

Social Well-Being Among Colombian and Peruvian Immigrants in Northern Chile

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Abstract In recent years, northern Chile has received a large number of immigrants attracted mainly by mining and related services. The last population census revealed that 70.5 % of foreigners in Chile came from South America, and were mainly Peruvians (30.5 %), Argentines (16.8 %), and Colombians (8.1 %). The aim of this cross-sectional study is to describe the social well-being levels reported by Colombian and Peruvian immigrants in northern Chile, as well as their connection to socio-demographic and relational factors. The Spanish version of the Scale of Social Well-being (Keyes in *Soc Psychol Q* 61:121–140, 1998) was administered to 431 men and women over 18 years old, with a minimum residence of 6 months in the city of Antofagasta. The highest-rated aspect was Social Contribution, and the lowest-rated aspect was Social Acceptance. The relational variables that show statistically significant differences in both populations relate to who the subject lives with, the degree of contact that the subject has with people from Chile, and the subject's relationship status. There are no differences that indicate a higher level of social well-being in one population more than the other; however, it appears that the Peruvian population has a greater perception of Social Coherence, while Colombians show a greater perception of Social Contribution.

Keywords Immigration · Social well-being · Colombians · Peruvians · Northern Chile · Cross-sectional study

Introduction

Migration is defined as the process by which people move from one society to another with the intention of settling there [2]. In recent decades, South American populations have moved within the context of international migration processes, motivated by labour as well as social, political, and economic factors, among others [3–6].

The flow of migrants to Chile has grown exponentially in recent years: as of 2009, the Alien Status and Immigration Department [7] estimated that in Chile, foreigners account for 2.08 % of the total population (not including the percentage of migrants that are illegal aliens). Of the total percentage of migrants in this country, 73 % are South American immigrants [5] who are mainly Peruvians (30.5 %), Argentines (16.8 %), and Colombians (8.1 %) [8]. According to Cano et al. [9], 85 % of migrants fell under the category of economic migrants reported by the National Socio-Economic Characterization Survey [8]. From 2006 to 2012, temporary residence permits were granted, with a 106 % increase.

Colombia is one of the countries from which migration to Chile has increased the most. In 2012, 17,573 temporary residence permits were granted to migrants from Colombia, a 600 % increase in comparison to 2006. Colombian citizens tend to settle more in the Metropolitan Region of Chile (64.81 % of cases) and in the region of Antofagasta (6 %). In the latter region, this group has achieved notable visibility due to the relatively lower population density of the area and the absence of an indigenous

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population of African descent in this particular geographical area. On the other hand, there was a 28 % increase in the granting of temporary residence permits to immigrants from Peru, in comparison to the 28,635 permits granted in 2006 [7].

Migrants not only experience economic, social, and political difficulties in their country of origin, but also face difficulties in the host country as they are not arriving in empty territories or new nations in the process of consolidation, but are rather joining fully structured societies. This involves additional difficulties in the process of social, economic, and cultural integration, as well as citizen participation and the consequent exercise of their rights in the society of residence [4, 5, 10]. Additionally, there is a negative perception held by nationals regarding the use of social services such as health, housing, immigrants' education in the host country [3], residential segregation in urban areas of the country [11], segregation and residential conditions [12], and social exclusion in the Chilean labour market [13]. These last three elements generate the presence of rejection, discrimination, and prejudice [4, 14–16] which directly impact migrants' quality of life and well-being.

Córdoba [17] defines well-being as the set of things and conditions necessary for living well. These are in turn associated with people's perception of well-being or feelings of happiness in life, the ability to meet the demands involved in daily activities, and possessing a sense of personal purpose [18]. Keyes [1] proposed the concept of social well-being, defined as 'the appraisal of one's circumstance and functioning in society' [1; p. 122; 19]. To achieve the objective measurement of social well-being, Keyes developed an instrument called the Scale of Social Well-being which measures each of the five proposed theoretical dimensions: *Social Integration*, *Social Acceptance*, *Social Contribution*, *Social Actualisation*, and *Social Coherence*. This study aims to describe the levels of social well-being in the Peruvian and Colombian adult immigrant populations in northern Chile, in the city of Antofagasta. This particular area has in recent years received a large number of immigrants who are attracted mainly by the mining and related services.

