor. Pasamos la noche en una bodega, estaba muy aburrido, así que conté a todos allí. Éramos 300 personas. [My mom and I were very tight inside the furgoneta [truck], and it was very hot. We spent the night in a cellar, I was very bored, so I counted everyone there. We were 300 people]. (Guatemalan boy, ten years old).
Xenophobia. The children reported despotic treatment, or “groseros” [rude] as they called it, by immigration authorities and locals from different towns. Some children pointed out that there was also prejudice among migrants, especially if they came from El Salvador or an African country. The children also spoke of a feeling of otherness that they recognized and felt, questioning their self-worthiness.

_Cuando llegamos al albergue y nos abrieron la puerta, iban pasando unos señores y le gritaron a Doña Olga, “¿Por qué los ayudas a ellos habiendo tantos mexicanos pobres? Esos son pura basura humana.”_ [When we arrived at the shelter, and they opened the door for us, some men passed by and yelled at Doña Olga, "why are you helping them when there are so many poor Mexicans? Those are human garbage"]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

_Me apena ver a un niño africanito que no sabe hablar español. No lo invitan a jugar y dicen que tiene la cabeza hueca pero no les entiende, porque habla otra lengua. El otro día yo le compartí unas papitas._ [It saddens me to see an African boy who does not know

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**Figure 29. We Were Very Tight Inside the Truck**
how to speak Spanish. They don't invite him to play and say that he has an empty head, but he doesn't understand them because he speaks another language. The other day, I shared some chips with him]. (Salvadoran boy, nine years old).

Ya tengo cuatro meses acá (albergue). Aquí se gasta para la comida, para la semana. A veces mi mamá sale a trabajar y a veces no le dan trabajo. Ella es cocinera y el letrero decía que necesitaban alguien que supiera cocinar. Le dijeron, “si eres de México te vamos a dar trabajo, si eres de otro país no te vamos a dar.” No entiendo. ¿Qué tiene que ver eso con el trabajo que puede hacer mi mamá? Me dolió porque aquí no tenemos dinero, no tenemos nada. [I already have four months here (shelter). Here we need to pay for food for the week. Sometimes my mom goes out to work, and sometimes they don't give her a job. She is a cook, and the sign said they needed someone who could cook. They told her, “If you are from Mexico, we will give you a job. We will not give you a job if you are from another country.” I don't understand. What does that have to do with the work my mom can do? That hurts me because we don't have money here. We don't have anything]. (Guatemala boy eleven years old).

Íbamos en el camión pasando por El Salvador y se subieron unos “Güirros” (jóvenes), el camión ya había andando unos kilómetros y me di cuenta que unos hombres los llevaron a la puerta de atrás y los tiraron, aún cuando el camión se movía. Me asusté mucho y le pregunté a mi mamá cómo es que los habían tirado así. Una señora que iba al lado de nosotros nos dijo que eran Maras, étos que han estado contaminado Honduras. Luego
dijo, ‘O los matamos, o nos matan. A mi eso me dio mucha tristeza. [We were on a bus passing through El Salvador, and some “Güirros” (young guys) got on. The bus was a few kilometers out, and I noticed that the men would take people to the door at the back of the bus and throw them out even though the bus was moving. It scared me a lot, and I asked my mom how they could do something like that. A woman beside us said they were Maras, the ones contaminating Honduras. Then she said, 'Either we kill them, or they kill us.’” That made me very sad]. (Honduran girl, eleven years old).

Figure 30. Sadness

Me duele sentir que la gente me mira feo. Creen que, porque vienes de El Salvador ya eres delincuente, tu sabes, como Mara. A veces me siento mal porque me avergüenzo de ser de mi país y de no tener una casa. De no ser nadie aquí. [It hurts me to feel that people look at me bad. They think that because one comes from El Salvador, we are already criminals, like Mara. Sometimes I feel bad because I’m ashamed to be from my country and not have a home. Of being nobody here]. (Salvadoran boy, ten years old).
Violence

Based on the children’s narratives, violence in its various forms was the most common risk factor they faced before and during their migration.

Insecurity. The children spoke of feeling unsafe in their country of origin and on the migratory route.

Dejamos nuestro pueblo porque allá no hay seguridad. Mi papá era mecánico, arreglaba carros. Los malos se lo llevaban con un paliacate en sus ojos para que arreglara sus carros. Él no quería pertenecer a los malos así que les arreglaba sus carros de a gratis. La última vez que se lo llevaron arreglar carros, pudo ver a través de su paliacate y pasó por un lado que eran como unos establos y tenían gente ahí amarrada. Niños, mujeres, hombres. También vio a niños como de trece años que ya los tenían entrenando con pistolas. Escuché que mi papá decía llorando, “y yo que soñé ¡Carajo! Que algún día iba a tener mi taller. Que iba a mandara mis hijos a la universidad. Y aquí estoy. Arreglando los coches de esos delincuentes. No está bien, no está bien.” Al otro día en la madrugada, salimos con dos mochilas. En una traíamos los papeles, y en la otra ropa, y nada más. Salimos con dos mochilas nada más para que no se dieran cuenta que salimos los señores que se llevaban a mi papá. Nos escapamos de los malos.

[We leave our village because there is no safety. My dad was a mechanic. He fixed cars. The bad guys took him with a bandana over his eyes to fix their cars. He didn't want to belong to the bad guys, so he fixed their cars for free. The last time they took him to fix cars, he could see through his bandana and passed by one side that they were like stables and had people tied up. Children, women, men. He also saw children as young as thirteen]
that already had their training with guns. I heard my dad say crying, “I dreamed, damn!
That one day I was going to have my workshop and send my children to college. And here
I am! Fixing those criminals’ cars. It’s not good; it’s not good. The next day at dawn, we
left with two backpacks. In one, we brought the papers. In the other bag, clothes and
nothing else. We left with just two backpacks so they would not realize we were leaving.
We escaped from the bad guys]. (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

Los Polleros me querían hacer daño, pero me dijeron que no hablara o que iban a matar
a mi mamá. Cuando llegamos aquí a este albergue, le dije a mi mamá y ella me dijo que
no podíamos hacer nada porque eran unos delincuentes y no había seguridad. Que 84ajor
me quedara calladita. [The Polleros wanted to hurt me, but they told me not to talk, or they
were going to kill my mother. When we got here to this shelter, I told my mom, and she
told me that we couldn’t do anything because they were criminals, and that there was not
safety. She said that I better keep quiet]. (Salvadoran girl, nine years old).

Figure 31. The Polleros Wanted to Hurt Me
Las Maras me perseguían y querían llevarme. Corrí y corri. Pude llegar a casa y mi mamá salió a defenderme. La agarraron y la golpearon en medio de la calle. [The Maras chased me and wanted to take me away. I ran, and I ran. I was able to get home and my mom came out to defend me. They grabbed her and beat her in the middle of the street]. (Salvadoran girl, ten years old).

La Danza de los Viejitos me la enseñó mi abuelo. Ahora, vemos más las máscaras de los criminales que las de los viejitos. [The Dance of the Old Men was taught to me by my grandfather. Now, we see more the masks of criminals than the mask of the old men]. (Mexican boy, eleven years old).

Figure 32. The Masks of the Old Men vs the Masks of Criminals

Mi consejo para otro niño es que mejor se regrese con la familia. Estos caminos son muy peligrosos; hay mañosos. A nosotros nos asaltaron y nos quitaron las cosas en la frontera de Tecún (Guatemala). [My advice to another child is that he better go back to his family.
These roads are very dangerous; there are tricksters. They robbed us and took our things at the border of Tecún]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

**Fear.** The children reported various traumatic situations they suffered in their countries of origin that caused them high stress and fear, and some learned coping strategies to protect themselves. However, during their migration, children traveled unknown paths without knowing what would happen, which caused an enormous fear. Consequently, they perceive themselves as vulnerable and in a continuous state of alert.

*Mi papá le pegaba a mi mamá y nos fuimos a otro Departamento (another State) ahí mi mamá conoció a otro Señor que ahora es mi padrastro. Estábamos comiendo y mi tía llegó a decirnos que ahí venía mi papá con la policía y que iba a matar a mi mamá. Mi papá es un jefe de los Maras. Dejamos todo y nos fuimos, pero se me cayó mi muñeca y la perdí.* [My father beat my mother, and we went to another Department (another State). There, my mother met another man who is now my stepfather. We were eating, and my aunt told us that my father was coming with the police and that he would kill my mother. My dad is a boss of the Maras. We left everything and left. I droped my doll and lost it (Salvadoran girl, ten years old).

*Nos metieron a una furgoneta, y pasaron muchas horas, ya iba a ser de noche, se paró el camión, abrieron la puerta y ahí estaban unos hombres con pistolas y les dijeron a unos Güirros que se bajaran. Ellos no querían bajarse, pero vino el chofer del camión y les dijo que se bajaran. Mi abuelo me abrazó y puso mi cabeza debajo de sus brazos, como para que no me vieran. Yo lo que hice fue quedarme callado y obedecer a mi mamá y a mis abuelos.* [They put us in a truck, and many hours passed. It was going to be night, then the
truck stopped, they opened the door, and there were some men with guns, and they told some Güirros to get out. They didn't want to get off, but the truck driver came and told them to get off. My grandfather hugged me and put my head under his arms so those men wouldn't see me. So, what I did was keep quiet and obey my mom and grandparent]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

*En Lima, me molestaban unos "Güirros", eran de la banda 18. Querían que fuera novia de uno de ellos. Como no quise, me tiraron cosas, me tiraron palos. Para que no me golpearan, me montaba en mi bicicleta y corría rápido con la bicicleta, pero mi mamá estaba muy asustada y nos fuimos. Así, solitas.* [In Lima, some kids bothered me; they were from Gang 18. They wanted me to be a girlfriend to one of them. Since I didn't agree, they threw things at me - they threw sticks at me. So that they wouldn't hit me, I would get on my bike and go fast, but my mom was very scared and we left. Alone]. (Honduran girl, eleven years old).

![Figure 33. Alone](image-url)
Me amenazaron, me dijeron que si no me unía (a la pandilla), matarían a mi madre, a mis hermanos ya toda mi familia. Llorando les dije que no podía hacer cosas malas, podía ir a la cárcel o morir. Me ofende cuando me dicen que haga algo en contra de mis valores. [They threatened me. They told me that if I didn't join (the gang), they would kill my mother, my brothers, and my entire family. Crying I told them that I could not do bad things. I could go to prison or die. It offends me when they tell me to do something against my values]. (Honduran boy, eleven years old).

Caminamos por la selva llena de mosquitos. Llegamos a un lugar, todavía era selva, no había nadie, y ahí estaba un camión. El pollero que venía con nosotros se fue y nos quedamos con otros dos que no conocíamos. Viajamos por horas y horas. Llegamos a un lugar que se llama Durango. Lo supe porque vi un letrero en la carretera decía 'autopista Durango/Mazatlán.' Nos llevaron a una bodega con más gente. Todos éramos migrantes. Sin agua, sin comida. Después llegaron unos hombres y nos quitaron nuestro dinero y celulares. Muchos adultos empezaron a decir que nos iban a matar, así que mi mamá y yo nos escapamos de ese lugar. Caminamos mucho. Mi mamá tocó las puertas de muchas casas. En una nos abrieron y nos quedamos a trabajar. Yo cuidaba a un bebé. Ahí estuvimos hasta que tuvimos dinero, tomamos el bus y llegamos aquí. [We walked through the jungle full of mosquitoes. We arrived at a place. It was still jungle. There was no one, and there was a truck. The Pollero that came with us left, and we stayed with two others we did not know. We travel for hours and hours. We arrived at a place called Durango. I knew because a sign on the highway said ‘Durango/Mazatlán.’ They took us to a warehouse with more people. We were all migrants. No water, no food. Then some men
came and took our money and cell phones. Many adults started saying they would kill us, so my mom and I ran away from that place. We walked a lot. My mom knocked on the doors of many houses. In one, they opened us, and we stayed to work. I took care of a baby. We stayed there until we had money, took a bus, and got here. (Honduran girl, nine years old).

