

# Transnational parenting and the well-being of Angolan migrant parents in Europe

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**Abstract** *Studies on the transnational family highlight the emotional difficulties of migrant parents separated from their children through international migration. This article consists of a large-scale quantitative investigation into the insights of transnational family literature by examining the well-being of transnational parents compared with that of parents who live with their children in the destination country. Furthermore, through a survey of Angolan migrant parents in both the Netherlands and Portugal, we compare the contexts of two receiving country. Our study shows transnational parents are worse off than their non-transnational counterparts in terms of four measures of well-being – health, life satisfaction, happiness, and emotional well-being. Although studies on migrant well-being tend to focus exclusively on the characteristics of the receiving countries, our findings suggest that, to understand migrant parents' well-being, a transnational perspective should also consider the existence of children in the migrant sending country. Finally, comparing the same population in two countries revealed that the receiving country effects the way in which transnational parenting is associated with migrant well-being.*

**Keywords** CHILDREN, EUROPE, TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES, TRANSNATIONALISM, TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANTS, TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL RELATIONS, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, WORLD REGION

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International migration, especially from the Global South, is characterized by transnational family formations in which family members are spread across national borders due to stringent policies or sometimes by choice. An important type of transnational family occurs when parents migrate while their children remain in the country of origin in the care of others. Although they continue to engage in their children's upbringing from afar, parents living apart from their children feel anxious, guilty and depressed (Bernhard et al. 2009; Dreby 2006; Fresnoza-Flot 2009; Horton 2009; Moran-Taylor 2008; Parreñas 2005; Viruell-Fuentes 2006; Zontini 2004) and, in some instances, this results in poor child–parent relationships (Haagsman and Mazzucato 2014). These studies have important implications for the study of migrants' well-being in destination countries because they show that the aspects of migrants' lives that relate to the country of origin affect their well-being. Thus, a transnational perspective is warranted, yet most of the literature has adopted a national perspective by confining explanations of migrant well-being to aspects of the migrants' lives in the destination countries.

However, the transnational family literature on which this study draws is largely based on small-scale studies of transnational parents, and these do not include comparison groups. Therefore, they leave open the question of whether the effects found are due to the migrants being part of a transnational family or broader characteristics of the overall migrant population (Mazzucato and Schans 2011). Furthermore, the majority of the studies focus on Latin American (Abrego 2014; Dreby 2006; Horton 2009; Schmalzbauer 2004; Viruell-Fuentes 2006) or Asian migrants (Fresnoza-Flot 2009; Parreñas 2005), which leaves the experiences of African migrants, who make up a significant proportion of the 'new' migrant populations in Western destinations, such as Europe (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008; Koser 2003), relatively under-researched.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it builds on the findings of transnational family literature to investigate, on a large scale, the extent to which being in a transnational family affects parents' well-being in destination countries. It does so by comparing transnational parents with at least one child in the origin country with non-transnational parents who live with all their children in their destination countries. Second, it investigates the well-being of Angolan parents, thereby adding an African case to the literature. Third, it compares the well-being of these Angolan migrant parents in two places, Portugal and the Netherlands, which allows us to investigate the role played by the contexts of the destination country. Each destination country has distinct economic conditions and policies for immigration and family reunification. Fourth, we hone in on transnational parents to examine what factors explain the heterogeneity in well-being among this group.

### **Theoretical considerations**

Two areas of study address the well-being of migrants – transnational family studies and the literature on migrant well-being. The former are primarily small-scale, in-depth case studies conducted by anthropologists and qualitative sociologists who focus on relationships within migrant families that span nation-state borders, while the latter use quantitative approaches conducted by sociologists to compare populations in migrant-

receiving countries. We argue that these bodies of literature together offer a relatively complete framework through which to understand the effects of living in a transnational family on migrant parents' well-being.

The migrant well-being literature generally concentrates on migrant states of mind in the receiving country. One aspect of this literature looks at the mismatch between high aspirations and actual living conditions, which arise from unpleasant and insecure jobs (Knight and Gunatilaka 2010), and false expectations compounded by discrimination in the host society (Bartram 2011; Safi 2009). Being undocumented and having a low socioeconomic status are other conditions that the literature identifies as negatively affecting migrants' well-being. Several authors find that an undocumented status has a negative impact on migrants' physical and mental health by lowering their socioeconomic position and their access to public health care; it also heightens the risk of emotional distress due to worry over deportation (Berk et al. 2000; Cavazos-Rehg et al. 2007; Dias et al. 2008; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Knipscheer et al. 2000). A high socioeconomic status improves health and emotional well-being by increasing the capacity to access care and cope with stress (Beiser et al. 2002; Hao and Johnson 2000; Leu et al. 2008; Sharareh et al. 2007). Better well-being is associated with the presence of social support from within and outside one's community (Griffin and Soskolne 2003; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Oppedal et al. 2004) and with a longer duration of stay (Dias et al. 2008; Lebrun 2008).

This literature focuses on migrant conditions in the destination countries. It therefore fails to address the potential effects of migrant ties with the country of origin, especially when parents migrate and their children remain at home. One reason for this gap is the assumption that family life requires geographic proximity if meaningful interactions and exchanges are to take place within families and households (Mazzucato and Schans 2011; Zontini 2004). The only family characteristics accounted for in this literature are family size (Frisbie et al. 2001), marital status, other cohabitation arrangements (Cavazos-Rehg et al. 2007; Frisbie et al. 2001), or whether the migrant has children (Hao and Johnson 2000). In most studies, family members who do not reside in the same country are not considered.

