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Urban Poverty Among Mountain Raramuri Women: Migration, Fiesta, y Familia

The Raramuri are an indigenous group that has lived in northern Mexico since well before the conquest. The Raramuri¹ have remained relatively isolated in spite of incursions by Mexican society to exploit the mountains' natural resources. They experience serious economic deprivation (as assessed by official Mexican standards) accompanied by high infant mortality and malnutrition. Yet, a rich cultural tradition and a successful adaptation to the arid mountains has allowed them to survive and preserve a vibrant way of life and community.

In the past fifteen years two major trends have affected many of the Raramuri. Population growth and a severe drought have forced many to migrate from the mountains to the cities and the rural commercial farms of Chihuahua. These migrants are men and their families who live in makeshift dwellings. Others are more permanent migrants who live for longer periods of time within the cities. There is little social scientific knowledge of the situation of these migrants, their culture, or the effectiveness of the government programs.

The research reported here is designed to provide insights into the living conditions and poverty of the migrant Raramuri women themselves. As such, it is a case study which examines, in depth, the problems and conditions of these women: their culture, roles, and life stories in the cities based on interviews conducted among Raramuri women in Chihuahua, Mexico. We attempt to present their conditions as they choose to describe them rather than as outsiders' accounts. Our research is part of a growing interest in expanding the work on poverty to the non-economic dimensions and to expand the definitions and discussion of poverty to include the interests and opinions of the poor expressed in their own terms (Narayan, et. al. 2000).
