

## Quality of Life for Beneficiaries of an Unconditional Transfer Education Program in Mexico City\*

**La calidad de vida de los beneficiarios de un programa educativo de transferencias no condicionadas en la Ciudad de México**

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### ABSTRACT

Education is a path to achieving greater wellbeing and improving Quality of Life (QoL), but economic distress often leads to school dropout. In 2007, the Mexico City Government established the Guaranteed Education Program to prevent dropout by students who lost financial support due to parental death or total and permanent impairment. In this paper, we focus on the perceptions of a stratified sample of beneficiaries (1,147 children and 806 adults) regarding QoL dimensions. Although our findings show that perception within most dimensions improves upon receiving the benefits of the Program, we suggest that program evaluations consider the adaptive perception process according to a hedonic analysis framework.

**Keywords:** Mexico, quality of life, school dropout, unconditional transfers

**JEL classification:** H75 and I38

### RESUMEN

La educación permite alcanzar un mayor bienestar y mejora la calidad de vida (CV), pero los problemas económicos frecuentemente conducen al abandono escolar. Desde el 2007, el Gobierno de la Ciudad de México implementó el Programa Educación Garantizada para reducir la deserción escolar de aquellos estudiantes que perdieron el apoyo financiero debido a la muerte o la discapacidad total y permanente de los padres. En este artículo, a través de una muestra estratificada de beneficiarios (1,147 niños y 806 adultos), nos enfocamos en su percepción de las dimensiones de la CV. Aunque los resultados indiquen que la percepción de la mayoría de las dimensiones mejora al recibir los beneficios del Programa, sugerimos que las evaluaciones de los programas deberían considerar el proceso de adaptación de las percepciones de acuerdo con el marco de análisis hedónico.

**Palabras clave:** Abandono escolar, calidad de vida, México, transferencias no-condicionadas.

**Clasificación JEL:** H75 e I38.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Mexico City Government established the Guaranteed Education Program (*Programa Educación Garantizada-Edugar*) to support vulnerable children, adolescents and youth, aged 3<sup>1</sup> to 18, living in Mexico City and enrolled in local public schools through high school level. Since inception, the Program has granted monthly cash transfers (832mxn≈44usd at 19mxn/usd) aimed at preventing children who have lost household financial support due to the death or total and permanent impairment of their father, mother or tutor(s), from dropping out of school. From 2011 onward, the Program has also provided psychological, legal and health-care services, as well as entertainment and cultural activities, to beneficiaries and their families.

According to data published by the National Institute of Education Evaluation (*Instituto Nacional de Evaluación de la Educación*) (INEE, 2018: 334-341) in Mexico, between the 2001-2002 and 2015-2016 school years, dropout rates decreased (from 1.7 to 0.7 percent at primary level, 7.3 to 4.4 percent at secondary level and 15.9 to 15.5 percent at high school level). Despite the progress, almost 1.2 million students dropped out of school<sup>2</sup> during 2015-2016.

Total dropout rates<sup>3</sup> are higher for males than females (primary school: 0.9 vs. 0.6 percent; secondary: 5.4 vs. 3.4 percent; high school: 17.7 vs. 13.3 percent), mostly because of the intracurricular dropout rate, as the burden of the intercurricular dropout rate becomes relevant at high school level. That is to say, student dropout seems to be mostly a consequence of unforeseen events that force them to leave school.

In Mexico City, the total primary school dropout rate is almost twice the national average (1.3 vs. 0.7 percent), regardless of gender (males: 1.4 percent; females: 1.2 percent), led by the intercurricular rate (1 percent for both genders) (INEE, 2018: 337). However in secondary school (INEE, 2018: 339), it is much lower than, even below, the national average (-1.2 vs. 4.4 percent), because the intercurricular rate of -3.7 percent (males: -2.9 percent; females: -4.5 percent) compensates for the intracurricular counterpart (total: 2.5 percent; males: 3.1 percent, females: 1.8 percent).

Finally, at high school level (INEE, 2018: 340), Mexico City has the worst rates nationwide, as a 24.4 percent total dropout rate (national average: 15.5 percent)

<sup>1</sup> Until 2014, the minimum age to be entitled was 6. In compliance with the Law on Comprehensive Care for the Development of Girls and Early Childhood Children in the Federal District, the minimum age to access the Program was set at 3, to include preschool level.

<sup>2</sup> Total dropout is 1,180,500 students, considering primary (105,301), secondary (302,984) and high school (772,215) levels.

<sup>3</sup> Total dropout rate is the sum of intracurricular and intercurricular dropout rates. The former is the dropout that occurs between the beginning and the end of the same school year; the latter is the dropout that occurs between the end of a school year and the start of the next one (INEE, 2018).

affects both males (27.4 percent) and females (21.3 percent), due to high intracurricular (total: 14.1 percent; males: 16.5 percent, females: 11.7 percent) and intercurricular dropout rates (total: 10.3 percent; males: 10.9 percent, females: 9.6 percent).

Hence, in Mexico City we observe particularly high primary and high school dropout rates compared to the national average. In general, males leave school more frequently and during high school, while intracurricular dropout increases along school levels.

As previous research has extensively reported that low socioeconomic household status is a determinant of school dropout, the implementation of conditional or unconditional public transfer programs for tackling school abandonment is an expected response. In the short run, the purpose of such programs is to increase students' school attendance, which in turn will foster improvement of their well-being in the long run.

Stemming from the Program impact evaluation performed during fall 2016, this paper analyzes beneficiaries Quality of Life (QoL) dimensions at three moments: 1) before the event, 2) immediately after the event but before joining the Program and, 3) after receiving Program support. Because perceptions may smooth out over time, the analysis considers beneficiary seniority in the Program.

The school dropout literature review section that follows the introduction sheds light on the role of household income, emphasizing the link between education and QoL. Section two focuses on conditional and unconditional transfer programs, the main results achieved in lessening school dropout and the efforts of the Mexico City Government to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goal for education. Next, section three presents the hypothesis and the sampling process. We also briefly describe the questionnaires administered to both children and parents/tutors and the testing strategy. The purpose of section four is a discussion of item and QoL factor level dimensions according to Program seniority. Finally, the last section provides conclusions and some recommendations for program evaluation.