Transnational family studies, which gained prevalence in the 2000s, have shown that active and meaningful family life can exist across nation-state boundaries (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). These studies focus primarily on the family relationships of migrants from the Global South who move to the Global North. The experiences of migrants who have been separated from their children, as documented in this literature, show that parents assume that the separation is temporary and that reunification is a definite outcome (Bernhard et al. 2009; Horton 2009; Moran-Taylor 2008). In some cases, however, parents adjust their expectations after arriving in the destination country. In other cases, living transnationally is a preferred choice for parents who want their children to be raised according to the norms of their country or region of origin, or who prefer their home country's educational system (Bledsow and Sow 2011; Coe 2008).

Transnational family studies highlight the emotional difficulties of parents trying to raise their children transnationally. Latin American transnational migrant mothers in the USA expressed feelings of depression, hopelessness, and guilt; they reported an

inability to function and a decreased sense of meaning because they felt that the separation deprived their children of ‘something that could not be replaced’ (Bernhard et al. 2009: 22). Parreñas (2001) documented similar findings among Filipino mothers in Rome and Los Angeles who felt trapped because they wanted to reunite with their children but were unable to do so because they had to meet their children’s material needs. ‘Feelings of profound moral failure in not being able to serve as physical caretakers for their children’ are at the core of the emotional difficulties parents experience (Horton 2009: 29). Migrants’ feelings of guilt and hopelessness are associated with gendered expectations through which mothers, children and society at large expect mothers to nurture their children while in close proximity to them (Abrego 2014; Bernhard et al. 2009; Parreñas 2001).

Their children’s reactions add to transnational parents’ emotional difficulties. Dreby’s (2006) study on the children of migrant parents in Mexico indicates that children express their resentment of their parents’ migration by treating them with indifference, disregarding their authority, acting out, becoming outwardly resentful, and running into difficulties at school. The children of Latin American mothers living in the USA also responded to what they perceived as their mother’s abandonment (Horton 2009) by doing worse at school (Moran-Taylor 2008), seemingly forgetting their parents (Schmalzbauer 2004), being unwilling to talk to them (Bernhard et al. 2009), and withdrawing their love. These reactions cause parents additional emotional suffering, as demonstrated by the case of an Ecuadorian migrant mother in the USA who sought help from a mental health specialist after her daughter in Ecuador said that she had erased her from her heart and did not love her anymore (Horton 2009).

Transnational parents use various strategies to cope with the pain of separation. Regular communication and remittances from parents help sustain family ties (Horton 2009; Parreñas 2001). Parents remain engaged in their children’s upbringing by discussing the minute details of their daily schedules with their caregiver or by giving them instructions about major decisions involving their schooling (Madianou and Miller 2011). However, these coping strategies, which relate to fulfilling the material needs of children, depend on migrants’ circumstances, such as their documented status. An undocumented status, as many El Salvadorian and Guatemalan mothers in the USA found, weakens parent–child relationships because it lengthens the period of separation and limits parenting simply to sending remittances and making phone calls (Fresnoza-Flot 2009; Horton 2009; Moran-Taylor 2008). Few transnational family studies document fathers’ experiences (Dreby 2006; Nobles 2011; Pribilsky 2012). However, when these are stressed, no differences are found in the experiences of fathers and mothers, especially in terms of the types of conversations they have with their children, their remittance behaviour, and the frequency of contact (Dreby 2006; Haagsman et al. 2015; Nobles 2011; Poeze and Mazzucato 2012).

Despite the attention given to these important transnational family dynamics, there are some gaps in the literature. First, the considerable attention given to a particular migrant group in a particular destination country makes it difficult to investigate how differences in the economic and migration contexts of destination countries, which affect conditions of regularization and access to the labour market, shape the nature and

consequences of transnational parenting. Second, there are no comparisons with the experiences of migrant parents living with their children in the destination countries. Moreover, it is unclear whether the reported emotional difficulties of parents result in worse well-being.

In this study, these gaps are addressed using quantitative data and the insights gained from the transnational family and migrant well-being literatures. We examine (a) whether transnational parents have lower well-being compared with non-transnational parents, namely those who live with their children in the destination countries; and (b) under what circumstances transnational parenting leads to better or worse well-being. We do this (i) by taking into account the conditions of transnational parenting related to socioeconomic status and migration characteristics highlighted in the migrant well-being literature; and (ii) by focusing on two destination countries, the Netherlands and Portugal, whose distinct contexts (discussed below) influence transnational parents' well-being. This helps understand the implications of different migration policy contexts on migrant well-being.

### **Angolan migration to the Netherlands and Portugal**

Angolans began migrating to the Netherlands because of the civil war plaguing the country from 1975 to 2002. Until 2002 it was relatively easy for Angolans to apply to the Netherlands, given the Dutch states' attractive asylum granting policies of the time, making the Netherlands one of the major destinations for Angolan asylum seekers in Europe (UNHCR 2002). Consequently, Angolan migrants in the Netherlands increased from 3071 in 1998 to 12,281 in 2004 (CBS 2013). These migrants were mainly from middle-class families and their primary reasons for migrating were fear of being recruited to fight in the war, poverty and a shortage of work and study opportunities (van Wijk 2008). Approximately half this group consisted of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors (UAMs) who were under the age of 18 and arrived in the Netherlands on their own (van Wijk 2008). The end of the civil war, which made it more difficult to obtain asylum in the Netherlands, and the upturn in the Angolan economy, which encouraged migrants to return to Angola, has led to a sharp decrease in the numbers of Angolan in the Netherlands. By 2012, the Angolan population in the Netherlands was close to 8700, mostly first-generation migrants (CBS 2013).