These two groups were selected because they represent the oldest group of migrants in Chile (Peruvians) and the newest group that has come to this country (Colombians). Higher levels of social well-being are expected in Peruvian immigrants in comparison to Colombian immigrants, given the recent history of Colombian immigration. In addition, because the Peruvian migrants have a long-standing residence in Chile, the authors assume that they are more adapted to the Chilean context than are Colombians.

Methods

Respondents

This study was conducted with the voluntary participation of 431 men and women of Peruvian and Colombian nationalities. The inclusion criteria were: be of legal age, to have been born abroad (Peru and Colombia), and to have been living for more than 6 months in the city of Antofagasta. There were no exclusion criteria. Respondents were contacted through different organisations in the city such as the Department for Non-Citizens, the Investigative Police (PDI), the Catholic University of the North, clinics, schools, local stores, and corporations working with immigrants, among others.

Instrument

The Scale of Social Well-being was applied as designed by Keyes [1] and adapted by Blanco and Díaz [20]. This instrument has 17 items with responses in a Likert-type format (1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree), where the highest score obtained represents the highest degree of well-being perceived in each of the five dimensions that make up the scales. First, *Social Acceptance* refers to being and sensing a part in a group or community, with the requirement that this belonging to a group meets at least two conditions: firstly, trust, acceptance, and positive attitudes towards others (attributions of honesty, goodness, kindness, ability), and secondly, acceptance of the positive and negative aspects of our own lives. *Social Contribution* refers to a feeling of usefulness, or feeling that one is a vital member of society and that one has something useful to offer to the world which is appreciated. *Social Actualisation* refers to the trust placed in society and believing that society controls its destiny, knows where it is headed, and intentionally draws upon its wishes to reach towards the future. *Social Integration* means the assessment of the quality of the relationships that we maintain with the society and community. According to *Social Integration*, the greater the ability to engage in healthy and positive relationships within the ethnic group, the greater the well-being experienced by the individual. *Social Adherence* is conceived as the ability to understand the dynamics of society and the perception of the quality, organisation and functioning of the social world, and includes the concern for knowing what is happening in the world.

Procedure

This research was approved by the ethics committees of the Catholic University of the North and the National

Commission for Scientific and Technological Research—CONICYT. Prior to the final application of this instrument, it was tested on five individuals of each nationality to corroborate its comprehensibility, which led to the subsequent and relevant changes. After the final modifications were completed, the process of application of the instrument took place between the months of June and August of 2014.

This study used convenience sampling. Initially, the authors used the snowball sampling technique for data collection; however, this tool was not enough to obtain the required sample size. Therefore, in a second phase, the members of the research team went to different public places with an influx of immigrants of both nationalities, where participation was requested from those who met the inclusion criteria for this study. Each person voluntarily agreed to participate in this research and signed their informed consent which explained the anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed within the application of the instrument. The data was entered in an SPSS 21.0 statistics base. Subsequently, the descriptive analysis of the variables was carried out, as well as the mean difference test (t test or ANOVA, as appropriate).

Results

Respondents

The respondents included 431 participants between the ages of 18 and 65, most of whom had a job and a residence permit or were nationalised. With regard to race, over 40 % of the Peruvian and 20.3 % of the Colombian populations identified themselves as mestizo. On the other hand, over 30 % of the Colombian population identified themselves as white/Caucasian in comparison with 10.1 % of Peruvian. In addition, 24.1 % of Peruvians versus 2.6 % of Colombians identified as indigenous. In the characterisation of the social relationships of the total sample, over 60 % of respondents indicated that they were in a relationship (60.8 % of Peruvians and 65.5 % of Colombians). Additionally, 79 % of the individuals of both nationalities live with other people, whether with a partner, friends, or family. The socio-demographic characteristics of both populations are shown in Table 1.

