PROGRESA/Oportunidades Mexico’s Conditional Cash Transfer Program: Promises, Predictions and Realities

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

As the world seeks to find a solution to the poverty that plagues so many, increasing attention has been given to poverty alleviation programs that will produce long-term effects. One program that has been adopted by several countries in Latin America is the conditional cash transfer program (CCT). CCTs were developed and implemented to invest in the human capital of the poor. By providing cash to families based upon their completion of specific health, education and nutritional requirements, CCTs respond to the different aspects of poverty and focus not only on the short-term discomforts of being poor, but also to the long-term consequences in an attempt to stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Proponents of CCTs argue this strategy to poverty alleviation is one of the best in the world.

Mexico’s CCT, PROGRESA/Oportunidades, is one of the largest and longest running CCTs in the world. Due to the relative newness of CCTs, little is known of the long-term effects of the program. Initial research on the short-term impacts has proved promising, but no data is available in English regarding the long-term impacts on the adults who were program participants in their youth. More importantly, no qualitative data has been released in English about the impacts (both long and short-term) of PROGRESA/Oportunidades in the lives of Mexico’s poorest citizens. This research seeks
to address this issue by examining documented evidence of the impacts of

*PROGRESA/Oportunidades* and supplementing it with anecdotal evidence collected in central Mexico. By conducting interviews with program participants and two professionals who work with the poor in Mexico, this analysis provides qualitative insights in addition to quantitative data. The final conclusion however, remains unclear. Poverty’s multidimensionality may prove to be too vast to be conquered by one program alone.
This thesis is dedicated to my mother Betty Harrington, whose love, support and encouragement never waned. You made me the person I am today.
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“Being confident of this, that he who begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 1:6
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

We live in a world that has experienced unprecedented progress in the last 6 decades. Man has travelled to the moon, discovered how to generate electricity from nuclear energy and can instantly communicate with people all over the world with the click of a button. Yet for all this progress, we also live in a world that has great poverty juxtaposed with incalculable wealth, immense hunger alongside unspeakable greed, vast ignorance adjacent to untold knowledge, and utter powerlessness only an arm’s length away from those who rule the world. How do such grave discrepancies exist in a world blessed with so much? How can so many go without when there is more than enough for everyone?

As attention for those less fortunate continues to grow and global entities such as the United Nations and the World Bank set reducing poverty as one of their principle missions, focus has shifted from simple entitlement programs that yield short-term results to income generating sustainable programs that will not only impact the poor immediately, but also garner long-term results that hope to affect families for generations to come. Many countries, both developed and developing, have adopted a variety of different programs into their policies as a means to combat poverty and lessen the gap
between the rich and the poor. One such program is the conditional cash transfer program.

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) were developed and implemented to invest in the human capital of the poor. By providing cash to families based upon their completion of specific health, education and nutritional requirements, CCTs respond to the different aspects of poverty. They focus not only on the immediate discomforts of being poor, but also on the future consequences, in an attempt to stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty (IGT). CCTs provide instant relief to the poor by increasing consumption while offering long-term investments in its participants. With increasing attention given to poverty alleviation through sustainable methods conditional cash transfer programs have been hailed by many as one of the best poverty alleviation programs in the world.

Mexico’s conditional cash transfer program, PROGRESA/Oportunidades, is the second largest CCT in the world. It began in 1997 with a modest 300,000 families in 320 rural villages. In 2011 the program serves 6.5 million families or 34 million individuals, a full third of the Mexican population and includes families living in both rural and urban localities. PROGRESA/Oportunidades has been evaluated nationally as well as internationally and is upheld by many as the model conditional cash transfer program for nations worldwide. As the global community seeks a solution to poverty, Mexico’s CCT leads the way as it attempts to put an end to the vicious cycle of poverty that is so painfully present throughout the country. This thesis examines the impacts of PROGRESA/Oportunidades in Mexico and its effectiveness in disrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty.
Poverty

Extreme poverty is one of the most dehumanizing conditions faced by humankind today. The United Nations estimated that there were 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty, earning less than US $1.25 per day, in 2005. Although the proportion of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition has fallen since the 1990s, as a result in increased food aid programs, the number of people who lack access to food has increased. Strong growth during the first half of the new millennium reduced the number of people in developing regions living in extreme poverty, however, the global economic and financial crisis that began in 2008 reduced trade and investment consequently slowing progress and growth in developing countries. USAID reports that during the one year period from March 2007 through March 2008 food prices rose an average of 43% around the world, with staples such as wheat increasing an astounding 146% (USAID.org1). The rising costs of food compounded with an already volatile situation for the world’s poor, who sometimes spend more than half of their income on food, has created greater instability in many nations prompting several governments to seek better solutions for their citizens.

There is a general consensus that all poor individuals are worthy of some assistance. Hanlon et al (2010: 15) state that “helping poor people is one of the fundamental duties prescribed in all of the world’s major religions.” Some would argue there is a more desperate need to help those who suffer from chronic poverty: poverty that affects several facets of one’s existence, lasts an entire lifetime and spans several

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1 http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/foodcrisis - accessed on 4/1/11
generations. These individuals suffer from much more than a simple lack of income or resources and require unique approaches that will address the cycle of poverty. It is necessary to understand the factors contributing to how places of poverty are not only formed, but also maintained in a world that possesses more than adequate resources.

Poverty is a global phenomenon that has been placed at the forefront of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. One of the major focuses of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to improve the lives of those suffering from chronic poverty. Whereas the transient poor are those who may slip in and out of poverty over the course of their lifetime, the chronically poor remain in a constant state of deprivation throughout their entire lives and consistently lack basic needs. Those who are chronically poor lack much more than assets and resources. Chronic poverty encompasses a multidimensional deprivation that leads to devastating effects in all areas of a person’s life. It is hunger, under-nutrition, illiteracy, unsafe drinking water, lack of access to basic health services, social discrimination, physical insecurity and political exclusion (The Chronic Poverty Report 2009). Chronic poverty is varied and complex. It can be equated with the inability to better one’s life or the lives of one’s children. Many of the poor residing in the rural areas of Mexico are chronically poor.

Historically, the poor have been looked at as a single homogenous group whose main difficulties lie with their lack of income (Hulme and Shepherd 2003). However, poverty is multidimensional and its heterogeneity should not be over-shadowed by a “one policy fits all” strategy which emphasizes income generation in the market economy (ibid). This ignores the needs of other forms of support in order to begin to improve their
situations and exit poverty. Studies of both individual and structural causes of poverty suggest that a better assessment can be made to identify the most important factors to avoid poverty for the future generations of the poor (ibid).

**Poverty Alleviation and the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty**

The effectiveness of many assistance programs, like job training and microcredit designed to aid many of the poor garnered mixed results when evaluated and did little to help the poor escape poverty permanently (Bouillon and Tejerina 2006). A new approach to poverty alleviation was needed that would combat the multiple dimensions of poverty. Conditional cash transfer programs were developed to integrate interventions in health, education and nutrition simultaneously. These programs recognize that these three factors are both key causes and consequences of being poor (Lindert 2006).

The shift towards sustainable programs has led many to believe that conditional cash transfers will be the magic bullet in poverty alleviation throughout world. The assumption is that when a child is raised as a beneficiary of a CCT program they will be better educated, have better health and be more prepared to obtain higher paying jobs than their parents, thus putting an end to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The intergenerational transmission of poverty (IGT) occurs when those who are poor pass down the disadvantages associated with poverty to their children. Also referred to as the cycle of poverty this poverty spans generations and is both a cause and characteristic of chronic poverty. Poverty is not transferred as a simple package, but is a complex set of factors that affect an individual’s chances of experiencing poverty.
throughout their life-course. Simply put, being a poor child increases the chances of being a poor adult.

It is with this knowledge of intergenerational transmission of poverty that conditional cash transfers were created and implemented, first in Brazil and Mexico and eventually in some form in most countries in Latin America. By investing in the human capital of the poor, the goal of CCTs aim to increase the educational and health outcomes of children living in poverty in hopes that upon reaching adulthood these children will fare better than their parents.

**Critiques of Conditional Cash Transfers**

Though many praise the successes of conditional cash transfer programs, there are several critiques from those who remain skeptical that a program of this kind could in fact obtain the long-term outcomes it proponents claim. Lomeli (2008) points out several limitations of CCTs. He states that there are too many assumptions associated with the implementation of conditional cash transfers that have not been thoroughly evaluated. The assumptions that higher enrollment and attendance rates of poor children in school will lead to an actual increase in learning has yet to be determined. Unfortunately, conditional cash transfer program evaluations currently focus solely on attendance and enrollment rates and completely ignore the quality (or lack thereof) of the education that the children are receiving.

Morley and Coady (2003) question that same point. They state that the quality of education will need to be improved in order to obtain the goals of CCTs and to make the
program more efficient. However, improving the quality of education was not an original goal of conditional cash transfer programs and has only recently begun to be addressed. The quality of the education that was imposed on participants was taken for granted and constitutes a serious deficiency according to Lomeli (2008). He argues that historically, the quality of education for the poor has been substandard and assuming that the number of years of schooling will produce similar results for poor children as it does for privileged children is incorrect.

Another assumption of CCTs is that an increase in education will automatically lead to higher future incomes. Lomeli (2008) asserts that the growth in the number of workers with increased years of education does not necessarily equate to greater future income-producing capabilities. If the levels of education are increasing throughout Latin America as a result of CCTs, there will also be an impact on labor wages. The assumption of higher future income for program participants also leads to another expectation - that there will be enough jobs available for the millions of program participants entering the workforce after graduation. Duhua (2000) calls this assumption heroic. Unless there is an increase in employment opportunities, the effects that conditional cash transfers have on future earnings will be minimal. This is especially true of persons living in rural areas where access to income earning resources is even more limited (Duhua 2000).

Some also argue that the stipends the beneficiaries receive are too low to make a substantial impact in the lives of the poor families it is designed to help. Gonzalez de la Rocha (2003) found that although PROGRESA/Oportunidades did reduce the economic
vulnerability of participants, the reduction did not end deprivation nor “eradicate poverty”. She felt that PROGRESA/Oportunidades only reduced the intensity of poverty rather than the incidence. In essence, because of the size of the transfer (which is set at an amount that is only suppose to compliment a family’s current income), the poor are still poor. She does acknowledge that the gap between a household’s income and the poverty threshold has been shortened. A valid argument brought up by Morley and Coady (2003) states that the comparisons of the effects of CCTs on poverty should not simply include data from before and after their implementations, but should compare results of a treatment and control group.

All of the critiques raise valid points. Conditional cash transfers can do little to improve the lot of a person born into poverty if they receive a substandard education or if no jobs are available for them to gain a return on the investment of human capital. Are the assumptions that the creators of CCTs designed the program around too many to actually stand true?

As the world turns to more sustainable poverty alleviation strategies, it is necessary to determine which approach will deliver the greatest long-term results. To what extent will the alleviation of poverty not only benefit those born into a life of chronic poverty, but prove to be paramount to the vitality and stability of nations worldwide? Are conditional cash transfer programs the poverty alleviation program that will finally put an end to mass deprivation?
Research Problem

My objective was to examine the extent to which there was documented evidence of the positive impacts of PROGRESA/Oportunidades or to provide critiques of the program’s limitations. My initial plan to locate longitudinal studies that had been completed on past program participants did not prove to be a viable one. Obtaining information on the young adults that were once a part of the program was more difficult than I expected. There were a limited number of studies available that had been completed on the beneficiaries once they had left the program. One obvious reason for this is that although the program began in 1997, it was implemented on a very small scale in relatively few communities. National incorporation did not occur until 2002. The evaluation of long-term impacts requires sufficient time to pass in order to properly assess the effects. While 10 years have passed since the program’s initial incorporation, longitudinal studies on individuals and families in English have yet to surface.

A second reason it is difficult to obtain this information is that a large percentage of the young adults in poverty stricken areas of Mexico migrate after completing their education. Migration is often necessary in order to find employment. Locating information on past participants who have migrated and are no longer being tracked by the program’s evaluations severely limited the scope of my research. While the ideal situation would have been to examine the wages of the young adults who had participated in PROGRESA/Oportunidades and compare them with both the wages of their non-participating counterparts and the wages of their parents, the reality was that I was
limited to what information was available. I would need to actually go to Mexico in order to obtain a more complete view of the long-term impacts of the program.

I traveled to Mexico during the summer of 2010 as part of a study abroad program sponsored by the College of Social Work at The Ohio State University. During the course of the short 3 week stay in Central Mexico I spoke with several professionals who work with the poor in addition to an official of PROGRESA/Oportunidades and program participants in two rural villages. While interviewing these individuals regarding their experience with the program, I attempted to gain insights that could not be gleaned from quantitative analysis. These insights go beyond statistics.

Sociologists have long been interested in the study of poverty and inequality along with the differing strategies implemented to tackle the problems associated with poverty and inequality around the world. Rural sociologists in particular have been concerned with spatial inequality and how places of poverty are maintained by governmental policies and programs (or the lack thereof). This research adds to this knowledge by examining some of the impacts that a poverty alleviation program in Mexico has had on the program’s beneficiaries. The program was created with the intention to help close the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

This thesis includes four chapters. The first briefly has introduced conditional cash transfers as a poverty alleviation strategy and discussed the various critiques associated with the program. Chapter Two will discuss poverty in more detail, including the reality of poverty in Mexico, as well as the intergenerational transmission of poverty.
I will then share information regarding the theory of conditional cash transfers programs and give background information on Mexico’s CCT, PROGRESA/Oportunidades. In the same chapter, I will explain the methods I used to conduct this study in the field in addition to the specific evaluations and data that I was able to access. Chapter Three is devoted to the analysis of the evaluations and I supplement this information with important insights provided by the individuals I was able to interview in Mexico. Chapter Four concludes the thesis with a summary of known outcomes, highlighting some of the issues uncovered during fieldwork and through analysis of program evaluations and other studies. It also discusses limitations of the study, suggested solutions to some problems, and future research needs.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

In a discussion surrounding poverty, it is first necessary to define who the poor are and what it means to live in poverty. This chapter begins with a short discussion on poverty with additional background regarding the intergenerational transmission of poverty, specifically as it relates to Latin America and Mexico. I then discuss the many aspects of poverty in Mexico including the factors associated with being poor in Mexico such as being indigenous and living in a rural area. I follow that discussion with a brief history on conditional cash transfer programs and detailed information on Mexico’s CCT, PROGRESA/Oportunidades. The chapter closes with an explanation of the research design and methods.

Poverty

A review of the literature on poverty reveals a significant consensus that poverty is multidimensional and should be examined using diverse indicators. “People can be financially poor, resource poor, politically poor, health poor, educationally poor, housing poor, politically poor, land poor and so on” (Rakowski 1999: 60). Rakowski’s argument is a valid one. As I stated in Chapter 1, historically income was used as the sole indicator
to identify those living in poverty. Hulme and Shepherd (2003) state that this view led to a conceptualization of the poor as a single homogeneous group whose main difficulties lie with their lack of income. This in turn, resulted in policy-makers focusing largely on strategies that would simply increase the income of the poor. They argue that one of the problems with contemporary poverty analyses is that it views the poor as those who are not involved in the market economy and ignores the needs of those requiring different forms of support, such as policy changes or broader changes within society that take time (Hulme and Shepherd 2003). The goal was simply to see a rapid reduction in the number of those considered to be poor. Piscke (1996: 227) calls this the “fender-bender assistance strategy” and states that many donors of poverty alleviation programs are an “impatient lot” eager “to put a dent in poverty.”

Poverty is a result of a stratified society on several dimensions, not just one. Walters (1994) states that stratification divides society into segments that are closed off against each another leading to individuals having more in common with the fellow members of their own stratum and less in common with those belonging to other strata. The exclusion creates a pattern of stratification that is reproduced in successive generations, meaning that an individual’s probability of access to material rewards is based on the power that can be partially predicted by the parents’ stratum membership (Ibid). Inevitably, the members of the upper strata will almost always seek to exclude and exploit those on the lower strata.

The UN estimates that there are 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty throughout the world, most of which are chronically poor. Chronic poverty refers to
individuals who have experienced an extended period of deprivation in several facets of their life including, but not limited to basic capabilities such as health care and education. Though most international agencies have agreed to define extreme poverty as those who live on less than US $1.25 per day, Joseph Wresinski painted a more vivid picture for the Commission of Human Rights in a 1987 statement requesting that extreme poverty be considered a violation of human rights.²

“A lack of basic security is the absence of one or more factors that enable individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may become more extended and lead to more serious and permanent consequences. Extreme poverty results when the lack of basic security simultaneously affects several aspects of people’s lives, when it is prolonged, and when it severely compromises people’s chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future.”

According to the 2011 Rural Poverty Report, 70% of those suffering from chronic and extreme poverty reside in rural areas resulting in the additional suffering of spatial inequality that their urban counterparts know little about. The majority of those who are chronically poor do work, with only a small minority unable to engage in the labor market. These marginalized individuals are disproportionately made up of indigenous, nomadic and caste groups, migrants, bonded laborers, refugees, disabled persons, those with ill health and women and children. Individuals who are chronically poor often experience poverty through different dimensions of dispossession which overlap and interact with each other.