Having a refugee status meant that Angolans were better able to regularize their situation than economic migrants from other African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria (Haagsman 2015). However, Angolan migrants generally have few employment opportunities and often have to resort to low-skilled work (Heelsum and Hessels 2006). The Angolan migrant population in the Netherlands was at first dominated by men, though the sex ratios have now evened out (CBS 2013). While there are no official statistics on the educational levels of Angolan migrants, our sample shows that 62 per cent had received a tertiary education. This is because many entered the Netherlands at an early age, which made it possible for them to pursue their further schooling there. It also explains the high levels of Dutch language skills among this population and the low levels of unemployment found in our sample (3 per cent).

Portugal's longstanding colonial relationship with Angola, during which cultural, linguistic, political and economic links were established between the two countries and migrant networks formed, has been the main factor in fostering this migration stream. The height of Angolan migration to Portugal was reached in the 1990s and early 2000s because of the civil war. By 2006, there were 33,000 Angolan migrants and they formed the fourth largest migrant group in the country (SEF 2010). While some Angolan migrants in Portugal were the children of elite, middle-class families fleeing compulsory military service, the majority were low skilled and worked in construction, cleaning and similar jobs. Traditionally, the gender composition of Angolan migrants in Portugal shows a male dominated migrant population. However, recent trends indicate a sharp rise in females, reaching 51 per cent in 2010 largely due to family reunification (Grassi 2010). Nearly 80 per cent of Angolan migrants arrive in Portugal on tourist visas, but most can regularize these by gaining citizenship, or acquiring the permanent or temporary permits that give Angolan migrants access to the same rights as the native Portuguese population, as well as access to the labour market and to social and financial services (IOM 2010). Since the mid-2000s Angolan migrants in Portugal have been returning to Angola because of the downturn in the Portuguese economy and strong growth in the Angolan economy. Their numbers had declined to 21,563 by 2011 (SEF 2012).

The two destination countries have different economic and migration policies. Portugal has lower GDP and higher unemployment rates than the Netherlands, yet it has a more flexible and pragmatic immigration and family reunification policy. Portugal has a more favourable migration policy than the Netherlands in terms of labour market mobility, family reunification, and status regularization (MIPEX 2010). Since the 1970s, Portugal has been easing its bureaucratic restrictions and facilitating access to nationality, family reunification, and visa renewals (Grassi 2009). For example, in 2009, because of the negative impact of the economic crisis on migrants' employment levels, for a while Portugal suspended the economic costs of regularization and family reunification (Grassi and Vivet 2013). Furthermore, since the 1990s, the Portuguese government has launched three special regularization processes, one of which is positive discrimination for citizens from Portuguese speaking countries, including Angola (Decree Law no 212/92, 12 October 1992).

In the Netherlands, on the other hand, family reunification laws have become more restrictive over time. Since 2005, Dutch family reunification law has required family members seeking reunion to start the integration process while residing in their countries of origin by studying the Dutch language and aspects of Dutch society, and by passing an integration test (Bonjour 2010). In 2011, the application fee increased to 830 €, with an income requirement of 1250 €; in addition, migrants are required to show a work contract for at least a year.

The contexts of not only the destination countries but also the country of origin are important in explaining family separation and its consequences. In Angola, there is a longstanding tradition of circulating children among relatives; this type of care transference exists because parents assume that these caretakers can provide a better future for their children (Grassi 2010; Øien 2006). However, the war and postwar situation in Angola contributed significantly towards splintering families both in and outside

Angola. Family separation through international migration and its consequences should be understood in this context.

Although there is insufficient evidence to explain the reasons behind transnational family formations among Angolan migrants in each destination country, we presume that features of both the host and origin countries can affect the formation, characteristics, and well-being of transnational Angolan families in each destination country.

## **Methods and data**

In this study, we used data from a survey conducted between 2010 and 2011 as part of the Transnational Child Raising Arrangements between Africa and Europe (TCRAf-EU) project. The survey includes 306 Angolan migrants in the Netherlands and 300 in Portugal. As there are no baseline surveys of Angolan migrants in either destination country, it was not possible to sample randomly. Instead, the respondents were recruited using various gateways – through public places and various Angolan associations and churches, through the personal contacts of researchers and interviewers, and through snowballing – to reach a diverse population.

The survey targeted one migrant parent per family who had arrived in the Netherlands or Portugal for the first time at the age of 18 or older and who had spent at least one year uninterrupted in the respective destination country. The respondents in Portugal were surveyed in the greater Lisbon area, which includes the Lisbon and Setubal districts and 86 per cent of the total Angolan population in Portugal. In the Netherlands, the survey focused on Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, and Utrecht, the main cities where migrants live, and on different cities with asylum seeker centres, for many Angolans entered the Netherlands as asylum seekers.

Quota sampling was employed to compose a sample consisting of equal proportions of parents with all their children in the destination countries (the control group) and parents with some or all of their children living in Angola. In the resulting sample, 44 per cent of the migrant parents lived in the Netherlands (n=137), and 48 per cent in Portugal (n=148); all had at least one child in Angola. Furthermore, quotas were specified to include an equal number of men and women and an equal number from different age groups. The same questionnaire was administered in both destination countries to ensure comparability.<sup>1</sup> The survey includes extensive data on basic socio-economic and demographic characteristics and the whereabouts of the respondent's children, in addition to various supplementary survey modules. For this study, an important module of interest includes questions about health, satisfaction, and happiness, as well as a general health questionnaire (GHQ-12), which is often used to measure emotional well-being.