Figure 34: A Road in a City

Yo me vine con mis dos hermanos para encontrarnos aquí con mi papá. Él está aquí en el albergue, se vino primero, juntó dinero y nos lo envió. Llegamos ahí en Guatemala y mi hermano les dio a unos hombres dos mil dólares para que nos pasaran por el río. Ellos iban vestidos con una playera de manga corta negra y un pantalón también negro. Yo pude ver sus armas junto a su cintura. Pensé que nos iban a matar. [I came with my two brothers to meet my dad here. He is here at the shelter. My dad came first. He earned money and sent it to us. We got there in Guatemala, and my brother gave some men two thousand dollars to take us across the river. They were dressed in a black short-sleeved shirt and
pants. I could see their weapons next to their waist. I thought they would kill us]. (Honduran boy, eleven years old).

Figure 35: They May Kill Us

*Mi mamá rentó un hotel y en la mañana se salía a buscar trabajo. Ella me dijo que quizá nos quedaríamos a vivir en México. Como al tercer día mi mamá no llegó en toda la noche. Yo tenía mucho miedo y sólo a ratos me dormía. Al otro día llegó mi mamá muy golpeada. No podía caminar. Le salía sangre de entre sus piernas. Mi mamita me dijo que mejor siguiéramos hacia los Estados (Estados Unidos) que ahí seguro sabían tratar mejor a las mujeres. [My mother rented a hotel, and in the morning, she left to look for work. She told me that maybe we would stay and live in Mexico. On the third day, my mom didn't come all night. I was very scared and only occasionally fell asleep. The next day my mother came back very beaten. She couldn't walk. She was oozing blood from between her legs. My mommy told me that we better go to the States (the United States) because they sure knew how to treat women better]. (Honduran girl, nine years old).
Figure 36. In the United States They Sure Know How to Treat Women Better

Death. In many cases, they witnessed threats and physical aggression toward their family or acquaintances, perceiving it as the chronicle of their announced death.

Yo estaba jugando con mi hermanito afuera de la casa cuando escuché gritos y vi que le dispararon a mi abuelo. Agarré a mi hermanito y corrimos, y corrimos hacia abajo, para dentro del campo. Nos escondimos entre unas matas de maíz. Yo sabía que mi padre Dios y los espíritus de la monta nos iban a proteger. Empezó a llover muy fuerte y así, la Santa Nube, el Santo Rayito y el Santo Viento los alejaron. Ya nos había dicho nuestro abuelo que, si algo así pasaba nos fuéramos directo con el Padrecito, así lo hice y ahí llegaron después toda la familia. Con la misma, nos fuimos escondidos en dos camionetas hasta el otro pueblo y de ahí caminamos toda la noche hasta aquí (albergue). Yo rezo para que a donde lleguemos encontremos un lugar donde vivir, arriba, en la montaña. Los espíritus malos viven abajo. [I was playing outside with my little brother when I heard shouts and I saw that they shot my grandfather. I grabbed my brother and we ran, we ran down into the field. We hid among some corn plants. I knew that my father God and the
spirits of the mountain would protect us. It started to rain really hard and that way the Saint of the Clouds, the Saint of the Sun and the Saint of the Wind pushed them away. Our grandfather had already told us that if something like that happened, we should go straight to the priest, that’s what I did and then the whole family went there. With my family, we hid in two buses and went to another village and from there we walked all night to get here. I pray that when we get to our destination, we find a place to live that’s above, in the mountains. The bad spirits live below. (Guatemalan boy, eleven years old).

Déjeme ver como le puedo explicar como sí estamos en guerra: ¿usted sabe lo que es una pistola? Los Güirros de mi barrio pelean contra los Maras. Por ejemplo, si yo cruzo la calle grande del otro lado, ellos me matan. Algunas veces los Maras se meten a mi barrio, se escuchan los silbidos, salen todos los Güirros y se empiezan a pelear. Así pasa mucho tiempo, y ahí quedan los muertos. Como yo acabo de cumplir doce años, mi mamá me sacó del barrio. [Let me see, how can I explain how we are in a war. Do you know what a gun is? The Güirros of my neighborhood fight against the Maras. For example, if I were to cross the big street on the other side, they would kill me. Sometimes the Maras come into my neighborhood, you hear the whistling, all the men come out and they start to fight. That’s how it is a lot of the time, and that’s where the dead stay. Since I turned twelve, my mom took me out of the neighborhood]. (Honduran boy, twelve years old).

Me preocupa que les pase algo a mis hermanos o a mi papá. Cuando me deprevo yo pienso que, qué va a ser mañana, si vamos a vivir o no vamos a seguir viviendo. Digamos que no despertemos porque pasan muchas cosas malas en el mundo, como que los hombres matan
a la gente. [I worry that something will happen to my brothers or my dad. When I fall asleep, I think about what will happen tomorrow, if we are going to live or we are not going to continue living. Let's say we don't wake up because many bad things happen in the world, like men killing people]. (Honduran boy, eleven years old).

Mataron a mi papá unos hombres que llegaron a mi casita por la noche cuando todos estábamos dormidos. Nos fuimos a la casa de mis abuelitos y ya no regresamos. Estuvieron hablando y mi mamá nos dijo que nos teníamos que ir. Nunca más volví a ver a mis animalitos. [My dad was killed by some men who came to my home at night when we were all asleep. We went to my grandparents’ house and never came back. They were talking, and my mom told us we had to go. I never saw my pets again]. (Guatemalan boy, twelve years old).

![Figure 37. Some Men Killed my Dad](image)

**Injustice**

Children expressed distrust, anger, and indignation at the lies, contradictions, and corruption of some adults from their community, the criminals, but above all, the immigration authorities.
**Untruth.** Children witnessed undisguised lies and were forced not to trust others. Hence, to feel insecure but, above all, disconcerted since, as they expressed, their most important in life was the truth.

La señora de la panadería se ha encargado desde hace mucho a juntar grupos para irse al Norte. Y su sobrino Pablo es el que nos lleva. Tomamos primero un bus, luego pasamos de noche un río grandote en una tabla con llantas, y luego nos llevaron a una casa en un lugar con mucho calor, se llama Tabasco. Al otro día nos levantamos muy tempranito, todavía no amanecía y caminamos entre la selva y ahí vimos una furgoneta con otras personas también esperando. Pablo nos dijo, “aquí ya me despido y ustedes siguen con ellos” y mi mamá entre asustada y enojada le dijo “pero no quedamos en eso, te pagamos para que nos llevaras hasta los Estados Unidos” él sólo se rió y se fue. Luego entramos a esa furgoneta llena de gente. [The lady from the bakery has been in charge of gathering groups to go to the North for a long time. And her nephew Pablo is the one who takes us. We first took a bus, then crossed a big river at night on a board with tires, and then he took us to a house in a very hot place called Tabasco. The next day we got up very early, it was not yet dawn, and we walked through the jungle, and there we saw a furgoneta with other people also waiting. Pablo told us, “Here I say goodbye, and you continue with them,” and my mother, frightened and angry, told him, “But we didn't agree on that. We paid you to take us to the United States.” He just laughed and left. So, then we got into that furgoneta full of people]. (Honduran girl, eleven years old).

No pudimos llegar al otro lado. Llegamos justo arriba del puente, y la policía nos dijo que migración estaba cerrada, y regresamos a México. Entonces volvimos a pasar, y dijeron
que no podíamos pasar por el Covid, pero no teníamos Covid. Eso fue una mentira. fue injusto. [We couldn't get to the other side. We arrived just above the bridge, and the police told us that migration was closed, and we returned to Mexico. So, we went again, and they said we could not go through because of the Covid, but we didn’t have Covid. That was a lie. It was unfair]. (Girl from Guatemala, nine years old).

Contradiction. Children expressed not understanding or tolerating the contradiction due to its lack of logic. When they talked about a contradictory situation, the researcher could observe the discomfort and tension in their body language.

Se me murió mi papá. Me lo mataron. Era policía y lo mataron los delincuentes. Fue muy injusto porque los criminales tienen armas buenas. Lo policías no. ¿Cómo es eso posible? [My dad died. They killed him. He was a policeman, and the criminals killed him. It was very unfair because criminals have good weapons. The police do not. How is that possible?] (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

Ya pasando Tekún Uman nos detuvieron unos federales, y querían que nos fuéramos pa’tras. Creo que eran de Guatemala y entonces nosotros, no nos queríamos remontar. Querían que nos regresáramos; y nosotros, no queríamos y no queríamos y entonces nos tuvieron un rato ahí y nos dijo un policía “ahí entonces aguanten hambre, se van a arrepentir estar ahí afuera bajo la lluvia” Empezó a llover bien fuerte. ¿Cómo es que los adultos pueden ser así? Fue muy injusto. [Once we were passing Tekún Uman, some federal officers stopped us. I think they were from Guatemala and so we didn't want to go back. They wanted us to go back. We didn't want to, then they kept us there for a while and the policeman told us “Deal with hunger then. You’re going to being out in the rain.” It
started to rain really hard. How could those adults be like that? It was very unfair]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

Figure 38. How Could Those Adults be Like That?

Es muy injusto. En mi casa no podía salir a jugar con mis amigas porque había delincuentes. Estamos aquí, tampoco puedo salir porque también hay delincuentes. No entiendo por qué nos fuimos ¡Qué tontería! [It is very unfair. At home, I couldn't go out to play with my friends because there were criminals. We're here, and I can't go out either because there are criminals too. I don't understand why we left. What nonsense!]. (Mexican girl, eight years old).

¿Qué cuál es mi fuerza? Bueno, no mucho, solo me quedo callado y dejo que las cosas pasen. De todos modos, no me escuchan. Yo no quería venir pero mi mamá me dijo que estaríamos mejor aquí. Pero, por el contrario, estamos peor, solos, y es aún más peligroso. ¡Qué contradicción! [What is my strength? Well, not much; I just keep quiet and let things

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happen. They don't listen to me anyway. I didn't want to come. My mother told me that we
would be better here. But, on the contrary, we are worse off, alone, and it is even more
dangerous. What a contradiction!] (Honduran boy, ten years old).

Se me murió mi papá. Me lo mataron. Era policía y lo mataron los delincuentes. Fue muy
injusto porque los criminales tienen armas buenas. Lo policías no. ¿Cómo es eso posible?
[My dad died. They killed him. He was a policeman, and the criminals killed him. It was
very unfair because criminals have good weapons. The police do not. How is that
possible?] (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

Corruption. The children who reported corruption understood the abuse of authority and
their defenseless condition, which caused them great indignation.