Despite the heterogeneity of poverty, “The Chronic Poverty Report” (2009) lists five main traps (types of dimensions) that support and exacerbate chronic poverty: insecurity, limited citizenship, spatial disadvantage, social discrimination, and poor work opportunities. The causes of chronic poverty are all interrelated and are a part of larger social problems. The insecurity the poor suffer is due to residing in unstable environments and the inability to cope with shocks and stressors. This vulnerability often leads the poor to take less risks and trade long-term goals for an immediate need. They are unable to invest in themselves, a business or their children. Many chronically poor individuals work in the informal market and/or have micro businesses, but lack the assets necessary to obtain a loan to grow their business. Programs such as microcredit have been established in some communities to assist the poor in obtaining credit, but there is much more need than there are funds available.

The marginalized suffer from social discrimination that often leads them to have exploitative relationships with those in power. They also suffer because they are frequently denied access to goods and services that are offered in both the public and private sectors. The discrimination is based on class or caste systems, gender, religion, ethnic identity, age or other factors. Discrimination commonly leads to poor work opportunities and where there is already limited economic growth, work opportunities are few and far between. The poor may be able to find menial jobs; however, this simply allows them to survive day-to-day.

Amartya Sen (1999) likens poverty to a lack of choices and powerlessness. He states that poverty must be seen as deprivation of basic capabilities rather than inadequate
income. According to Sen, one’s freedom of agency is directly linked to (and consequently constrained by) the social, political, and economic opportunities available to them (Sen 1999). A poor individual’s limited citizenship occurs as the result of a lack in effective political representation. Many of the societies that the chronically poor live in do not recognize their most basic needs and rights as citizens. They are often seen as an expendable group to those with power. Without power it is almost impossible to demand the services and resources they so desperately need.

Lobao et al. (2007) examine material resources, life chances, structural determinants and the ways in which unequal relationships are mediated by spatial processes. A major concern is how and why socially valued resources are differentially allocated across space (Lobao et al. 2007). The spatial disadvantage suffered by the chronically poor fosters a weak economic integration which can lead to intra-country spatial poverty traps (The Chronic Poverty Report 2009). Rural areas as well as urban areas can suffer from poor or non-existent public services, high levels of violence and desperate living conditions (ibid). If an individual spends their entire life being poor they cannot help but to pass their extreme deprivation on to their children and children’s children.

The Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty

As stated previously, the intergenerational transmission of poverty (IGT) occurs when the disadvantages associated with being poor are passed down from generation to generation in one’s family and is both a cause and characteristic of chronic poverty. It
includes several factors that affect an individual at different stages in their life. These factors include both the “private” transmission (or lack of transmission) of resources and the “public” transfer (or lack of transfer) of resources from one generation to the next (Bird 2007). Some elements affecting IGT include norms of entitlement determining access to capital (productive resources), structure of household and family, child rearing practices, education and skill level of parents, political access, nature of living space, coping/survival strategies, access to and nature of markets, quality and accessibility of public, private and community-based social services, and safety-nets amongst many others. The IGT theory predicts that without intervention poor children will become poor adults (ibid).

In Latin America, IGT has been associated with family size, parental education, family income, health and nutrition of mothers, early child education and nutrition, residence, adolescent motherhood, domestic violence, and being indigenous. According to a study by CEPAL (the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), only about 20% of children of poorly educated parents are able to their finish secondary education. This level of education is important to note because it is the level stated as the minimum for a person to be able to exit poverty. This is especially disheartening when taking into consideration that only about 33% of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean actually complete a secondary education and that a secondary education has been shown to greatly increase ones earnings as well as future job mobility in Latin America (www.iadb.org, Castaneda and Aldaz-Carroll 1999). Unfortunately, those

3 http://www.iadb.org/sociometro/index.html
suffering from chronic poverty inadvertently leave a legacy of poverty behind to their future generations.

**Poverty in Mexico**

Mexico is a highly stratified society. Many studies have uncovered structural/institutional and cultural factors that contribute to this stratification. The largest indigenous population in the Americas resides in Mexico. In 2001 the Human Rights Document Centre estimated that there were about 56 different ethnic and indigenous groups living in Mexico. However, accurate numbers are hard to come by due to the fact that the Mexican census classifies populations linguistically, thereby counting all Spanish speaking indigenous people as non-indigenous (Human Rights Document Centre 2001). This method has proven to be problematic as many indigenous groups no longer speak their own language, but chose to maintain their identity, cultural heritage, and social institutions.

For the indigenous groups who speak their native language, barriers prevent many of them from participating in the public education system as the Mexican schools teach in the national language- Spanish. This has resulted in an illiteracy rate among the indigenous that is six times the national average (ibid). In regions were indigenous people are the minority, they are more likely to face discrimination while seeking employment even if they speak the national language. Spanish illiterate persons face an even greater likelihood of employment discrimination and cannot actively participate in the political process (ibid).
CONEVAL (the National Council of Evaluation of Social Development Policy in Mexico), whose mission entails measuring poverty and generating objective information to improve decision making on social policy, estimates that in 2008 44.2% of the Mexican population were living in “multidimensional poverty” (www.coneval.gob.mx). This is a measurement of poverty that addresses more than the traditional one-dimensional perspective which looked only at income as the determining factor for poverty level. CONEVAL examines several aspects of a person’s life. For example, household income, average educational deficit in home, access to health services, quality of living spaces, access to basic housing services, access to food, and degree of social cohesion are all used to determine levels of “social deprivation” (ibid).

CONEVAL separates those who live in poverty into 3 groups, the poor, the very poor and the extremely poor, based on the number of “social deprivations” each group endures. For instance, in 2008 47.2 million people in Mexico were living at a level of poverty that included at least one social deprivation, had sufficient income to buy a basic food basket and to make the necessary expenditure in health and education, but lacked enough income to make the necessary expenditures in housing, clothing and public transportation. These individuals are categorized as “the poor.” The “very poor” are the 36 million Mexicans who averaged 2.3 social deprivations. They had a sufficient amount

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5 CONEVAL determines that there is an educational deficit in the home if a family meets any one of the following criteria- a youth aged 3-15 who has had no primary education and is not currently enrolled in school, a person born before 1982 who has not had any primary education or a person born after 1982 who has not had at least a secondary education.
6 CONEVAL actually uses the terms “patrimonial,” “capacities,” and “alimentary” in describing the different levels of poverty. Due to possible confusion with the translation of the terms I renamed the categories “poor”, “very poor”, and “extremely poor.”
of income to buy a basic food basket, but did not have enough to make the necessary expenditures in health and education. Those living in “extreme poverty” could not even afford a basic food basket for their families, even if they spent all their income for this purpose. They also suffered from 3 or more social deprivations. CONEVAL reports the number of Mexicans living in extreme poverty in 2008 as 11.2 million Mexicans (ibid).

CONEVAL also reports that those living at the levels of poverty above face greater chances of dropping out of school, greater vulnerability to disease and malnutrition and lower possibilities of finding productive and well-paid work (ibid). All of these factors work together and contribute to the cycle of poverty.

**Rural Poverty in Mexico**

*Where* one lives greatly affects *how* one lives and there are few better examples of this than in rural Mexico. Although only 25% of Mexico’s population resides in rural areas, 60% of those surviving on less than US $1 a day live there (www.worldbank.org). In 2004 the World Bank estimated that out of the 25.2 million rural residents in Mexico, 57% live in what they classify as moderate poverty, living on less than US $2 a day, while another 28% live on less than US $1 per day. This translates to over 14 million rural Mexicans without basic needs (ibid).

According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) the degree of poverty in rural Mexico is associated with three main factors: 1) geographic location and proximity to urban centers, 2) ethnicity, and 3) the gender of the head of

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7 go.worldbank.org/MDXERW23U0 – accessed on 5/25/10
household. Rural areas that are closer in distance to urban centers fare better than those rural areas that are located in remote regions separated from cities. The incidence in rural poverty is significantly higher in the southern region of Mexico where small towns are widely dispersed and have a greater density of indigenous people. In Mexico, 61% of the indigenous population lives in extreme poverty as opposed to 19% of the non-indigenous population (www.ifad.org\(^8\)). Indigenous homes are less likely to have running water and electricity and suffer from poor health conditions with little access to health resources (ibid).

In Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guerrero, states with higher than average indigenous populations, extreme poverty affects 50% of the population (ibid). For example, the southern state of Chiapas is 52% rural and has a high concentration of indigenous people (Human Rights Document Centre 2001). In 2005 the National Population Council (CONAPO) examined the percentage of the population that “does not enjoy the use of goods and services essential to the development of its physical capacities” and reported that municipalities located in the Highlands of Chiapas represented the highest level of marginalization in the country (www.sipaz.org\(^9\)). In Chiapas, 25.9% of homes do not have running water, 32.9% have dirt floors and 85.7% of the inhabitants cook with wood or coal (ibid). The 2005 census revealed that Chiapas has the highest illiteracy rate in the country. Among Chiapas residents over the age of 15, 42.76% did not completed primary school and 20.4% have not received any kind of formal education (ibid). While only 58.3% of the non-indigenous population in the state work in agriculture, 83% of the

\(^8\) www.ifad.org/poverty - accessed 4/18/10
\(^9\) http://www.sipaz.org/data/chis_en_02.htm - accessed on 5/7/11
indigenous work in that sector and 42% of the indigenous population survives on an income below the minimum monthly wage (ibid). Less than 10% of the indigenous people in Chiapas earn between one and two minimum monthly wages (ibid).

The last determinant, gender, is a consequence of the prevalence of female headed households; 8 out of 10 single parents in Mexico are women (www.ifad.org5). These households are more prone to poverty due to the fact that women have fewer job opportunities and access to productive resources (ibid). In addition, the illiteracy rate for indigenous women is estimated at 20% higher than the average for indigenous populations resulting even lower employment opportunities for indigenous women (Human Rights Document Centre 2001).

Traditionally, rural areas in many nations have serious deficits with respect to built capital/infrastructure and services such as adequate health centers, schools, water delivery, roads…etc. The poor living in urban areas have greater access to services such as transportation, health clinics, employment opportunities and public housing. Rural Mexico is no different. Many of the very poorest in Mexico live in areas that have never even had access to the country’s public services. This has led many to believe that poverty alleviation policies should focus more on place-based strategies as opposed to people-based strategies. Lobao et al. (2007) discuss the critical nature of locality and argue that policies should target the rural poor specifically. In line with this principal, Mexico’s conditional cash transfer program, PROGRESA/Oportunidades, attempts to address the differing needs of the rural and urban poor by implementing a program comprised of two different models based on locality.
Conditional Cash Transfers in Theory

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) have been adopted in many countries in Latin America. (CCTs) are an innovative alternative to traditional social assistance programs in that they invest in the human capital of poor families as a means to fight the various ills associated with poverty. As I stated in Chapter 1, CCTs provide cash to families based upon their completion of specific health, educational and nutritional requirements. Thus they respond to the different aspects of poverty and focus not only on the short-term discomforts of being poor, but also on the long-term consequences in an attempt to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The specific criteria for participation in conditional cash transfer programs varies from country to country, but each program focuses on providing a safety net for the poorest families, reducing inequality and providing some necessary resources that may enable families to break the cycle of poverty. The conditionality of the program requires the participants to take an active role in improving their future and the future of their children. Common conditions include the following; parents are required to ensure that their children attend school regularly, that they are seen by a health care professional a certain number of times per year in addition to having their required immunizations. In some cases, participants are also obliged to attend informational lectures on health, nutrition, and hygiene. In exchange for the family’s participation in the program, the family is given a monthly stipend based on family size, income and the number of children attending school. Unlike other social welfare programs, conditional cash transfers allow the families to choose how they will spend their money as long as the
conditions of the program are met. This shift in welfare reform has been hypothesized as contributing to greater autonomy and empowerment (Inter-American Conference on Social Security 2008).

By design, conditional cash transfers intervene simultaneously in education, health and nutrition. The very nature of the program implies a belief that by addressing several dimensions of human capital at the same time there will be greater social returns than programs developed with the same objectives, but implemented separately. Flora and Flora (2004) describe human capital as the assets a person possesses. These assets include health, formal training, skills knowledge, leadership and talents. Some think of human capital accumulation in terms of formal education and training, however, it also consists of the attributes in an individual that “contribute to their ability to earn a living, strengthen community, and otherwise contribute to community organizations, to their families, and to self-improvement” (Flora and Flora 2008; 84). By developing a social program that impacts several areas of a person’s human capital accumulation the chances of interrupting the cycle of poverty that occurs through the intergenerational transmission of poverty would be greatly increased.

When the health and nutrition of a child is improved, it not only has an effect on his or her physical wellbeing, but also impacts the educational attainment of that child. Several studies have found that school attendance and performance are often directly affected by poor health and nutrition (Skoufias 2005). If a child has better health and nutrition s/he is more prepared to be successful in school. The more successful a child is in school, the greater the likelihood of completing school. Higher educational attainment
has been linked to higher paying jobs. With all of these aspects working together, a poor child who participates in a program that builds human capital should be less likely to become a poor adult.

The rationale behind the creation of conditional cash transfers includes four main arguments. 1) There is a significant difference in health and education between the poor and non-poor. 2) The vicious cycle of poverty is transmitted from generation to generation. 3) There is an inability of the poor to benefit fully from available interventions such as health care and education because of a lack of needed resources (i.e. transportation, school supplies, uniforms…etc), and 4) The general assumption that the income of poor families will not grow rapidly even during times of high economic growth (Inter-American Conference on Social Security 2008). The immediate objectives of CCTs are to increase food consumption, school attendance and participation in preventative health care. The long-term expectation is that eventually the cycle of poverty will be broken resulting in better returns in the labor market and higher percentages of income. Most research suggests that conditional cash transfers have had positive impacts in every country that has adopted them. In many documented cases, the transfer of cash has brought immediate relief to millions living in extreme poverty and provided a financial safety net for families where there was not one before.

Conditional cash transfers began in Brazil in 1995 under former president (and sociologist) Fernando Henrique Cardoso as a program named Bolsa Escola, School Grant (Hall 2006). President Cardoso incorporated the program in the municipality of Brasilia as an encouragement to poor families to enroll and keep their children in school. Bolsa
*Escola* assured a minimum wage to every poor family in which all children between the ages of 7 and 14 were registered for public school (ibid). There was a list of several requirements that the family had to complete in order to receive the cash including an attendance rate of 90% and a minimum of five year residence in the district of Brasilia (ibid). *Bolsa Escola* was incorporated in hopes that parents would find it more beneficial to keep their children. Traditionally, parents of poor families would pull their children out of school because they were needed to work and contribute to the household income. With *Bolsa Escola* parents were given a monthly stipend as long as their children remained enrolled in school and attended classes regularly.

In 2003, Luiz Inacio “Lula” de Silva, the newly elected Brazilian president, formed *Bolsa Familia* (Family Grant) by combining *Bolsa Escola* with his anti-hunger program *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) and *Auxilio Gas*, a reimbursement program for cooking gas (ibid). By merging the separate programs into one and creating a new ministry, the Ministry of Social Development, Lula successfully reduced the administrative costs and bureaucratic complexities for both the participants and the administration of the program (ibid). *Bolsa Familia* effectively expanded its focus to include health and nutritional outcomes in addition to education. *Bolsa Familia* is the largest conditional cash transfer program in the world and boasts 50 million participants (www.bolsafamilia.net\(^{10}\)). CCTs have since been diffused throughout the world and have

been adopted by 15 Latin American countries and the Caribbean as well as a few countries in Africa, Asia, Turkey and most recently, the United States.\textsuperscript{11}

As previously stated compared to other social assistance transfers, CCTs reach a higher percentage of the poor (Lomeli 2008). Lindert (2005) found that overall 45\% of conditional cash transfers benefit the poorest quintile of the population and that 28\% of the program reaches the second poorest quintile. In 2007 Soares et al. reported that in Mexico 80\% of the cash transfers were received by the poorest 40\% of Mexicans. Among the 16 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean who have conditional cash transfer programs, Mexico’s \textit{PROGRESA/Oportunidades} is one of the largest and longest run CCT programs in the world. All CCT programs have experienced varied success, but research suggests \textit{PROGRESA/Oportunidades} has seen great success on almost every level.

\textbf{An Introduction to PROGRESA/Oportunidades}

Recognizing the fact that rural poverty is truly multifaceted, policy makers in Mexico during the Zedillo administration aimed the conditional cash transfer program directly at the population in extreme poor rural areas in an effort to alleviate current and future poverty levels (Skoufias 2005). The program, formally called \textit{PROGRESA (Programa de Educacion, Salud y Alimentacion)/Education, Health and Alimentation Program} was implemented in 320 rural villages in 1997 as a randomized social

\textsuperscript{11} Named after Mexico’s CCT, “Opportunity NYC: Family Rewards” was the first comprehensive CCT program in a developed country. The experimental program was privately funded and lasted from 2007-2010. Families were paid $20-$200 based on their completion of a wide range of specific activities regarding children’s education, families’ preventative health care and parents’ employment. For more information see http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/fastfocus/pdfs/FF5-2010.pdf
experiment (ibid). The 320 villages served as the treatment group, while another 186 rural villages were assigned as the control group. The 300,000 eligible households who lived within the treatment villages began receiving their benefits in the spring of 1998, whereas the families in the control group villages were not incorporated into the program for another 18 months (ibid).