## *Dependent variables*

We measure well-being in four ways to capture its multi-dimensional character (Griffin 1986) and to investigate whether there are differences between these dimensions. These are self-assessed health status (Erikson et al. 2001; Simon et al. 2005), life satisfaction (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2003), happiness (Hills and Argyle 2002), and emotional

well-being (Jackson 2007; Montazeri et al. 2003). For these indicators, an increase on a scale from 1 to 5 represents better outcomes. Emotional well-being is based on the GHQ-12 (Goldberg and Williams 1988), which includes four-point scale responses: 1='more than usual', 2='the same as usual', 3='less than usual' and 4='much less than usual'. For each question, the first two categories were coded to 0 and the latter two to 1 to create a dichotomous variable. After confirming that the 12 items measured one-dimensional latent outcomes using factor analyses, the emotional well-being score was constructed by adding the responses to the 12 general health questions (Goldberg 1978). The aggregate outcomes ranged from 0 to 12, and a higher score was interpreted to reveal worse emotional well-being. For both samples, the measure was found reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.94$  for the Netherlands sample, and Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.85$  for the Portugal sample).

*Independent variable:* the transnational parenting variable is a dichotomous variable capturing those parents who, at the time of the survey, have one or more children in Angola, in comparison with non-transnational parents, namely those who live with all their children in the Netherlands or Portugal.

*Control variables:* to isolate the effect of transnational parenting on well-being, the study includes a series of control variables. *Demographic characteristics* include sex, age, education, and marital status. Dummy variables are included for sex and marital status, with female and single (single includes divorced and widowed), respectively, as reference categories. Education is measured in levels ranging from some primary education to completed university education. *Socio-economic characteristics* include house ownership in the respective destination country, number of assets in Angola, and adequate money for daily living. *Social network- and migration-related characteristics* were captured by the number of people a migrant knows in the host country and his or her length of stay in the destination country. We also include a variable relating to the children's ages, as it is more difficult for transnational parents to relate to their young children; hence, these parents suffer more (Haagsman et al. 2015). As reviewed above, studies that have investigated migrants' well-being have found documented status to be an important factor. However, this variable cannot be investigated in this study because virtually the entire sample consists of documented migrants. When analysing heterogeneity within the transnational parent group, we include two additional variables that are only reported for these parents, along with the aforementioned control variables. To determine whether the parent has chosen to live transnationally or whether transnational living is an imposed situation, we consider who the caregiver is for the children back in Angola and whether the parent prefers to live with his or her child or children.

### *Analytical procedure*

We present two sets of analyses using ordinary least square regression. Across the four well-being outcomes, the first regression analyses estimated the effect of transnational parenting by including the control variables discussed above. The second regression analyses focused on the transnational parent sub-group to investigate which of the control variables explained differences in each of the well-being outcomes. In both

regressions, analyses were separately conducted for each well-being outcome and for each migration flow, Angolans in Portugal and Angolans in the Netherlands. In all of the models, coefficients were estimated with robust standard errors to address any arbitrary forms of heteroskedasticity.

### **Transnational parenting and well-being**

Table 1 presents the summary statistics for the Netherlands and Portugal samples. Statistical significance is tested using an independent two-sample t-test. On average, Angolan migrant parents in the Netherlands reported better well-being outcomes compared with those in Portugal. In both the Netherlands and Portugal, statistically significant differences are found between transnational and non-transnational parents, with the latter reporting better well-being outcomes in all well-being dimensions except health status for Angolans in Portugal.

In each sample, transnational parents show no significant differences compared with non-transnational parents in terms of age, marital status, educational status, enough money for daily activities, and communication difficulties in the host country's language. In the case of language difficulties, only 13 Angolans in the Portuguese sample reported communication problems. This finding is understandable because Portuguese is the official language in Angola. Instead, 43 per cent of Angolans in the Dutch sample found it difficult to speak the Dutch language. As such, we include language difficulty as one of the independent variables only when analysing the data in the Dutch sample.

There are significant differences in the two groups of parents in each sample in terms of sex composition, socioeconomic status, social network, length of stay in the host country and children's ages. While in both the Dutch and Portuguese samples the male-female ratio is almost one to one, transnational parents are predominantly male, accounting for 70 per cent in the former sample and 75 per cent in the latter. The proportion of these parents who own houses in the host countries is significantly lower than that of the non-transnational parents – 26 per cent and 11 per cent of transnational parents as opposed to 36 per cent and 34 per cent of the non-transnational parents in the Netherlands and Portugal, respectively. Transnational parents have fewer people in their social networks compared with those in the control group. Angolan transnational parents have stayed in Portugal for relatively shorter periods, while no significant differences in the length of stay are found between the two groups of parents in the Netherlands sample. Transnational parents in both destination countries have relatively older children compared with those in the control group.

