Social network deficits and resource drain among first-generation Hispanic migrants in the Netherlands

Migrants' social networks are usually studied as sources of support, such as information, jobs, and emotional help. Less is known about what those same relationships cost. A co-ethnic network member who offers a room may expect rent above the market price, unpaid childcare, or a share of the first paychecks. Family abroad may expect money every month. Many ties are supportive and costly at the same time, which the literature describes as ambivalent ties, and research on negative social capital has shown that close-knit networks can make heavy claims on their members. This project introduces the concept of social network deficits, which refers to the liabilities and constraints generated through an ego's network that result in negative consequences for migrants.

My PhD project asks how two features of a migrant's network can lead to these social network deficits. The first is its network composition, related to the characteristics of the people in the network and what they are able to offer to an ego. The second is power asymmetry, the extent to which an ego depends on specific alters.

The project focuses on one consequence of these deficits, resource drain: demands from network members that reduce the resources available for the ego's own economic security. Financial drain concerns money, for instance remittances or supporting kin. Non-financial drain concerns time and energy, such as care obligations. The project then studies how resource drain can lead to economic vulnerability, understood as a limited capacity to cope with shocks such as job loss or unexpected costs.

Design

This is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with first-generation migrants from Spain and Latin America living in the Netherlands. Migration from Spain grew after the 2008 crisis and consists largely of young, highly educated people. Latin American migrants are a more mixed group, and many work in jobs below their qualifications. Because the two groups differ in their resources and context of arrival, the comparison shows how the processes that cause deficits vary.

Contribution

Academically, the project contributes to research on negative social capital in migration studies. It introduces the concept of social network deficits, and offers qualitative evidence on how costly ties arise among Hispanic first generation migrants in the Netherlands. Societally, informal ties and everyday dynamics within migrant groups are often invisible to policy. Understanding when they constrain migrants can inform where formal support matters most.