Participating families receive cash, nutritional supplements for pregnant/nursing women and children under 5 in addition to free preventative health care at the local health center. As is the case for most CCTs, in order to receive the program’s benefits families must complete certain “co-responsibilities” as the conditional portion of the cash transfer program. The benefit, or stipend, is divided into three separate components—health, nutrition and education—with a co-responsibility for each area (Skoufias 2005). The co-responsibility for the health component requires each family member to receive a yearly health exam/check-up. In addition, the mothers and teens over the age of 15 must attend monthly health workshops. The nutrition co-responsibility is also linked to attendance at the health workshop. The co-responsibility for the educational stipend, called “scholarships”, requires eligible children to be enrolled in school and attend at least 85% of the time (ibid).

In 2011 the health and nutrition components pay each family roughly US $34.52, plus an additional US $8.95 per child under the age of 9 (www.oportunidades.gob.mx12). Scholarships are given to all participating children in 3rd grade or higher. Scholarship amounts range from US $12.79-$81.83 depending on the grade and gender of the child.

Each household can receive a maximum of 3 child benefits (ibid). Seniors over the age of 70 residing with a beneficiary family are also eligible to receive a monthly stipend of US $26.85, with a co-responsibility of 2 health exams per year (ibid). In a recent addition to the nutrition component of the program families now receive an extra stipend to offset the global increase in food prices as well as a small benefit to support the cost of the consumption of energy sources such as gas, electricity, firewood and charcoal (SEDESOL 2010). The payments are dispersed every other month directly to families in cash, or more recently, directly deposited onto a debit card at the designated time (ibid).

Serving as a link between each community and the programs officials are representatives called *vocales*. There is 1 *vocal* for every 25 participants. *Vocales* are *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* beneficiaries who have been elected into office in their respective communities. This position is volunteer (and unpaid), but comes with a level of prestige and power in each community. *Vocal* elections occur every two years with no limit to the number of terms a person can serve. Each community also possesses a “suggestion box” in which program participants can offer suggestions to the program. The suggestion box is also used as a “complaint box”, in which beneficiaries can make program officials aware of issues with *PROGRESA/Oportunidades’* operation at the local level. All beneficiaries have the opportunity to drop an anonymous note into the box if they feel something should be improved or if they feel they are being treated unfairly. The suggestion boxes are kept locked and keys are held by a third party individual who is not affiliated with the program.
The experimental design of PROGRESA allowed the program to be evaluated at the onset by collecting and comparing information from both the control and treatment groups before and after its implementation. It also permitted the opportunity for evaluators to examine the impact of the program on the beneficiary households. This was the first time in Mexico’s history that a national poverty alleviation program was subjected to rigorous evaluations from its inception (Skoufias 2005). These evaluations were important sources for this thesis.

The evaluations were used to introduce recommended changes to the program. Initial results garnered from an external evaluation completed by the International Food and Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) using data from the programs first few years (1998-2000) found that the program had significant impacts in reducing child labor, improving health outcomes, and increasing school enrollment (Skoufias 2005). Due to PROGRESA’s overwhelming evidence that it was positively impacting the lives of poor families living in rural areas, the newly elected Vicente Fox decided to continue the program during his administration after the 2000 election. PROGRESA underwent a name change and came to be known as Oportunidades (Opportunities). The program also expanded its coverage to include most of rural Mexico provided sites had the necessary educational and health facilities in order for participants to fulfill their co-responsibilities.

The expansion included several improvements that were based on the findings of IFPRI’s evaluation. The evaluation noted that larger impacts were found on the school attendance of children of secondary school age as opposed to children who were of primary school age (Skoufias 2005). Initially, the program only provided benefits for
families with children in third through ninth grades and did not extend benefits to those attending in high school. IFPRI suggested that funds be reoriented to families with children attending junior high and high school, and in 2001, benefits were extended to those attending high school. This incentive was used to discourage students from dropping out before completing their high school education. At present, *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* gives benefits to families with children attending school from third grade through twelfth grade and slightly increases amounts as the children progress from one grade to the next. The increasing benefits address the higher education opportunity costs as a child ages and has the chance to leave school to join the workforce. The program also gives a slightly larger amount for girls than boys at the onset of secondary school. The difference is meant to provide an additional incentive for sending girls to school, as girls in Mexico have traditionally had lower enrollment rates than boys at the secondary and high school levels (Behrman et. al 2006).

Another improvement that was made to the educational benefit was that the children receiving the benefit would be required to do more than just attend school regularly. The program currently links benefits to performance, giving bonuses for children who successfully complete a grade level and discontinuing benefits for children who repeat a grade more than once. There is also a separate stipend given at the onset of the school year for school supplies for each eligible child enrolled in the program.

Another program was also created out of *PROGRESA/Oportunidades: Jovenes con Oportunidades* (Youth with Opportunities). This program provides high school students with a savings account and a one-time payment upon graduation. In addition, the youth in
this program have the option to being linked with a program that aims to create future income generating opportunities through preferential access to microcredit, housing improvements, adult education and more recently a scholarship geared to supporting low-income youth in obtaining higher education (Skoufias 2005, www.oportunidades.gob.mx). 

In 2004, PROGRESA/Oportunidades was expanded again and began serving the poor in urban areas. The program continues to grow and change in order to meet the differing needs of the poor living in both rural and urban Mexico and focus on the most marginalized citizens living at the most extreme level of poverty. In 2011 the federal program operates in 2,444 municipalities in all 32 states and assists more than 6 million poor families, 30% of Mexico’s population (SEDESOL 2010). The program continues its focus on eliminating rural poverty as 96.8% of the programs beneficiaries reside in rural areas with less than 2,500 residents and 25% of the beneficiaries are indigenous (SEDESOL 2010). Of the participants 69.2% live in the poorest 10 states: Chiapas, Veracruz, Puebla, Mexico, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, and San Luis Potosi (www.oportunidades.gob.mx). In 2011 PROGRESA/Oportunidades received an operating budget of approximately US $5 billion from the federal government, the largest budget of any social program in Mexico (ibid). It is said to be one of the most efficient conditional cash transfer programs in the world with only 3% of the budget used for administrative costs leaving the remaining 97% to the beneficiaries.

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13 http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/did182007_22072007 - accessed 4/20/11
14 http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/oportunidades_mas_de_57_mil_567_millones - accessed on 4/14/11
(SEDESOL 2010). As a way to offset rising prices, the program continually monitors the cost of living in Mexico and increases the stipends given to the beneficiaries on a yearly basis (www.oportunidades.gob.mx\textsuperscript{15}).

Due to the conditionality of the program, PROGRESA/Oportunidades can only be implemented in areas where the necessary facilities exist. Therefore, if a village is located in an area so remote that it does not have a health center or school nearby, the residents cannot be served by the program. Unfortunately, some of Mexico’s poorest citizens reside in areas without schools and/or health facilities. As I noted previously, a large number of Mexico’s indigenous communities are so marginalized that they have never had access to public services. In an attempt to combat this grave inequality, SEDESOL (the Ministry of Social Development) set PAL (the Food Support Program) under the jurisdiction of PROGRESA/Oportunidades in 2009 (ibid). This ensured that the poor living in some of the most isolated areas of the state would not be left without any type of support. It also allowed the government access to information on what type of services were needed where (www.oportunidades.gob.mx\textsuperscript{16}).

In 2011 670,000 families benefit from PAL which offers the same health and nutritional supports for poverty stricken families without the co-responsibilities (ibid). PAL participants receive identical stipends and supplements for the health and nutrition portion of PROGRESA/Oportunidades, but do not receive the educational scholarships for their children to attend school (because there are no schools in the vicinity). They are

\textsuperscript{15}http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/en_10_anos_oportunidades_ha_crecido_mas_de_160 - accessed on 4/22/11

\textsuperscript{16}http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/oportunidades_mas_de_57_mil_567_millones - accessed 4/14/11
not required to attend the monthly health workshops; however, each family member must be seen at the nearest health facility once per year in order to receive preventative care and show that they are still living (ibid). If an area obtains the necessary infrastructure to support a school and health center, the families in that municipality who participate in PAL are transferred to PROGRESA/Oportunidades. PAL beneficiaries are also allowed to transfer to PROGRESA/Oportunidades in the event that they move to an area that has the necessary health and educational facilities (ibid).

Though most research has shown that preliminary results are encouraging, most researchers admit it is too early to study the long-term goals of the program. Since the program’s adoption, Mexico has seen a 35% increase in attendance at health centers in rural areas and a 26% increase at health centers in urban areas along with a 22% decrease in morbidity for children between 0-2 years of age (Rodriguez and Amman 2007). There has been an increase in the variety of food consumption by the poor on items such as fruits, vegetables and meat, resulting in greater height and weight among participating rural children and in reduced malnutrition (Lomeli 2008). Anemia has gone from 61% to 35.8% in rural children under 2, considered a major victory because inadequate iron intake in children has been linked to poor cognitive development (SEDESOL 2010).

During the first year of PROGRESA’s implementation, enrollment to schools increased 26% in rural areas and high school enrollment rates increased an impressive 85% after the first 2 years of including high school students as beneficiaries for the educational component (Rodriguez and Amman 2007, SEDESOL 2010). Rodriguez and Amman (2007) report that in rural areas an increase in enrollment of 24% was
experienced between primary and secondary schools as well as a 28.7% increase in girl’s enrollment to secondary schools. There has also been a rise of 23% nationwide in young people who finished secondary school (Rodriguez and Amman 2007). The agencies that administer PROGRESA/Oportunidades have predicted that if each child enrolled in the program completes at least one additional year of school, it could result in a 13% increase in income over a lifetime.

In the past 10 years PROGRESA/Oportunidades has grown 160%; from approximately 2.5 million households in 2000 to 6.5 million households in 2010 and has been regarded by many as one of the world’s top models for poverty alleviation (www.oportunidades.gob.mx17). The international community and national organizations continue their efforts in evaluating the impacts of the program. Unfortunately, no one knows if this expected increase in income will actually come to fruition since the children who benefited from PROGRESA/Oportunidades during their childhoods are just now entering young adulthood. Studies show many short-term goals have been attained, but the long-term goal of disrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty has yet to be determined.

There are many questions that remain unanswered. Most evaluations use quantitative analysis. What about qualitative evaluations that may improve the quality of education and health care? Does the program actually fulfill its objective of interrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty? To answer this question, research is needed.

17http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/en_10_anos_oportunidades_ha_crecido_mas_de_160 accessed on 4/14/11
that follows children after they exit the program in order to compare their employment situation with that of their parents. I have found no such studies. One reason, aside from the program’s fairly new existence, may be that children leave the villages once they reach adulthood and seek employment elsewhere.

**Research Design**

For this thesis I designed a study to look both at the quantitative evaluations and analyses available on program implementation and impacts and to interview a small sample of program participants to get their perceptions regarding the benefits and drawbacks of the program as it has affected their families.

I have been successful in locating English versions of Spanish quantitative studies on program evaluations of *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* in its early stages, but have been largely unsuccessful in finding reports in English regarding qualitative research that has been done on the program. Initially, my research was focused on the impacts that *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* has had on the lives of young adults whose families were beneficiaries of the conditional cash transfer program during their childhood. Specifically, I wanted to examine whether they had fared better than their non-participating counterparts in obtaining better jobs and/or higher wages. I was interested in knowing, does childhood participation in *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* lead to higher income in adulthood? In addition to comparing wages, I had planned to look at whether or not the past participants were living above the poverty level. Therefore, answering the
question- Is PROGRESA/Oportunidades meeting its goal as a sustainable poverty alleviation tool and interrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty?

However, it was necessary for me to reformulate my research objectives given the difficulty that I encountered while researching the program. The lack of available data on past participants severely hampered my search. I was limited to the available data that existed on current participants only.

While researching the program several themes emerged for which data were available. The themes were poverty reduction and inequality, education, health and nutrition, gender, community/social relations, program implementation and changes, and unintended consequences. I focused on these 7 themes while collecting and examining data in hopes that I could find some answers to the above questions.

I gathered all the available data that I could find on the above themes in an effort to compare them to what I would learn while collecting data in Mexico. With the exception of a few critiques of the program, most reports concluded that the program is working and find many positive impacts in the lives of those participating in PROGRESA/Oportunidades. I expected that the information that I would gather in Mexico would also be overwhelmingly positive--stating that the children who have graduated from high school with the help of PROGRESA/Oportunidades are earning higher wages than both their non-participating counterparts and their parents and that program is indeed interrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty.
Methods

During the summer of 2010 I went to Mexico as a participant of a study abroad program sponsored by the College of Social Work at The Ohio State University. One of the components of the study abroad program was visiting with several different professionals and agencies who worked with the poor in the state of Morelos. Prior to my visit I contacted Antonio Ortega, the program coordinator with The Center for Global Education (CGE) in Cuernavaca, Mexico to inform him of my desire to conduct research for my thesis while I was there for the study abroad program. I expressed interest in interviewing several social service workers who were employed by PROGRESA/Oportunidades or a social service agency who was involved in either the implementation or evaluation of the program. The interviews were to serve as exploratory research for this thesis. Unfortunately, Mr. Ortega was unable to put me in contact with social workers who worked directly with the program. He was, however, able to coordinate a presentation given by Dr. Luis Rodriguez, an official of the program who worked at the federal offices of Oportunidades in Mexico City. In addition to Dr. Rodriguez, I was able to speak with several program participants in two rural villages. Table 1 lists the individual who were involved in this study, indicating three whose names were kept private.\textsuperscript{18} None of the names of the women interviewed as a group have been included either.

\textsuperscript{18} Names of individuals have been changed to protect their identity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antonio Ortega</td>
<td>Program coordinator at CGE, arranged presentation with Dr. Rodriguez. Served as interpreter for Isabela.</td>
<td>Dr. Luis Rodriguez¹⁷</td>
<td>PROGRESA/Oportunidades official who gave formal presentation on program.</td>
<td>Jose Lopez¹⁷</td>
<td>Founder of NGO that works with indigenous communities. Arranged interview with Isabela.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabela</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>PROGRESA/Oportunidades participant living in a rural village in the state of Morelos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Esteban</td>
<td>Professor at the Colegio de Postgraduados. Arranged group interview with women living in rural village in the state of Puebla.</td>
<td>Women from Puebla</td>
<td>A group of 30 women living in a rural village in the state of Puebla who gathered to speak with me regarding experiences with the program</td>
<td>Professor Ignacio</td>
<td>Professor at the Colegio de Postgraduados. Served as interpreter for the women's group in Puebla.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez Dajui</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Cerda</td>
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Table 1 - Persons Who Participated in Interviews

Dr. Rodriguez traveled from Mexico City to Cuernavaca to give a presentation on PROGRESA/Oportunidades to the entire group of students who were present on the study abroad trip. We met at the Oportunidades headquarters for the state of Morelos in Cuernavaca. Though his presentation was formal in nature, I was allowed to ask questions regarding the information he was presenting and previous information I had obtained on the program. The presentation lasted about 2 hours and was very fruitful. At the end of the presentation Dr. Rodriguez gave me a list of websites that had more reports and official data that I could use for my research. He also told me I could contact him if I had any further questions. I used the official data of the program that he provided and compared it with the information I received from the interviews with the participants.

While attending an educational seminar given at the Center for Global Education in Cuernavaca, I met “Jose Lopez,” an advocate for social justice and human rights for the indigenous population in central Mexico. I asked him several questions pertaining to
his opinions regarding PROGRESA/Oportunidades. To my surprise, Mr. Lopez had very strong feelings towards the program--he considered it nothing more than ploy by the government to get the poor to vote for a particular political party. He stated that he worked with several participants in the program and asked if I would like to speak with one if he could arrange an interview. I was elated at his generous offer and told him I would be very interested in speaking with a participant if that were possible. Mr. Lopez arranged an interview with a young indigenous woman living in a rural village in the state of Morelos.

The woman, whom I will call “Isabela,” was in her mid-twenties and lived in a home with her husband, mother-in-law and 2 young boys. Her oldest son had just completed the third grade and her youngest son had just graduated from kindergarten. Isabela had been a PROGRESA/Oportunidades participant for one year. The interview took place at Isabela’s home and was attended by the entire student group as well as Mr. Lopez and Mr. Ortega who served as the interpreter. The interview lasted about an hour and was guided by questions from both myself and the other students.

I was also able to interview a group of 30 women beneficiaries who lived in a small rural town in the state of Puebla. This town was actually one of the original localities used in the experimental design in 1997. Some of the women in the group had been a part of the program for 10 years. They all either had children who had graduated high school with the help of PROGRESA/Oportunidades or had children still enrolled in school with the hope that they would graduate from high school. The group interview was arranged by Professor Esteban Martinez Dajui, a faculty member at the Colegio de
Postgraduados (the national agriculture university) in Mexico. I met Professor Martinez while he was visiting The Ohio State University during the winter of 2009. He was very interested in assisting me with my research and arranged for a group interview with the women with whom he worked as part of the extension work he does with the university. The ages of the women in the group ranged from mid-20s to 70s. They were all beneficiaries of PROGRESA/Oportunidades. The group interview took place at a small non-profit that specialized in providing women in the community with small loans to start or expand small businesses. It was attended by the 30 women, myself, Professor Martinez and Professor Ignacio Cerda, who served as the interpreter. The interview lasted about an hour and was guided by questions that I developed (see Appendix B).