## I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is an internationally recognized right embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations Organization, 1948) reiterated by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations Human Rights, 1966) and by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Human Rights, 1989). It also constitutes an important development leverage for both people and countries (Cano, 1998). Earlier, the relationship between education and development was analyzed from an economic perspective (Mincer, 1974; Becker, 1964), but later education research availed the link among several wellbeing dimensions (Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor, 2010). Of course, education benefits cannot be achieved when school dropout occurs.

### *I.1. Education and School Dropout*

An extensive body of literature identified both internal and external factors linking households to dropouts. On one hand, previous research identified poverty, marginalization and vulnerability that motivate an early start of child labor (Román, 2013) as those internal household conditions that hamper school attendance and performance. In this regard, it is important to note that child labor is not the direct cause of school dropout, because the decision to start working is made when the student has already left school, or when labor and school activities are paired. Family structure and household organization (Bulanda and Manning, 2008; DeLeire and Kalil, 2002), parent disability conditions (Racanello and Garduño, 2018), in addition to youth issues (alcohol/drug use, as well as pregnancy) and cumulative stress from an early age (Ramsdal *et al.*, 2013) also induce school dropout.

On the other hand, external factors are those inherent to the educational system, and among the most important, we highlight resistance to the socializing codes provided by the education system, interaction among teachers and students, as well as the image teachers create regarding their students and the interaction that follows (Román, 2013:38). Low school and teacher quality and/or motivation is another issue associated with school dropout (Dahal *et al.*, 2019; Lee and Burkam, 2003; Jensen and Nielsen, 1997).

Despite internal and external factors intervening simultaneously in the dropout decision (Goldschmidt and Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 1995), household socioeconomic level is the main factor that determines school abandonment (ECLAC, 2008; 2002). Poverty and vulnerability are closely linked to child labor both outside and inside the household (Levinson *et al.*, 2001; Basu, 1999) due to the delay in studies that such activities imply, and as long as time allocation prioritizes those that generate income (Gunnarsson *et al.*, 2006; Beegle *et al.*, 2005; Orazem and Gunnarsson, 2003). Thus, the needs of families may cause them to choose meager short-term gains that jeopardize the future of the next generations.

### *I.2. Education and Quality of Life*

Quality of life (QoL) is a central issue in human actions. As QoL measurement depends on the dimensions that define this construct, its operationalization is complex and manifold (Arenas, 1998; Nussbaum and Sen, 1996). A QoL measure is fundamentally a cognitive evaluation expressed as a judgment that includes satisfaction, importance, increased or diminished expectations about the domains of life, as well as their meaning, identified by the person. It also denotes an affective assessment, expressed as a feeling of happiness or sadness as a result of the [person's] interaction in both

material and social environments, including available alternatives for actions, freedom and access to goods and development (Garduño, 2002: 232). QoL also encompasses happiness experienced in several domains, such as family, friends, money available and health status (Palomar, 1998). Although QoL's subjective and objective dimensions are complementary, the former approach is often preferred, because the latter might misinterpret the link with satisfaction, purpose of life and happiness by focusing on goods people have access to. In this regard, earlier research found that wealth might even undermine happiness (Scitovsky, 1976). Later, in a study about the most important domains of life and their relationship with perceived happiness in a sample of upper-middle-level students in a poor rural community in the state of Puebla (Mexico), Garduño and Raccanello (2009) found that life domains involving family, friends, inner life and home comforts were significant, while money had a lesser role. Even though research on the connection between income and subjective wellbeing/happiness has mixed results (Rukumnuaykit, 2016; Schneider, 2016), it is evident that, directly or indirectly, income pervades several domains of life.

## II. CONDITIONAL AND UNCONDITIONAL TRANSFER PROGRAMS TO LESSEN SCHOOL DROPOUT

In different countries, money or in-kind transfers have been used successfully to reduce low-income household vulnerability by promoting human capital (Rosati, 2016) and effectively tackling child labor and school dropout.

The two modalities for granting transfers are:

- Unconditional: when beneficiaries are not obliged to comply with any requirement and
- Conditioned: when beneficiaries must fulfill the conditions (i.e. attending school, advancing in grade level, etc.) established by the program to continue being entitled to the benefits.

Over time, the impact of Conditional Transfer Programs is usually determined by reduction in dropout rates, improvements in health status and/or food intake, gender equity ratios and the quality of relationships within the household (Adato and Hoddinott, 2010). Even when program impact may fade over time (Handa *et al.*, 2019), no major drawbacks seem to arise when the intervention is carefully designed (Heinrich and Knowles, 2020; Handa *et al.*, 2018). The Progresa-Oportunidades program, aimed at reducing poverty through differentiated cash support – according to pupils' gender and school grade – conditioned to school and health visit attendance,

is an example frequently cited in Mexico. Because of its implementation, a significant difference in the likelihood of attending school (De Brauw and Hoddinott, 2011), as well as a reduction in school enrollment gender gaps for secondary education in rural areas (Parker, 2003, 2004), were observed. According to Behrman *et al.* (2012), this program had a significant positive effect on school achievement and school enrollment, as well as on time spent doing homework (without affecting average grades). Additionally, Martínez (2012) found that lack of money was the significant factor explaining school nonattendance.

The effects of cash and non-cash transfer programs on human capacities reveal progress in short-term goals like school access (Bastagli, 2009). However, there is still no hard evidence on their contribution to long-term goals such as learning (Reimers *et al.*, 2006) or school graduation (Dustan, 2020). Although enrollment is increasing in countries with a high interschool dropout rate and among the poorest households (Schady and Araujo, 2006), impact depends on program operation and may vary according to baseline, gender and time horizon, among other factors (Churchill *et al.*, 2021; Heinrich and Knowles, 2020; Baird, McIntosh and Özler, 2019; Sabates *et al.*, 2019). Within this context and since 2007, the Mexico City Government has been implementing the Guaranteed Education Program (Edugar) to intervene after an event that threatens household economic conditions, which in turn could alter household members' roles (Carrillo, 2015). Edugar is an Unconditional Cash Transfer Program, because benefits are not conditioned upon passing any school grade.