In this study, transnational parenting for Angolans is predominantly a male affair; for most, their children back home are taken care of by the other biological parent. For 75 per cent of the transnational parents (in both samples), at least one child in Angola is cared for by the other biological parent. In addition, it seems that living transnationally is more of a choice for Angolans in Portugal than it is for Angolans in the Netherlands. While only 47 per cent of the transnational parents in Portugal would prefer to live with their children, this number was much higher (73 per cent) for parents in the Netherlands.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of all variables by transnational parenting characteristics**

	Angolans in the Netherlands			Angolans in Portugal				
	All N=306	Non-TN n=169	TN n=137	P-Value	All N=299	Non-TN n=149	TN n=150	P-Value
<b>Well-being Outcomes</b>								
Self-assessed health status	4.09 (0.88)	4.19 (0.87)	3.97 (0.88)	0.03**	3.59 (0.93)	3.67 (0.91)	3.51 (0.95)	0.13
Self-assessed life satisfaction	4.08 (0.85)	4.20 (0.84)	3.94 (0.85)	0.01**	2.82 (1.23)	3.01 (1.12)	2.64 (1.30)	0.01**
Self-assessed happiness	4.08 (1.00)	4.30 (0.89)	3.81 (1.06)	0.00***	2.95 (1.28)	3.26 (1.18)	2.65 (1.30)	0.00***
Emotional well-being (ghq_12) <sup>1</sup>	3.39 (3.98)	2.53 (3.55)	4.45 (4.24)	0.00***	4.55 (3.34)	3.95 (2.99)	5.11 (3.54)	0.00***
<b>Socio-Demographic Characteristics</b>								
Sex of the parent (1=male) %	52.29	37.87	70.07	0.00***	54.67	34.23	75.33	0.00***
Age of the parent (years)	33.95 (6.35)	33.76 (7.00)	34.19 (5.45)	0.55	37.03 (5.17)	37.36 (6.07)	36.71 (4.10)	0.27
Marital status of the parent (1=married or in a relationship) %	83.28	83.93	82.48	0.74	78.67	81.21	76.00	0.27
Education status of the parent in levels	7.25 (2.17)	7.16 (2.37)	7.37 (1.89)	0.40	7.04 (2.23)	6.89 (2.34)	7.21 (2.12)	0.23
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>								
Owns house in the Netherlands (1=yes) %	31.70	36.09	26.28	0.07*	22.67	34.23	11.33	0.00***
Number of assets owned in Angola	0.37 (0.92)	0.18 (0.50)	0.60 (0.48)	0.00***	0.52 (1.31)	0.60 (0.96)	0.44 (1.59)	0.28
Has enough money to live on day-to-day (1=yes) %	63.12	62.75	63.70	0.85	5.67	6.71	4.67	0.45
<b>Social Network and Migration Characteristics</b>								
Number of friends and family in the host country	31.03 (30.15)	35.54 (32.52)	25.46 (26.01)	0.00***	24.78 (18.36)	26.90 (18.73)	22.67 (17.86)	0.05*
Difficulties communicating in host country's language (1=yes) %	42.81	43.20	42.34	0.55	4.33	6.04	2.67	0.92
Length of stay in the host country (years)	13.77 (4.25)	13.76 (4.15)	13.79 (4.39)	0.95	10.62 (5.22)	11.90 (5.84)	9.37 (4.20)	0.00***
Age of children (years)	7.10 (5.13)	6.62 (5.16)	7.68 (5.06)	0.07*	9.89 (4.15)	9.32 (4.56)	10.47 (3.64)	0.02**
Caregiver is the other biological parent (1=yes) %			75.91				74.67	
Prefers to live with child (1=yes) %			72.99				46.67	

Notes: Standard errors are reported in parentheses. P-values indicate statistical significance for the comparison between transnational parents (TN) and non-transnational parents (non-TN). 1 Higher scores indicate worse well-being. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. Source: TCRAf-Eu, 2011.

Regression results for the Netherlands sample show that transnational parenting is negatively associated with the well-being of Angolan parents (Table 2a), for all well-being outcomes. Stronger associations are found in the cases of happiness ( $p=0.05$ ) and emotional well-being ( $p=0.01$ ), while weaker associations are found in relation to health status and life satisfaction ( $p=0.10$ ). Compared with the control group, being a transnational parent reduces the reported scores for both health status and life satisfaction by 19 percentage points and for happiness by 42 percentage points and increases GHQ scores, hence reducing emotional well-being by two units.

**Table 2a: OLS regression of well-being of Angolan migrants in the Netherlands**

	Angolans in the Netherlands N=297			
	<i>Health status</i>	<i>Life satisfaction</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Emotional well-being</i>
Transnational parent (1=yes)	-0.19 <sup>+</sup> (0.11)	-0.19 <sup>+</sup> (0.11)	-0.42*** (0.12)	2.20*** (0.51)
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>				
Sex of the parent (1=male)	0.26* (0.10)	-0.05 (0.11)	0.03 (0.11)	0.02 (0.51)
Age of the parent (years)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.08 <sup>+</sup> (0.05)
Marital status of the parent (1=married or in a relationship)	0.05 (0.16)	0.24 (0.16)	0.35** (0.18)	-1.71* (0.66)
Education status of the parent in levels	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.10)
<b>Socio-economic status</b>				
Owns house in the Netherlands (1=yes)	-0.10 (0.11)	0.08 (0.11)	-0.04 (0.12)	-0.13 (0.52)
Number of assets owned in Angola	-0.10* (0.05)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.69** (0.23)
Has enough money to live on day-to-day (1=yes)	0.04 (0.12)	0.32** (0.12)	0.63*** (0.12)	-1.54** (0.55)
<b>Social network and migration characteristics</b>				
Number of friends and family in the host country	0.10** (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.08* (0.04)	-0.16 (0.17)
Difficulties communicating in host country's language (1=yes)	-0.11* (0.05)	-0.09* (0.05)	-0.17** (0.06)	0.30 (0.21)
Length of stay in the host country (years)	-0.02 <sup>+</sup> (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.06)
Age of children (years)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.15* (0.06)
Constant	4.44*** (0.41)	4.27*** (0.42)	3.91*** (0.45)	4.06* (1.59)
R-squared	0.12	0.13	0.23	0.18

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses, \*\*\*  $p<0.001$ , \*\*  $p<0.01$ , \*  $p<0.05$ , +  $p<0.10$ .  
Source: TCRAf-Eu, 2011.