Although much of the data collection process while in Mexico was more opportunistic in nature than planned, it garnered interesting results. I will now discuss my findings for each of the aforementioned themes, examining both official data and the data I was able to collect while in the field. Though fieldwork findings are based on the perceptions of a small number of professionals and participants, the thesis includes findings from other, primarily quantitative studies in order to situate the individual experiences within the larger national perspective.
CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the various findings regarding PROGRESA/Oportunidades from its modest beginning in 1997 to the present state of its widespread diffusion throughout Mexico. I include information that has been reported in both national and international evaluations as well as the anecdotal evidence that I obtained from participants and a program official while conducting fieldwork in central Mexico. The chapter is divided into sections, each of which covers a specific theme: poverty reduction and inequality, education, health and nutrition, gender and ethnicity, community/social relations, and changes in program implementation. The chapter ends with a discussion of some of PROGRESA/Oportunidades’ unintended consequences, both positive and negative, uncovered in the two rural towns that I visited in the states of Morelos and Puebla.

Poverty Reduction and Inequality

The immediate short-term goal of any cash transfer program, whether conditional or unconditional, is to alleviate some of the suffering and deprivation that results from living in poverty. PROGRESA/Oportunidades is no different. As previously stated,
CONEVAL (National Council of Social Development Policy Evaluation) found that in 2008 47.4% of the population in Mexico lived at a level of poverty that meant that they had insufficient income to buy a basic food basket, make the necessary expenditure in health and education, as well as in housing, clothing and transportation. They also found that 18.2% lived in extreme poverty and could not afford to purchase a basic food basket for their family even if they spent all of their income for this purpose (CONEVAL 2008). In this section I discuss answers to two questions: Has PROGRESA/Oportunidades reduced poverty in Mexico? Has PROGRESA/Oportunidades had an impact on the inequality suffered by the marginalized in Mexico?

Lomeli (2008) reports that PROGRESA/Oportunidades has accomplished its goal of short-term poverty reduction. In fact, most researchers agree that the program achieves its objective of reducing poverty in the poor households enrolled. However, when it comes to how much of a reduction, discord emerges. There have been mixed results when looking at the data regarding the amount of poverty reduction that can be attributed to PROGRESA/Oportunidades in Mexico. While national evaluations and external international evaluations reported by the World Bank (2004) conclude that PROGRESA/Oportunidades made a significant contribution to poverty reduction throughout Mexico during the period 2000-2002, Cortes et al. (2007) find that the

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19 CONEVAL uses the terms “patrimonial,” “capacities,” and “alimentary” to describe the levels of poverty in Mexico. I substitute the terms “poor,” “very poor,” and “extremely poor,” respectively because they are more widely accepted in the literature on the stratification of poverty.
program had only modest impacts on poverty reduction in the years following that from 2002-2005 with the most significant reductions of that period occurring in rural areas.

Although the size of the cash transfer is not enough to lift families completely out of poverty, the extra assistance does reduce the intensity of the poverty. Skoufias et al (2001) stated shortly after the program was first evaluated that programs such as PROGRESA may be successful at reducing the poverty gap or the severity of poverty, but may not be as successful in impacting the actual number of individuals living in poverty. Gonzalez de la Rocha (2006) reported that PROGRESA/Oportunidades reduced the economic vulnerability of the poor enrolled, but the stipend was not enough to completely eliminate deprivation. The women interviewed in Puebla agreed. When asked if they felt the amount of money that they received from PROGRESA/Oportunidades was a sufficient amount, one woman replied “It should be more because it is barely enough to use for the kids. Let me clarify, we work, so we earn some money, but it’s not enough. It’s never enough.” Another woman commenting on the past stated “Before we didn’t have any help and we used to work a lot. And now that we have it, we still keep working a lot.”

Dr. Rodriguez explained how the program differentiates between the three types of poverty in Mexico--the poor, very poor, and extremely poor, corresponding to the three levels established by CONEVAL. He stated that “In Mexico everyone thinks they are poor if they are not rich” so it is important to distinguish between those who need the most assistance and those who are moderately poor and need less assistance. Food poverty is the most extreme form of poverty; it means that a family does not have enough
income to afford a basic food basket consisting of a daily consumption of 2,200 calories per person. Dr. Rodriguez explained that Mexico’s conditional cash transfer program focuses mostly on those living in extreme/food poverty because they are the ones least likely to be able to invest in their children. To determine if a family is living in extreme poverty, the social workers look at material possessions and living conditions in addition to household income. They examine the style and conditions of the house such as dirt floor versus cement floor, type of roof, if they have a refrigerator and gas stove...etc.

Isabela applied to the program five times before she was accepted, demonstrating her strong desire to participate in the program and the difficulty those who are poor face given the inability of the program to cover the needs of all families that are eligible. Mr. Lopez, who works in several rural indigenous villages, stated his belief that this is because she was not involved with the right political party. He stated that, in some towns, acceptance and denial in the program has more to do with a person’s political affiliation than it does with the level of poverty.

When asked what the money helps to do for her family, Isabela replied “It helps me for many things. Sometimes I get it and they [her children] need shoes, so I will get them shoes. And then the next month arrives and then I will get them something else.” She also noted that for people who are poorer than she is, the program was “definitely not a big help.” In addition to the money provided by PROGRESA/Oportunidades, Isabela earns money by renting her brother-in-law’s house to students and visitors to the town while he is away working in Mexico City. She also makes small candies to sell at the
local community market. Prior to her participation in the program Isabela says that “I couldn’t buy anything.”

Dr. Rodriguez stated that although the payments were small and were not enough for families to live on alone, PROGRESA/Oportunidades is helping to alleviate some of the strain that accompanies being poor. When asked why the participants received their payments every other month when it would be more helpful for the poverty stricken families to be given the payments monthly, he explained that it would be much more expensive to distribute the payments monthly. At this time, only 3% of PROGRESA/Oportunidades’ operating budget is used for administrative purposes, leaving a full 97% to go to the participants. According to Dr. Rodriguez, the cost of administration would increase greatly if they were to distribute payments on a monthly basis.

Examining the impacts of the program from a different angle and using a predictive model to project what future poverty levels would have been without the program, CONEVAL estimates that the number of people living in extreme poverty would have increased 2.6 million or 13.5% between the years 2006-2008 due to the global recession. Figure 1 is a chart consisting of real data collected by CONEVAL on the evolution of poverty in Mexico from 1992-2008. If we look at the percentage of people in poverty in 2008 we can see that if poverty had increased 13.5%, the percentage of people living in extreme poverty would have been 31.7% instead of 18.2%. Though researchers tend to disagree on how much of an impact PROGRESA/Oportunidades has had on poverty, the assessments completed by CONEVAL strongly suggest that poverty
in Mexico began to decrease steadily in the years following 1998. This drop occurs after a sharp increase between 1994 and 1996. Nonetheless, it could just be coincidental that extreme poverty levels fell 23.6% in the 10 years between 1996 (37.4%) and 2006 (13.8%) or other factors may have played a significant role.


**Figure 1 – The Evolution of Poverty in Mexico from 1992-2008**

Source: http://www.coneval.gob.mx/cmsconeval/rw/pages/medicion/cifras/pobrezaporingresos.en.do

*PROGRESA/Oportunidades* began to serve those living in the poorest rural areas in 1997 and expanded nationwide in 2002. SEDESOL (the Ministry of Social
Development) that oversees PROGRESA/Oportunidades supports the position that it was no coincidence—they credit nearly all of the reduction in poverty to PROGRESA/Oportunidades (SEDESOL 2010). Since Mexico was hit hard by a global economic crisis and rising food prices at the time, like CONEVAL SEDESOL believes that the increase in poverty from 2006 to 2008 would have been much higher than 4.8% if it were not for PROGRESA/Oportunidades (ibid).

Though the beneficiaries interviewed admit that the stipend is relatively small and does not cover all of their families’ needs, they are very appreciative of the program’s timely assistance. I asked the women from the small town in Puebla if they thought the program should give them a higher stipend. This question brought cheers and laughter in the group as they resounded with a unanimous “yes”. However, after the group quieted down and regained their seriousness they confessed that if the program provided a larger stipend then it would be possible for some people to quit their jobs, which everyone agreed would not be a good thing. “Then a lot of people would say ‘Oh, the people in the program, they are just lazy people because they belong to the program.’ And no one wants to be considered lazy.”

In the spirit of solidarity with the non-beneficiaries in their community, one woman stated “I think that what would be better than that is giving the help to everybody, instead of giving more money [to a few]”. Several women agreed: “Exactly.” I believe this statement is the result of a recent breach in community relations and increased conflicts caused in part by the selection process for PROGRESA/Oportunidades. Not all who are eligible are accepted into the program. In fact, while in Mexico I heard stories
from several professionals who work with the poor on how the program had caused problems in some communities. Neighbors who were once friendly sometimes became estranged because one person would qualify for the program while the other one did not. Due to confusion among the community members, including not understanding the selection process or rejecting the outcome, people who were denied sometimes became jealous and mistrustful of the ones who were approved. In some cases they believed that their neighbor’s acceptance into the program came by way of dishonesty or unfair use of contacts. In some communities the tension caused by the program’s implementation spilled over into other areas and disrupted social solidarity among community residents.

However contradictory the results may be on how much the national poverty level has been impacted or reduced due to the program, it appears that many evaluations conclude emphatically that PROGRESA/Oportunidades has played a major role in reducing poverty in Mexico in general. Poverty was significantly reduced in the years immediately following the implementation of the transfer program and continued to decrease as the program spread to more municipalities throughout the country. Even during the global food crisis when food prices increased an average of 43% in one year from 2007 to 2008, greatly affecting those living in poverty worldwide, the percentage of people living in poverty in Mexico only increased by 4.8% (www.usaid.gov20, CONEVAL 2008). This has led to the conclusion that the program appears to serve as a financial safety net for the families who are beneficiaries. (Nonetheless, other factors may have been equally important but remain unstudied.)

As far as reducing inequality in Mexico, Soares et al (2007) assert that PROGRESA/Oportunidades is responsible for a 21% reduction in inequality. They argue that the cash transfers were one of the most important inequality reducing factors in Mexico, second only to income derived from labor during the time period of the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s (Soares et al. 2007). I examined Mexico’s GINI coefficient (a measure of inequality in which 0 denotes total equality and 1 expresses maximum inequality) for the years immediately preceding the conditional cash transfer program’s implementation through 2008 (the latest data I could find) and charted the results in Figure 2. The numbers for Mexico’s GINI coefficient vary somewhat by source, but the World Bank estimates Mexico’s level of inequality between .48 and .52 for most years from 1992-2008. Looking at Figure 2 we can see that inequality dipped slightly to .46 in 2004, but rose once again to .52 by 2008. Regardless of the source, Mexico’s GINI coefficient for the past 20 years has been fairly high, showing a society largely unequal in its distribution of resources, making reducing the amount of inequality another one of PROGRESA/Oportunidades implicit objectives.
Figure 2 – A measure of inequality in Mexico from 1992-2008

Source: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI

In addition to reducing inequality nationwide, some evaluations argue that *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* has been instrumental in closing the large gaps in education that have existed between women and men in Mexico as well as those between indigenous and non-indigenous populations (www.oportunidades.gob.mx). For example, currently more women are completing their high school education than ever before in Mexico. There are also significantly more indigenous children in school than there were before the program’s implementation (ibid). I will discuss more detailed findings regarding gender and ethnicity in a later section.

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Education

One of the main goals of PROGRESA/Oportunidades is to increase the human capital of the children participating in the program by ensuring that they complete their education and graduate from high school. PROGRESA/Oportunidades pays a stipend to families with children in 3rd grade or higher, provided the eligible children are enrolled and attending school at least 85% of the time (SEDESOL 2010). As stated in Chapter 2, in 2011 the educational stipends, called scholarships, range from US $12.79 to $81.83 depending on the grade and gender of the child (www.oportunidades.gob.mx22). Each family enrolled in the program also receives money for school supplies every 6 months for each child receiving a scholarship. In 2011 this amount ranges from US $16.60 to $31.08, depending on the grade the child is in (ibid). To offset the child’s income that families may lose as a result of sending children to school, older children are given a higher stipend to encourage the completion of their education. The hope is that this will discourage them from dropping out and entering the workforce prematurely. In addition, girls receive a larger scholarship than boys after entering secondary school (7th grade) to counter the tendency of girls ending their education after completing primary school. If they complete high school by the age of 22 and within 4 years of their first enrollment, each student has the opportunity to be entered into Jovenes con Oportunidades (Youth with Opportunities). Each Joven con Oportunidades is given a savings account with money that has been deposited on her/his behalf to use as seed money to begin the

journey into adulthood. This amount was US $340.81 in 2010 and was given in hopes that students would use it to further their education (ibid).

Table 2 lists the scholarship amounts for each grade level by gender in addition to the school supply stipend and contributions through Jovenes con Oportunidades. As stated above, the amount of scholarship money girls receive is higher than that of boys at the onset of secondary school. We can see that the difference slightly increases with each passing year and ends with females in their last year of high school receiving more than US $10 per month than boys in the same grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 Education Stipend/Scholarship (USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 School Supply Stipend (USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$16.60</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 Jovenes Con Oportunidades (USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$340.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 – Scholarship Amounts for Child Beneficiaries

Source: http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/semestral
One of my initial intentions for fieldwork was to find data on the number of graduating students who go on to pursue higher education at a college, university or technical school. Unfortunately, this information is not tracked by PROGRESA/Oportunidades because their evaluations focus solely on current beneficiaries and not former participants. This is a serious shortcoming given assumptions built into the program and explicit program goals. In this section I will examine the impacts that PROGRESA/Oportunidades has had on the educational attainment of the children whose families participate in the program. I use the information I was able to obtain on current participants from a variety of external program evaluations. Table 3 lists the impacts on education that have been reported since PROGRESA/Oportunidades’ implementation in 1997. The table is separated into categories based on locality-- rural, urban, and both rural and urban-- and lists the impacts on specific grades levels, females and overall. The specific years the impacts were found are also listed. I highlight some of the findings listed on the table below.

School attendance records are checked every other month and evaluations show that the program appears to have had a positive effect on increasing the rates of school enrollment and attendance. Lomeli (2008) reports that, since the program’s inception, school enrollment from primary to secondary school has increased 12% throughout Mexico and has had the strongest effect on girls’ enrollment going into secondary school. During the presentation given by Dr. Rodriguez, he stated that in 2000, only 5 out of 10 children finished their primary education in Mexico. However, by 2008 7 out of 10 were completing their primary education. He believes this can be attributed to the program,
though other factors such as remittances from migrant family members or expansion of schools into new areas may play a role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impacts on Education</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Rural and Urban</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary School Grades K-6</strong></td>
<td>11 yr olds who failed in the past had 46% decrease in grade failures¹ (2004)</td>
<td>Increase in primary education completion-from 5/10 in 2000 to 7/10 in 2008²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease in drop-out rates after primary school¹ (1997-2000)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary School Grades 7-9</strong></td>
<td>42% increase in school enrollment for 12 yr olds³ (2004)</td>
<td>12% increase in secondary school enrollment¹ (1997-2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School Grades 10-12</strong></td>
<td>85% increase in high school enrollment within the first 2 yrs of high school scholarship³ (2003)</td>
<td>23% increase in enrollment at high schools attended by beneficiaries³ (2002)</td>
<td>23% decrease in 16-19 year old drop-outs³ (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15-19 yr olds obtain an additional 1 yr of schooling compared to non-beneficiaries³ (2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease in drop-out rates of high school students¹ (1997-2000)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td>Among female beneficiaries those from indigenous backgrounds have reached an extra year of schooling compared to mestizo girls⁵ (1997-2007)</td>
<td>Decrease in the amount of domestic work at all ages of girls attending school³ (1998-2000)</td>
<td>Less than 14% of girls attended high school in 2000. In 2010 40% of females attend high school through their senior year²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.7% increase in girls enrollment to secondary school³ (1997-2007)</td>
<td>54% of secondary school scholarship holders are female⁶ (2010)</td>
<td>50% of high school scholarship holders are female⁶ (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>Average length of time a child attends school increased .66 to 1 yr¹ (1997-2000)</td>
<td>Increase in school attendance and school activities for all child beneficiaries⁶ (1998-2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease in child work (domestic and market)⁶ (1998-2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficiaries scored 10% points higher in mathematics achievement⁶ (1998-2003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average length of time in school increased by .85 yr for girls, .65 yr for boys³ (1997-2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3- Impacts on Education in Mexico since PROGRESA/Oportunidades® implementation**

Per Lomeli, on average the length of time a child attends school has increased by 0.66-1 year in rural areas (Lomeli 2008). He also states that PROGRESA/Oportunidades has lessened the occurrence of drop outs in rural primary and high school education. SEDESOL (2010) reports that that in 2004, rural children who were 12 and 14 years of age increased their enrollment to secondary school by 42% and 33% respectively. They also report that high schools attended by PROGRESA/Oportunidades beneficiaries experienced an increase of 23% enrollment in 2002 and that in urban areas in 2004 the dropout rate among teens aged 16-19 had decreased by 23% (SEDESOL 2010). One of the most impressive impacts on education appears to be the number of rural teens choosing to continue their education beyond secondary school. Two years after extending the cash stipend to students attending high school, there was an 85% increase in high school enrollment in rural areas (SEDESOL 2010). A woman in Puebla confirms: “We just went to primary school, now kids go all the way to high school.”