En la frontera para entrar a México, un policía federal nos quitó 200 dólares. Como los
iban a enviar a todos de regreso a la frontera con Guatemala, había nicaragüenses y un
cubano. Fuimos extorsionados por un policía federal, se llamaba César, y nos quitó 200
dólares, pero él sabía muy bien que si éramos niños no nos deportarían. Pasamos el dinero
por una puerta donde hay una reja. Iba a ayudarnos, pero no fue verdad, era mentira. Nos
hizo esperar todo el día. [In the border to enter Mexico, a federal police officer took $200
from us. They were going to send everyone back to the Guatemalan border - Nicaraguans
and a Cuban. A federal policeman extorted us. His name was Cesar and he took $200
dollars from us, but he knew very well that as children, they would not deport us. So, we
passed him the money through a door where there is a fence. He was going to help us, but
it wasn't true, it was a lie. He kept us waiting all day]. (Salvadoran girl, eleven years old).
En mi país, los de la pandilla Barrio 18 mataron a mi tío, luego a mi abuelo. Fuimos a la comisaría a poner una denuncia, y esperamos todo el día. Entonces, mis papás se dieron cuenta de que no habría justicia y que era mejor irse. Ya no me siento triste porque ya lo he olvidado. La tristeza se olvida con el tiempo. [In my country, the Barrio 18 gang killed my uncle, then my grandfather. We went to the police station to file a complaint. We waited all day. Then, my parents realized that there would be no justice, and that it was better to leave. I don't feel sad anymore because I have already forgotten it. Sadness is forgotten over time]. (Honduran boy, twelve years old).

![Figure 39. Barrio 18 Gang](image)

Allá (Michoacán, México) los delincuentes atacaron y robaron a mi papá. Fuimos a denunciar, esperamos todo el día y la señora que escribió lo que mi papá le contaba no lo estaba poniendo bien. No era la verdad. Luego nos dijo que, si no nos gustaba, nos fuéramos a otro lado. Mi papá me dijo que como no le dimos dinero, no iba hacer su trabajo. Y luego vimos a los mismos que atacaron a mi papá caminando cerca de mi casa,
There (Michoacán, Mexico), criminals attacked and robbed my father. We went to file a complaint, we waited all day, and the lady who wrote what my father told her was not fixing it. It wasn't the truth. Then she told us that if we didn't like it, we should go elsewhere. My dad told me that since we didn't give her money, she wasn't going to do her job. And then we saw the same ones who attacked my dad walking near my house, free.

(Mexican girl, eleven years old).

La policía está comprada por ellos (criminales). Por eso el pueblo se tiene que defender. Los hombres de la comunidad ya están llamando a niños mayores de diez años. [They bribe the police (criminals). That is why people have to defend themselves. The men in the community are recruiting boys over ten years old]. (Mexican boy, eleven years old).

**Figure 40.** I Don’t Want to Learn How to Kill People

**Oppression**

Children recounted not only of the action of tyranny by one dominant group over another but also of oppression in the form of inequality, dispossession, and voicelessness—reducing children's potential to reach their human development.
Inequality. Children evidence the disparity of resources available in the Northern Triangle and Mexico countries. Especially in terms of gender and age, women and children were considered disposable. Moreover, children spoke of the inequity of the resources allocated to counter natural disasters and the lack of access to health services during the COVID pandemic.

Mis abuelos eran como yo. Cuando vivían era muy difícil porque comían muy poco y las casitas eran de cañita. Sus papá tampoco tenían casi comida. Ahora, estamos igual pero peor. [My grandparents were just like me. When they lived, it was very difficult because they ate very little, and their home was made of cane. Their parents didn't have much food either. Now, we are the same but worse]. (Mexican boy, nine years old).

Allá (Michoacán, México) querían llevarse a mi hermano a la barricada. Le dijeron a mi mamá, "como eres mujer, no trabajas en el campo, ni defiendes a la gente. Así que por lo menos danos a tu hijo". Ellos ponen a los niños al frente, para que los adultos tengan
tiempo de preparar sus armas. Esos hombres ponen a los niños en primera línea para que los maten porque no sienten nada ya que no son su familia, y no son adultos como ellos. [There (Michoacán, Mexico) they wanted to take my brother to the barricade. They told my mother, “Since you are a woman, you do not work in the fields, nor do you defend the people. So, at least give us your son.” They put the children in front, so the adults have time to prepare their weapons. Those men put the children in the front line to be killed because they don't feel anything since they are not their family, and they are not adults like them]. (Mexican girl, eight years old).

Vivíamos en San Miguel hasta que explotó el volcán de Fuego. Nos salvamos porque tomamos un camino a la derecha, pero muchas personas fueron enterradas. No pudimos regresar a nuestra casa porque estaba totalmente destruida. La gente lloraba y no había nadie para ayudarnos. Nos fuimos a vivir a Amatitlán, ahí también se resintió la explosión del volcán, pero no tanto. Me di cuenta de que otras niñas como de mi edad ya estaban en la escuela y se veían bien, pero nosotros no podíamos encontrar trabajo y nos moríamos de hambre. Por eso estamos todos aquí (albergue). [We lived in San Miguel until the Fuego volcano exploded. We were saved because we took a path to the right, but many people were buried. We could not return to our home because it was totally destroyed. The people were crying, and nobody was there to help us. We went to live in Amatitlán. The people also felt the volcano's explosion, but not as much. I noticed that other girls about my age were already in school and looked good, but we couldn't find work and were starving. That's why we are all here (shelter)]. (Guatemalan girl, ten years old).
A mi abuelito le dió el Covis y se murió estando en casa. Se quedó con nosotros muertos por varios días hasta que un día ya no estuvo. Pregunté que había pasado con mi abuelito y me dijo mi mamá que los del forense ya habían pasado por él. Pero yo supe que no era cierto. Seguro mis papás lo llevaron al terreno baldío que se encuentra a unas cuadras de mi casa. Los vecinos han llevado ahí a sus muertos del Covis para quemarlos porque a nadie de mi barrio los aceptan en un hospital. Tengo mucho miedo de que mi familia se enferme del Covis y nadie los pueda curar. Salimos de nuestro país porque ahí nos vamos a morir peor que perros. [My grandfather got Covis, and he died while at home. He stayed with us dead for several days until one day he was gone. I asked where my grandfather was, and my mom told me the coroner had picked him up. But I knew that was not true. I think my parents took him to the vacant lot that is a few blocks from my house. The
neighbors have taken their dead from Covis there to burn them because no hospital accepts anybody from our neighborhood. I am afraid my family will get sick from Covis, and no one can cure them. So, we left our country because there we will die worse than dogs]. (Salvadoran boy, ten years old).

**Dispossession.** Children told us about the overwhelming power and control of criminal forces operating in collaboration with the authorities. Also, in the form of a story, children expressed how migration is the last uprising of the dispossessed, whose existence has been curtailed little by little.

*Mi abuelo estaba trabajando en el campo. Unos policías llegaron, le dispararon y lo mataron. Unas personas del rancho se acercaron a mi papá y le dijeron que lo mejor para nosotros era huir. Caminamos mucho, y mi abuelita ya no pudo caminar más. Ahí me quedé con ella. Ahí las dos sentadas a la orilla del camino lloramos juntas. Mi abuela me dijo, “mijita, ellos ganaron. Se quedaron con nuestra tierra, pero no con nuestra voluntad.”* [My grandfather was working in the field. Some policemen arrived, shot him, and killed him. Some village people came up to my dad and said that it would be better for us to flee. We walked a lot and my grandma couldn’t walk anymore. I stayed with her. The two of us sitting on the side of the road crying together. My grandmother said, “Mi hijita they won. They stole our land, but not our will.”] (Guatemalan girl, nine years old).

*Los criminales mataron a mi tío por cuidar el bosque y a las mariposas. Eso ya fue hace como un año y medio. Mi familia que se quedó allá. Los criminales quieren quitarles sus tierras porque las necesitan para los aguacateros. A mi papá también lo amenazaron, y por eso dejamos nuestra casa. Si no cuidamos del bosque, cuando las mariposas lleguen,
cansadas de tanto viajar, ya no van a encontrar su casa. [The criminals killed my uncle for caring for the forest and the butterflies. That was about a year and a half ago. My relatives stayed there. Criminals want to take away their land because they need it for the avocado growers. They also threatened my dad; that's why we left our home. If we don't take care of the forest, when the butterflies arrive, tired from traveling so much, they won't find their home]. (Mexican boy, ten years old).

![Figure 43. The Forest](image)

Pues mi papá nos pegaba, nos encerraba, no nos dejaba salir era una violencia bien horrible y mi mamá sufrió amenazas de muerte de mi papá. Él trabaja en el gobierno, y como allá en Guatemala hay una política “azul y blanco” entonces nos querían matar, nos perseguían en carros la policía. Por eso, mejor dejamos nuestra casa y nos escapamos. [Well, my father beat us, locked us up, and didn't let us go out. It was horrible violence, and my mom suffered death threats from my father. He works in the government, and as in Salvador, there is a "blue and white" policy; they wanted to kill us. The police chased us in cars. That's why we left our home and ran away]. (Salvadoran girl, eleven years old).
Cuando el señor Juan se enfermaba iba a ver al doctor. Él era tan obediente con todo lo que le decía el Doctor que cuando le decía que tenía que quitarse un pedacito de piel, se lo quitaba, un ojo, también se lo quitó que, porque ya no veía bien, un pedazo de pancita, un riñón. Poco a poco le fue quitando su cuerpo. Sólo le quedaba completo un pie. Aún así, Juan le tenía confianza al Doctor. Él sabía mucho. Llegó al hospital con su pie que le dolía y pidió que por favor llamaran a su doctor. El Doctor revisó el pie y dijo muy preocupado, “Hay demasiado pie, con razón se siente mal. Hay que quitárselo. [When Mr. Juan got sick, he went to see the Doctor. He was so obedient to everything the Doctor told him that when he took off a little piece of Juan's skin, he was okay with that. The Doctor also took off an eye because Juan couldn't see well anymore—a bit of belly, a kidney. Little by little, the Doctor was removing the body from him. He only had one foot left. Still, Juan trusted the Doctor. He knew a lot. Juan arrived at the hospital with his foot that hurt and asked that they please call his doctor. The Doctor checked the foot and said very worried,
"There is too much foot, no wonder it feels bad. You have to take it off]. (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

Figure 45. Mr. Juan

Unheard Voices. Children told us about times when their opinion had not been heard by their family, community, or strangers. Sometimes they would only say "no," but it was a "no" that they said with all their might.

_En el camino tuvimos que caminar mucho a través del campo y la selva para que no nos vieran a policía. Tenía mucho miedo y no podía llorar, me tenía que quedar calladito, pero yo quería decir que mejor nos regresáramos. Fueron muchos días así hasta que atravesamos el río por la noche._ [We had to walk a lot through the fields and the jungle on the journey so that the police would not see us. I was very scared and couldn't cry, I had to keep quiet but I wanted to say that we better go back. It was many days like this until we crossed the river at night]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).
Le dije a mi papá, "no," que no quería irme. Sé que hay gente mala en mi país, pero si mis abuelos, mis primos y mi perro se quedaron, ¿Por qué no podía quedarme yo? Quiero volver a mi casita. [I told my family, “No,” that I didn't want to leave. I know there are bad people in my country, but if my grandparents, cousins, and my dog stayed, why couldn't I stay? I want to go back home]. (Honduran boy, eight years old).
Yo le quiero decir a mi mamá que mejor nos regresemos a nuestra casa. Aquí no nos van a dejar pasar y está muy peligroso estar aquí solas. Un hombre aquí en el albergue me está acechando. Me dice si quiero platicar con él y le digo que "no." Ya le dije a mi mamá, pero ella no quiere decir nada aquí en el albergue porque tiene miedo de que no nos crean y nos echen. [I want to tell my mom that we better go back home. They will not let us pass here; it is very dangerous to be here alone. A man here at the shelter is stalking me. He tells me if I want to talk to him, and I say "no." I already told my mom, but she doesn't want to say anything here at the shelter because she's afraid they won't believe us and kick us out].

(Guatemalan girl, ten years old).

Figure 48. I Say “No”

Resilience

Family

For children, their family is the repository of their security, their shared values, affection, and above all, of mutual trust. In general, their mother is the migrant child's most significant support.

