

## **Intensive Case Study #5 Irma and separation of animals, household mobility, store, remittances.**

### **Meta Data**

Irma preferred that we come Friday around 11am to 12pm. Her preference was at 12pm, but wanted to cater to our time table. We decided to go with her preference at noon. She is incredibly warm and caring as a person so be prepared to have to turn down fruit or eating at her house. She also participated in the alcoholism focus group and shared interesting perspectives as a store owner.

Survey case #, GPS (N 18.83609 W 098.43337)

### **Rationale for Case Study (Generic and from the Survey):**

- Irma has a good separation of animals from her living spaces that hasn't been witnessed until this community.
- She has a store at the front of her house. How does easy access to snacks and sodas affect their health?
- Her mother, who lives with her, has mobility problems as she's had knee issues and the house has some different levels and steps to get to other parts of the house.
- Remittances have greatly impacted family finances, improving living conditions

### **Synthesis of Case from Survey**

- Irma (52 yrs) lives with her mother (Carlota, 84 yrs) and her son (Salvador, 23).
- The son is currently studying at university and Irma had finished preparatoria.
- One house on the lot, but the lot was previously split by her grandmother. Her cousin is her neighbor. *What caused the lot to be split?*
- They frequently go to Irma's niece, Edit, to get medical check-ups. *Should ask her more about Edit and why they prefer her*
- Carlota had a knee replacement that took a long time for her to recover from. *How long ago? What made the recovery difficult?*
- They had used a huesero, but had poor experiences with them.
- No chronic illnesses and only one case of an acute illness. The mom had diarrhea. *Could that relate to the mom using the tap (or well?) water more frequently?*
- She has another son who was born and lives in McAllen, Texas.
- Irma has lived in the U.S for a year, but returned a long time ago.
- Irma has a brother that lives in the U.S and has arthritis.
- Regarding mental health, she seemed positive and upbeat during the interview. She said that if she is feeling down or more stressed than usual she turns on her music and it helps.
- She uses both gas and carbon to cook with, but primarily uses gas.
- Her family eats fruit the majority of the week. In her backyard, she has dragonfruit, pomegranates, and calabaza. *How did she even start growing dragonfruit? Are there other plants? When did she start growing these?*
- She did say that her family doesn't consume store-bought food that much.

- The family uses well water and bottled water. She drinks from the bottled water because she is worried about the chlorine levels in the water. Her mom pays for aqua potable, but it isn't used as much as well water and bottled water.
- The water sample was taken from the water they use most frequently which was the well water. *Should check the chlorine level of their tap water.*

CC 7/18; VR 7/20

## Report

### **Concerning the Properties:**

This all comes from Irma's grandparents who were ejidatarios, and who started the process a long time ago. She doesn't know the exact year, but she mentions that her grandparents died around their 80s, and they passed about 30 years ago, so, they have been here for over 100 years (they were probably beneficiaries of the land reform process of the 1920s and 30s.. The town was then very small.. As ejidatarios they would have their social property rights registered and they would pay their fees there. (PMW was interested to know the property rights and who was the "owner" of Irma's lot and the lot next door. Also, once established, whether anyone had a Will to ensure future inheritance and avoid conflict and "clouded" titles.)

Dr. Ward asks her first about the person living next door. She mentions it is Adela Juarez, who is the daughter of the brother of Irma's mom. They divided up their lot, half for one child and half for the other one. That's why her cousin is her neighbor.

There are some sort of registrations, but they don't have formal deeds. Their holdings are registered (as ejidatarios) – now with her mother who inherited the ejidal land rights from her parents. There are years of records of having paid the boleto (property tax). Mom (Carlota) is the "owner". The lot is registered but lacks deeds. This is the case for Irma's lots, and for Adela's. When they did the whole process of deeds in the community, they took measurements with the government and segmented the lots; many people got deeds but they didn't.

So, to sum up, her mom pays for the taxes of the property, but they lack deeds. They have receipts that everything is paid, since the time of her grandparents. Her mother has a Will, not with a notary but with the local civil authority and a judge. And also a comisariado, and her grandmother set the inheritance there, and divided up each property. There are 8 siblings, and each of them has two lots, so there are 16 fields/lots. They are both for living, and one for producing, that's why there are two per person.