With regards to the *Degree of Contact* (declared by both study populations) with people in the country of arrival, 32 % indicated that they maintained contact with Chilean people since they had friends in this group, while 12.3 % indicated having close relatives in this group (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the results in relation to *Social Well-being*. In the total sample, as well as in each of the nationalities, the lowest scores were obtained in the

dimension of *Social Acceptance*, while the highest scores were obtained in *Social Contribution*.

In the comparison of the means obtained from respondents from both countries, there are statistically significant differences in the dimensions of *Social Coherence* ($t = -2.523$ (427); $p = 0.012$), where the mean for the Peruvian respondents is greater than the mean for the Colombians, and in *Social Contribution* ($t = 3.656$ (428); $p = 0.000$), where the mean for the Colombian population is greater than the mean for the Peruvian population. With regards to the difference between each dimension and the gender variable for the total sample, there is a statistically significant difference in *Social Actualisation* ($t = 2.538$ (427); $p = 0.012$), where the mean for men is greater than the mean for women.

On the other hand, the analysis of the means for the question *Do you have a partner?* did not present differences in the total sample. However, when the analysis is stratified by nationality, a difference does appear in the Peruvian population in the dimension of *Social Integration* ($t = 2.421$ (195); $p = 0.016$), where a greater integration is perceived in those who have a partner in comparison to those who do not. With regards to the variable linked to *Who do you live with?*, there was a statistically significant difference in the dimension of *Social Integration* ($t = 2.415$ (4); $p = 0.05$) in the Colombian population.

Finally, there were statistically significant differences in the dimensions of *Social Contribution* ($t = 4.830$ (4); $p = 0.01$) and *Social Integration* ($t = 2.515$ (4); $p = 0.041$) with regards to the *Degree of contact you have with Chilean people*. After conducting the post hoc test, it was determined that the statistically significant differences are evident in the subcategories for ‘See them often for reasons of neighbourliness, work, or studies but do not speak to them unless they address you’, and ‘Have friends in that group’, where those who have Chilean friends possess a greater perception of contribution. In the case of ‘See them often for reasons of neighbourliness, work, or studies and often interact with them’ and ‘You have relatives in that group’, immigrants who frequently interact with Chileans have a greater perception of contribution. Finally, those who have friends in the host country have a greater perception of contribution in comparison to those who have relatives in the host country. When this phenomenon was analysed by nationality, it was found that this trend is repeated in the Colombians, who present a greater perception of Social Contribution ($t = 3.521$ (4); $p = 0.008$). The Peruvian population presented a statistically significant difference in the dimension of *Social Actualisation* ($t = 2.502$ (4); $p = 0.044$). After conducting the post hoc test to determine the specification for the statistically significant difference, we found that in the subcategories for ‘Have friends in that group’ and ‘Have

Table 1 Socio-demographic Information for Peruvians and Colombians

	N = 431	
	Peruvians (N = 199) Mean (standard deviation) or %	Colombians (N = 232) Mean (standard deviation) or %
Men	48.2	47.8
Women	51.8	52.2
Age	34.1 (9.8)	32.4 (9.1)
Is in a relationship	60.8	65.5
Who they live with		
Alone	19.6	18.1
With a partner	36.2	39.0
With friends	9.5	13.9
With family	31.7	28.6
Other	3.0	0.4
Educational level		
≤12 years	67.7	69.7
≥12 years	32.3	30.3
Occupation		
Employed	75.1	77.3
Unemployed	24.9	22.7
Legal situation in Chile		
With residence permit	67.3	79.3
Without a residence permit	19.1	17.7
Nationalised	13.1	3.0
Not answered	0.5	–
Years of residence in Chile		
6 months to 3 years	56.8	80.9
4 years or more	42.0	18.9
Not answered	1.2	0.2
Race		
White/Caucasian	10.1	31.0
Multi	14.1	22.0
Black	4.0	20.7
Mestizo	41.7	20.3
Indigenous	24.1	2.6
Not answered	6.0	3.4