Lo mejor en mi vida es mi familia. Nosotros decimos siempre la verdad y tratamos bien a la naturaleza, a nuestros animalitos, pero sobretodo a nuestros hermanos. Cuando hay
que cosechar, vamos todos juntos, todos nos apoyamos. Mi papá y mis abuelos me contaban que hay que ser limpios y puros de espíritu para sembrar el maíz. [The best in my life is my family. We always tell the truth and treat nature well, our animals, and our brothers. When we go to harvest, we all go together and support each other. My dad and grandparents told me one must be clean and pure in spirit to plant corn]. (Mexican boy, eleven years old).

La historia que más me gusta es cuando se casaron mi mamá y mi papá. Habían muchas flores, pájaros y la gente del pueblo. [The story I like the most is when my mom and dad married. There were many flowers, birds, and the townspeople]. (Mexican boy, nine years old).

En mi familia nosotros nos abrazamos y nos amamos, y tratamos de estar siempre juntos. [In my family, we hug and love each other and try always to be together]. (Honduran girl, eight years old).

Figure 49. We Hug and Love Each Other
Dejar mi casa, el camino, los animales venenosos, la aburrición y estar aquí ha sido muy difícil. Lo que me da fuerza para seguir adelante es que estamos todos juntos. Es todo lo que me importa. [Leaving home, the road, the poisonous animals, the boredom, and being here has been very difficult. What gives me the strength to keep going is that we are all together. It's all that matters to me]. (Guatemalan girl, nine years old).

Yo sé que algún día voy a tener mi casa y voy a apoyar a mi mamá. Mi fortaleza es Dios, mi madre y mi familia. Cuando ya tenga una casa y ver que todo este bien, ya voy a poder estudiar para ser científico. Voy a investigar, descubrir, y así, enseñar. [I know that one day I will have a house and support my mom. My strength is God, my mom, and my family. When I have a house and I see that everything is good, I will be able to study to become a scientist. I'm going to research, discover, and then teach]. (Honduran boy, twelve years old).

Figure 50. My Home
Los Maras me persiguieron y querían llevarme con ellos. Corrí y corrió. Pude llegar a casa y mi mamá salió a defenderme. La agarraron y la golpearon en medio de la calle. Amo a mi mamá. [The Maras (gangsters) chased me and wanted to take me away. I ran, and I ran. I was able to get home, and my mom came out to defend me. They grabbed her and beat her in the middle of the street. I love my mom]. (Salvadoran girl, eleven years old).

Mi mamá y mi familia son quienes me hacen sentir bien y salir adelante. [My mom and my family are the ones who make feel good and keep me going]. (Mexican boy, eight years old).

Figure 51. Family

Faith

Faith gave children confidence along their migratory journey. Children at Mexico's southern border spoke of God, Jesus, the Virgin of Guadalupe or nature spirits. In stark contrast, some children on Mexico's northern border who had migrated long distances did not speak about God.
Realizing this, the researcher asked some of them about God, and the children looked the other way and gave very terse answers.

*Yo sí creo en Dios. Me imagino que Diosito es un niño que defendió a la gente. A él le pegaron por nosotros, y él nos defendió para que nosotros no nos muramos. Yo siento que él vive. Él está en todos lados dónde vamos la gente. Diosito cuida a la gente, él protege a todos de algo malo. Diosito es como un niño, juega con ellos, ayuda a la gente, a los niños pobres les da de comer, les regala una cobijita. Dos cobijas, una para poner en el suelo y otra para no pasar frío. Dios está mirando todo. [I believe in God. I imagine that Diosito is a child who defended the people. They beat him for us, and he defended us so we don't die. I feel that Diosito lives. He is everywhere where people go. Diosito takes care of people, and he protects everyone from something bad. Diosito is like a child; he plays with them, feeds poor children, and gives them a blanket. Two blankets, one to put on the floor and another to keep them warm. God is watching everything]. (Mexican boy, 11 years old).*

*Yo le diría a una niña como yo que tenga fe, que va a poder seguir adelante y de que todo lo malo va a pasar. En las manos de Dios vamos nosotros siempre. [I would tell a girl like me to have faith, that she will be able to move on and that everything bad will pass. In God's hands, we always go]. (Honduran girl, eleven years old).*

*Dios es muy bueno, salva a la gente del Covid, ayuda a los pobres. Lo siento bien poderoso y grande. Pelea con el diablo para que no nos haga nada. Él tiene un volado blanco, lo vi en mi biblia, en cada número hay una foto. [God is very good, save people from Covid, help the poor. I feel him very powerful and big. Fight with the devil, so he doesn't do*
anything to us. He has a white frill. I saw him in my bible; there is a photo in each number].

(Salvadoran boy, ten years old).

En el camino, Diosito me fue cuidando, y a mi mamá, y a mi padrastro y a mi hermana.

[Along the way, Diosito took care of me, and my mother, and my stepfather, and my sister].

(Salvadoran boy, eight years old).
Yo solo puse mi fe en Diosito, creí en él, y él siempre está conmigo. Siempre lo ha dicho en su palabra, “yo estaré contigo donde quiera que vayas,” así que yo confié y dije “señor si es tu voluntad vamos a llegar hasta nuestro destino,” y gracias a él, estamos aquí. [I just put my faith in God, I believed in him and he is always with me. He has said, “I will be with you wherever you go,” so I trusted and said, “Lord, if it is your will, we will reach our destination,” and thanks to him, we are here]. (Honduran girl, twelve years old).

Mi mamá dice que cuando alguien quiere ayuda, que le ayude porque es como si ayudara a Dios. [My mom says that when someone needs help, help them because it's like helping God]. (Guatemalan girl, ten years old).

Para seguir adelante junto mis manos y rezo y así puedo hablar con Dios. Todos los días hablo con él. [To keep going, I put my hands together and pray so I can talk to God. Every day I talk with him]. (Guatemalan girl nine years old).

No tengo ni idea. Nadie lo ha podido ver, sólo tenemos las fotos, pero las fotos no aseguran nada. [I have no idea. Nobody has been able to see him, we only have the pictures, but the photos do not guarantee anything]. (Salvadoran girl, twelve years old).

No sé. Dios ya no está. [I don't know. God is not there anymore]. (Guatemalan boy, eight years old). Pues yo creo que sí existe, pero no se acuerda de nosotros. [I think he does exist, but he doesn't remember us]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).
Jesus.  


![Jesus](image)

**Figure 54. Jesus**

Virgen de Guadalupe.

Pues Diosito es buena gente, te cuida, te salva de la enfermedad. Te cuida mucho. La Virgen, es también buena gente. Te protege. A un primo se le apareció en esta frontera. Se le apareció cuando le estaba rezando a Diosito. Entonces, estaba rezando para que no le pasara nada malo, porque lo había dejado el “Coyote.” Mi primo se llama (...). Estaba rezando, y se la apareció la Guadalupana. Era morena, altísima, tenía una sonrisa bien bonita, con sus dientes blanquísimos. Luego se quedó dormido como dos horas y al día siguiente apareció allá al otro lado de la carretera en Texas.

[Well, Diosito is a good person. He takes care of you, saves you from illness, and takes good care of you. The Virgin is also a good person; she protects you. She appeared to my cousin on this border. She appeared to him when he was praying to Diosito. So, he
was praying that nothing wrong would happen because the "Coyote" had left him. My cousin was praying, and the Guadalupana appeared to him. She had dark skin, was very tall, and had a beautiful smile and white teeth. Then he fell asleep for about two hours, and the next day he turned up across the road in Texas]. (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

**Figure 55. The Virgen**

**Nature Spirits.** Some indigenous children told us about the existence of natural divinities who listen, see, and feel from the height of the mountains.

_Cuando tuve que escapar recé a Dios, y a los Dioses buenos de allá arriba. Mi consejo para otros niños es que si necesita algo busque un Santo Rayito, una Santa Nube o a un Santo viento, ellos siempre los van a ayudar._ [I prayed to God and the good Gods above when I had to escape. My advice to other children is to look for a Santo Rayito, a Santa Nube, or a Santo Viento if you need something. They will always help you]. (Mexican boy, eleven years old).

_Después de que los Dioses terminaron de crear a todos los hombres y animales, se dieron cuenta que no habían creado ninguno que transportara los pensamientos hermosos. Ya no_
tenían barro así que utilizaron una piedra pequeñita de Jade y crearon el colibrí. En Maya se llama X’ts’unu’um. Es pequeñito, muy suave, muy rápido y sólo él puede transportar los pensamientos de un lado a otro. Los Dioses ordenaron que nunca se encierre al colibrí, porque si se encierra, se encierran también los pensamientos. [After the Gods finished creating all men and animals, they realized they had not made any that transported the beautiful thoughts. They no longer had mud, so they used a small Jade stone and made the hummingbird. In Maya, it is called X’ts’unu’um. He is tiny, very soft, and swift, and only he can transport thoughts from one place to another. The Gods ordered that the hummingbird should never be locked up because the thoughts would also be locked up]. (Guatemalan girl, eleven years old).

![Figure 56. X’ts’Unu’Um Hummingbird](image)

Mientras estemos en el bosque, no tengo miedo de caminar en la oscuridad porque Dios va con nosotros. Los espíritus de la naturaleza también nos acompañan. [As long as we are in the forest, I am not afraid to walk in the dark because God goes with us. The spirits of nature also accompany us]. (Guatemalan boy, ten years old).
Character

Most children realized about the need to leave their home country despite their young age. Such awareness on their part did not mean that they would were reconciled with that necessity. Yet, they accepted the challenge with integrity, perseverance, and denouncement what was unjust.

Integrity. Children presented themselves to this researcher with genuine sincerity and a clear sense that they thought and acted by what they morally believed. That is, honoring the truth and justice.

Te voy a contar el cuento del niño y el cachorro. El niño, llegó a comprar un perrito con un señor que los vendía. El niño le preguntó que cuánto costaba. El señor le dijo que 1000 Lempiras. El niño vio a un cachorrito que no podía caminar y dijo: ‘ése es el que quiero’ entonces el señor le dijo que ese cachorrito estaba fallado, que si de verdad lo quería se lo regalaba. El niño le contestó enojado que no, que ese cachorrito valía tanto como los demás. Así que le pago todo completo. [I’m going to tell you a story about a boy and a puppy. The boy came to buy a puppy with a man who sold them. The boy asked him how much it cost. The man told him that 1000 Lempiras. Then, the boy saw a puppy that couldn't walk and said: 'that's the one I want.' Then, the man told him that that little puppy was wrong, that if he really wanted that dog, he would give it to him for free. The boy angrily replied that no, that the puppy was worth as much as the others. So, he paid fully for the puppy]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

Voy a decirte la verdad. No creo que esté mal que hagas dos o hasta tres travesurillas al día. Más de tres ya es exagerado y puede afectar a otras personas. Por ejemplo, el otro
días salí a la calle a jugar fútbol con los niños del albergue y no le dije a mi mamá. Diosito no se va a enojar por eso. Se enojará si maltratas a otra persona, especialmente si es un niño pequeño. [I'm going to tell you the truth. I don't think it's wrong for you to do two or even three pranks a day. More than three is already exaggerated and may affect other people. For example, the other day, I went to the street to play soccer with the shelter's children and didn't tell my mom. Diosito [God] is not going to be angry about that. He will be mad if you maltreat another person, especially if he is a younger child]. (Mexican boy, eleven years old).