Overall, she sounds very well informed of all of the tenure and paperwork situation. Dr. Ward recommends her that she needs to make her own Will, concerning her property. She nods, and doesn't appear to have one. She says that her mother had made her Will a few years back under the Septiembre – Mes del Testamento program. (This was [is] a low cost program of making Wills that in part came out of the LAHN research project.). Dr. Ward mentions that this is a consequence of the project he has worked on. He also stresses that sometimes informal agreements can be complicated, because when the person passes it makes everything harder. So he's happy that everything is in order. In fact, as we find below, her brother will be the beneficiary of the Will (not her), so it is **he who should make a Will** regarding the property ownership. But nothing to stop her doing the same with her personal assets, etc.)

**The Family:** *Complicated so we went around the houses somewhat to get it clear*

She goes into talking about her family in the US. She has one son, who is right now in Mexico but is living right now in New York. In McAllen, she has a brother. She has 5, 4 brothers and a sister. Her son was born in McAllen and he just finished his studies in Mexico, but now has moved to New York. Her mother receives remittances, from all of her siblings.

The money her mother receives is mostly for health, and also for the maintenance of the various properties and fields. She doesn't tell them exactly what it is for, but then she on her own distributes them.

Her brother in McAllen has a huge house, and he has worked a lot. That's why her brother will keep the house. He was a mariachi in Mexico City and in the 1985 earthquake he was there. That's when he decided to move to the US. By that time, he had already repaired the house. He toured the US with Antonio Aguilar, and he was even in the shows of Zabdulovsky and some other famous musicians. He did well. He was living in Houston, but he was paying very high rent. He bought an acre in McAllen and built his house there. It's a big house with three bedrooms, a kitchen, a place to eat, two restrooms, a studio, a nice roof, nice big trees in the front and in the back. She hasn't seen the house since 1996, but he has shown her videos and slowly has built it.

For repairing the house here, he contacted her. He's the one who has helped Irma the most, since she was young. He's the one who helps the most. He brings gifts, and takes them to places, toys, in the birthday of her kid he would celebrate them to him. However, recently he changed jobs and now he transports people to the hospital (the mariachi business went down a lot), but until the kid was 15 years he made them big parties and everything. Her brother has two kids, and her cunada is a Testigo de Jehova where they have no parties, but he hasn't changed and still celebrates. The kids are no longer Testigos de Jehova. One of those kids was a nurse, but dropped it and decided to become a cop. Ever since he was a kid he showed interests in playing with guns, and that's what he does up to this day.

Paty asks her why her siblings left to the US rather than stay here. She doesn't know, says her older brother worked a lot in the field. But maybe out of curiosity he left. Concerning the other brother, he never liked the fields, more like driving in taxis and in greenhouses, so he's up there in the US. He says that if he comes back, he'll work in a greenhouse with flowers. He worked in a taxicab, as driver of the floristas of the community -- he would transport their product. He would take them to CDMX, to Oaxaca, etc. He drives a taxicab in the US, really never liked the fields.

She mentions that her brother used to be an alcoholic. She talks about how in the US they give a lot of attention to alcoholics, they get chats. They were all scared of him, because he would get very aggressive and hit his wife, and her mother got involved and her as a kid would get scared. They would get neighbors to control him and hold him something in his mouth so he wouldn't talk while holding him with a rope. He was very rude and aggressive, even sometimes with a machete or cuchillo. She had about 8 years at the time, and now she's 52. She would hide in the closet and tremble. She grew up with a lot of trauma with him. This was her older brother, the one who liked the fields. He was the first one who left.

Her second brother is the one most respected, even the older brother respects him the most. (My bad, we should have stopped here and just asked her to name each so that we would have a mini family tree to "ubicar" each sibling.)

Her sister left because she got married and her husband took her. (This is usual practice in Mexico – to live with the suegra...)

Her grandfather came from a nearby pueblo San Salvador de algo, since he was a kid. There he met her grandmother and built a family. He had cattle, he would kill some bulls, or a pig, or a donkey. She did know him. He would use it as a butcher room (the current room where her mother is). It was a meat store -- the crisp pork was super good! They did a lot of partying because her grandma did great mole, so people would hire her for it, for weddings or parties. Her mother made sure that everyone would get through elementary and secondary education.