Since inception, Edugar has granted beneficiaries cash transfers, and in keeping with the recommendations that emerged from the 2009 Program evaluation (Ebrard, Delgado and Carrillo, 2010), the Comprehensive Care Model was added in 2011 to provide adequate tools for coping with adversity and generate better opportunities after completing each level of schooling. Since then the model has been growing. Through workshops and in-depth personal meetings, it aims to display all possible alternatives for reconstructing familial and communal ties from a gender, equality, non-discrimination and environmental awareness perspective. The Program also contributes to guaranteeing the human rights of girls and boys established in the normative systems at international, national and local levels.

A Program impact evaluation based on 2010 and 2012 data (Carrillo, 2015: 73-76) revealed that cash transfers contribute to lessening school dropout. As well, beneficiary and tutor satisfaction with the Program depends on the (Program's) operative process, except for counseling and grief therapy (only for parents/tutors). Accordingly, beneficiaries are those who avail the support due to the contingency they have had to face.

## II.1. *Education Programs in Mexico City and Sustainable Development Goals*

Based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda promulgated by the United Nations in 2015, the commitment to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” as stated in SDG-4 (Quality Education), was endorsed by the education and social development policies adopted during the 2012-2018 Mexico City Government administration. In this regard, several public programs and actions designed to support education were set up and began operating, based on a transverse perspective, especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable population, providing scholarships for several school grades, transportation, food security, school supplies and insurance, among others (Evalúa-CDMX, 2018: 111) with mixed evidence as to impact significance (Dustan, 2020). For the purpose of this paper, the comparison of SDG-4’s indicators between 2012 and 2016 in Mexico City provides evidence of a major step forward toward accomplishing SDG-4, Target 1, as enrollment and completion indicators improved sharply, especially for secondary education<sup>4</sup> (Inegi, 2020). From this perspective, the Edugar Program design clearly contributes to completion at primary, secondary and high school level by preventing dropout at least in the short run (Raccanello and Palacios, 2017: 408). Even further, as Edugar beneficiaries plan to pursue undergraduate studies in the future (Ebrard, Delgado and Carrillo, 2010: 239), the Program could also contribute to a promising mindset change that might improve beneficiaries’ future.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### III.1. *Hypothesis*

We posit that neither death or total and permanent impairment affects the domain of life perceptions (for children) and satisfaction (for parents/tutors), nor does Program support enable QoL dimension recovery.

Of course, as the event affects households due to the economic downturn, among other effects (Ebrard, Delgado and Carrillo, 2010), we expect a worsening in the domains of life perceptions (for children) and satisfaction (for parents/tutors) immediately after the accident, which could recover (totally, partially or not at all) after joining the Program. Such prediction holds for children and parents/tutors who recently joined the Program as well as for the most experienced ones.

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<sup>4</sup> Net rate of enrollment ratio in primary school education: 108.03 to 108.51 percent, and secondary school education: 101.57 to 105.81 percent (indicators 4.1.2 and 4.1.3); Completion rate in primary school education: 96.60 to 98.97 percent, and secondary education: 84.86 to 104.83 percent (indicators 4.1.4 and 4.1.5).

### III.2. *Sampling*

In 2016, the Program supported 9,234 beneficiaries, most of whom attended primary or secondary school, and females comprised slightly more than half of the population served (50.18 percent).

A random sample of beneficiaries (N=619) stratified according to municipality, gender, grade in school<sup>15</sup> and seniority in the Program, was selected. A threshold of two years of permanence was defined to distinguish between experienced beneficiaries (two years or more in the Program – identified as “old” hereafter) and new entries (less than 2 years – identified as “new” hereafter).

To guarantee beneficiary anonymity and safeguard personal data, the Special Programs Sub-Directorate of the Mexico City System for Comprehensive Family Development – DIF-CDMX (*Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia de la Ciudad de México*) telephoned the parents or tutors of children entitled to the Program, to invite them to participate in the survey, stating that at least one girl/boy per family had to be present, too. To avoid insufficient data due to unresponsiveness, 50% oversampling was requested.

To administer the questionnaires, beneficiaries were summoned to the courtyard of the DIF-CDMX Center of the Venustiano Carranza Municipality on December 10 and 11, 2016, from 09:00 am to 03:00 pm. At the gate, they were identified by verifying their name and Program/id; then, questionnaires were administered simultaneously to adults and children, ensuring that the two groups could not communicate with each other. Previously-trained DIF-CDMX personnel was available to help children/parents/tutors with the questionnaire and to assure that forms were filled out properly.

A greater number of beneficiaries participated than expected, which meant 1,147 children’s questionnaires (863 “old”, 284 “new”), as well as 806 adult questionnaires (599 “old”, 207 “new”), were collected. All beneficiaries who responded to the appointment were surveyed. DIF-CDMX personnel entered the information in an excel spreadsheet and then delivered the questionnaires for any corrections needed in the database.

#### III.2.1. Children Questionnaire

To determine the QoL perception of the students benefited by the Program, we applied the valid and reliable *Kidscreen-27* (Screening for and Promotion of Health Related Quality of Life in Children and Adolescents – 27 item version) questionnaire (Vélez *et al.*, 2016). The domains of life of the *Kidscreen-27* are: Physical

<sup>15</sup> Although the beneficiary population ranges from preschool to high school, the sample considered only upper primary (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades), secondary and high school, to ensure the youngest students answering the questionnaire would understand it.

Wellbeing, Psychological Wellbeing, Autonomy and Parental Relationship, Friends and Social Support, and School Environment. Because of the age of some of the students surveyed, some minor adjustments were made to the instrument text, and two items (#18 and 29) were added, resulting in 29 items in the final version of the questionnaire. We used a Likert five-point scale of agreement for all items: (1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Indifferent, (4) Disagree and (5) Strongly disagree.

### III.2.2. Adult Questionnaire

Adults were administered a 26-closed-ended-item questionnaire to assess the socioeconomic characteristics of the household (members, sex, age, educational level, and economic dependents), housing services, work activities, expenditures, school dropout, Program Comprehensive Care Model usage and family relationships. We also elicited the level of satisfaction related to inner life, couple relationship and family integration through a 21-item battery. A Likert five-point scale of agreement was used for all items: (1) Very satisfied, (2) Satisfied, (3) Indifferent, (4) Dissatisfied and (5) Very dissatisfied.

### III.3. *Testing*

To test our hypotheses, we relied on a t-test for group (“new”, “old”) mean comparison on factors obtained through averaging beneficiary responses corresponding to each factor. Stata® software version 15.0 was used in all data analysis.