Skoufias and Parker (2001) examined the preliminary data gathered from the first few years of the program and notes that the program seems to have also succeeded in its goal of impacting child work. They find that, overall, while school attendance and participation in school activities increased for children participating in the program, work activities (both domestic and market) significantly decreased for those same children. They state that the most significant changes in Mexico were found in children of secondary school age for both boys and girls, and that girls show a reduction in hours spent on domestic work at all ages.
Pointing out the effects the program has had on educational attainment for girls, Dr. Rodriguez stated that prior to PROGRESA/Oportunidades’ diffusion throughout Mexico, less than 14% of females were attending school during their senior year of high school. After its widespread implementation almost 40% of females were attending school through their senior year of high school, while the number of boys attending their senior year in high school has remained relatively the same at around 27% during the years 2000-2010. Due to PROGRESA/Oportunidades’ encouragement of girls to continue their education beyond primary school, more than 80% of females in 2010 went on to secondary school and more than 60% went on to attend high school.

During my interview with the women’s group, I asked several questions regarding the education of the children in their community. When asked if they thought the children in their community could complete their high school education without the help of PROGRESA/Oportunidades, they all agreed that it was possible, albeit a much more difficult task to complete. They cited some instances where children had graduated without the program, but noted that since the program began many more children were able to complete their education. They seemed very pleased with this outcome. The older women in the group stated that when they were children, they were not afforded the opportunity to attend any schooling at all “just because they were girls”. One woman commenting on the benefits the program stated: “I’m pretty sure if in our days, we had this kind of help, we would be more prepared now.”

One of the key long-term objectives of the program is to produce children who have a higher level of education than their parents and who will be able to obtain higher
paying jobs, thus interrupting the intergenerational transfer of poverty. In the absence of any official data on this issue, I asked the women interviewed about the young people in the community who had graduated from high school. What were their employment opportunities in the small rural town in Puebla State? The women unanimously agreed that if a young person wants a paid job, in all likelihood he or she must leave the community. One woman stated: “Here [there] is no employment. We don’t have any.” Another said: “A lot of people from here leave... And that is not only here. There are a lot of people who live farther along on these roads [that leave] because around here we don’t have any source of [paid] employment.”

In the small town I visited in the state of Morelos, I asked Isabela about the high school graduates in her community--whether they were able to find work there or if they furthered their education by attending a university. “No, some went to the States [US]. Because after they leave the program there is no help. If they continue their education they would have to pay for it themselves.”

When asked how many of the graduating students go on to college, Dr. Rodriguez noted that some do go on to obtain higher education. However, he stated that, regrettably, there are no official data available on the numbers because the program does not track students once they have graduated from high school and/or are no longer participating in the program.
Health and Nutrition

In addition to increasing the educational attainment of the poor, another explicit goal of PROGRESA/Oportunidades is to improve the health and nutrition of those who participate in the program. Each family is given a basic health care “package” (paquete) which now includes access to a government insurance plan called Seguro Popular (Popular Insurance), a stipend for both the nutritional and health components of the program, including an allotment to offset the energy costs associated with cooking (such as gas, wood or electricity…etc), as well as nutritional supplements for children under 5 and for pregnant or nursing women. As a part of the beneficiary’s “co-responsibilities,” all family members must receive regular health check-ups at the community’s health center. In addition, mothers and teens over the age of 15 must also attend an hour long monthly workshop. The workshops cover a variety of health topics such as proper nutrition, hygiene, preventative health care, women’s health, and family planning. Senior Support is a more recent addition to the health component of the program. Seniors over the age of 70 who live with a participating family are able to receive a small monthly stipend (US $26.85 in 2011) provided that they attend medical check-ups every 6 months and are not already involved in the government program 70 y mas (70 and over) that also provides support to seniors. This next section examines the question: Has PROGRESA/Oportunidades obtained its goal of improving the health and nutritional status of the beneficiaries?
### Health Component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Support</th>
<th>Amount (USD)</th>
<th>Item(s)</th>
<th>Co-responsibility</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Health Package</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preventative health care and</td>
<td>Attendance at health</td>
<td>All Family members over 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>health workshops</td>
<td>workshops</td>
<td>yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Support</td>
<td>$26.85</td>
<td>Stipend for senior in household</td>
<td>Attendance at health check-</td>
<td>Seniors over 70 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(per senior)</td>
<td></td>
<td>ups every 6 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Nutrition Component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Support</th>
<th>Amount (USD)</th>
<th>Item(s)</th>
<th>Co-responsibility</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live Better</td>
<td>$10.23</td>
<td>New stipend to offset global increase</td>
<td>Attendance at health</td>
<td>Entire family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(per family)</td>
<td>food prices</td>
<td>workshops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional</td>
<td>$19.18</td>
<td>Stipend to improve family nutrition</td>
<td>Attendance at health</td>
<td>Entire family</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(per family)</td>
<td></td>
<td>workshops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nutritional supplement for children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>under 5 and pregnant/nursing women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic Component</td>
<td>$5.11</td>
<td>Stipend for energy consumption</td>
<td>Attendance at health</td>
<td>All Family members over 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(per family)</td>
<td>associated with cooking</td>
<td>workshops</td>
<td>yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under 6</td>
<td>$8.95</td>
<td>Stipend for children under 9 yrs old</td>
<td>Birth Certificate</td>
<td>Entire family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 6-9</td>
<td>(per child)</td>
<td></td>
<td>School Enrollment Certificate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 – Health and Nutrition Components of PROGRESA/Oportunidades

Source: http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/semestral

Table 4 lists the health and nutrition components of the program in more detail, including the co-responsibilities for each component. As we can see, many of the co-responsibilities for the health and nutrition portion of PROGRESA/Oportunidades are linked to the beneficiaries’ attendance at the health workshops. Though the stipends for the health and nutrition components are not very large, they comprise a significant portion of the cash payments. Dr. Rodriguez states that the payments are used as “a kind of bribe for the families so that they will take their children to school and to the doctors.” However, in some cases the co-responsibilities associated with the program may be
burdensome for the families. For example, the requirement to provide a birth certificate could prove to be a hardship if a child was born at home in a rural village. Nonetheless, there have been several positive health outcomes for the beneficiaries reported in the evaluations.

As reported in Chapter 2, as a result of the conditional nature of the program Mexico has seen a 35% increase in visits to health centers in rural areas and a 26% increase in urban areas (Rodriguez and Amman 2007). There also has been a 22% decrease in morbidity overall for children between 0-2 years of age attributed to the program (ibid). The consumption of fruits, vegetables and high protein meats has increased for children participating in the program (22% in rural areas, 16% in urban), resulting in a reduction in the occurrence of stunting (Lomeli 2008). Though Lomeli (2008) reports that the program has not had a significant impact on the prevalence of anemia in children over the age of 2, Dr. Rodriguez cited a report from SEDESOL stating that anemia has been reduced from 61% to 35.8% among beneficiaries under 2 years of age in rural areas. Combating anemia is a huge concern for the welfare of children in Mexico. Low iron intake in young children can hinder proper cognitive development and affect a child’s learning abilities for years to come. Lomeli (2008: 483) points out that that could be an obstacle for PROGRESA/Oportunidades in that it would “undermine the learning and long-term human capital formation of anemic children.” Table 5 lists the impacts on health that have been reported since the programs implementation in 1997. The table is separated by locality and includes impacts based on age, females and overall. It also includes the years for which the impacts were found.
### Impacts on Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Rural and Urban</th>
<th>Urban</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children 0-2</strong></td>
<td>25.2% reduction in anemia(^1) (1999-2007)</td>
<td>22% decrease in morbidity(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
<td>Increased height by 0.6 inches(^3) (2006)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2% decrease in infant mortality(^1) (2003)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td>22% increase in consumption of fruits, veggies and high protein meats(^1) (1997-2000)</td>
<td>Fewer social-emotional and behavior problems in children 0-3(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
<td>16% increase in consumption of fruits, veggies and high protein meat(^1) (1997-2000)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Health and motor skills improvement(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical development improvement(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
<td>90% of children who consume supplements receive adequate intake of iron, zinc, and vitamins A and C(^1) (2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20% reduction in sick days in children 0-5(^3) (2004)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11% decrease in stunting(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Greater speech and language development skills in children 0-3(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teens/ Young Adults</strong></td>
<td>Less consumption of alcohol in young adults aged 22-24(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Less consumption of junk food(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Increased condom use(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Lower levels of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Women/Girls</strong></td>
<td>60% more women beneficiaries get annual pap smears compared to non-beneficiary women(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
<td>17% increased use of family planning methods(^3) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Girls postpone sex until later in life(^5) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased in having prenatal/postnatal care(^3) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased use of doctor during child birth(^1) (1997-2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11% decrease in maternal mortality(^3) (2003)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Higher tendency to discuss sexual reproduction topics (including birth control and pap smears)(^3) (1997-2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>35% increase in preventative health visits to health center(^2) (2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td>26% increase in preventative health visits to health Center(^2) (2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Impacts on health and nutrition compared to non-beneficiaries since PROGRESA/Oportunidades’ implementation

Sources: \(^1\)Lomeli (2008), \(^2\)Rodriguez and Amman (2007), \(^3\)SEDESOL (2010)

In a report that was compiled by SEDESOL in 2010 examining ten years of program impacts from 1997-2007, researchers indicated that they found another benefit
of the program—participating in risky behaviors had been reduced among beneficiary teens throughout Mexico. A decreased amount of alcohol and tobacco use was reported as well as a decrease in the amount of junk food consumed for those teens whose families had been in the program for several years. In addition to, they found that girls were postponing sex until later in life. Dr. Rodriguez mentioned that there has also been a decrease in the consumption of alcohol in young adults between the ages of 22-24 that were enrolled in the program.

Another positive outcome that has been reported in SEDESOL’s evaluation report is that in rural communities 60% more women received annual pap smears than their non-benefitting counterparts. This is a very important improvement because cervical cancer is the leading cause of death among Mexican women. Beneficiaries are now made aware of the importance of getting an annual exam and learning that early detection of cervical cancer is key to surviving it. They also found a 17% increase in the use of family planning methods among women whose families participate in the program (SEDESOL 2010). Female beneficiaries have also increased prenatal check-ups and are choosing to deliver their babies with the help of a doctor more often (ibid).

In addition to the many positive impacts on health mentioned above and significant gains in combating anemia in rural children under 2, Dr. Rodriguez stated that the levels of health and motor skills as well as physical development of children improved considerably among both rural and urban beneficiaries compared to non-beneficiaries. The supplements provided by the program for young children and pregnant and lactating women help to ensure that they receive the necessary intake of several
important vitamins and nutrients. When asked if they had seen a reduction in the number of teen pregnancies since the program began, Dr. Rodriguez reported that they had found a lower incidence of teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and increased condom use among teens and young adults.

Unfortunately, Isabela did not have positive experiences with the health and nutritional component of the program. She complained about the quality of attention and care. For example, at the check-ups the doctors simply weighed them and wrote it down on a piece of paper. She also stated that sometimes they forgot. “You have to make sure that they really write it down because many people go and if they forget to write down your weight then you are going to get a discount [cash deduction related to lack of proof of fulfilling a co-responsibility].” Her mother-in-law lives with them and is a part of the Senior Support program. In her town, everyone who is in the participating families has to go to the health workshops, including her mother-in-law and husband. Isabela stated that her mother-in-law, who was well over 70, complained about going to them. She did not like going to the health workshops because they spoke about things that were not relevant to her, such as birth control. However, if she did not go, the family believes that they would risk not receiving the stipend for the senior support component. In addition, the husbands in her community were now expected to attend the health workshops—another expectation that is not a program requirement. Normally, only the mothers and children over 15 are required to attend the workshops. Isabela stated that her husband is also not very happy about this new requirement. “My husband doesn’t go. He only goes when it is time to weigh the family.” However, this does not stop the vocales (the elected volunteer
representatives) from making threats that the family will not receive their monthly health stipend.

When asked about the seniors having to attend the health workshops in Isabela’s community though it was not a program requirement or co-responsibility, Dr. Rodriguez admitted that some communities have appeared to make up their own rules. He acknowledged that a senior attending a workshop on birth control may sound silly, but defended the program stating that the point of the workshops were to educate the people in communities. He said that the program’s administrators were aware that “not all workshops would be relevant to all participants” (emphasis mine). Even though a senior woman may not be able to use the knowledge she gained about birth control herself, he said that she would now have the information and would be able to share the knowledge with her daughters, granddaughters and nieces. As for the husbands in Isabela’s town having to attend the monthly health workshops, he stated that that was definitely not a condition of the program and should not be occurring in any community. The beneficiaries in that community would need to make PROGRESA/Oportunidades aware of what was happening in their community via the suggestion/complaint box so that program authorities would be able to address that issue and correct it.

Gender and Ethnicity

Interested in the impacts that PROGRESA/Oportunidades has had on gender inequality in Mexico, I explored the effects the program has had on women specifically. Most conditional cash transfer programs disperse the payments to the mothers in the
family as opposed to the fathers. The reasoning behind this lies with the widespread findings of research that has documented the fact that mothers are the parent more apt to spend their resources on children than are fathers. Additionally, some proponents of CCTs believed that giving the payments to the woman of the house would strengthen her role as a decision maker when it came to the health and education of the children (see, for example, Blumberg et al. 1995\textsuperscript{23}). Lomeli (2008) also reports that several studies have shown that CCT programs do in fact strengthen the position of the women in participating households. He notes several positive effects – higher self-esteem, reducing educational gaps between men and women and increasing the influence of mothers. “Given an unequal balance of power within the household, conditional cash transfers gave mothers an effective commitment device with which to defend the welfare of children” (Lomeli 2008: 489). In addition, Skoufias et al. (2001) found that \textit{PROGRESA/Oportunidades} improved men’s recognition of women’s importance to family welfare.

When \textit{PROGRESA/Oportunidades} first began in Mexico there was fear that giving the money to women would create conflict in the homes of the beneficiaries. Dr. Rodriguez stated that Mexico opted to give the payments to the men at first because “they were the heads of the household.” Unfortunately, the administrators soon found out that was a mistake because “they drank the money.” The decision to give the money to the mothers did not come without critics who warned that the men may feel threatened by the women receiving money for their household. Dr. Rodriguez explained: “We changed and

gave the money to the mothers because they are more interested in the education and nutrition of their children. A lot of people thought that there was going to be an aggressive reaction from the husbands because women are receiving money… We thought they were going to hit them, but actually the women were empowered. Sometimes they leave their husband because maybe the husband was always drunk and hitting the children…. They are leaving with the money they receive and taking care of the children.” In 2011 SEDESOL reports that 96% of the beneficiaries of PROGRESA/Oportunidades are women (www.oportunidades.gob.mx24).

Dr. Rodriguez also attested to the shrinking educational gaps between men and women and the rising self esteem of girls and women involved in the program. He feels that one of the many lessons they receive at the workshops is to value their self-worth. “The information they receive in the workshops is helping them to take care of themselves… Something very basic to understand is that they are not objects.” He stated that in some communities the girls think they should do what their families or boyfriends tell them to do, but when they are armed with the knowledge that they are not less than men and that they have the same rights as men, they can make better choices for themselves and for their future. Dr. Rodriguez reported that he has seen research that shows that girls in the program are going to school longer and delaying marriage until after completing their schooling more so than girls not enrolled in the program.

The report from SEDESOL in 2010 found that among the female beneficiaries, those from indigenous backgrounds completed an additional year of schooling compared to *mestizo* (non-indigenous, of mixed heritage) beneficiaries. They also reported that female students who are beneficiaries who attend primary and secondary school outperform their male counterparts in both mathematics and Spanish. This may be attributed to the finding that parents in beneficiary households now have positive expectations for their daughter’s education or that women are more appreciative of the opportunity to attend school (SEDESOL 2010). This is a major change in the way girls are viewed. As an older woman interviewed from Puebla State lamented that when she was young she did not even have the opportunity to go to school simply because of her gender. “Just because we were girls, our parents didn’t even send us to school. The school was only for boys.” As noted earlier in the section on education, Skoufias (2004) found that the most significant impacts in the reduction of child work were found among girls of all ages.

Prior to the national incorporation of the program, *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* reports that less than 50% of the female population attended high school. In 2010, there were more girls completing high school than boys with the help of *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* (www.oportunidades.gob.mx). *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* also reports that in 2010 54% of the scholarship recipients in secondary school are female and more than 50% of the scholarship holders in high school are female (ibid).