Un día un elefantón llegó a un pueblo para asustar a todos. Era muy presumido y malo. Iba por la calle aplastando a todos. Un cachorro, pensó, me voy a ir pero primero le voy a decir sus verdades, y le gritó con todas sus fuerzas: "¿por qué en lugar de quedarte en tu pueblo vienes aquí a tratar de asustarnos?". Eres muy malo y no te tengo miedo. Otro perro viejo le dijo: "No lo hagas, ¿no ves el tamaño de sus patas? Él puede aplastarte en menos de un momento." Entonces el cachorro respondió, "si todos piensan como tú, la voz de la justicia nunca se escuchará y el mundo se convertirá en una jaulota de cobardes."

[One day an elephant came to a town to scare everyone. He was very vain and mean. He went down the street, crushing everyone. A puppy, he thought, I'm going to leave, but first I'm going to give him a piece of my mind, and yelled at him with all his might: "Why, instead of staying in your town, do you come here to try to scare us?" You are evil, and I am not afraid of you. Another old dog told him: "Don't do it, don't you see the size of his paws? He can crush you in less than a moment." Then the puppy replied, "If everyone
thinks like you, the voice of justice will never be heard, and the world will become a huge cage of cowards." [Honduran boy 11, years old].

**Courage.** Some children not only recounted their experiences to the researcher but also felt compelled to strongly and courageously denounce their offenders, especially to the authorities who were supposed to be there to provide safety. También, hablaron de sentir temor a continuar por caminos desconocidos, pero se sobreponían para acompañar y proteger a su familia.

Mi familia vendió todo lo que pudo para que pudiéramos hacer este viaje. Primero estuvimos mucho tiempo en Corinto (Honduras) para que la policía revisara nuestros papeles. Luego en Izabal, para ir a Guatemala, la policía de inmigración nos dijo que no nos podían dejar pasar porque tenían que proteger a los guatemaltecos del Covis. Pero uno se acercó a mi papá y le pidió mucho dinero, y así entramos a ese país. Para entrar a México, otros policías le pidieron más dinero a mi familia. Leí en su uniforme que decía Guardia Nacional. Nos quedamos sin nada de dinero. En total fueron unos 50 mil lempiras. [My family sold everything they could so we could make this trip. First, we spent a long time in Corinto (Honduras) so that the police could review our papers. Then in Izabal, to go to Guatemala, the immigration police told us that they couldn't let us pass because they had to protect Guatemalans from Covis. But one approached my dad and asked him for a lot of money, and that's how we entered that country. To enter Mexico, other police officers asked my family for more money. I read on their uniform that it said National Guard. We ran out of all the money. In total, it was about 50 thousand lempiras]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

Nos fuimos porque uno de la pandilla quería ser mi novio. Era un hombre mayor, y un día tocó a la puerta de mi casa. Mi abuela lo abrió y respondió: "Primero tienes que matarme".
Entonces, le dijo a mi mamá en la noche, y salimos muy temprano en la mañana. Aquí en México le dijeron a mi mamá que es más seguro ir con un Pollero que solo lleva mujeres y que va por otra ruta a un lugar que se llama Sonora. No me gustó la gente que estaba hablando con mi mamá. Pero mi ella me dijo que todo estaría bien. Me da miedo, pero tengo que cuidar a mi mamá. [We left because one of the gang wanted to be my boyfriend. He was an older man, and one day he knocked on the door of my house. My grandmother opened it and replied, "You have to kill me first." So, she told my mom at night, and we left very early in the morning. Here in Mexico, they told my mother that it is safer to go with a Pollero that only takes women and that he goes by another route to a place called Sonora. I didn't like the people who were talking to my mom. But she told me that everything would be fine. I'm scared, but I have to take care of my mom]. (Honduran girl, ten years old).

Allá en Apatzingán, salía para asegurarme de que no vinieran los delincuentes. Yo vigilaba afuera de mi casa, la de mis primos o el taller de mi papá. Si los veía cerca, corría y les

Figure 57. Just Girls

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avisaba a todos. Como yo soy niño, cuando se acercaban, no se preocupaban de mí, y a veces ni me veían porque me escondía detrás de una zanja. [There in Apatzingán, I went out to ensure that criminals did not come. I watched outside my home, at my cousins’ or my father's workshop. If I saw them nearby, I would run and tell everyone. Since I was a child, when they approached, they did not care about me, and sometimes they did not even see me because I was hiding behind a ditch]. (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

Yo me imaginaría decirle a una niña que viajara como yo, pues que no se puede quedar callada si ve algo raro o malo. No tengas miedo de decirle a tu mamá o a alguien en quien tú confíes. [I would imagine telling a girl traveling like me that she can't keep quiet if she sees something strange or wrong. Don't be afraid to tell your mom or someone that you trust]. (Mexican girl, nine years old girl).

Perseverance. In the face of adversity, children recounted the continuous effort they and their families made to continue en route to the United States. Many knew that leaving their home country was no point of return, either because of threats from criminal groups or because the resources of the land or society did not exist for their subsistence. Therefore, they had to persevere and keep going.

No voy a decirme a mí mismo, ‘si pasó esto, no voy a poder superarlo.’ No, al contrario, si pasó, yo voy a poder superarlo y a seguir adelante. Tener fuerza y como yo siempre he sabido que cosas así, difíciles, siempre van a pasar. [I’m not going to tell myself that ‘If this happens, I won’t be able to overcome it.’ On the contrary, if it happens, I will be able to overcome it and keep on going. Having strength and having always known that difficult things are always going to happen]. (Honduran boy, twelve years old).
En el camino, solo descansamos ahí un rato, y ahí al ratito avanzamos para el norte. Yo me decía a mi mismo, ya vamos a llegar, un poquito más, no te rindas. [Along the way, we just rested there for a bit, and we kept moving north. I told myself, we are almost there, a little more, don't give up]. (Honduran boy, ten years old).

Mi familia y yo fuimos trasladados en bote para cruzar el río entre Guatemala y Honduras. Pasamos, luego fuimos a una casa, y la gente de allí nos dio de comer. Después de comer, seguimos y seguimos. Al final, llegamos aquí (albergue). Venimos caminando. Siempre adelante. [My family and I were transferred by boat to cross the river between Guatemala and Honduras. We passed, then we went to a house, and the people there gave us food. After eating, we went on and on. In the end, we arrived here (shelter). We come walking. Always ahead]. (Honduran boy, nine years old).

Figure 58. Keep Going

Cuando mataron a mi papá, mis tíos me dijeron que ya no esté triste y que siga adelante. Yo también me digo a mí mismo eso. [When my dad was killed, my uncles told me not to
be sad anymore and to move on. So, I also tell myself that]. (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

Si una niña viaja como yo, le diría, no te rindas nunca, porque ¡tú puedes lograr tus sueños! [If a girl travels like me, I would tell her, never give up, because you can achieve your dreams!] (Mexican girl, ten years old).

Cuando me siento cansada o triste, no me dejo caer. Tengo que seguir adelante. [When I feel tired or sad, I don't let myself fall. I have to move on]. (Mexican girl, twelve years old).

Yo le diría a otro niño que viaje como yo, que el viaje no es fácil, es muy duro, no es como uno piensa, es algo difícil porque tienes que esconderte, no hacer ruido y así. Hay que aguantar lo que viene, no rendirse nunca porque no se puede regresar. Siempre mirar hacia delante, no hacia atrás. [I would tell another child who travels like me that the journey is not easy, it is very hard, it is not what one thinks, it is somewhat difficult because
you have to hide, not make noise, and so on. But you have to endure what comes. Never give up because you can't go back. Always look forward, not back]. (Guatemalan boy, ten years old).

**Relational Health**

Children showed warm interactions with their families. They also reported a wide range of social and cultural relationships in their countries of origin. We observed that they participated in activities promoted by the shelter. The children highlighted, above all, the communication through play with their peers.

**Interaction.** The interaction of children with the other migrant companions revolved around the possibility of continuing and moving to the United States. Within this social system, children were not alien to the interrelation and construction of migrant networks and locals from where they are passing that share information about routes, migratory trends, and moral support.

*Cuando me subí al camión había una señora y un niño, la señora me preguntó, porque vio mis pantalones sucios y me dijo: “¿De dónde vienes?” Y yo le dije de Guatemala.*

*Me dijo: “¿Qué idioma hablas?” Le contesté, yo hablo Q’eqchi’. Soy de Cobá, le dije.*

*Luego fue platicando con mi mamá acerca de cuál era la mejor frontera y nos compartimos la comida.* [When I got on the truck, there was a lady and a boy, the lady asked me because she saw my dirty pants, and she said: "Where do you come from?"

And I told her that I came from Guatemala. She said to me: "What language do you speak?" I replied to her, I speak Q'eqchi'. I'm from Cobá. Then she was talking with my mom, about which was the best border, and we shared the food]. (Guatemalan boy, eight years old).
A mí lo que me saca adelante son las personas que nos apoyan. Cuando vamos caminando, y se dan cuenta que somos migrantes, nos acercan un plato de comida, algo de tomar. Nos dan información sobre dónde encontrar un albergue y nos dicen cuáles son los caminos peligrosos. La comunidad. [What keeps me going are the people who support us. When we are walking, and they realize that we are migrants, they bring us a plate of food or something to drink. They give us information on where to find a shelter and tell us which roads are dangerous. Community]. (Honduran boy, twelve years old).

**Figure 60. Community**

**Camaraderie.** Children had to face significant adversities before and during the route. Children generally thought that these ordeals of migration were particular and only happening to their families. However, when they met other children in similar conditions, they spontaneously connected, joining as brothers in the same ordeal.

_Allá en mi país casi no teníamos para comer, y no salíamos de casa por el Covis, pero tampoco porque no había dinero. Vinimos en autobús y luego caminamos. Cuando llegamos aquí, me di cuenta de que habían otros niños como yo y que también lo estaban pasando difícil. Estoy muy feliz de haberlos encontrado. Apenas me despierto, los busco y hacemos todo juntos._ [Back in my country, we hardly had anything to eat, and we didn't leave the house because of the pandemic but also because there was no money. We came
by bus and then walked. When we got here, I realized that there were other children like me and that they also had a tough time. I am very happy to have found them. As soon as I wake up, I look for them, and we do everything together]. (Salvadoran boy, ten years old).

_Pues aquí tengo un amigo, usted lo conoce, ayer lo entrevistó. A él le mataron a su papá y a veces lo veo llorar. Yo nada más me acerco y lo abrazo. No le digo nada. Sólo lo acompaña._ [Well, I have a friend here, you know him, you interviewed him yesterday. They killed his father, and sometimes I see him cry. I walk over and hug him. I don't say anything to him. I just accompany him]. (Mexican boy, twelve years old).

**Play.** Children expressed the need to find times and places to play with their peers, especially involving the activity of running, when space permitted, or through symbolic and verbal games with small toys and dolls when they were in small places or inside of a truck. They also shared that these moments of play made them feel free and led them to perceive being in a better place.

_Jugar con otros niños me hace sentir bien porque me hace olvidar muchas cosas. Porque así sonrío. Juego con la pelota, es lo que más me gusta._ [Playing with other children makes me feel good because it makes me forget many things. Because that's how I smile. I play with the ball. It’s what I like the most]. (Guatemalan girl, twelve years old).

_Me gusta encontrar a otros niños para poder jugar a las “perseguidas.” Me gusta ese juego porque cuando corro puedo sentir el aire en mi cara, lo siento fresco, cierro los ojos y se me olvida la tristeza._ [I like to find other kids so I can play tag. I like that game because...
I can feel the air on my face when running. I feel it fresh, close my eyes, and forget the sadness. (Guatemalan girl, ten years old).

Lo que yo hago para seguir adelante es que salgo afuera a buscar otros niños, y los invito a jugar fútbol. [To keep going, I go outside to find other children and I invite them to play soccer]. (Mexican boy, eight years old).