We carried out the test comparing the mean factor perception (for children) and mean factor satisfaction (for adults/tutors):

- before the event vs. immediately after the event but before joining the Program; to assess the impact of the event;
- immediately after the event but before joining the Program vs. after receiving Program support; to assess the impact of the support;
- before the event vs. after receiving Program support; to assess the overall result of the Program.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presented and discussed below are the results for the children’s sample, at item and factor level, followed by adult/tutor results.

#### IV.1. Children Questionnaire Item Analysis

When comparing “old” (N = 863) and “new” (N = 284) beneficiary average values for each of the 29 items (Table 1), children’s perception on all items, and therefore for all domains of life, worsen immediately after the event (averages increase), supporting the expected behavior. Since items #8, 9, 10 and 18 characterize discomfort, as averages fall we detect greater awkwardness. However, once entitled to Program benefits, perception improves for all items. It is worth noting that we observe the same pattern regardless of beneficiary seniority in the Program. Nonetheless, the (average) perception worsening for “new” beneficiaries – along all items – is greater than the “old” ones immediately after the event (“new”: 0.4931; “old”: 0.3985). Then, once families receive the benefits, the average improvement is also slightly greater for “new” beneficiaries (-0.5438) versus “old” ones (-0.5212). This is probably because the shorter the time since the event, the greater the perception of difficulty. That is to say, as “new” beneficiaries may not have internalized the recent unfortunate event yet, they show higher variance in their perceptions<sup>6</sup>. In this case, the old adage “time is the best cure” fits.

When comparing children’s perception before the event versus that reported after joining the Program, we observe such a positive effect of the support that the latter overwhelms the former one. We note that on average, the change in perception is greater for “old” (-0.1227) than “new” beneficiaries (-0.1047).

It should be noted that Program support by itself could not improve some of the aspects elicited by the adapted *Kidscreen* questionnaire. A detailed look at the data highlights that before the event children agree on almost all items but those referring to the economic situation. In fact, economic vulnerability comes up when referring to monetary matters (items #19 and 20), as they reflect the lowest agreement level compared to all other items. Although immediately after the event the household economy might worsen even further, it partially recovers once beneficiaries are entitled to Program support. Thus, children seem to be aware of it.

In line with the common expectation, children agree that parents/tutors love them (item #17), but immediately after the event, probably because of the inevitable disequilibrium inside the household, they perceive higher parental detachment that recoups once they join the Program. Such behavior is similar for items regarding the time parents/tutors devote to children, as well as children-parent communication, but works inversely for scolding. Thus, children’s environment seems to recover after accessing Edugar. Children’s perception about their health, mood, spare time, happiness and especially school, due to Edugar, also improves. Above all, beneficiary perceptions about the future take a noticeable upturn, which is worth mentioning when considering their capacity to cope and overcome difficulties, despite the young age.

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<sup>6</sup> Average standard error for the “new” group before the event (1.1654 vs. 1.1322), immediately after the event (1.4219 vs. 1.3088) and once in the Program (0.9238 vs. 0.8972) are always higher than for the “old” group.

Table 1. *Children Questionnaire, Item Results*

	Before the event		Immediately after the event, but before receiving Program support		After receiving Program support		
		Mean	s.e.	Mean	s.e.	Mean	s.e.
1. In general, my health is good	Old	1,7305	0,9762	2,1294	1,1866	1,4959	0,6150
	New	1,6904	1,0108	2,1343	1,2867	1,4789	0,6535
2. I feel good	Old	1,8341	1,0795	2,7448	1,4392	1,4508	0,6441
	New	1,8114	1,1068	2,7447	1,5734	1,4190	0,5737
3. I am physically active	Old	1,8767	1,3422	2,6741	1,4009	1,6961	0,8336
	New	1,9542	1,1835	2,6833	1,4938	1,6890	0,8350
4. I feel full of energy	Old	1,8615	1,1295	2,7165	1,4339	1,6480	0,7862
	New	1,9291	1,1638	2,6099	1,5175	1,6464	0,8634
5. My life is enjoyable	Old	1,7077	1,0865	2,6543	1,3948	1,4820	0,7009
	New	1,7148	1,1308	2,7143	1,5579	1,4574	0,7108
6. I am in a good mood	Old	1,8225	1,0765	2,7593	1,3772	1,6651	0,7464
	New	1,7837	1,1093	2,8434	1,5779	1,5634	0,6826
7. I am having fun	Old	1,7401	1,1147	2,6887	1,4284	1,5064	0,7366
	New	1,7067	1,1496	2,7722	1,5962	1,4331	0,6665
8. I feel sad	Old	3,5628	1,4784	2,8233	1,4869	3,8341	1,2776
	New	3,5714	1,5105	2,6750	1,6213	3,7234	1,3996
9. I feel so bad, I do not want to do anything	Old	3,6411	1,4093	2,9616	1,3850	3,9849	1,2770
	New	3,6502	1,5186	3,0361	1,5389	3,9326	1,3936
10. I feel lonely	Old	3,6488	1,4273	2,9872	1,4137	3,9442	1,2763
	New	3,5567	1,5506	2,9819	1,5591	3,9120	1,3926
11. I am happy	Old	1,9408	1,2842	2,9419	1,5217	1,5233	0,8305
	New	1,9149	1,2960	3,0358	1,6399	1,4824	0,7771
12. I have time for myself	Old	1,8746	1,1240	2,5828	1,3180	1,6717	0,8756
	New	1,9253	1,1974	2,6129	1,4984	1,5669	0,8609
13. I can do what I want in my free time	Old	1,9814	1,1642	2,4785	1,3104	1,7645	0,9634
	New	1,8728	1,1721	2,5000	1,4040	1,6950	1,0155
14. My mom (dad or tutor) has enough time for me	Old	1,8074	1,0427	2,2729	1,2242	1,7923	0,9674
	New	1,7430	1,0334	2,2250	1,3689	1,8511	1,0049
15. My mom (dad or tutor) treats me fairly	Old	1,5436	0,8850	1,8316	1,0829	1,4455	0,7853
	New	1,6525	1,0637	1,9250	1,2348	1,4393	0,8273
16. I can talk to my mom (dad or tutor) when I want to	Old	1,7007	0,9964	2,0453	1,1806	1,5303	0,8653
	New	1,6714	1,0593	2,1331	1,3463	1,6286	0,9642
17. My mom (dad or tutor) loves me	Old	1,4686	0,9469	1,5800	1,0110	1,2962	0,7017
	New	1,5282	1,0973	1,6953	1,2042	1,3039	0,7529
18. My mom, dad or tutor scolds me a lot	Old	3,4470	1,2875	3,3221	1,3458	3,5169	1,2725
	New	3,4064	1,4196	3,3763	1,4879	3,6219	1,3000
19. I have enough money to do the same things as my friends do	Old	2,6123	1,2627	2,9138	1,2934	2,6802	1,2439
	New	2,5018	1,3165	2,8746	1,3789	2,7411	1,3098
20. I have enough money to buy what I want	Old	2,5723	1,2116	2,9173	1,3059	2,6868	1,1938
	New	2,5493	1,3455	2,9283	1,3919	2,7900	1,3688
21. I have time to be with my friends	Old	1,9860	1,1183	2,4425	1,3226	1,7724	0,9629
	New	1,8516	1,1200	2,4516	1,4433	1,7527	0,9615
22. I have fun with my friends	Old	1,7998	1,0608	2,2839	1,3215	1,4524	0,7556
	New	1,6537	1,0212	2,2420	1,3984	1,4558	0,7860