Table 2 Degree of contact with Chilean people as declared by the Peruvians and Colombians

Degree of contact with Chilean people	N = 431		
	Peruvians (%)	Colombians (%)	Total (%)
No contact. Only see them on the streets or in public places but never speak with them	7.0	5.2	6.0
Often see them in the neighbourhood, at work, or at school. Do not speak with them unless addressed by them	20.1	22.2	21.1
Often see them in the neighbourhood, at work, or at school, and interact frequently with them	23.1	28.9	26.2
Have Chilean friends	28.1	35.3	32.0
Have Chilean relatives	19.1	6.5	12.3

Table 3 Scales of social well-being according to nationality and gender for the total sample

Social well-being	N = 431				
	Peruvians [mean (SD)]	Colombians [mean (SD)]	Men [mean (SD)]	Women [mean (SD)]	Total [mean (SD)]
Social contribution	3.9 (.76)	4.2 (.69)**	4.0 (.78)	4.0 (.68)	4.0 (.73)
Social actualisation	3.2 (.85)	3.1 (.82)	3.2 (.82)***	3.0 (.83)	3.1 (.83)
Social coherence	3.3 (.66)*	3.1 (.71)	3.2 (.83)	3.2 (.62)	3.2 (.69)
Social acceptance	3.0 (.83)	3.0 (.83)	3.0 (.83)	2.9 (.83)	3.0 (.83)
Social integration	3.4 (.69)	3.6 (.80)	3.6 (.78)	3.4 (.72)	3.5 (.75)

* Mean greater than the Colombians ($p = 0.012$); ** mean greater than the Peruvians ($p = 0.000$); *** mean greater than the women ($p = 0.012$)

relatives in that group', those who have Chilean friends present a greater perception of contribution.

Discussion

This study is an approach to gain an understanding of the perception of social well-being in Colombian and Peruvian immigrants in the city of Antofagasta in northern Chile. We have found that women present a lower level of well-being in the *Social Actualisation* dimension in comparison to the men. This may be explained by a construction of the female subject, based on asymmetric power relations in which the men are not those who occupy a position of subordination, but rather the women in relation to the male immigrants [21, 22]. In many cases, there is a greater job insecurity among women that restricts the progress of their work duties, which are usually linked to domestic work, subcontracted and integrated particularly in accomplishing specific tasks [23–25], resulting in low wages, abuse by employers, scarce social protection, and high levels of informality. In these experiences, there are cases of subordination and hierarchies of gender, class, education, and ethnicity, in addition to work exploitation and discrimination towards the figure of the immigrant woman [25]. This last point is related to a low socio-economic level among many of these women which affects their personal life, making it perhaps more difficult for them to achieve the necessary changes in the adaptation process [26]. According to Silva and Lufin [25], this hinders the adaptation of immigrant women and strengthens the mistrust in the host society.

In relation to the Peruvian population, the perception of *Social Coherence* is based on the number of years immigrants have lived in the host country, a number that increased in the second half of the 1990s. This allows Peruvian immigrants to have better control of public spaces and a greater awareness of their rights, local regulations,

and the structure and composition of society and its flaws. Peruvian immigrants at times use such flaws in their favour, such as when they access health benefits or when the law does not apply to protect those who work in abusive conditions with unfair wages or are not given deductions for social security [27].