Dr. Rodriguez stated that 70% of the inhabitants in the state of Chiapas (with an overwhelmingly indigenous population) were beneficiaries of the program and that the
children in the program would be less likely to inherit their parent’s social, economic and working conditions because of the opportunities that would be afforded them due to their increased educational attainment. Out of the 7.5 million indigenous people living in Mexico, almost 1.5 million indigenous households are beneficiaries of the program. Though numbers on the indigenous population vary, the UN Refugee Agency reports that the indigenous people of Mexico consist of 13% of the national population. They comprise 25% of the population served by PROGRESA/Oportunidades. Another 87,000 families living in indigenous villages are a part of the PAL (Food Support Program) program operated by PROGRESA/Oportunidades that offers assistance to poor families without any requirement for co-responsibilities.

Community/Social Relations

As mentioned above, one of the unfortunate consequences of PROGRESA/Oportunidades in some communities has been a breakdown in social solidarity and growing conflict among community members due to resentment over program eligibility and acceptance. This may be due to jealousy over what some have and some do not or to a lack of understanding of the targeting and selection process. Lomeli (2008) points out that often times the selection process is not correctly interpreted by both those who are approved and those who are denied. People who belong to communities where there are different levels of poverty, including extreme poverty, are not always aware of the fine distinctions made by government entities. “In an

\[\text{\textsuperscript{25} http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic,463af2212,469f2e812,49749ce423,0.html – accessed on 5/14/11} \]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{26} http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/atiende_sedesol_a_siete_millones_y_medio_de_indige - accessed on 4/4/11}\]
environment characterized by widespread illiteracy, clientelism, and a history of *cacique* [literally “chief” or boss] rule, it is difficult for people to comprehend selection methods based on digital media and advanced statistical models. In such a context, interpretations are inevitably constructed among community members about reasons for selection (chance, fate, luck, favoritism), thereby fueling general annoyance in the community” (Lomeli 2008: 489). As Dr. Rodriguez noted as well, most people in Mexico consider themselves poor if they are not rich and many of those people feel they should be eligible for the extra assistance.

Gonzalez de la Rocha (2005) and Adato (2004) have studied the social tensions that are created by inclusion and exclusion decisions, especially in rural areas. Existing conflicts may be exacerbated and/or new resentments may arise. Behrman and Skoufias (2006) feel these issues should be taken into account during the program’s design phase. Nonetheless, Lomeli (2008) states that some studies find that participation in CCTs strengthens the network ties of some beneficiaries as a direct result of their participation and leaves them empowered by the transfers. In this section I plan to examine the effects *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* has had on the social relations of the communities who participate in the program.

During the interview with the women’s group, several issues relating to social relations among community members arose. One woman stated that sometimes people will tell the program officials things about beneficiaries in an effort to get them dismissed from *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* “just because they don’t like that person in the program.” Another issue that surfaced in both the community in Puebla and in Isabela’s
town was the issue of who would clean the health center and the area surrounding it in addition to paying for the additional medical supplies. Apparently, the increased usage of the health center by the beneficiaries has left both small towns wondering who would cover the rising expenses due to the increased traffic at the clinic.

The women from Puebla stated that the kinds of issues mentioned above were now handled by different committees in their town, but it took a while to get to that point. Due to the rise in conflicts in their town, it was necessary to form different committees comprised of several beneficiaries that would respond to the issues relating to PROGRESA/Oportunidades as they surfaced. These committees were formed in addition to the vocales who were elected representatives that served as links between the beneficiaries and program officials.

When PROGRESA first began in their town in 1997, all the participants agreed that they would donate 5 pesos to go towards the needs of the health clinic. However, problems arose when some people did not donate their share to the clinic. At one point the beneficiaries were being stopped when they went to pick up their stipends, “Somebody accused us of not giving the money and they caught us in the same place where we were receiving the program cash benefits to end chances to avoid the donation. Just right there in the same place where we were receiving the benefits.”

The women said that even after that some people still refused to donate the money. Then threats from the vocales began, stating that the program would be taken away from them if they did not donate. “That caused a big problem” one woman stated.
Next, the beneficiaries tried to make the donation obligatory at the town level so that everyone would help to pay for the clinic, not just the people in the program. “But of course the people outside of Oportunidades, they stepped up and said no and argued that we were the ones who were supposed to pay the 5 pesos because we have Oportunidades. So then we didn’t have a choice.” Later on, however, the program participants discussed the matter again and came up with the idea of charging 10 pesos per visit to the clinic. This charge, they decided, would apply to everyone--beneficiary or not--when they visited the dentist or the doctor at the community’s health center. They wrote to the authorities at the health department and got their plan approved. “Why? Because when we asked for it at the town level they said no. So now that is how we could charge this way.” It appears that the beneficiaries in this town have gained some power in their small community by creating the committees. However, the program has obviously provided a new mechanism of stratification in this rural town in which the beneficiaries are now seen by some as the privileged, with the non-beneficiaries constructing ways to make them share their newfound income.

The women also stated that they felt pressure from the schools. Sometimes the teachers and school administrators tell the beneficiaries that they should donate some of their cash payments to help the school. One woman said: “They say that money must be given just because we are in Oportunidades.” Another commented: “We understand that they are giving us money to help us, but they don’t give us this money to give to the school. The school even asks for the chalk for the chalkboard!” Unfortunately, most of the women said that they feared speaking up against the teachers because they were
afraid that they would say something bad about them, such as they are mistreating their children or sending them to school dirty. When asked if they felt any sort of stigma as a result of being a part of the program one woman stated: “Yes. They are always looking at you, like you are the person who must give donation or pay fees just because you are in the program.”

Isabela had similar complaints. The women in PROGRESA/Oportunidades in her town were responsible for cleaning the health center. If they did not want to clean, they were obligated to pay 10 pesos so that someone else could be paid to clean it. Mr. Lopez stated that in every community it was different, but it was always something. “In some communities they will ask for 10 pesos to clean the church or to clean the cemetery or the main street or the school or the health center…”

Isabela complained that in her community the beneficiaries were also obligated to donate 10 pesos every 2 months when the PROGRESA/Oportunidades officials came to distribute the cash payments. This money was collected from every participating family in the community and allegedly went to provide the food for the 2 days the government officials were in town. However, there were only 2 or 3 officials and 4 police who attended these sessions. Even counting meals for the vocales in her community, she felt it was an excessive amount of money for 6 meals. “So if we are 500 families in the program and they come here every 2 months that’s 5000 pesos… I would say with 1000 pesos or even 2000 pesos we could feed them.” Both Mr. Lopez and Isabela complained about feeding people from Cuernavaca (a prosperous city) who had “good wages and good cars.” They did not think it was fair that the beneficiaries who were living in extreme
poverty had to pay for meals for the privileged from what little money they received from the program.

Dr. Rodriguez was questioned on the practice of charging beneficiaries to clean the health clinic or provide meals for program officials. He stated that those were not requirements of the program and that no one could, technically, make them pay or dismiss them from the program if they did not. “That is an arrangement between the people and no one can ask for money or make a burden to anybody or make it a condition of the program. The only way for someone to get put out of the program is to stop going to the clinic or attending school less than 85% of the time for 4 months continuously or in 6 months in separate times [when the program officials check the school records every other month].” When asked if there was something that could be done about the people in the towns who tell the beneficiaries that they must do these things as part of the requirements, he explained that the problem most likely lay with the vocales. “They also are beneficiaries, but they are chosen by the community of all beneficiaries to serve as a link between the families and the programs. These vocales become empowered by the rest of the beneficiaries and sometimes they, by themselves, make bad use of their power. If they [the other beneficiaries] tell us, then we are going to take them out of the position of being a vocal and choose someone else. But these are the little details that we cannot control.”

Dr. Rodriguez said that at times there are officials from other countries who come to learn more about how the program operates. He sometimes takes them out to the beneficiary towns when the payments are being made so that they can see how the money
is distributed. He tells the people in the town that they are coming and to not make a big deal out of it, but still they will prepare an elaborate meal for the guests. “They do it because it is a way of saying thanks. For me, it is very difficult because I know these people are in extreme poverty and they are sacrificing to give us food. But you can’t tell them ‘no thank you, I don’t want any food’ because they already spent the money to make the food.”

When I asked Isabela if there was a stigma attached to enrollment in the program in her town she stated that there is some. “Some people say ‘Oh, you’re applying to the program. Why don’t you work harder?’” Mr. Lopez pointed out that there may be some stigma, but in that particular town the majority of the families were actually beneficiaries of the program. Isabela did state that on occasion, similar to the other town visited in Puebla, people will report that someone has acquired something like a new car and “try to get them put out of the program.” She didn’t agree with this though. “I don’t think you should envy other people in your community, you should respect those people. I don’t think you should be selfish, we all need the help. It’s government money.” Mr. Lopez adds: “It’s kind of like revenge [to the government]. The community all cares for each other. They cover each other’s backs.”

**Program Implementation and Changes**

As stated in Chapter 2, *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* currently receives the largest budget from the federal government for a human development program in Mexico and is said to be one of the most efficient conditional cash transfer programs in the world with
its operating cost around 3% of each invested peso (SEDESOL 2010). In 2010 the program was allotted 63 billion pesos, an equivalent of approximately US$5 billion (SEDESOL 2010). The program serves 6.5 million families throughout Mexico in both rural and urban areas; this is a third of the Mexican population.

_PROGRESA/Oportunidades_ currently operates in 2,444 municipalities in all 32 states of Mexico, focusing on the most marginalized citizens. Of the programs beneficiaries, 69.2% of the program beneficiaries reside in the country’s 10 poorest states--Chiapas, Veracruz, Puebla, Mexico, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, and San Luis Potosi (www.oportunidades.com). Soares et al. (2007) found that 80% of all cash transfers are distributed to 40% of the poorest households in Mexico.

Since its modest beginning in 1997, _PROGRESA/Oportunidades_ has gone through several changes in an effort to improve the program. This section will focus on those changes. Each year the program expands to include more families. Dr. Rodriguez says that some people may see this as a sign that the program is not working if more and more people are living in poverty and need help, but he explains that the program did not initially have the budget to serve every poor family living in Mexico. “We receive the money from congress and we base our beneficiary numbers on the amount we receive.” Due to the program’s overwhelmingly positive reviews and evaluations, congress continually increases the program’s budget. Salvador Escobedo Zoletto, the national coordinator of _PROGRESA/Oportunidades_, states that “the growth of _Oportunidades_ is the government’s response to rising poverty levels derived from the current international
economic crisis” and credits the program’s most recent success to the incorporation of using technology in its targeting and delivery methods (www.oportunidades.gob.mx\textsuperscript{27}).

As previously noted, in 2001 officials included students attending high school as scholarship holders and in 2003 they implemented Jovenes con Oportunidades, a one-time payment for high school graduates. This is an effort to encourage enrolled students to complete their high school studies by the age of 22 and continue their education. A survey of the 2007 PROGRESA/Oportunidades high school graduates was conducted and found that 75\% of them had interest in continuing their education beyond high school. This finding prompted PROGRESA/Oportunidades to form a collaboration with the National Scholarship Program for Higher Education (PRONABLES), a scholarship program aimed at assisting low income students who wish to go to college or technical school upon their completion of high school. The scholarship holders of PROGRESA/Oportunidades now have direct access to the scholarship, resulting in the quadrupling of the number of PROGRESA/Oportunidades students receiving the scholarship for higher education. The number has increased from 7,261 in the 2003-2004 school year to 33,310 in the 2009-2010 school year (www.oportunidades.gob.mx\textsuperscript{28}). Unfortunately, it seems as if this information has not been disseminated well in the rural areas. Isabela reported “After they leave the program there is no help. If they want to continue their education, they must pay for it themselves.”

\textsuperscript{27} http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/did102010_04062010 - accessed on 4/16/11
\textsuperscript{28} http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/mas_de_33_mil_ex_becarios_de_oportunidades_estudia - pronables - accessed 4/10/11
The program went from serving only rural residents in 1997 to also serving those residing in urban areas in 2004. In 2009, the PAL program (Food Support Program) was introduced in addition to the unveiling of a new urban model that was applied initially as a pilot program in 7 cities with a plan to incorporate the new design nationwide in 2010. The innovative urban design consists of a new model for household-level targeting, has an increase in health services coverage that will be able to respond to the unique urban dynamics and epidemiological issues, an increase in the amount of the educational scholarships to match the higher opportunity costs in urban areas, bonuses for good grades, a new set of co-responsibilities with more flexible terms of completion, and electronic payment methods in which beneficiaries are given debit cards with the benefit amount electronically deposited into their personal accounts (SEDESOL 2010).

One positive outcome of the electronic payment system, in addition to the greater efficiency of the new system, has been that it allows PROGRESA/Oportunidades to get aid to beneficiaries in need of emergency assistance in a timely manner. The electronic system enables SEDESOL to expedite benefits to families living in states affected by natural disasters such as hurricanes and mass flooding. In 2010, the states who were hit by Hurricane Alex in July and severe weather that caused massive flooding in September were able to receive their payments ahead of schedule even if they had lost their identifying documents (www.oportunidades.gob.mx29)

Dr. Rodriguez explained the rationale behind the PAL program. “It is nonsense to include a family and then tell them ‘I am going to take you out because you did not go to the clinic or to school’ and they didn’t go because there are no clinics or schools.” PAL participants receive the same monetary and supplementary benefits to help support better health and nutrition for their families as PROGRESA/Oportunidades beneficiaries. However, they are only required to visit the nearest health facility twice per year and do not receive the educational stipend. Dr. Rodriguez pointed out that PAL was originally developed to operate in isolated rural areas, but now has participants in urban areas. He stated that this is helping to make the government more aware of the vast deficiencies that also exist in urban areas. “Nowadays, we have the program in urban areas because we didn’t have the [health] clinics. It’s a way of putting pressure on the health sector because we can tell them ‘Hey, I am in the city and I have this many families in PAL and they shouldn’t be in PAL. You should have clinics for them to attend so I can put them in Oportunidades instead of PAL.’ The idea is to put pressure on them because if there are more schools and more clinics it’s easier for us to include more families.”

The amount of the stipend undergoes a yearly cost of living increase resulting in the current stipend being more than double the amount that it was only 10 years ago. A family who would have received 3,000 pesos (US $257.53) in 2000 would receive 7,000 pesos (US $600.88) in 2010 (www.oportunidades.gob.mx30). Acknowledging the effects of global changes in the economy on the poor, in 2008 PROGRESA/Oportunidades

30http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/en_10_anos_oportunidades_ha_crecido_mas_de_160 - accessed on 4/14/11
beneficiaries began receiving *Food Aid for Better Living*, an additional nutrition stipend to offset the global increase in food prices. In 2010, the participants also began receiving the *Child Benefit for Better Living*. This additional cash payment is given to households with children 0-9 years of age in order to support proper nutrition and development of children (SDEDESOL 2010). Prior to this addition, children in grades below 3rd grade did not receive any financial support from the program. Another more recent addition to the program is the automatic entry into the government’s insurance program called *Popular Seguro* (Popular Insurance). This bonus was added because the program coordinators realized there was little aid the health clinics could offer to persons without insurance in the event that a health issue was discovered at one of the required check-ups. Dr. Rodriguez explains: “For example, they [beneficiaries] go in to have a check-up and if at the check-up they discover this person has diabetes, they couldn’t do anything else because we only provide the check-up. Nowadays, we have this other program called Popular Insurance and everybody that enters into Oportunidades gets this insurance. This is something new and it is in response to a concrete problem.”

Another change the program has undergone is the application they use to determine a family’s eligibility. Dr. Rodriguez states: “We used to have our own survey, but we have started to use the socio-economic questionnaire that is common for all the social programs for citizens… We have an addition, a few questions that are specific to Oportunidades. With the help of this program we can make a common database of all the families.” This database consists of much more information about the family than the program originally obtained from the families. Now, when examining families the
PROGRESA/Oportunidades workers are more easily able to determine whether they would be eligible for their program and/or any other government program. “In some places the families live on dirt floors. So we [the Mexican government] have a program to give the families cement floors and we can go to the database and say ‘ok, let’s check this community and see who has cement and who does not’ and thanks to this program information we go directly to those families and we don’t have to do another survey to find the families who don’t have cement floors. This is helping us to get better results and in a cheaper way.”

Unintended Consequences

As with any new program, there are some impacts that could not be foreseen. The implementation of PROGRESA/Oportunidades has generated a few unintended consequences; some are positive, others not so positive. Many such consequences were noted in earlier sections. One of the more positive unintended consequences, however, has been the empowering of women in Mexican society. I have already discussed the research regarding women gaining more influence when it comes to decision making in their homes. In addition to that, Dr. Rodriguez stated that because of the program granting the cash transfers to the mothers instead of the fathers, women were now able to leave abusive situations and still have enough money to care for their children. “Maybe some people think ‘Oh, you are destroying families.’ Yes, but they were families with violence and now they are not violent families. The women are taking care of the children and maybe better now than they were before.”
Unfortunately, not all of the women have such positive experiences with the additional money in their households. As one of the women from Puebla stated: “There are some exceptions. For example, there is this woman that I know whose husband likes to drink a lot and they take advantage of the program because he does not make any effort to find a job or to change the way he lives because he knows he gets the money from the scholarships.” Another woman spoke up: “There are other women who get the money and go home and the husband is right there waiting for them to ask them for the money as a loan. They give it to him and he leaves! He spends all the money and then later they do not have money for the kids. Then the kids go to school with broken [down] shoes or dirty and the teachers get angry. They say if you are receiving the help from the program, you must have your kids well-fed and well-dressed. But of course, if the woman gives the money to her husband, in the end they will not have enough.” For some women it is empowering, yet for others it is not.