Table 1. *Continuation*

23. My friends and I help each other	Old	1,8393	1,0455	1,9548	1,1237	1,5552	0,7721
	New	1,6784	1,0101	1,8714	1,2143	1,5461	0,8725
24. I trust my friends	Old	1,9930	1,1438	2,1058	1,2031	1,8591	1,0242
	New	1,7153	1,0777	1,8968	1,2042	1,7163	1,0355
25. I feel happy at school	Old	1,7331	1,0888	2,5580	1,4169	1,5116	0,7722
	New	1,6502	1,0725	2,5571	1,5206	1,3993	0,6787
26. I get along well at school	Old	1,7984	1,0607	2,3824	1,2897	1,7378	0,8339
	New	1,6678	0,9871	2,3357	1,4046	1,6206	0,8188
27. I can pay attention during classes	Old	1,8098	1,0776	2,4258	1,2963	1,6311	0,7968
	New	1,6678	1,0084	2,3546	1,3426	1,5142	0,8146
28. I get along well with my teachers	Old	1,7500	0,9784	2,1787	1,2496	1,5991	0,8055
	New	1,7082	1,0523	2,0000	1,2012	1,5516	0,8313
29. I am confident that in the future the circumstances will improve for me and my family	Old	1,6177	0,9359	1,9000	1,1905	1,4093	0,7025
	New	1,5709	1,0108	1,8221	1,2293	1,3298	0,6379

Source: Survey data.

## IV.2. *Children Questionnaire Factor Analysis*

As previously mentioned, we identify five domains of life throughout the adapted *Kidscreen* questionnaire: Physical Wellbeing (items #1 to 4), Psychological Wellbeing (items #5 to 11), Autonomy and Parental Relationship (items #12 to 16), Friends and Social Support (items #17 to 24), and School Environment (items #25 to 29). For each domain of life, we obtain the corresponding factor by averaging the answers to all items within the domain.

Before the event, children perceive that School Environment is good, as well as agree that Autonomy and Parental Relationship and Physical Wellbeing are at a positive level. However, the Friends and Social Support factor scores lower on the agreement scale, probably because of the vulnerable environment surrounding the household. The day-to-day struggle and the scarce opportunities available might hamper the youth from accessing a supportive circle of friends, and they could also interfere with some related Psychological Wellbeing items; according to Table 1, children agree less with their good mood and happiness but tend to agree on having fun. The former two features (items #6 and 11) would point to some underlying problems faced by children that might be coped with by engaging in enjoyable activities (Item #7). As shown below, this factor partially improves once beneficiaries receive Program support because the monetary transfer can lessen internal (economic) household pressures and/or provide access to entertainment activities, but it might not have *a priori* effects on the external variables, like the circle of friends they have access to.

Mean factor comparisons (Table 2) reveal a worsening perception for all factors immediately following the event, but recovery is observed after receiving Program support. It is relevant to observe that in line with previous discussion, besides worsening, perceptions also have higher standard errors, suggesting that there might be different ways (and results) to cope with the loss. It is worth mentioning that perceptions worsen for both “new” and “old” beneficiaries in all domains of life, but the increment is higher for Psychological Wellbeing (“old”: 0.7404; “new”: 0.6968), Autonomy and Parental Relationship (“old”: 0.4607; “new”: 0.5062), and Friends and Social Support (“old”: 0.4777; “new”: 0.4744). Additionally, we acknowledge that mean factor differences are all significant (Table 3) between pre-event and immediately after the event; this is, all children’s domains of life statistically worsen. However, we observe an improvement after receiving support for these same domains. Interestingly, the Program aims at preventing dropout, and the School Environment domain has an above-mean improvement once beneficiaries receive support. Table 3 reports that all mean differences are significant once beneficiaries join the Program.

Table 2. *Children Questionnaire, Factor Analysis*

Mean s.e.		Physical well-being	Psychological well-being	Autonomy and parental relationship	Friends and social support	School environment
Before the event	Old	1,8257 1,1318	2,5806 1,2681	1,7815 1,0425	2,1613 1,1295	1,7440 1,0131
	New	1,8463 1,1162	2,5569 1,3236	1,7730 1,1052	2,0594 1,1645	1,6537 1,0147
	Old	2,5662 1,3652	2,8309 1,4297	2,2422 1,2232	2,4531 1,2604	2,2217 1,2565
	New	2,5430 1,4679	2,8655 1,5845	2,2792 1,3705	2,4326 1,3604	2,1281 1,2944
After receiving Program support	Old	1,5727 0,7197	2,5629 0,9779	1,6409 0,8914	2,0368 0,9665	1,5943 0,7847
	New	1,5583 0,7314	2,5006 1,0033	1,6362 0,9345	2,0364 1,0073	1,5040 0,7756

**Source:** Author based on survey data.

As all life dimensions improve after receiving Program support, regardless of seniority, it is tempting to state that support allows for perception recovery for children and young people. In particular, the domains with variations above the mean are Physical Wellbeing, Autonomy and Parental Relationship, and School Environment, suggesting that they are the ones most harmed by the event but also mended by Program intervention.