Moreover, contact with Chilean people generates a perception of *Social Actualisation*. Hernandez [28] argues that Peruvians who spend more years in Chile do not return to their country of origin since they have their own jobs and at the same time employ other Peruvians, thus perceiving a social promotion and consolidation on the quality of life. The success of Peruvian cuisine in Chile and the growing trade in this field have contributed to an increase in the perception of a better world. Such perception that 'the world can be better for all' may have been strengthened by the change in government, according to the opinion of some of the Peruvian participants. Specifically, during President Bachelet's first term (2006–2010), the issue of migration was included in the plans of the government, which in 2007 adopted the first action related to the regularisation of persons who were undocumented in the country [28]. The amnesty contributed to the improvement of the conditions for residence, employment protection, and social security, thus generating the perception that people grow and develop in the host society.

On the other hand, those who are in a relationship evidence a greater perception of *Social Integration*, thus enhancing the reason for belonging and interacting with the need to maintain or reinforce feelings of closeness to and acceptance by others [29, 30]. Being in a relationship translates into a higher level of well-being or happiness, as this is associated with emotional and instrumental support. Such support leads to a positive assessment of the quality of the relationships that are formed in society [31].

In relation to the Colombian population, the perception of *Social Contribution* makes us think that as a contemporary migration, where the majority of its members are

occupationally active, Colombian immigrants perceive themselves as contributing to society in terms of entrepreneurship and labour as they possess the ability to potentially take on jobs that Chileans have left vacant. Silva and Lufin [25] argue that this type of migration can be seen in itself as a strategy for the economic survival of their families, as those who migrate do so with the hope of joining the labour market in the host country and quickly generate income, which allows them to send money home or generate resources that will lead to family reunification. Several studies indicate that a minority may in time hold a status similar to the one held in their country of origin, as well as a kind of economic stability [31]. From this perspective, the perception of contribution could remain or be strengthened with immigrants' degree of contact with people in their host country through their working environments and neighbourhoods.

Living with a partner, friends, and/or relatives generates the perception of *Social Integration* in the Colombian population. Here is where the results are more striking, as the feeling of integration as a dimension of *Social Well-being* is provided by the cohabitation with those of a shared nationality, rather than by the degree of interaction with people from the host country. According to Torres and Garcés [27], the episodes of discrimination and exclusion experienced by immigrant populations have created dynamics of integration within the communities: as immigrants rely upon family support networks or compatriot friends when faced with the need to solve problems, they thereby ultimately build personal ties with Chileans who help solve these problems. Silva and Lufin [25] emphasise this idea, arguing for the existence of events that hinder the adaptation and integration of immigrants into the local society, thus making immigrants prioritise cohesion among themselves above their integration with the national population. A study conducted by Yáñez and Cárdenas [32] reached the conclusion that Colombians prefer to keep their traditions and links with people from their country who reside in Chile, partnering to work, live, and have fun with their compatriots.

On the other hand, the low valuation of the dimension of *Social Acceptance* in the analysis of independent and socio-demographic variables would mean that immigrants do not feel that they belong to a social group due to manifestations of exclusion, which would result in a negative valuation of the social group they belong to as well as of themselves. This leads us to consider the construction of the image of the immigrant created by the host society, given either by a political discourse, by the media, or by the transmission between generations. Solé et al. [33] argue that the host population develops a logic of exclusion towards immigrants based on three main dimensions: Citizen Safety, Cultural Identity and Competition for

Economic Resources. In this way, a rejection of immigrants is generated based on the logic of exclusion as synonymous with marginalisation and social segregation, thus promoting the development of prejudice and stereotypes which impair the coexistence between immigrants and locals. International studies have shown that this marginalization could affect the quality of life of migrants, noting a negative relationship between discrimination and life' satisfaction [34].

One of the limitations of the study is the cross-sectional design which does not allow us to assume causality between the variables studied. Another limitation of this study includes the difficulty in accessing the sample of immigrants. However, this study provides us a greater understanding of the phenomenon of migration in northern Chile, and lays the foundation for future research and interventions in the area.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee, and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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