**Table 2a: OLS regression of the well-being of Angolan migrants in Portugal**

	Angolans in Portugal N=299			
	<i>Health status</i>	<i>Life satisfaction</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Emotional well-being</i>
Transnational parent (1=yes)	-0.23* (0.12)	-0.33* (0.16)	-0.50*** (0.18)	1.10** (0.46)
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>				
Sex of the parent (1=male)	0.18 (0.12)	0.16 (0.15)	0.24 (0.15)	-0.50 (0.43)
Age of the parent (years)	-0.04** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.05)
Marital status of the parent (1=married or in a relationship)	-0.02 (0.15)	0.63** (0.17)	0.26 (0.18)	-0.78 (0.48)
Education status of the parent in levels	-0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.24* (0.09)
<b>Socio-economic status</b>				
Owns house in the Netherlands (1=yes)	0.23* (0.16)	0.61** (0.18)	0.63** (0.19)	-2.19*** (0.44)
Number of assets owned in Angola	0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)	0.11 (0.10)
Has enough money to live on day-to-day (1=yes)	0.77*** (0.20)	1.10*** (0.24)	1.03** (0.26)	-1.88** (0.60)
<b>Social network and migration characteristics</b>				
Number of friends and family in the host country	-0.23*** (0.07)	-0.13** (0.08)	-0.18*** (0.08)	0.29* (0.23)
Length of stay in the host country (years)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.07 (0.04)
Age of children (years)	0.01 (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.06)
Constant	5.52*** (0.52)	2.44*** (0.68)	3.04*** (0.67)	5.75*** (1.87)
R-squared	0.19	0.22	0.23	0.17

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses, \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10.  
Source: TCRAf-Eu, 2011.

Examining the rest of the control variables, men report better health status compared with women, with no significant differences found between men and women in the other well-being outcomes. An increase in age is weakly associated with lower emotional well-being. Being married or in a relationship is associated with higher levels of happiness and better emotional well-being. Socio-economic status, measured using the parent's assets owned in Angola, is negatively associated with health status and positively associated with emotional well-being. The effect found on health status is counterintuitive, which may be caused by the reverse relationship: low health status also affects one's ability to have more assets. Having adequate money to live on daily is positively and strongly associated with more life satisfaction and happiness and

with better emotional well-being. Social networks are positively associated with health status and happiness. An increase in the number of years in the Netherlands is weakly and negatively associated with self-assessed health. An increase in the age of children is associated with better emotional well-being of Angolan migrants in the Netherlands.

Transnational parenting is also negatively associated with the well-being of Angolan migrant parents in Portugal (Table 2b), with stronger effects found for happiness ( $p=0.01$ ) and emotional well-being ( $p=0.05$ ). Being a transnational parent reduces the health status, life satisfaction, and happiness scores by 23, 33 and 50 percentage points respectively compared with the control group. It is associated with lower emotional well-being, increasing the GHQ scores by one unit and thus reducing emotional well-being.

As for the remaining control variables, the sex of the migrant parent does not seem to matter for any of the well-being outcomes; age does appear to matter, but only in explaining health status. An increase in age is associated with lower reported health scores. Married migrant parents or those in relationships are more satisfied with their lives than their unmarried counterparts. An increase in educational level is strongly and positively associated with better emotional well-being. Owning a house in Portugal and having enough money to live on daily are positively associated with the well-being of those in Portugal. In the case of house ownership, stronger effects are found on life satisfaction, happiness and emotional well-being, while the effect found on health status is weaker. At the same time, the presence of adequate money to live on daily is strongly and positively associated with all the well-being outcomes. Social networks are only important in explaining health status and happiness, but they unexpectedly have a negative effect. In contrast to what is found in the Dutch sample, the number of years in Portugal does not matter for any of the well-being outcomes. An increase in the age of children is positively associated with life satisfaction.

#### *Heterogeneity within the transnational parent group*

Tables 3a and 3b show the regression results for the Netherlands and Portugal transnational parent group samples respectively. Due to the small sample size, the focus is on the direction of the associations of the control variables with the well-being outcomes. The control variables explain little of the health status variation for transnational parents in the Netherlands (Table 3a). However, more variables play a part in the health of transnational parents in Portugal (Table 3b). Being a man, married or in a relationship, and having a better socioeconomic status – measured in terms of house ownership in Portugal and adequate money for daily living – are significantly and positively associated with self-assessed health. On the other hand, increases in age and the number of family and friends in Portugal and having the other biological parent as the primary caregiver are significantly and negatively associated with self-assessed health. The negative effects of the social network and having the other biological parent as the caregiver are counterintuitive, as transnational parents may be expected to worry less if their child is in the care of the other parent.