The last row of Table 3 compares mean factor differences before the event vs. after receiving support; according to the t-test. Except for Psychological Wellbeing

(“old” and “new”) and Friends and Social Support (“new” only) we detect a significant difference in all other life dimensions. In other words, once they join the Program, children and young people recover their pre-event Psychological Wellbeing perceptions, but only the “new” group does so for Friends and Social Support. As we wondered whether children might even have a better perception after receiving support than the one they had before the event, a one-tailed t-test provides statistical evidence that perception improves for Physical Wellbeing, School Environment (“old” and “new”), as well as Friends and Social Support (“old” only). Thus, the Program does not lead to an improvement in Psychological Wellbeing but helps recover pre-event perceptions, a positive result after all.

Table 3. *Children Questionnaire, Factor Analysis (mean difference)*

Mean difference		Physical well-being	Psychological well-being	Autonomy and parental relationship	Friends and social support	School environment
Immediately after the event vs.	Old	0,7404 ***	0,2503 ***	0,4607 ***	0,2919 ***	0,4777 ***
Before the event	New	0,6968 ***	0,3086 ***	0,5062 ***	0,3732 ***	0,4744 ***
After receiving Program support vs. Immediately after the event	Old	-0,9935 ***	-0,2680 ***	-0,6014 ***	-0,4164 ***	-0,6274 ***
	New	-0,9847 ***	-0,3649 ***	-0,6430 ***	-0,3963 ***	-0,6241 ***
After receiving Program support vs.	Old	-0,2530 *** ooo	-0,0177	-0,1407 *** ooo	-0,1245 *** ooo	-0,1497 *** ooo
Before the event	New	-0,2879 *** ooo	-0,0563	-0,1368 ** ooo	-0,0231	-0,1497 *** ooo

Null hypothesis: factor mean (before event) > factor mean (after Program support). P-value to reject H0: ooo: p < 0.01; oo: p < 0.05; o: p < 0.1.

Null hypothesis: factor means are equal. P-value to reject H0: \*\*\*: p < 0.01; \*\*: p < 0.05; \*: p < 0.1.

**Source:** Author based on survey data.

#### IV.3. Parent and Tutor Item Analysis

Item average comparisons before and immediately after the event by “old” (N = 599) and “new” (N = 207) parents/tutors (Table 4), disclose worsening in their satisfaction for each of the 21 items of the questionnaire. On average, the “new” group reports greater worsening than the “old” one (“new”: 0.6007; “old”: 0.4912). As in the previous section, the same interpretation holds: the shorter the time span since the event, the more vivid the perception and therefore higher means and volatility responses. Upon receiving Program support, adults with lower seniority, on average, show heightened perceived satisfaction (“new”: -0.5189; “old”: -0.4560), a result aligned with the above explanation. In fact, people who get through the difficult time, having received the government support, might be more prone to

manifest over-improvement in their satisfaction because the Program could ease unsolved (real or perceived) worries. Finally, when comparing satisfaction level after receiving the support with that prior to the event, and although results vary according to item, on average, reduced satisfaction is detected, especially for “new” beneficiaries (“new”: 0.0818; “old”: 0.0353).

Before the event, parents/tutors were satisfied with the support and atmosphere resulting in living with the partner; however, economic vulnerability harms their satisfaction regarding the stability and comfort achieved through the money earned (items #8, 9 and 10).

Despite the capillary local transportation network, in Mexico City people may spend up to two hours reaching the workplace during peak hours because of traffic and public transport crowding; this is why workers living in the suburbs of the capital may allocate up to 12 hours a day for a work shift. Thus, besides economic needs, the stress and rushing they experience undermine time available for themselves (item #13), so they agree less on time left for personal activities like reflecting and relaxing or for vacations (items #14, 15 and 20). Satisfaction level drops immediately after the event for all items but recover once receiving Program benefits except for those referring to the love within the family as well as love, understanding and support from the partner and assessment of inner life and its stability (items #4, 5, 6, 7, 16 and 17). Because of the severity of the event, the Program can improve the adult and family characteristics linked to economic needs. (Ebrard, Delgado and Carrillo, 2010: 202), except those referring to the intimate relationship with the partner hopelessly affected by the event (items #5, 6 and 7).

Table 4. *Parent/Tutor Questionnaire, Item Results*

Before the event				Immediately after the event, but before receiving Program support		After receiving Program support	
	Mean	s.e.		Mean	s.e.	Mean	s.e.
1. The support that existed in my family	Old	2,0057	0,9630	2,5678	1,1323	1,8636	0,7731
	New	1,8830	0,9058	2,5868	1,1936	1,8601	0,7746
2. The atmosphere that existed in my family	Old	1,9198	0,9405	2,4364	1,0748	1,9211	0,7529
	New	1,8511	0,9129	2,5449	1,1653	1,8741	0,8211
3. The communication that existed in my family	Old	1,8550	0,8734	2,2775	1,0102	1,8636	0,7479
	New	1,9309	0,9368	2,4072	1,1202	1,9021	0,8249
4. The love that existed in my family	Old	1,6279	0,7925	2,0403	0,9423	1,8158	0,7536
	New	1,7128	0,9379	2,0599	1,0625	1,7692	0,8281
5. The love that existed with my partner	Old	1,7786	0,9361	2,3962	1,1647	2,2010	1,0238
	New	1,8617	1,0557	2,4192	1,2863	2,4196	1,2860