Le doy gracias a Dios porque llegamos hasta aquí (albergue) y tenemos dónde dormir, donde nosotros los niños poder jugar. [I thank God that we got here (shelter) and have a place to sleep, where we children can play]. (Honduran boy, twelve years old).

Figure 61. To Keep Going I Play Soccer

No pienso en eso (los criminales que extorsionaban a su mamá), veo las caricaturas, juego con otra niña y compartimos nuestras Barbies. Nuestras muñecas van de viaje, viendo cosas diferentes y contentas con toda su familia. [I don't think about it (the criminals extorting her mother). I watch the cartoons, play with another girl and share our Barbies (dolls). Our dolls go on a trip, see different things, and are happy with their whole family]. (Mexican girl, nine years old).
Para estar bien, juego con los niños de acá, a veces carritos, a veces pelota. A veces Grecia (Directora del albergue) nos saca aquí en el patio. [To be well, I play with the children here, sometimes carts, sometimes ball. Sometimes Grecia (Shelter’s Director) takes us out on the patio]. (Guatemalan boy, eleven years old).

Figure 62. Emiliano Plays

Culture. In general, cultural influences, similarities, and diversities formed broader relationships among the children. They interacted in a constant accommodation and assimilation of new worldviews.

Cuando necesito ayuda busco a mi mamá, a Dios, y a los que están al lado mío. Como a mis tíos, mis hermanos, mis abuelos, mis amigos, o mis vecinos. Ahora que estoy aquí (albergue) busco a alguien de mi pueblo que hable mi lengua. Pero ayer estuve hablando con un niño que venía de Honduras y a los dos nos gusta jugar con el perro de aquí. [When I need help, I look for my mom, God, and those who are by my side. Like my uncles, my brothers, my grandparents, my friends, or my neighbors. Now that I’m here (shelter), I look
for someone from my town who speaks my language. But yesterday, I was talking in Spanish with a boy from Honduras. We both like to play with the dog here. (Guatemalan boy, eight years old).

Confío en Dios, pero mi fuerza viene de todos los que están cerca de mí, en especial del abuelo Chimán (el mayor de la comunidad). [I trust in God, but my strength comes from all those close to me, especially Grandpa Chiman (the eldest in the community)]. (Guatemalan boy, twelve years old).

Figure 63. Grandpa Chiman

Mi abuela dice que nuestros ‘Cadejos’ nos guían por el camino correcto. Cuando un bebé nace, ella recibe un animal spiritual para guiarla, y aparece cuando más lo necesitas. Aquí en el albergue les hablé a unas niñas de los Cadejos, les gustó mucho saber de ellos. Luego, me preguntaron si ellas también tenían uno. [My grandmother said that our ‘Cadejos’ guided us on the right path. When a baby is born, she receives a spirit animal to guide her,
and appear when they are most needed. Here are some girls to whom I spoke about the Cadejos. They really liked hearing from them. So, they asked me if they also had one].

(Guatemalan girl, ten years old).

![Figure 64. The Cadejo](image)

**4.5. Qualitative Summary**

We conducted 76 psychosocial interviews about adverse experiences and strategies to overcome traumatic situations. Children were encouraged to identify their individual and sociocultural assets, and they expressed their opinion and the sense of their experiences in narrative form. In some cases, in the form of stories, legends, and drawings.

Children reported conditions of vulnerability and risk, as well as relational, individual, and cultural factors that protected them and made them feel *mejor* [better] as they said. The risk factors included suffering, violence, injustice, and oppression. Protective factors were identified within the family, faith, character, and relational health.

**4.6. Chapter Conclusion**
The interviews included a demographic questionnaire, two psychometric scales, and a semi-structured interview per participant. Among the 76 participants, 45 children made a free drawing. The total duration of each interview was between one hour and one hour fifteen minutes.

We maintained a similar approach in all interviews. That is, first, we asked about children's demographics and perceptions about the COVID pandemic. Then, we continued with the qualitative interview and the drawing for those who so chose, and finally, we applied the two scales. This order allowed children more openness, confidence, and discernment of trauma and resilience to answer the questions on the scales, thus optimizing time.

As for the qualitative interview, all participants agreed to continue the guided conversation about their adverse experiences and resilient resources before and during their migratory journey. Furthermore, to establish better communication and obtain elements that could enrich or better explain the emerging themes, we asked the children to make a free drawing, which 60% of them did during the interview (Sondegaard & Reventlow, 2019; Farokhi & Hashemi, 2011).

Three children felt overwhelmed while recounting their traumatic experiences (they moderately cried). We interrupted the interview and asked the child if we could do a breathing exercise. Children agreed, regained their balance, and chose to continue the interview, which allowed the researcher to ensure that the child's affect (a person's moment-to-moment emotional expression) was stable.

Two of those children suggested showing that exercise to others. Listening to them, at the end of the day's sessions, we showed some migrant families that were present such mindfulness technique. Additionally, after the interview, we showed each participant an emotional self-regulation resource (the butterfly hug) that lasted approximately three minutes (Jarero & Artigas, 2021).
Finally, it is worth mentioning that at the end of each interview, as compensation for their time, we gave each participant a bag with sanitary items (soap, masks, gel), a sandwich, fruit, candies, and small toys. Some children indicated that the food was their first meal of the day or even the day before. Also, they appreciated that the toys were small enough to fit in their pants pocket since they needed to have their hands free when traveling, whether in the jungle, desert, or crammed into a truck.
Chapter 5. Discussion

The Paso del Norte region has witnessed that the history of humanity is the history of migrations and migration is the history of humankind. And with this axiom –oppression, violence, and hunger. People from the Northern Triangle and Mexico who leave their country for these reasons emigrate in search of opportunities and respect for their development aspirations and those of their children.

The South looks to the North as a place of more humane treatment –a potential sanctuary. The North looks to the South as a perennial threat –a source of problems. This dichotomy has governed the destinies of thousands of people who have traced escape routes to stop being nobody and try to be someone in a foreign land. Thousands of migrants, including children, try to reach fulfill this longing at the cost of sometimes supreme sacrifices that end up in the statistics of human tragedy, whether crossing the jungle, the desert, the Rio Grande, or suffocating in a truck. Despite the dangers, migrants choose to head towards where there is still the possibility of continuing to exercise the right to hope. That hope that the United States of today is letting slip through its fingers, thus betraying the humbleness of its own immigrant origin.

Given the pressing problem of children in the context of migration, we conducted this study from the human rights approach (UN, 2021), under the psychosocial perspective (Ungar, 2013, 2012, 2008), of the recognition of middle childhood (Osher, 2020) and from a gender perspective.

In the study of migration and issues concerning children, an approach prevails that is based on the interpretations and interests of the adult (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017). Thus, it was of paramount interest in this research to recover the voices of children who experience migration seeking their right to be heard and understood (Chacón, 2015). This right is regulated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Article 12, which states that the signatory
nations must guarantee the children's right to express their opinion freely in all matters that affect them (UN, 2021).

We started from the theoretical conceptions that guided the design of this research, as well as the referential, spatial-temporal, and psycho-sociological systems related to the phenomenon of child migration in the Northern Triangle region and Mexico. This study included demographic data, perceptions of COVID since we collected data during the pandemic's first phase, conversational interviews, and free drawings. Additionally, two psychosocial evaluations were used to obtain indicators of trauma symptoms and resilience.

5.1. Demographics Highlights

Within the demographic data, it is worth mentioning that in Ciudad Juarez (Mexico-US border), the number of participating girls from the Northern Triangle and indigenous girls from the South of Mexico decreased considerably compared to the participation of girls in Tapachula (Guatemala-Mexico border). A natural response might be that they simply go to other frontiers. But it is not an accurate reflection since the boys of those regions were present.

Let us consider the comment of a 10-year-old girl from Honduras who said that smugglers intercepted them to take them in a “special” van to the border of Sonora with the U.S. It may seem that this is beyond the objective of the present study. However, we could argue that this situation is but one more of the common risk factors among girls, in this case, human trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018) and, consequently, traumatic situations generated by migration.

Another situation that draws attention and is found in the gender sphere is the significant migration of single mothers with their children (55.2%), in stark contrast to migration with only the father (2.6%). This fact is consistent with what was reported by the CNDH (2020) that women
frequently face violence, abuse, and discrimination related to the entrenched historical oppression of their gender. It also coincides with the girls’ accounts of violence and abuse inflicted by their fathers or another man. However, a bright side of the matter is that we observed a respectful, warm, and secure attachment between mother and child (Simpson & Rholes, 2012). What makes us reflect that these mothers only need from society in transit and destination countries to lend them a hand. In addition, we can infer that the secure attachment that we observed explains the trust and openness of the children with this researcher.

Another aspect to mention is the balanced participation of all children from 8 to 12 years old, which allows us to see that risk factors are a widespread issue among the child population. In addition, it supports reports, such as that of the CNDH (2020), that children are in vulnerable conditions in their countries of origin and are being recruited by criminal groups from age six (Arista, 2021; Dreifuss, 2021; Leutert, 2020; Hernandez, 2019).

Essential to consider was that all children before the pandemic attended formal school and, in general terms, attended the school grade that corresponded to them. That speaks of families committed to children. Therefore, we infer that despite the challenges, children did not suffer neglect from the parents with whom they migrated.

However, all children preferred not to read or write during the section that included the scales. The previous could inform education programs that some organizations provide to children on the move. We suggest that education programs include recognition and validation of the natural environment and culture of the migrant child. Considering that attention comes from the child's interest, we suggest spontaneous, playful activities, and mindfulness techniques (Lindo, 2015; Chavarría, 2012).
5.2. COVID Pandemic Remarks

After obtaining demographic data, we asked participants about their understanding of the pandemic. All showed knowledge that it was an infectious and dangerous disease, which caused social distancing and an interruption in schooling. They also expressed knowledge of their self-care, although they did not have elements for it. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher provided each child with face masks and taught them their proper use.

According to children's accounts, the pandemic was not the apparent cause of their emigration. Still, it contributed significantly to breaking the fragility of their protective factors in their countries of origin. Even more, it became a potent reason to fuel xenophobic attitudes throughout their journey. As a nine-year-old Honduran boy told us the Guatemalan immigration authorities would not let them pass, arguing that they were surely infected with Covid. Similarly, his mother reported that accessing shelters was difficult since they assumed she and her child were infected.

5.3. Psychosocial Assessment Highlights

Trauma Assessment

We applied the CPSS to the 76 participants, of which 73.7% reported clinical symptoms of PTSD, and 40.8% were within the severe range. The children reported witnessing extreme adverse situations, directly or towards a loved one. Remarkably those concerning poverty, specifically hunger and thirst, as well as death threats, having witnessed homicide, and being victims of extortion.

The children's emotional responses involved reactions of intense fear and horror. Their experiences were generally found in the symptomatic groups of reexperiencing, primarily through nightmares, and hyperarousal showing sleep difficulties and hypervigilance.
In general, children adequately understood the questions, their answers were without oscillations, and they did not express that the questions were intrusive. These observations allow us to reflect that the CPSS is a tool suitable in the clinical setting and emotional assessment within psychosocial research.

**Resilience Assessment**

Although most children had traumatic experiences, paradoxically, the CYRM-32 results showed high resilience scores. The scale scores confirm Ungar's (2013) postulate that resilience is a dynamic process in a significantly adverse situation. Through the CYRM-32, we verified the presence of family interaction, interaction with others, and individual skills in promoting resilience.

On the one hand, the items related to adaptation, autonomy, spiritual beliefs, and family support obtained the highest scores. On the other hand, on the items about feeling treated equally and not having enough food, children reported the lowest scores. Still, scores were high in most children. However, there was a 10% decrease in resilience scores among the children interviewed at the Ciudad Juárez site, specifically among children from the Northern Triangle and South Mexico. We infer that the greater the distance and time on the migratory route, their reservoir of resilience was more depleted.