**Table 3a: OLS regression of the well-being of Angolan transnational parents in the Netherlands**

	Angolan transnational parents in the Netherlands N=134			
	<i>Health status</i>	<i>Life satisfaction</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Emotional well-being</i>
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>				
Sex of the parent (1=male)	0.26 (0.22)	0.28 (0.19)	0.11 (0.24)	-0.98 (1.05)
Age of the parent (years)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.04+ (0.02)	0.18** (0.06)
Marital status of the parent (1=married or in a relationship)	0.28 (0.30)	0.35 (0.24)	0.48+ (0.26)	-2.53** (0.97)
Education status of the parent in levels	0.06 (0.05)	0.03 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.17)
<b>Socio-economic status</b>				
Owns house in the Netherlands (1=yes)	0.03 (0.18)	0.14 (0.17)	0.11 (0.21)	-0.44 (0.82)
Number of assets owned in Angola	-0.09 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.02 (0.07)	-1.02*** (0.25)
Has enough money to live on day-to-day (1=yes)	-0.09 (0.22)	0.18 (0.18)	0.89*** (0.19)	-1.89* (0.86)
<b>Social network and migration characteristics</b>				
Number of friends and family in the host country	0.03 (0.05)	0.03 (0.04)	0.04 (0.05)	-0.43+ (0.26)
Difficulties communicating in host country's language (1=yes)	-0.12 (0.09)	-0.07 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.09)	0.43 (0.35)
Length of stay in the host country (years)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.12 (0.09)
Age of children (years)	-0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	-0.27*** (0.08)
Prefers to live with child (1=yes)	-0.15 (0.19)	-0.14 (0.17)	0.12 (0.21)	1.06 (0.89)
Caregiver is the other biological parent (1=yes)	-0.17 (0.24)	-0.26 (0.20)	-0.40+ (0.23)	1.37 (0.94)
Constant	3.41*** (0.68)	4.51*** (0.65)	3.76*** (0.80)	5.63** (2.65)
R-squared	0.11	0.20	0.32	0.34

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses, \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10.  
Source: TCRAf-Eu, 2011.

For transnational parents in the Netherlands, the only variable that is associated with life satisfaction relates to the parent's age. As expected, a significant and negative association is found. For transnational parents in Portugal, being married or being in a relationship and having enough money for daily living are significantly and positively associated with life satisfaction. The opposite is found when the other biological parent

**Table 3b: OLS regression of the well-being of Angolan transnational parents in Portugal**

	Angolans in the Netherlands N=297			
	<i>Health status</i>	<i>Life satisfaction</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Emotional well-being</i>
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>				
Sex of the parent (1=male)	0.55* (0.22)	0.16 (0.30)	0.26 (0.32)	-0.52 (0.89)
Age of the parent (years)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.16 (0.10)
Marital status of the parent (1=married or in a relationship)	0.38* (0.16)	0.90*** (0.25)	0.74* (0.27)	-1.44 <sup>+</sup> (0.72)
Education status of the parent in levels	-0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	-0.35** (0.14)
<b>Socio-economic status</b>				
Owns house in the Netherlands (1=yes)	0.52* (0.25)	0.57 (0.37)	0.57 (0.37)	-2.34** (0.88)
Number of assets owned in Angola	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	0.21** (0.08)
Has enough money to live on day-to-day (1=yes)	1.02*** (0.23)	1.45** (0.46)	1.61** (0.51)	-2.24* (1.04)
<b>Social network and migration characteristics</b>				
Number of friends and family in the host country	-0.26** (0.09)	-0.12 (0.14)	-0.24 <sup>+</sup> (0.13)	0.49 (0.36)
Length of stay in the host country (years)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.05 (0.09)
Age of children (years)	0.01 (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.17 <sup>+</sup> (0.09)
Prefers to live with child (1=yes)	0.26 (0.16)	0.09 (0.20)	0.17 (0.22)	0.14 (0.60)
Caregiver is the other biological parent (1=yes)	-0.57** (0.20)	-0.55 <sup>+</sup> (0.29)	-0.45 (0.28)	1.70 <sup>+</sup> (0.82)
Constant	6.03*** (0.86)	1.52 (1.40)	2.22* (1.30)	2.50 (3.68)
R-squared	0.42	0.37	0.34	0.23

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses, \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

Source: TCRAf-Eu, 2011.

is the caregiver for the children back home. For this same group, happiness declines as the parent's age increases, as the number of family and friends increases in the Netherlands, and when the other biological parent is the caregiver. On the other hand, happiness is positively associated with being married, with socioeconomic status – measured in terms of having adequate money for daily living – and with increases in the children's ages. Similar results are found for the effects of marital status and having adequate money for daily living on the happiness of Angolan transnational parents in

Portugal. We find that these transnational parents tend to be less happy with increases in their social network in Portugal.

More control variables explain the variation in the emotional well-being of Angolan transnational parents in the Netherlands. An increase in age is associated with increased GHQ scores, which indicates worse well-being for older parents. At the same time, being married, having a better socioeconomic status – measured in terms of more assets in Angola and the presence of adequate money for daily living – and having older children back home reduce the GHQ scores, which indicates better emotional well-being. In the case of transnational parents in Portugal, parents with higher education levels, better socioeconomic status – measured in terms of house ownership in Portugal and the presence of adequate money for daily living – and older children are significantly and positively associated with the GHQ scores, which indicate an improvement in emotional well-being. On the other hand, socioeconomic status, measured in terms of assets in Angola, and having the other biological parent as the children's caregiver tend to increase the GHQ scores, which indicates worse emotional well-being.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

This study investigates the effects of transnational parenting on the well-being of migrant parents. We use various measures to capture the multi-faceted nature of well-being and to investigate whether there are differences between the dimensions. We find that transnational parenting is associated with lower well-being, no matter how it is measured. However, stronger effects are found for happiness and emotional well-being, a result that is in line with findings from transnational family studies that emphasize the emotional difficulties experienced by parents in transnational families (Bernhard et al. 2009; Dreby 2007; Fresnoza-Flot 2009; Horton 2009; Parreñas 2005). Although the main way of assessing migrant well-being focuses exclusively on migrants' conditions in the receiving country (Bartram 2011; Knight and Gunatilaka 2010; Safi 2009), our findings suggest that a transnational perspective brings a better understanding of how family life can affect migrant parents' well-being. We show that the well-being of parents with all their children in the receiving country is greater than those with some children in the country of origin.