Table 4. *Continuation*

6. The understanding that existed with my partner	Old	1,9618	1,0078	2,4492	1,1880	2,2536	1,0424
	New	2,0319	1,1037	2,5449	1,2881	2,4825	1,2884
7. The support that existed with my partner	Old	1,9198	0,9764	2,5466	1,2024	2,2919	1,0416
	New	1,9734	1,0312	2,5090	1,3074	2,4545	1,2600
8. The money I had	Old	2,3836	0,9357	2,9258	1,1005	2,3230	0,8779
	New	2,3617	0,9795	3,0599	1,1285	2,3147	0,9148
9. The stability I had through money	Old	2,4752	0,9262	2,9852	1,0597	2,3708	0,8588
	New	2,4521	1,0459	3,0898	1,0745	2,2657	0,8797
10. The comfort of the house I had (material goods, appliances, type of house)	Old	2,5076	0,9327	2,8771	1,0394	2,3900	0,8244
	New	2,4043	1,0271	2,9940	1,1642	2,3357	0,9490
11. The job I had	Old	2,4122	0,8993	2,8114	1,0489	2,3900	0,8474
	New	2,3245	0,9898	2,8623	1,1919	2,3427	0,9277
12. The money I earned through my job	Old	2,5057	0,9245	2,9216	1,0325	2,4713	0,8427
	New	2,4096	0,9905	2,9401	1,0682	2,4336	0,9536
13. The time I had for myself	Old	2,4828	0,9864	2,9576	1,0778	2,4617	0,8813
	New	2,4894	1,0470	3,0958	1,1260	2,4965	0,9559
14. The time I had to reflect	Old	2,5000	0,9307	2,9216	1,0649	2,4665	0,8815
	New	2,5000	1,0368	3,0838	1,0722	2,5035	0,9410
15. The time I had to relax	Old	2,5553	0,9693	3,0212	1,0666	2,4785	0,8873
	New	2,5213	1,0365	3,1138	1,1054	2,5245	0,9702
16. My inner life (Emotions, mental health, well-being with myself, etc.)	Old	2,3130	0,9823	2,9131	1,1206	2,3421	0,8870
	New	2,2713	0,9733	3,0000	1,1086	2,3427	0,9277
17. The stability of my inner life (emotions, mental health, well-being with oneself, etc.)	Old	2,3034	0,9687	2,8750	1,1245	2,3421	0,9031
	New	2,2553	0,9749	2,9940	1,1167	2,3147	0,9672
18. My health	Old	2,2099	0,9367	2,7712	1,1242	2,1411	0,8769
	New	2,2074	1,0104	2,9281	1,1542	2,1608	0,9904
19. The stability of my health	Old	2,3263	1,0040	2,7966	1,1643	2,3038	0,9425
	New	2,2819	1,0497	2,8982	1,2056	2,4266	0,9230
20. The time I had for my vacation	Old	2,7290	1,0813	3,1695	1,1477	2,8469	1,0062
	New	2,6862	1,1293	3,3054	1,1807	2,7972	1,1105
21. My personal development	Old	2,4599	1,0478	2,8877	1,1464	2,4354	0,9505
	New	2,3404	0,9871	2,9281	1,1117	2,4476	0,9906

Source: Survey data.

#### IV.4. Parent and Tutor Factor Analysis

We focus on three domains of adult life: Family Integration (items #1 to 4); Couple Relationship (items #5 to 7), and Inner Life (items #14 to 17). For each domain of life, we obtain the corresponding factors through the same methodology as above.

Adult factor analysis (Table 5) reveals that prior to the event Family Integration and Couple Relationship were “satisfactory”, while respondents’ perception of their Inner Life was “indifferent”. As for children, the lower the adult’s seniority in the program the higher the factor’s volatility. As well, regardless of seniority, adult/tutor satisfaction worsens after the event, but recovers once adults access the Program and its benefits (table 6), except for the Couple Relationship factor (“new” only). Thus, although Family Integration and Inner Life mean values return to pre-event levels, Couple Relationship does not, and its mean and standard error increase significantly (Table 5). In fact, items aggregated into this factor refer to specific facets of the relationship that irreversibly changed in the aftermath of the event that involved the partner. Hence, obviously rather than compensate for, the Program can only mitigate such lost.

Table 5. Parent/Tutor Questionnaire, Factor Analysis

Mean s.e.		Family integration	Inner life	Couple relationship
Before the event	Old	1,8521 0,8923	2,4179 0,9627	1,8868 0,9735
		1,8444 0,9233	2,3870 1,0054	1,9557 1,0636
	New	2,3305 1,0399	2,9327 1,0941	2,4640 1,1850
		2,3997 1,1354	3,0479 1,1007	2,4910 1,2939
Immediately after the event, but before receiving Program support	Old	1,8660 0,7569	2,4073 0,8897	2,2488 1,0359
		1,8514 0,8122	2,4213 0,9515	2,4522 1,2781
	New			
After receiving Program support	Old			
	New			

**Source:** Author based on survey data.

Table 6. *Parent/Tutor Questionnaire, Factor Analysis (mean difference)*

Mean difference		Family integration	Inner life	Couple relationship	
Immediately after the event vs. Before the event	Old	0,4784	***	0,5148	***
	New	0,5553	***	0,6609	***
After receiving Program support vs. Immediately after the event	Old	-0,4645	***	-0,5254	***
	New	0,5553	***	0,6609	***
After receiving Program support vs. Before the event	Old	0,0139		-0,0106	0,362
	New	0,007		0,0344	0,4965

Null hypothesis: factor mean (before event) > factor mean (after Program support). P-value to reject H0: \*\*\*: p < 0.01; \*\*: p < 0.05; \*: p < 0.1.

Null hypothesis: factor means are equal. P-value to reject H0: \*\*\* p < 0.01; \*\* p < 0.05; \* p < 0.1.

Source: Author based on survey data.

#### IV.5. Discussion

According to the analysis of children's domains of life perceptions before the event, immediately after and once entitled to Program benefits, we found that the support helps make up for perception worsening in the aftermath of the event. However, "new" beneficiaries' perception has a higher volatility level than the "old" one at both item and factor levels. This is probably due to the shorter time span from the event increasing the perception of being in trouble.

Overall, children's perceptions improve mostly for Physical Wellbeing, Autonomy and Parental Relationship and School Environment dimensions, but barely for Psychological Wellbeing and Friends and Social Support. Although the Comprehensive Care Model is available to beneficiaries, they seldom rely on it, apparently unaware of the services provided,<sup>7</sup> except for the entertainment and cultural activities, as 76 percent of parents/tutors are aware of them. According to survey data, less than 5 percent of "old" or "new" beneficiaries<sup>8</sup> rely on such services, except for entertainment and cultural activities, which is between 42.5 percent ("new") and 52.6 percent ("old"). Because Ebrard, Delgado and Carrillo (2010: 238) found higher attendance for psychological support by adults and beneficiaries through the Program, launching a continuous informative campaign about the availability

<sup>7</sup> The proportion of beneficiaries that ignore the existence of specific services of the Comprehensive Care Model is above 50 percent for psychological care (59 percent), legal services (66 percent) and health care (67 percent).