**5.4. Qualitative Interview Highlights**

Our interest was to capture the children's experiences as they lived them. The researcher avoided causal explanations, generalizations, or interpretations. Each word and sentence were grouped into thematic units, establishing meaning for them. The expression of the thematic unit became the subthemes trying to preserve what was expressed by the child (Fuster-Guillen, 2019;
Martínez-Salgado, 2012). At the core of this process were the lived experiences from the perspective and voice of the child. Children's voices were sufficiently clear, coherent, and strong.

Children generally showed cognitive and emotional capacities expected within the stage of middle childhood (Osher et al., 2020; Papalia & Martorell, 2017; Mah & Ford-Jones, 2012). In addition, most participants made practical use of language to communicate, showing a developmentally appropriate capacity for discernment and understanding of situations (Papalia & Martorell, 2017; Fiore, 2011). Based on this, their narratives and opinions were consistent to the situations they faced. Proof of this was one of the testimonies of a child from Guatemala who told us that 300 people were in a truck. When asked how he was sure there would have been that number of people, the boy replied that when they were taken to a warehouse to spend the night, he decided to count all the passengers.

It seems unlikely that 300 people could fit in a trailer, but the INFOBAE journalistic report (2022) confirms the boy’s saying. This fact supports the research of Dr. Jacqueline Woolley and her collaborators on children’s understanding of reality. The team found that children are often quite skeptical. They utilize and evaluate evidence using all kinds of tools that are reasonably scientific and analytical. Underlying lies a complex set of operations (Tullos & Woolley, 2009).

Likewise, the participants spoke about their feelings and significantly understood their emotions, which allowed them to assess their context. Additionally, the drawings made by some of the children validated that the contents of the narrative existed and were not made up of ideas or elements from their imagination (Sondegaard & Reventlow, 2019; Fuster-Guillen, 2019; Farokhi & Hashemi, 2011).

Within the axis of risk factors, we found that, as several authors who enrich our theoretical framework point out (Lusk et al., 2019; Thompson, 2019; Hernández, 2019; Kandel & Seghetti,
2019; Ungar, 2018; Jenson & Fraser, 2016; Chavez et al., 2015), poverty, violence, insecurity, and oppression were present in the children's accounts, corroborating the environment of adversity and trauma that they experienced both in their countries of origin and along the dangerous journey through Mexico. However, within the risk factors indicated, this research yields information identified by children with greater specificity and frequency, such as hunger, cold, threats, and fear.

On the other hand, we also corroborate the presence of protective factors such as family, faith, culture, and community (Lusk et al., 2019; Lucero, 2018; Jenson & Fraser, 2016; Masten et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2013; Ungar, 2012, 2008; Santos, 2012; Beristain, 2008; Bonnano, 2004; Seccombe, 2002). Among these factors, we identified the relational health within their migratory ecosystem and individual character traits such as integrity, courage, and perseverance. However, two experiences were consistently shown in most migratory trajectories; the feeling of malaise and the connection with another child.

Derived from their narratives and graphics, but also the presence of silence, children, expressed a generalized sense of uneasiness that something was terribly wrong and that they couldn't do anything to change it—a general air of malaise. It was a space constituted by what was not said, but constantly calling our attention (Fuster-Guillen, 2019). We realized that the essential dilemma of injustice always turned silent. It was in those moments that we understood the cause of their discomfort. We were in the presence of the truth.

The previous goes back to the reflections of Thomas Aquinas (as cited in Mora-Restrepo, 2011, p.7), who speaks of injustice as one of the greatest affronts to a person's dignity. Injustice takes away from someone what is theirs. Not because of the bad harvest, the hurricane, or the earthquake, but because of man's will. The outmost infamous corruption of the moral order.
On the other hand, children reported that meeting and connecting with another migrant child, primarily through play, which allowed them to breathe again. As a ten-year-old girl from Guatemala said, "when I play, I can breathe and feel the air on my face. I feel it fresh, close my eyes, and forget the sadness." Children’s peers, their camaraderie from the misfortune of migration, was a relevant protective factor. But, above all, it was the vehicle to recover child’s homeostasis, strengthen their resilience and continue on the path (Porges, 2022).

Migrant children cannot be understood solely through their personal reality, but rather through a reciprocity within their community that is associated with shared feelings of violence, injustice, and oppression that results in exposure to multiple stressors in their country of origin and throughout their migratory journey. When the magnitude of stress exceeds the adaptive capacity of the child, vulnerability is generated with its deleterious consequences for the child (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019; Van der Kolk, 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2014; Ungar, 2013; American Association of Psychiatry, 2013). Therefore, we cannot suggest the existence of resilience of migrant children without thoroughly knowing the context of migration and its risk factors.
Chapter 6. Conclusions.

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the key research findings concerning the research purpose and questions. It also mentions our actions related to the community engagement in global health research initiative since we conducted this research in another country and with a highly vulnerable population. Finally, it will review the professional and public policy implications, limitations of this investigation, and future research.

The investigation reveals that migrant children have survived significant psychosocial challenges in their countries of origin and xenophobic discourse centered on migration. According to the children's narratives, they experienced adversity and trauma before and during their migration. Paradoxically, they also showed high levels of resiliency and are protected by their family, faith, and relational health. Important to consider is the timely intervention of the societies and the states of the transit and host countries since children's resilient resources may not be sufficient to face the intensity of migration by land.

Given the results and analysis of this research, we can say that the relevance and interest of the ecological model of Jenson & Fraser (2016) and Ungar (2018, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2008) in understanding resilience is confirmed as a complete model aligned with recent health paradigms concerning child migration.

6.1. Overarching question. How do children make sense of their migratory experience?

For the children, the meaning of migration was found in accompanying their families and in being in solidarity with the decision of their mother or father to reach the United States. Even though they did not understand the coherence of leaving their home, family, and pets, they were encouraged by the feeling that they would travel accompanied by Diosito. They bravely set out on the journey and endured, as they called it, horrible suffering. Children's motivation was never to
go to the unknown United States. Their reason was their great love for their parents (Chacón, 2015). For many, their faith gradually faded with time, distance, and accumulation of traumatic situations. The cruelty of reality was more evident.

Although they expressed that they felt support and protection from their family, they were also aware of the significant vulnerability of their parents and, for most, their mother. The children recognized that it was better to return because their safety was in the community, and they could not envision a society that would embrace them any time soon.

6.2. What traumatic events have children experienced in their country of origin, during their migration, and at the US/Mexico border?

With the frequency Table 8 shown in chapter four of lived traumatic experiences and the children's expressions in the form of narratives or graphics, we answer the first specific research question. Poverty in its maximum expression, hunger, and thirst was the most prevalent push factor that children reported. Violence, in the country of origin, in transit, and at the US/Mexico border was also a predominant factor in children’s hardship. Underlying such factors were injustice and oppression.

6.3. To what extent do traumatic situations related to migration affect children?

The segment related to the evaluation of the CPSS answered the second specific research question, resulting in 73.7% of the participants reporting clinical symptoms corresponding to PTSD, and 40.8% were within the severe range. Undoubtedly, the situation in their country of origin and the overland migration in conditions of vulnerability were sources of traumatic events that adversely affected children's stressor system (Porges, 2022; Ungar & Perry, 2012).
6.4. What individual, social, and cultural resources do migrant children use as a source of resilience?

Through the CYRM, children's narratives, and graphic expressions, we identified that the prevalence of children's resourcefulness. Faith, culture, and relational health were decisive protective factors promoting resilience. Among these factors stand out the secure attachment with the mother, interactions with other children, and faith.

In sum, we interviewed 76 children between the ages eight to twelve. They were alarmingly underweight and spoke to us of having frequently suffered from hunger both in their home country and during the overland journey. They also reported repeated exposure to danger and signs of trauma were evident. However, children also showed a remarkable resilience that they developed mainly due to their perceived relational health.

6.5. Community Engagement in Global Health Research

The researcher conducted the conversation sensitively to avoid exceeding the child's window of tolerance, being aware of their vocal and gestural cues and narrative pauses. When the researcher identified that a topic was uncomfortable for the child, she shifted the conversation to their strengths, social capital, and comforting memories.

Invariably, the child was encouraged to describe an image associated with something positive (Jarero & Artigas, 2021) to self-regulate in future stressful situations. In this way, and by providing children, families, and shelters with food and sanitary items to prevent COVID, we join the initiative of community engagement in global health research to be empathic and supportive of the population in vulnerable conditions, which gives us an immeasurable opportunity to investigate for the benefit of society (Nelson, 2021).
6.6. Professional Implications

Our view of children on the move from the Northern Triangle and Mexico underscores the ongoing, cumulative, and adaptive nature of their trauma. The most basic individual mental and physical functions become unbalanced when the child is terrified. Thus, trauma treatment begins based on a body that can rest, a body that can sleep, a body that feels safe, and a body that can move.

Also, it is crucial to consider all the circumstances surrounding a traumatic event, such as having left family, friends, and pets behind, traveling for several hours crammed in a truck or being hungry, thirsty, or cold. All those factors are significantly impactful. Therefore, we cannot have a decontextualized vision focused on the traumatic event as if the other circumstances did not exist (Beristain, 2008).

Focusing on interventions to prevent or relieve stress and improve coping skills can have a significant favorable influence on the health of migrant children throughout their lives (Center on the Developing Child, 2021; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014; Van der Kolk, 2015; McLaughlin, 2014; Ungar & Perry, 2012).

Furthermore, the resiliency children have due to the social ecology in which they migrate can form the basis of clinical interventions that stress family connections. Further ground them in faith traditions and practices, reinforce their ties to migrant communities, and bolster their links to the cultural traditions that enhance their fortitude and perseverance. As Don Tucker stated (1992, p. 75), "For the human brain, the most important information for successful development is transmitted through the social rather than the physical environment."
Importantly as well are the admonition that psychosocial and clinical interventions, while addressing child adversity be grounded in trauma-informed practice that emphasizes the strengths perspective and acknowledges migrant children’s residence and assets.

This line of thought may inform not only mental health professionals but also public policy. In some cases, the mere recognition of the child's right to be protected and heard would ensure better understanding and practices.

6.7. Policy Implications

The unnecessary suffering of migrant children will be resolved when root causes in their country of origin do not compel them to leave. Humanitarian aid cannot be just a tool to buffer the route to the United States. It has to accompany the efforts of the people in the preventive fight against the causes of poverty, violence, and oppression and have a more significant commitment to the defense of human rights. The big question is whether a country submerged in high levels of impunity can reform itself or whether such a situation requires the intervention of international mechanisms.

The societies of the countries involved have many debts to settle with the migrant child population subjected to degrading treatment whose dimension is still insufficiently analyzed. There is a need to end authoritarian approaches to immigration enforcement. These policy-based strategies of imprisonment, deportation, and family separation must be replaced with humanitarian policies that stress resettlement, immigration reform, family reunification, and respect for the human rights of migrants.

A significant step would be for the United States to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child; it is the only nation on Earth yet to do so (Oppier, 2021). And the countries that have ratified it, including Mexico and the Northern Triangle nations, must guarantee its execution. Thus,
recognize migrant children as subjects of protection with full rights of expression and social status regardless of territory or country (United Nations, 2021).

Understanding the institutional capacities, international child rights frameworks, and current policies regarding children's rights in migration is an important starting point for building long-term regional cooperation.

Finally, we should note that the plight of children, the most vulnerable among migrants, is not only a scientific concern, but also a matter of the fundamental human rights of children.