Many critics of CCTs state that the program saddles the mothers in poor households with even more responsibility by making them the central link between the program and the family. Molyneux (2007) and Arriagada and Mathivet (2007) find that PROGRESA/Oportunidades reinforces traditional gender roles of women as people who live for other people. Fathers are exempt from almost all responsibilities of the program with the exception of the annual health exam. Due to the linkage between the stipends and the co-responsibilities, each mother is required to ensure her family attends the necessary check-ups and monthly health workshops (in addition to making sure her children attend school at least 85% of the time). This may not appear to be a major
responsibility at first glance: however, no exception is given to women who are single parents and/or may be working full-time outside the home. If a mother fails to show at one of the monthly health workshops, her family loses the “live better stipend” (US $10.23), the nutritional stipend ($19.18) and the energy stipend (US $5.11) of the program—an amount equivalent to US $34.52 in 2011. This is almost the entire stipend that the family receives for the health and nutrition component of the program minus the child benefit for better living (US $8.95 per child) for children less than 9 years of age.

Isabela reported that during the month of my visit, she had missed the health workshop and would receive the sanction. Her family would only receive US $8.95 for one of her sons plus the US $12.79 in scholarship money for a 3rd grader for a total of US $21.74, about one third of the $65.21 USD she is supposed to receive. Isabela is married and only works part-time because she has her husband’s income to depend on. However, for a single mother who is barely making ends meet, the deduction could be catastrophic. There are no exceptions if the mother is sick or cannot attend due to another obligation—even a job. The new urban model of PROGRESA/Oportunidades attempts to make the health workshop co-responsibility more flexible for its beneficiaries; they take into consideration the activities of the mothers, transportation and the differing schedules that exist in urban communities. As of yet, though, no such consideration is given to rural participants like Isabela.

Another unfortunate consequence is the apparent abuse of power by some of the vocales. In Isabela’s community the vocales appear to take advantage of the naiveté of the beneficiaries and make up rules for the program that simply do not exist. Isabela gave
several examples where the community-elected *vocales* told them that they *must* do something because it was a requirement of the program. The extra obligations, such as the husbands and the seniors in the beneficiary families having to attend the health workshops or the requirement to pay for the cleaning of the health center and the food to feed the program officials every two months, are passed off by the *vocales* as co-responsibilities. According to Mr. Lopez, variations such as these in *PROGRESA/Oportunidades*’ operation happen on the community level in many localities. These deviations appear to be examples of the program being used as a new mechanism of stratification in the small rural communities or as means of “skimming” off the top where possible.

Due to the program’s beneficiaries’ misunderstanding of the program rules (and their fear of losing their benefits), they give in to the *vocales* every time they come up with an additional “requirement”. The only way to complain about the abuse of power is via the suggestion/complaint box. However, if they are not completely sure that what the *vocales* are telling them is false, that is not very likely to happen. When informed of some of the extra requirements imposed in Isabela’s community Dr. Rodriguez stated “That is not the policy of *Oportunidades* and it is very difficult to control that… They [the *vocales*] can’t take anyone out of the program, but as you can see they are using this power that they have… Those are the things that we can’t do anything about unless we receive a complaint.” Recalling Isabela’s comment about people being afraid to put a complaint in the suggestion box because “if someone found out that you did that then they may write a note about you”, I reminded Dr. Rodriguez that sometimes in small
communities slipping an anonymous note into a suggestion box may not always be so anonymous. He stated “But sometimes people have the courage to do it because they are very angry at the vocal or something.”

In addition to vocales abusing their power to extort money from the participants and require them to do extra “co-responsibilities,” they sometimes misuse their power for political purposes. Mr. Lopez stated this goes on very often and that the vocales are actually chosen according to what political party is most powerful in that community.

“Each community has a municipal board that represents Oportunidades. It is the responsibility of each of the municipal boards to receive all the requests for new members…. The people on the municipal boards and the community boards are determined by the political party that controls that municipality. So in some communities if you supported a particular political party, you get registered and immediately your income goes up…. In some communities it is known that if you want to keep getting support from Oportunidades, you have to vote for a specific political party. And that is not legal. But it is kept a secret in the community. That the program is used by the political system.”

He also believes that some people in the program should not be in the program because they are working and earning a good wage. “If a beneficiary begins working in the municipality and earning a good wage, they are probably with the same political party that governs that municipality and they won’t report that they are making a good salary. Only when there is opposition do they follow up.” This may be true, as Lomeli (2008) reports that 4% of the benefits from PROGRESA/Oportunidades actually go to the richest quintile.

Dr. Rodriguez insists though, that if it were to be made known that any vocal or employee of Oportunidades is acting as a member of a political party then they will lose their position (or job) immediately. He states: “It is very easy to use it
politically, but I am very happy that my boss, who is the
general coordinator for the whole country, is always saying that no one can use the
program in a political way and if they do they are going to get fired… But at the lowest
levels it is easier for promoters to talk among themselves in order to benefit their
candidates or political objectives. If the vocal or the beneficiaries tell us ‘this person is
telling us to vote for this party or this candidate’ surely we are going to fire this person.”
However, he did acknowledge that sometimes they could do very little about what goes
on in each of the individual communities. “There are ways that are out of our control. For
example, sometimes when we go to someplace to give the payments, a truck appears with
the symbol of a political party or there is a person with a shirt with the symbol of the
party. And they start asking the beneficiaries if they are happy with the money because
‘the mayor is very interested in them receiving the money and he is working hard for you
to continue to receive the money.’”

Unfortunately, the political use of government programs is not a practice used
exclusively in Mexico. There is a long history of social programs being used as political
leverage throughout Latin America and elsewhere. Lomeli (2008) states that there is a
long list of problems with the people involved with CCT programs related to their being
as interested in accumulating power as they are with alleviating poverty. He concludes
that: “All of these elements make it wrong to label CCT programs simply as conditional
cash transfers for the accumulation of social and human capital. They inevitably have
broader social and economic consequences for community relations.” (Lomeli 2008: 489)
Though revealing mostly positive impacts of PROGRESA/Oportunidades during the presentation on the program, even Dr. Rodriguez acknowledged that it has its limitations. He concedes

“One problem is that after they graduate from high school, sometimes they don’t have anything else to do… It is a problem of our country…. We received a critique in the newspaper a year ago, ‘Now we are sending them to the states with better education.’ Because, you know, the persons that used to go as migrants to the [US] States are the poorest with no education and people from the country [rural areas] and now we are sending people with a better level of education and better nutrition. But the problem is what to do with them… I think there is a Nobel Prize waiting for the one who discovers what to do with these kind of persons that are more prepared and are waiting to use all the social [human] capital we gave them.”

Unfortunately, this also seemed to be true in the communities I visited. In both communities, the participants stated that in order for the young graduates to find employment, they must go elsewhere. For people who want to work in rural areas there are limited opportunities. Some of the comments I received after questioning the available employment in a small town in Puebla state were: “Here our main activity is keeping the house and working the land.” “We would like to get help for us, but we don’t want money; we want a place to work. We would like something like a factory or a place where single moms can work together even if it is only 3 or 4 hours for a product that could be sold to big stores.” “We just want to work, because sometimes we get sick of doing nothing.”

Due to the lack of employment opportunities, rural Mexico’s rural areas have experienced a high rate of outmigration. Throughout this research the shortage in the number of employment opportunities in rural areas has been made painfully obvious in
interviews and observations. In fact, Pechlaner and Otero (2010) report that since 1995 Mexico has experienced the greatest rural population exodus in the country’s history. They report that millions of rural Mexicans have left the countryside in search of a better life. While their research focused mainly on the impacts of the “agricultural liberation of NAFTA”, in which millions of peasant farmers were intentionally forced out of the rural areas to provide a labor force for the incoming transnational companies- *maquiladoras* or factories- it appears a similar push may be occurring with the implementation of a poverty alleviation strategy in which the accumulation of human capital of the rural poor is being invested in without the complementing investments in local job creation. It seems, therefore, as though another unfortunate consequence of *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* is the “de-development” of rural Mexico evidenced by a “rural brain drain” in which large groups of individuals are acquiring knowledge and/or technical skills and emigrating from the rural areas into urban areas in search of the promised better jobs that education is expected to lead to.

Mr. Lopez stated that although *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* is portrayed by the media as one of the best programs in the world for poor “it makes people dependent on the support from the government.” It seems though that no matter what type of aid program exists, there is always a fine line between a hand-out and a hand-up. One woman in Puebla stated “We have the program and we work also. But there are a lot of people who don’t. The people like us who like to work are the ones who improve our quality of life. The ones who don’t like to work, they stay the same, just waiting for whatever the government gives them.” *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* seems to offer a small glimmer of
hope for those who have the ability to take advantage of the new opportunities afforded to them. Though the proponents of the program can invest in the future of the poor in Mexico, there is no guarantee that the investment will actually payoff.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

As stated in Chapter 1, the research objective of this thesis was to examine documented evidence of the positive impacts of PROGRESA/Oportunidades and critiques of the program’s limitations. In particular, I was interested in the program’s goal of disrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty through interventions targeting poor families to alleviate poverty and to make human capital investments in the education, nutrition, and health care of children primarily. My original question focused on whether or not young adults who participated in the program as children had better jobs and/or higher wages than their parents. However, once I reviewed reports, studies and formal evaluations of the program, it became clear that there were no data on participating children once they left the program. As a result, research for this thesis focused on the themes and indicators that most frequently were included in reports, studies and formal evaluations. Seven themes predominated in the evaluation literature and were summarized in Chapter 3: poverty reduction and inequality, education, health and nutrition, gender differences, community/social relations, program implementation and changes, and unintended consequences. To these I added information on ethnic inequality.
I supplemented document analysis with brief interviews with a small number of persons during a short trip to Mexico in Summer 2010. These included 31 women whose families were participating or had participated in PROGRESA/Oportunidades and two professionals who work with the poor in Mexico, including one official directly involved with the program. These individuals provided additional insights into program implementation and impact as well as information on issues not touched upon in other studies, reports or in formal evaluations. In this chapter, I present key findings on the following issues:

1. What is known regarding whether or not PROGRESA/Oportunidades is meeting its goal of alleviating poverty. Information is drawn from reports, studies and formal evaluations and from comments provided by participants interviewed.

2. Critiques of the program’s effectiveness from those who have studied and evaluated the program and critiques provided by the participants interviewed. Where relevant, possible solutions suggested by sources also are included.

3. Critical areas where additional research is needed, particularly on the program goal of disrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Is PROGRESA/Oportunidades meeting its goal of interrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty? The only possible answer is “maybe.” Both document research and interviews strongly suggest that the conditional cash transfer program has reached short-term goals of decreasing the incidence and severity of poverty in the lives of beneficiaries nationwide. Though the program does not completely
eradicate poverty, Figure 1 in Chapter 2 illustrates that there was an unmistakable drop in the percentage of poor throughout Mexico following its implementation. Formal evaluations and reports support the existence of evidence of increased enrollment and attendance in schools across the country—though the degree of increase has been modest. This suggests that the program’s participants are taking advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them by PROGRESA/Oportunidades in response to the cash incentives provided. There is also documented evidence that the program has had significant impacts on the health and nutrition of beneficiaries when compared to non-beneficiaries. Anecdotal evidence provided by women participants supported these positive conclusions. When asked if there had been a change in their lives since they began the program, one woman in Puebla stated “Yes, our families’ health has improved and our quality of life.” The rest of the group nodded in agreement.

Evaluations also provide evidence that suggests that PROGRESA/Oportunidades is contributing to changes in gender and ethnic inequalities that characterize Mexico. One example is a higher school enrollment among indigenous girls than mestizo girls, a reversal of long-term trends. PROGRESA/Oportunidades also has been given credit for decreasing child work at home and in the market place. Given the formal evaluations and overwhelmingly positive ratings on indicators, it appears that Mexico’s conditional cash transfer program is positively impacting the lives of the poor enrolled and alleviating many of the ills associated with poverty.

However, a closer look at some of the outcomes reveals that at least some of them seem miniscule given the scope of the program. For example, the average length of time
that a participating rural child stays in school only increased by .66 to 1 year over non-participating children. Overall, the average increase in educational attainment was only .85 for girls and .65 for boys, not a full year for either gender. Evaluations suggest that these outcomes may be more beneficial (and increase) in the long-term, but no qualitative research could be found that would explain or hypothesize the reasons underlying such limited impacts. Would they be explained by structural factors such as problems with the quality of the educational system? By lack of relevance of education to job opportunities locally? By early migration in search of opportunities elsewhere? Answers are unknown.

In addition, there are still tens of thousands of Mexicans living in areas with no access to educational or health facilities, indicating clearly that conditional cash transfer programs are limited by infrastructural and service deficits. SEDESOL and PROGRESA/Oportunidades both have attempted to address this problem to some extent by implementing the PAL program in these isolated areas. Yet, unless there is more government collaboration to incorporate those areas into the public education and health systems, the families in those localities will not have access to key benefits of the program.

Lomeli (2008) may be correct when he argues that too many assumptions have been associated with the implementation of conditional cash transfer programs. He states that some assumptions, such as increased time spent in school leading to higher future income, have not been thoroughly evaluated. This is important because poor children usually attend schools that are lacking necessary educational resources. An increase in the number of days spent in school will not alone lead to increased learning; quality of
education must be considered. Unfortunately, PROGRESA/Oportunidades’ goal was to simply encourage children to stay in school longer and the amount of actual learning that takes place in the classroom was not taken into consideration nor is it regularly evaluated by the program.

Duhua’s (2000) critique regarding child beneficiaries’ inability to find employment upon high school graduation appears to be a valid one. Noting the obvious error in assuming that program participants will earn higher incomes simply because they have more education, Duhua states that the effects that CCTs will have on earnings will be minimal, especially in rural areas where there are limited employment opportunities. Without increased investments in economic growth, Duhua predicts that the program will not prove to be viable in the long-term. Unfortunately, in both communities that I visited, the participants stated that in order for the young graduates to find employment, they must go elsewhere. For people who want to work in rural areas there are limited opportunities.

During fieldwork, some problems not covered by reports or formal evaluations were revealed by those interviewed. Several points of conflicts were pointed out. Some conflicts were related to the selection process and inability to cover 100% of the families eligible in a given community. Others appear to be related to a lack of collaboration between PROGRESA/Oportunidades and the governmental entities that supervise the health clinics and schools. Implementation of the program and requirements to comply with co-responsibilities (health checkups, school attendance, talks and workshops) led to increased use of health centers which, in turn, strained already strapped services and
facilities. The increase in demand for health center services was not addressed adequately by PROGRESA/Oportunidades and the already impoverished communities were left to deal with the costs of serving more people on an already limited budget. This led to another point of conflict. Leaders in both towns that I visited wanted the PROGRESA/Oportunidades beneficiaries to cover some of the costs associated with cleaning the health centers and stocking supplies—presumably by diverting some of their cash payments to this purpose. In the town in Puebla State, the schools continually asked the beneficiaries for donations, stating that it was the obligation of beneficiaries to assist them because of the benefits they received from the government. No consideration was made for the very small amounts received by the still-poor beneficiaries.

Some ideas for resolving some points of conflict emerged during conversations. One possible solution to the problem of demands for beneficiary payments to cover increased costs to health care could be to supplement the CCT program with institutional transfers in the communities that are served by PROGRESA/Oportunidades. In fact, the conditional cash transfer program in Honduras provides semi-annual transfers to schools and health facilities as a compliment to the program. This is in an effort to encourage more effective outcomes and decrease strain on the poor communities (Moore 2008). This solution would benefit the entire community and may also lead to less negative feelings towards the beneficiaries among some non-beneficiaries, another unfortunate consequence of by the program.

Another cost-to-participants’ issue could potentially be resolved through a policy at PROGRESA/Oportunidades that would prohibit communities from offering meals to
program officials on their bi-monthly visits to the communities. In Isabela’s community, each of the beneficiary families was responsible for paying 10 pesos each time program officials came to town to distribute payments to participants. The money would go towards feeding the visitors, who were much more affluent than the town’s residents, for the 2 days they stayed in Isabela’s community. When the subject was brought up with Dr. Rodriguez, he responded by saying that this practice made him feel uncomfortable and was not required. He stated that it was difficult for him to accept food from individuals that he knew were living in extreme poverty, but that there was little he could do about it. By the time he arrived, the money had already been spent on the food. He stated that the beneficiaries prepared the food as a way to say thank you. However, considering the extent of poverty in the communities, a policy forbidding this practice is needed to put an end to this custom.