<sup>8</sup> The question was posed to parents/tutors only; those who answered that they knew about the Service ("old": 599; "new": 207) were asked how many times they used any of the services during the last 12 months.

of such services would be a paramount first step toward improving the Psychological Wellbeing dimension.

Parent and tutor satisfaction with Family Integration and Inner Life domains recovers after receiving Program support, whereas Couple Relationship does not, probably due to the nature of the event that disrupts the intimate ties (love, understanding and support) provided by the partner.

We acknowledge that the improvement in life domains for children and parents/tutors points toward suitable household environment reconstruction, which could be a positive basis for attending school.

Even though the number of beneficiaries assisted by the Program has been increasing (from 625 in 2007 to 9,425 in 2017,<sup>9</sup> and 9,368<sup>10</sup> in 2019), Edugar provides the same cash transfer (832mxn≈44usd) today as in 2007. Thus, transfer impact on day-to-day expense coverage (i.e. food, transportation) has decreased, in real terms. While the decision to increase the transfer amount depends on approved budget, and such analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, between 2007 and 2018<sup>11</sup>, reduction in transfer purchasing power reached 35.86 percent. Despite the Program's positive effects on beneficiaries, this should not be underestimated. However, as both children and parents/tutors behave quite similarly, and the time span from event occurrence is inversely related to the variance and means of their responses, we wonder whether beneficiaries are aware of the real (decreasing) transfer support or, as time goes by, life continues and people internalize the event. Accordingly, the question arises: do "old" beneficiaries have a lower variance/mean, versus "new" ones, once receiving the support, because the cash transfer (in real terms) is lower or because their perception/satisfaction fades over time? As children are not aware of economic issues, fading perception over time seems to be the reason for higher (mean/variance) responses. If this interpretation holds, then results fit within the hedonic adaptation framework analysis: as people get used to an event that elicits emotional responses, the wellbeing measure tends to return to the baseline (pre-event) level (Frederick and Lowenstein, 1999). Although we do not have data to test this hypothesis, this might be the reason why the "old" group shows a lesser mean/variance response, a result conceded by Armenta *et al.* (2014: 71), when stating, "Although individuals show some adaptation to negative life changes, they *often* [emphasis added] never completely return to their initial level of happiness following traumatic events." Therefore, although we cannot deny that the

<sup>9</sup> According to data in Edugar Operating Rules 2018 (table 1: 41). Available at: [http://intranet.dif.cdmx.gob.mx/transparencia/new/art\\_122/2/\\_anexos/rop\\_Edugar\\_2018.pdf](http://intranet.dif.cdmx.gob.mx/transparencia/new/art_122/2/_anexos/rop_Edugar_2018.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Preliminary data based on Edugar Operating Rules 2019 (p. 7). Available at: <https://www.dif.cdmx.gob.mx/storage/app/uploads/public/5d8/3be/f98/5d83bef98f6aa944417319.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> According to official data ([http://dof.gob.mx/nota\\_to\\_doc.php?codnota=5538666](http://dof.gob.mx/nota_to_doc.php?codnota=5538666)), between 2007 and 2018 (July) the Consumer Price Index increased from 63.6679211 to 99.27043177 (yearly means). Hence, the 832MXN monthly transfer should increase to at least 1,297.25MXN to maintain the same purchasing power in 2019.

Program might still play a complementary role in repairing the damage suffered by households, the local government could achieve the goal without increasing the Program budget due to beneficiary adaptation(!) Besides standard indicators, an impact evaluation designed to disentangle such a situation should consider the role of emotional adaptation, an aspect seldom included in such analyses.

Though the Program is widely justified for helping cope with household economic problems, one of the major factors linked to school dropout, preventing abandonment is only the first step in developing skills that lead to reaching a higher QoL. In fact, poor education quality may deny access to necessary academic competencies, jeopardizing children's QoL in the long run. From a broader perspective, QoL is the result of the interrelationship of endogenous and exogenous factors, as well as the decisions made by individuals (and their families) who live in an environment where public policy can reduce obstacles. That is why policymakers need to have a comprehensive view of the problems and inner consequences they are intended to solve through public budget and targeted expenditures. Recently, the results of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment 2018 (OECD, 2019) were published, and they highlight that "Students in Mexico scored lower than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science. In Mexico, only 1 percent of students performed at the highest levels of proficiency (Level 5 or 6) in at least one subject (OECD average: 16 percent), and 35 percent of students did not achieve (*sic*) a minimum level of proficiency (Level 2) in all three subjects (OECD average: 13 percent)" (OECD, 2019: 1), despite a minor improvement in science through the last 12 years (OECD, 2019: 4). This underscores our previous statements: although guaranteeing school attendance is the first piece of the puzzle, greater efforts are needed to achieve skill consolidation by students.

## CONCLUSIONS

Mexico City primary and high school dropout rates are among the highest all over Mexico. In 2007, the local government established the Edugar program to reduce dropout among students who lose financial support due to the death or total and permanent impairment of their father, mother or tutor, as economic distress often leads to school dropout, jeopardizing human development and harming their QoL because of reduced accumulation of human capital.

Despite the drop in children's perception and adult/tutor mean satisfaction in the aftermath of the event, we found that most of children's QoL dimensions – except for Psychological Wellbeing and partially for Friends and Social Support – improve after being entitled to Edugar benefits by returning to pre-event levels or even higher. The Program enables recovering QoL dimensions for parents/tutors, too, with the

exception of Couple Relationship, as the event probably undermined intimate ties with the partner. It follows that Edugar has a positive effect on household environment, which should foster school attendance.

We acknowledge that the monetary transfer amount has not been updated since Edugar's inception, though beneficiaries might not be aware of the diminishing purchasing power of the support over time, as the effect on children's perceptions and parent/tutor satisfaction follows the same trend. Such behavior could also be the result of a mean reverting process anticipated by the hedonic adaptation framework analysis, rather than the expected consequence of the transfer. Even though we lack data to test for hedonic adaptation, we dare posit such a possibility, encouraging its inclusion in future analysis. We hope this paper will shed light on next steps for both education policy assessment and program evaluations to come.

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