6.8. Limitations

Given the exploratory nature of the study, it may not generalize well to other contexts due to the following limitations:

- Participants only came from the Northern Triangle and Mexico thus the global implications are limited.
- We collected data in only two locations. The Mexico-Guatemala border and Mexico-US border.
- The risk of COVID-19 infection generated some level of fear for the researcher affecting rapport.
- The context was not free of sounds or interruptions.
- The ambient temperature, together with the protective equipment against COVID-19, caused some discomfort.

Certain aspects of this investigation could be seen in other migratory environments. Therefore, this research could be limited in informing policy and practice with migrant children outside of the Mesoamerican context.
6.9. Further Research

While we have a better understanding of the resilience of migrant children, we have barely scratched the surface. Addressing the heterogeneity of trauma reactions is a necessary first step. Likewise, it is essential to delineate better ways to promote emotional balance and the development of resilience.

Similarly, how intervention pathways to promote resilience could interact in different populations of children in conditions of vulnerability. Children at this stage have an innate learning potential that could be used in developing their resilience, which could reduce the adverse effects of a stressful event (Echavarría, 2012). Another line of research to delve into childhood trauma and promote resilience is the reconciliation of the social fabric.
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Appendices

A. Demographic and Qualitative Questionnaire

B. Parental Consent Form

C. Child Assent
Appendix A. Demographic and Qualitative Questionnaire

Demographic & Qualitative Questionnaire

A. DEMOGRAPHY
A.01 Age
A.02 Gender
A.03 Nationality
A.04 Country
A.05 Department or Province or Region or State
A.06 Suburb or Neighborhood
A.07 What grade are you in?

B. TIME FRAMES AND MIGRATORY COMPANIONS
B.08 When did you leave home?
B.09 Who are you traveling with?
B.10 When did you arrived at the border?

C. PERCEPTION OF THE PANDEMIC
C.11 What do you know about COVID-19?
C.12 How has COVID-19 affected you?
C.13 How do you protect yourself from COVID-19?

D. VARIABLES
D.14 What has been the most difficult thing that happened to you in your country?
D.15 What did you do to overcome it?
D.16 What has been the most difficult thing that happened to you during the trip?
D.17 What do you do to keep going?
D.18 What worries you most?
D.19 Who do you go to when you need support?
D.20 What do you think is your greatest strength?
D.21 What is the story of your family or your culture that you like best?
D.22 If you could give advice to a boy or girl your age to keep going, what would you say?
Appendix B. Parental Permission Form

Parental Permission Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

**Protocol Title:** Trauma and Resilience among Migrant Children from Central-America and Mexico Enroute to the United States

**Principal Investigator:** Georgina Sanchez-Garcia

**UTEP:** Interdisciplinary Health Science Ph.D. Program

**Introduction**
You are being asked to allow your child to take part in the research project described below. You are encouraged to take your time in making your decision. It is important that you read the information that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

**Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this face-to-face study is to explore what individual, social, and cultural resources do migrant children from Central-America and Mexico use to navigate migration. Approximately 7 children will be enrolling in this study. Your child is being asked to be in the study because he or she is between 8 and 12 years old; he/she is native from Central-America or Mexico, and is migrating to the United States with at least one parent or legal guardian.

**What is involved in the study?**

If you allow your child to participate in this study, the researcher will ask your child some questions about his or her culture, family and community support, the migration experience, and the strengths of the child that will help him or her move forward.

The answers of the child will be written down in researcher’s notes. Your child’s participation will last approximately 50 minutes for only one time, and the interview will be recorded. If you have any question or would like to read the information obtained, please do not hesitate to ask the interviewer.

Your child participation in the study is voluntary and will not affect the stay, food, or any benefit you are receiving from the shelter if you or your child decide not to participate. Similarly, if the child wants to end the interview before than planned.

**What are the risks and discomforts of the study?**

One potential risk associated with your child participation in this study is emotional discomfort may pose by questions related to their migration experiences. This may cause the child remember a difficult situation and may feel uncomfortable. However, the researcher is a trained mental health professional and will make sure that your child is comfortable and safe at all times during the interview. The investigator is trained to emotionally support your child in case he or she expresses an emotional reaction, for which the researcher would use techniques suitable for children. Your child’s participation will be suspended if he or she does not wish to continue.

It is important to let you know that if the child reveals information about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous behavior for others that may come across during the interview, the researcher will report it to the proper authorities.

Regarding the COVID-19 exposure, the researchers will comply with the safety requirements established by the Mexican Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization. These guidelines are:
Before the interview begins, those involved will have their temperature taken with a digital thermometer that will be placed on their forehead to identify that they do not have a temperature greater than 38 ° degrees Celsius (100° F).

The interview will be conducted in a ventilated space with open windows and fans if the weather is too warm. No more than three people will be in the room.

The interviewer and child will be at least one meter (six feet) away from each other. The interviewer will wear an N-95 face mask. Your child will receive a cotton fabric face mask suitable for children and be shown the proper way to put it on.

The interviewer will have enough children face masks to replace it in case the child removes it (for example, if the child goes to the bathroom).

The interviewer will have antibacterial gel on site at all times.

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**Are there benefits to taking part in this study?**

The questions are designed so that the child may be able to identify some of his or her skills and strengths. Also, other children in similar contexts will benefit from learning about the strategies children use to navigate migration. Equally important, your child’s participation will show that children have a lot to tell us through their perspective and voice. In addition, the children will learn or reaffirm about how to protect themselves from COVID-19 such as staying more than 6 feet away, using the face mask and antibacterial gel.

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**Who is paying for this study?**

The Research Program on Migration and Health (PIMSA for its Spanish acronym) is a transnational network of academic researchers and institutions throughout the United States and Mexico.

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**What are my costs?**

There are no direct costs to you or your child.

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**Will my child be paid to participate in this study?**

Yes, your child will be compensated for their participation with $30.- dollars in appreciation for his or her time. The researcher will also give to your child a bag containing 1 antibacterial gel, 1 soap, another face mask (total 2) and some candies.

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**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call to Georgina Sanchez at +(915) 304-8635 or gsanchezga@miners.utep.edu (Georgina speaks Spanish).

If you have questions or concerns about your child’s participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at +(915-747-7693) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

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**What about confidentiality?**

Your child’s part in this study is confidential. The following procedures will be followed to keep their personal information confidential:

- You and your child will sign the consent and assent forms with an "X" indicating that your names will not be asked.
- A case number will be assigned to your interviews and responses. No information will be collected that can link you to a specific village or neighborhood.
• Questionnaires, digital recordings, transcripts, and notes will be treated confidentially and kept in the study principal investigator’s cabinet.
• All material recorded and written on paper will be destroyed as soon as it has been encrypted (the content of the information will be hidden, making it undetectable by other people. Only researchers will have access to that information through a password).
• Access to the material will be restricted to the principal investigator.

The results of this research study may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your child’s name will not be disclosed in those presentations. Organizations that may inspect and/or copy research records for quality assurance and data analysis include, but are not necessarily limited to:
- The sponsor or agent for the sponsor
- Office of Human Research Protections
- UTEP Institutional Review Board

Because of the need to release information to these parties, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. All records will be transcribed and be encrypted which means that the information will have a code only available to the researcher.

**Mandatory reporting**

If information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

**Authorization Statement**

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). You will be given a copy of this Parental Permission form to keep. I understand my child’s participation is voluntary. He/she does not have to participate in this study if they do not want to. If he/she decides not to participate, they will not be enrolled even if you have agreed that he/she may. I understand I have the right to change my mind and remove my child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

I would like for my child to be in this study.

______________________________________________
Child’s Name (write an X)

______________________________________________
Parent/Guardian’s Name (write an X)

__________________________ Date
Parent/Guardian’s Signature

__________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date
Appendix C – Child Assent Form

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Minor Assent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Trauma and Resilience among Migrant Children from Central-America and Mexico Enroute to the United States
Principal Investigator: Georgina Sanchez-Garcia
UTEP: Interdisciplinary Health Science Ph.D. Program

This study seeks to understand how children navigate or cope when they migrate from their home to the United States. The study will include approximately 7 boys and girls who are in the State of Chiapas and Chihuahua, Mexico.

You are being asked to decide if you want to participate in this study because you are between 8 and 12 years old, you are originally from Central-America or Mexico, and you are heading to the United States.

Your parent/guardian knows about this study, but you can decide if you want to be in it or not.

I know that to be in this study I will be asked to:
- About how I felt when some difficult situations happened to me. Also, how I thought and what I did to resolve that situation or obstacle.
- About my strength capabilities.
- About the relationship with my friends, family and community.
- The interviewer will use a voice recorder when asking questions
- The researcher will write notes in his or her notebook.
- All material recorded and written on paper will be destroyed as soon as it has been encrypted (it means that the content of the information will be hidden, which will be undetectable for other people. Only interviewers will have access to that information with a password).
- The study will last approximately 50 minutes.

Can anything bad happen to me?
To take care of myself from the COVID-19 during the interview, the researcher and I will take the following steps:
- Before starting the interview, someone will take the temperature of our forehead to make sure that none of us has fever.
- We will be more than two meters apart (that's about the size of my arms when I have them extended).
- The interviewer will wear her face mask all the time and will give me a face mask suitable for my size. The researcher will also show me how to put it on properly. Still, if someone needs to sneeze or cough, we will turn our faces to another direction and cover ourselves with our forearms.
- If I need to change the face mask (for example, if I go to the bathroom), the researcher will give me a new one.
- The interviewer will have antibacterial gel handy.

Regarding the questions I am going to be asked, maybe some of those questions will remind me of something that could make me feel some how sad.

Can anything good happen to me?
- I am going to learn to take better care of myself from COVID-19
- I could identify what are my skills and strengths.
- I could identify who I can count on if I need help or just play around and be with someone.

What if I have questions about this study?
- I know that I can ask questions about this study at any time. I can call Georgina Sanchez if I have any questions later. This is the telephone number, +(915) 304-8635 or e-mail gsanchezga@miners.utep.edu (Georgina speaks Spanish).
What if I don’t want to do this or I change my mind later?

- I know that I can stop being in the study at any time without anyone being mad at me. I will not get in trouble if I stop being in the study.
- I know that only the people who work on this research study will know my name or pseudonym.

I want to be in the study at this time. A copy of this paper will be given to you.

Child’s Pseudonym: ________________________________  Date: ________________
Child’s Signature: ________________________________  Date: ________________
Witness or Mediator: ________________________________  Date: ________________

I have explained the research at a level that is understandable by the child and believe that the child understands what is expected during this study.
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent: ________________________________  Date: ________________
Vita

Georgina Sanchez-Garcia was born in Mexico City and obtained her degree in Clinical Psychology from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. In 2012 she collaborated in the Special Victims Unit of the State Prosecutor Office in Cancun, Mexico during her professional internship. The experience determined her path toward working with children under vulnerable conditions. In 2014, she collaborated in the Office of the Attorney General of Mexico in investigations of exploited children.

Georgina also obtained an M.Sc. in mental health counseling from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and conducted her mental health internship at Family Services of El Paso. In the fall of 2019, Georgina entered the Ph.D. of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences at UTEP, and along with her studies, she worked as a teacher assistant and research assistant.

Recently, Georgina has been a speaker at the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine in UT Tyler; at the 3rd Annual Conference on Global Health at Texas Tech University; at the VI Regional Congress of Social Work and Migration at Loyola University in Chicago, and the Hope Border Institute at Texas. Her most recent publication is Sanchez, G., Lusk, M. & Chavez, P. (in press). Trauma and Resilience among Migrant Children from Mexico and the Northern Triangle en Route to the United States. Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare. Georgina can be contacted at ginauniversidad@gmail.com.