A policy of this nature—prohibiting solicitation of funds from beneficiaries—would also prevent possible corruption in the form of the vocales extorting money from program participants. Isabela stated that the vocales demanded 10 pesos from the beneficiary families in her community (totaling approximately 5000 pesos) every two months in order to feed the program officials. Though she said she could not be sure, she stated that it should only cost about 1000 pesos to feed the few delegates who came to disperse the payments. Isabela hinted that the vocales may be pocketing the rest of the money for themselves. While being a vocal is an unpaid volunteer position to which a few selected beneficiaries have been elected by the other participants in their community, in Isabela’s community there is widespread suspicion that this is an abuse of power.
Extorting or requiring payments of money for any reason is another way of exercising power over individuals who have little power and status in their community.

There was little evidence for or mention of possible corruption in the evaluations analyzed. But Mr. Lopez was adamant that abuses of power and corruption happen within PROGRESA/Oportunidades in several towns where his non-profit organization operates. Because of the massive scale of the program, it is impossible for PROGRESA/Oportunidades to monitor each community’s individual activities. Even if corruption was discovered in particular communities, it is unlikely for people involved in the evaluations to disclose this type of information due to the fact that it could have repercussions for the beneficiaries. More research needs to be done in this area in order to explore these and other unintended consequences that may be plaguing the participating communities.

Reports and evaluations indicate that PROGRESA/Oportunidades has a solid reputation as one of the most successful poverty alleviation programs with the best model for conditional cash transfers around the world. Between 2008 and 2009 alone, representatives of 30 countries and organizations visited Mexico to learn more about the program in hopes of replicating it in their respective countries. Though PROGRESA/Oportunidades appears to be making great strides in poverty alleviation throughout Mexico and receives many accolades from around the globe, it must be acknowledged that a program of this kind does not have the ability to alleviate mass poverty on its own. As with any poverty alleviation program, PROGRESA/Oportunidades has its limitations.
First, structural causes that create and maintain immense deprivation need to be addressed to create any lasting, long-term effects. Conditional cash transfers will only reach their full capacity if there are additional investments in the economic, social, infrastructural and service development of impoverished communities. Failure to address structural factors is tantamount to placing most blame for chronic poverty on the families themselves.

Second, as stated in Chapter 2, poverty is multidimensional. If there are few job opportunities in the community or nearby, how can a child exiting the program be expected to find the kind of employment that will lead out of poverty? Compounding the lack of job opportunities is the lack of access to quality education, clean water, proper sanitation, safe housing, preventative health care and—perhaps most importantly—a lack of power due to structural discrimination and inequality to change their situations. All of these factors simultaneously work together to keep the marginalized impoverished. PROGRESA/Oportunidades attempts to address some of the needs of the country’s poorest citizens, but will not sustain significant long-term impacts without the support of other needed governmental programs through, for example, the ministries of health and education.

Third, Mr. Lopez’s criticism of possible political interference in program implementation is not the only problem that he identified. He also believes that the program simply makes people dependent on the government. The fact that participants interviewed wavered on whether they should get higher payments and whether higher payments would lead to “laziness” are apparently very real issues for participants, for
those not enrolled in the program, and for those demanding that participants use some of their payments to cover other expenses such as meals and cleaning of health centers.

The limited data produced by formal evaluations of the program are a problem; they omit and do not consider details that research for this thesis revealed are needed to improve implementation, identify and deal with bottlenecks, and could lead to complementary programs in problem areas. In particular, qualitative evaluations are needed to uncover problems not detected with standard evaluation indicators. In particular, research is needed to assess whether or not PROGRESA/Oportunidades actually disrupts the intergenerational transmission of poverty through its impact on participating children. Locating data on the young adults who participated in the program during their youth was extremely difficult. Not only, as stated previously, do many of the young people leave their communities in order to seek employment elsewhere, but, unfortunately, PROGRESA/Oportunidades does not track their progress once they have exited the program. In addition, much of the data on long-term effects has, unfortunately, not been collected on a large scale due in part to the fact that the program has expanded and is still relatively new in many communities. Tracking children as they leave the program will be critical as will be finding and monitoring communities where there are numerous past participants currently working or continuing their education beyond high school. One solution could be to select specific individuals to follow throughout their lives, beyond their enrollment in the program. The information gathered on a sample of beneficiaries could be used to evaluate attainment of long-term goals and make potentially important changes in the quality of the program.
In conclusion, conditional cash transfers are widely considered to be an effective way to increase household consumption and invest in the human capital of the beneficiaries, but there is a pressing need for more research to determine the long-term effects of the program. Since it is impossible at this time to assess whether or not PROGRESA/Oportunidades actually reaches its most important goal, this raises other questions regarding the many possibly unfounded assumptions that are foundations of the program.

Research on poverty alleviation strategies has grown and changed as more attention has been placed on the multidimensionality of poverty. This thesis provides some insight into one poverty alleviation program—PROGRESA/Oportunidades in Mexico. This thesis research represents a preliminary analysis based on information provided in formal evaluations, reports and critiques of the program. It is one of very few sources of insights provided through qualitative research involving program beneficiaries and professionals who know the program very well. It provides anecdotal evidence of beneficiary assessments and points to future research that will be critical to solve problems and improve the likelihood of success for PROGRESA/Oportunidades and its beneficiary families.
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APPENDIX A:
AGENCY SCRIPT

(Script for Augsburg faculty to use during recruitment of agency staff)

“Hello. There is a graduate student from The Ohio State University in the United States here in Mexico conducting research that will be used in her thesis. She is studying the long-term impacts of Oportunidades in Cuernavaca. LaVonda is interested in learning if the young adults whose families participated in Oportunidades when they were children obtain better jobs, earn a higher income and have more education than their parent’s generation. She has two goals during her short stay in Cuernavaca, Mexico. The first goal is to locate recent studies and/or reports on the implementation and impacts of Progresa/Oportunidades. The second goal is to interview some social workers who work with people who participate in Progresa/Oportunidades.”

“LaVonda would like to speak to social workers or others who work directly with families who participate in Oportunidades. We believe that your experience and expertise with the program and your assessment regarding other factors that affect program impact will help her to better understand the impacts of the program on the lives of the poor.”

“The information you share with LaVonda will be of great value and it will help her in the completion of her thesis. Her goal is to better understand the cycle of poverty in poor families and how programs like Oportunidades may contribute to breaking this cycle of poverty. Each interview will be focused on discussing the program and be relatively short. The interview will take about an hour and will be at a time that is convenient for you and her.”

“Participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can, of course, decline to answer any question during the interview, as well as to stop participating at any time, again without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There is a minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality.”

“If you have any additional questions concerning this research or your participation in it, please feel free to contact me, LaVonda, her thesis supervisor or the university’s research office at any time.”

(The respondents were given the contact information for each of the above mentioned entities, containing names, institutional affiliation, and contact information both in Mexico and in the United States.)
“If you agree to be interviewed by LaVonda, I will give your contact information to her and she will contact you shortly. Will you allow LaVonda to interview you for her research?
APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The focus of the questions will be limited to the following 3 sets of questions:

How long have you been a participant of Oportunidades? In your opinion, what do you see as the most important benefit of participating in the program? Do you believe Oportunidades is making a significant impact on the lives of the children in the program? Why or why not?

Do you have (or know) any children who are now young adults that participated in Oportunidades in their youth? If yes, in what way do you think these children have benefited as a direct result of the program? Do you see any differences between children who benefited more from the program and those who benefited less? What do you think are the reasons or factors explaining the differences? Do you believe that the young adults who participated in the program are (or will be) better off than their parents? Why or why not? Are children going to school longer, obtaining higher status jobs, earning more than their parents generation? If yes, do you think that this is a direct result of participation in the program or are there other factors that helped facilitate this change? Can you share any other examples of youth/young adults that you have worked with that were participants in Oportunidades?

Have there been any changes to the program since you have been involved in the program? If yes, what has changed? Why? Is there anything you would change about Oportunidades if you could? Why? In your experience with Oportunidades, have you come across any disadvantages of the program? If yes, what are they? Is there anything else you would like to add about the program that we have not covered in this discussion?
APPENDIX C:
IRB Approval Letter
June 3, 2010

Protocol Number: 2010B0154
Protocol Title: EXAMINING THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF "OPPUNTUNIDADES" IN CUERNAVACA, MEXICO, Cathy Rakowski, Lavonda Harrington, Human and Community Resource Development
Type of Review: Initial Review—Expedited
IRB Staff Contact: Jacob E. Stoddard
Phone: 614-292-0526
Email: stoddard13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Rakowski,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: June 3, 2010
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: May 20, 2011
Expedited Review Category: 7

In addition, the protocol has been approved for the inclusion of non-English speaking subjects and for a waiver of documentation of the consent process.

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federally Wide Assurance #00006378.

All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Jeannie A. Clement, EdD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX D:
Letter to IRB Asking for Exception to Use Data Collected in Field

Dear Institutional Review Board,

September 15, 2010

During June 24-July 15, 2010 I participated in a short study abroad program in Mexico. While I was there, I had planned to collect data for my thesis on a poverty alleviation program in Mexico called Oportunidades. I obtained IRB approval to conduct this research. However, my IRB application stated that I would only be speaking with social workers who worked with the participants of the particular program I was studying. While I was in Mexico an opportunity came up for me to speak with some of the actual participants of the program. I took advantage of the opportunity for two reasons; 1- a meeting with participants had been arranged on my behalf without my knowledge by Professor Esteban Martinez, a faculty member at the Colegio de Postgraduados (agricultural university) and it would have been rude for me not to take part in the meeting and 2- I had received a lot of mixed results from the professionals who worked with the participants and thought that hearing some opinions of the program participants would provide additional insights.

I spoke with a group of 30 women participants about their opinions of the program. All had received information about my visit and all had come voluntarily to meet with me. They did so because of their respect for professor Martinez, who works closely with these women on rural extension projects and because they were eager to share their mostly positive experiences with Oportunidades. Their insights provided a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the program than I had initially developed through interviews with social workers.

I asked the participants many of the same questions I had asked the professionals who worked with participants. I have attached a copy of these questions. Using the same dialog that was approved for use with the social workers, I obtained verbal consent to record the meeting before the conversation began. I have also attached a copy of this script. I recorded the conversations with a digital voice recorder so that I would be able to transcribe the conversations at a later date and review the discussion without a lot of distractions. The audio file will be destroyed once the meeting has been transcribed. There is minimum risk associated with this data as I did not collect any identifying information from the women such as their names, addresses or ages. Nor did Professor Martinez record any information on those present.

I understand that this is an unusual situation. Because I was participating in a very short study abroad program and there was no advance warning that a meeting of this nature would take place, I had no time to prepare or submit a request to amend my original protocol and the IRB
approval. I am requesting that an exception be made on my behalf to use the information that I obtained during the meeting with the participants as data for my thesis. The information I obtained at that meeting significantly added to my understanding of the Oportunidades program and my ability to accurately and fairly assess its impacts on children and poverty - the focus of my thesis. Thank you in advance for reviewing this matter and considering an exception.

Sincerely,

LaVonda Harrington
Graduate Student
APPENDIX E:

Letter of Support for Exception to be made for Use of Data Collected in Field

September 13, 2010

Institutional Review Board
The Ohio State University

Re: Protocol Number 2010B0154

I am writing to indicate my support for LaVonda Harrington’s request for an exception to be approved so that she may use information obtained during an unplanned meeting with women participants in Mexico. She explains very clearly in her letter the circumstances that led to this unplanned meeting. I will add some insight into how it came about and why I believe that her spur-of-the-moment decision to proceed with the meeting was the correct one.

The meeting was arranged by Professor Esteban Martinez, Ph.D., of the Colegio de Postgraduados (the national agricultural university) in Mexico. Dr Martinez and I are team members on a joint OSU-FAES/Colegio project funded by USAID, the Ford Foundation, and agencies of the Mexican government since 2010. Dr. Martinez was a researcher in residence at Ohio State in Winter quarter 2010 which is when he met Ms. Harrington. At the time, he provided her with much useful feedback on her proposed project. In particular, he was helpful in identifying sources of Spanish language materials on the Oportunidades program that is the focus of Ms. Harrington’s project. He offered to help her while she was in Mexico if she needed and he invited her to visit the Colegio campus in Puebla, a beautiful colonial city and big tourist attraction.

As pointed out in the original IRB application and Ms. Harrington’s request for an exception, she had very little time to conduct research during her participation in a short study abroad experience in Mexico. She did not plan to interview participants; she intended to interview a few social workers and program staff who work closely with participants. However, Dr. Martinez, whose position at the Colegio includes extension work with rural communities, is working with groups of women, some of whom participated in the Oportunidades program. On his own initiative and without discussing this beforehand with me or with Ms. Harrington, once she had set the date to visit the Puebla campus he asked several women in a community where he works if they might be willing to chat with Mr. Harrington about the program. He planned a side trip to the women’s community for a brief, informal conversation on the day that Ms. Harrington would visit the
Puebla campus; when Ms. Harrington found out about this she believed that she would be meeting a couple of women for an informal chat, not an interview. Apparently, the women he had approached spread the word and when she arrived there was a much larger group of women than even he had expected. And all were eager to recount their experiences. Given the circumstances, Ms. Harrington rightly decided to accept graciously the invitation to converse with the women. She made the immediate decision to follow appropriate IRB guidelines for guaranteeing voluntary participation and to use many of the same questions she had used in interviews with social workers. She did not ask for names, nor did anyone provide a name. But she did tape the meeting so that she could listen to the discussion again later.

I believe that Ms. Harrington was correct in conversing with the women for several reasons. First, OSU faculty involved in the joint project have routinely met with rural community groups to gather information about local problems and initiatives and have met with staff at rotating credit and savings and loan associations to gain insight into the barriers to credit for poor, rural borrowers, particularly those in farming and from certain ethnic groups. That is how I first met Dr. Martinez—when he organized several such meetings for me and two other colleagues from Ohio State. For Ms. Harrington to turn down the opportunity would have been culturally inappropriate, embarrassing both Dr. Martinez and the women who were eager to discuss their experiences with her. I know from 30 years experience conducting research in Latin America that it is important to be flexible and to not offend in the interest of good relations. [Our project, by the way, focused on developing a graduate level curriculum to prepare staff in lending organizations to work more effectively with rural borrowers and communities.]

Second, Ms. Harrington’s interviews with social workers and casual interaction with other staff elicited opinions that often reflected that person’s political ideas and political party lines rather than unbiased information on the experience of participants and outcomes in children’s lives. This also is typical of research in Latin America. In Mexico, workplaces are highly politicized and there are incentives to representing a particular political position depending on the party in power at the local and national levels and political affiliations of management. [Probably typical of research with government officials in the U.S. today too!] What Ms. Harrington found during her conversation with the women were clear, unembellished first-hand accounts of the problems and benefits perceived by participants during their time in the program. Most of what they had to say seemed devoid of politicking and, as a result, revealed many positive experiences that had not been included in the more politically charged conversations with staff. Therefore, the insights provided during this unplanned meeting are invaluable to the thesis objective of assessing the potential influence of the program on the future of children whose families participated.

I strongly support the request for an exception so that Ms. Harrington may use information from the meeting in her analysis of the Oportunidades program.

Sincerely,

Cathy A. Rakowski
Associate Professor of Rural Sociology and Women’s Studies
APPENDIX F:

Letter of Permission to Use Additional Data Collected in Field
October 7, 2010

Protocol Number: 2010B1154
Protocol Title: EXAMINING THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF "OPORTUNIDADES" IN CUERNAVACA, MEXICO, Cathy Rakowski, Lavanda Harrington, Human and Community Resource Development

IRB Staff Contact:
Jacob E. Stoddard
Phone: 614-392-0526
Email: stoddard.13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Rakowski,

Review of letters submitted documenting revisions that were made for the above named protocol have been completed. In the submission, it was noted that the researchers began recruitment of a new subject population into the study prior to receiving IRB approval and in addition exceeded the total number of approved subjects (5 social workers). The materials submitted noted that researchers interviewed a total of 30 participants in the Oportunidades program.

Conducting interviews with a new subject population and exceeding the approved number of subjects prior to securing approval via amendment constitutes noncompliance. However, because the noncompliance did not result in increased risk to participants the noncompliance is minor. For more information about OSU’s Noncompliance policy, please see http://orm.osu.edu/irb/ormpolicies/documents/Noncompliance.pdf.

In the future, please contact ORRP to help with the amendment process when revisions or changes are being made to the research. The IRB is aware that some research situations present challenging timelines; opportunities to further research goals that arise suddenly may make it difficult to secure the appropriate approvals. However, it is important to follow all human subjects' protection policies. The IRB and ORRP have encountered situations such as these in the past and strive to process these amendments with all expediency so not to cause delays or hinder the research in any way. The IRB does appreciate the promptness with which this event was reported. It has been determined that all data collected from these additional participants may be used for the projects’ data analysis.

It is my hope that this notification will serve as an educational opportunity. Your continued cooperation in assuring that the rights and welfare of the human subjects involved in research at OSU are protected is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Shari R. Speer, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board