By comparing the same population in different receiving countries, this study also investigated whether different receiving country contexts lead to different effects on transnational migrant parenting. We found that despite more open Portuguese migration and family reunification policies in comparison with the Netherlands, transnational parents in both contexts experience lower well-being than parents who live together with their children in these destination countries. The differences in the migration and economic contexts of the two receiving countries are reflected in the results found for the control variables. The worse economic context in Portugal makes owning a house there of greater importance for migrants' well-being than it is in the Netherlands. In Portugal, over a quarter of Angolan migrants in our sample are unemployed and thus face insecure living conditions. Owning a house gives them needed security. In the Netherlands, Angolans face more secure living conditions, with only 3 per cent of our

sample being unemployed. For these migrants, owning a house is of less importance and thus less influential in affecting their well-being.

The characteristics of the migrant flow, as it has developed historically in the two countries, are also important. We find that the role of social networks has different and contrasting effects; in Portugal, networks composed of more family and friends are associated with lower health and happiness scores in migrants, whereas the opposite is found in the Netherlands. The findings on social networks in the Portugal sample contrast with findings from other studies (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Kuo and Tsai 1986). Although this divergent result needs further investigation, we posit that an explanation lies in the resources available through the social network. Given the Portuguese context of high unemployment, especially among the migrant population, few resources can be obtained from one's network; in addition, perhaps many requests are made of the migrant from network members, which may lead to social and financial pressures on the migrant. This example represents what has been termed 'negative' social capital (Portes 1998).

Three findings point to the importance of gender and marital status, although sometimes in unexpected ways. First, in general, most transnational parents are men, while Angolan migrant women tend to be in the receiving countries with all their children. This is probably because in both Portugal and the Netherlands, family reunification is one of the main reasons for women to come to these countries, and they are likely to do so with their children. Second, for transnational parents, being married or in a relationship, as opposed to being divorced or single, contributes to increased well-being in both receiving countries. Yet, surprisingly, when the other biological parent is taking care of a child in Angola, this condition actually leads to poorer health, less happiness, and lower levels of emotional well-being for transnational parents in Portugal and to less happiness for those in the Netherlands. Problematic relationships between the biological parents could explain these negative effects. These findings are supported by the results of Mazzucato et al. (2015), who found that Angolan children have significantly poorer emotional well-being when one parent is abroad. They posit, based on qualitative in-depth studies of transnational families (Manuh 1999; Schmalzbauer 2004), that migration may lead to tensions and distrust between parents when one parent migrates and the other stays in the origin country, but that these tensions do not necessarily lead to dissolution of the marriage. Sensing this tension, children experience lower levels of well-being. This tension may affect parents in a similar way.

Third, in both receiving countries, the sex of the migrant parent makes no difference in terms of well-being. Transnational family studies tend to focus on mothers and argue that mothers are distinct from fathers in terms of the emotional suffering experienced when they live apart from their children (Bernhard et al. 2009; Parreñas 2001, 2005). However, with a few exceptions, there has been very little focus on migrant fathers. Where such studies exist, they show that fathers remain engaged and derive feelings of self-worth from their ability to contribute to their children's upbringing through sending remittances and gifts (Poeze and Mazzucato 2012; Pribilsky 2012).

It is worth mentioning that the restricted sample size limited our findings. We could not investigate the effects of being undocumented, even though this has been found to affect significantly the well-being of migrants (Abrego 2014; Cavazos-Rehg et al. 2007;

Dias et al. 2008; Dito et al. 2016; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Knipscheer et al. 2000), for there were very few undocumented parents in the sample. Nonetheless, that our analysis uses a control group of non-transnational parents, while also controlling for various socio-economic and migration characteristics, establishes that the negative sense of well-being that transnational parents experience is indeed associated with their separation from their children. The findings on gender are also an important contribution of this study, for they show that, when controlling for various socioeconomic and migration characteristics, the suffering caused by separation from one's child, which in-depth qualitative studies have documented, does not reveal different levels of well-being between mothers and fathers.

This is one of the first studies to focus on two destination countries from the same country of origin. As such, we show that the country of destination can negatively affect a transnational family's sense of well-being. Thus, the study points to important policy implications for receiving countries: employment seems to be a strong contributor to the well-being of transnational migrant parents, and possibly more than migrant-friendly policies. Economic stability in the form of employment helps to improve the sense of well-being of Angolan transnational migrant parents. This makes sense especially given that migrant parents see their task and derive feelings of self-worth from their ability to remit (Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2001; Poeze and Mazzucato 2012; Pribilsky 2012; Schmalzbauer 2004). In Portugal, despite more migrant-friendly migration policies and a shared language through Angola being a Lusophone country, unemployment played a strong part in worsening the Angolans' sense of well-being. In the Netherlands, despite linguistic difficulties and strict migration policies making it difficult for families to reunite, a much larger proportion of Angolans were employed, and overall had higher levels of well-being than in Portugal. This was further seen in the fact that having enough money for day-to-day living expenses was more significantly associated with well-being for migrant parents in Portugal, where it was an important issue, than in the Netherlands, where it was less of a problem. Furthermore, as dire economic conditions affect many people in one's network, social networks were associated with a decrease in one's overall well-being in Portugal. This study thus attests to the importance of the context of the receiving country to how transnational families operate and this ultimately affects their sense of well-being.

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### **Note**

1. The English-language questionnaire was translated into, and back again from, Portuguese to ensure consistency.

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