### **On Her Mother's Health:**

Because of her hard work over the years she originally went into surgery for her knees. It cost her over 100 000 pesos, around 20 years ago. With a particular orthopedist. Latterly the doctor recommended her to go to the Seguro, because many more procedures were needed and so it's better to go there. Given that she was younger, she didn't take care of her health, and so the knee got bad again. For the second surgery of the same knee, that second one she did it in the Seguro. It's the biggest surgery she's had with the Seguro. Then she had an eye surgery, and regular care. It was just one eye, the problem she had was that she looked blurry. It was a cataract.

The doctor who performed the surgery is one in Puebla, who her sister recommended, since she worked as a nurse and knew him to be an honest doctor.

### **On her Son's Health:**

She had her son in McAllen, since she was there for about a year. He had many health complications when he was born, it's called ictericia -- a yellowing of the skin. So he was hospitalized for 10-12 days, in an incubator with blue lights so that it wouldn't hurt his eyes. He was also born with a soplo in his heart, so he was also taken there. He was also born with one testicle up, didn't descend, so he had to get treatment for that. However, that took many years, so she paid him for surgery when he was older (aged 7 and back in Mexico), in a particular doctor here in Mexico. She paid for all of that on her own.

All of the expenditures in McAllen where paid by the government, she didn't pay anything. Her cunada took her to the appointments, but she didn't spend anything. She did have to pay for the surgery to do the testicle of his kid. She paid about 12 000 pesos for the procedure, he was 7. They also circumcised him. The surgery had to happen when he was 5 years, but it took her a while to gather the money. She was there with her brother.

### **On the Physical Structure of the House:**

The floors (in her Mom's rooms are made of the material they're made out of for a reason because it's easier for her mom to walk around. In her room, it can be slippery, so they put a special floor for her to walk about. She fell a lot of times outside in the street, when she was going to tajonal, a rock took her and fell in her knees, and broke whatever she was carrying. She had to walk all the way out, and go to Puebla because she was into trade. She says she fell many times and hit herself very hard.

She has fallen in the house. She says she never hurts her knees.

### **On the Store:**

The survey asks whether you ever “buy...” So she answered “No”. But of course buying and taking from her own stock are different. She doesn’t consume a lot from the store. Maybe a Coke once a day (she likes), but never fried stuff. Also water sometimes, sometimes lollipops. Usually during the time of lunch. She barely has sabritas, less than once per month.

She has had the store since her son had 3 years. She was sowing, in the room, and would put her kids legos right there and he would build with them, she would put him some shade and he would take care of the store. He’s now 23. Her main source of income right now is the store, she also gets some from the field. She would sow, she would prepare food in the school, she has done a lot and is very proud of her achievements and having raised her son. She built the current room of the store in 2001, when the Twin Towers fell. She did that on her own effort. She would manage it with the inventory of the store, to pay for her kid’s stuff.

PMW adds, that there was never any mention of male partners/spouses (Moms or hers). Wasn’t sure what was the situation and I was tentative about asking. So I asked about whether she knew her grandfather... and we took it from there. She waxed eloquent about him (avoidance strategy?) so I then asked about her Dad. There was no mention of divorce or separation or casa chicas. In her Dad’s case he was a musician and was based in Mexico City – so I suspect that he was absent largely and may have had a separate home (and household there). She would spend time with him in the DF and was happy doing so (she also got her education there), so I suspect that there may have been two households. He passed away 8 years ago. Nothing much (at all) about her own marriage and I didn’t push it, but notable that she didn’t talk about him and his role in the household.

7/19 and 7/20. AR; PMW; and VR.

PMW – OK so what did you “see” in this case. What struck you as significant?

Maria (BUAP). The fact that these were like two different casas/cases: the front section, largely well built and clean and “modern”; then transitioning through the lot to more provisional structures (around patio and “kitchen” through to the back part which was sheds and storage and provisional outbuildings, and the huerta and pens for the goats, etc., Like two adjacent cultures all integrated into a single case. (PMW – great comment and insights since that is what is. A semi urban pueblo in which agricultural activities sit alongside more service and other activities. Traditional and modern but in ways that are a positive hybrid not a dichotomy).

Also Maria and others: floors and outside surfaces quite broken and uneven. Surely a problem downstream for elderly. (Accurate, although somewhat paradoxically Carlota == 84 years doesn’t have problems – occasional falls but mostly when hurrying outside camino...) In her rooms special flooring to minimize falls.

Andrea and others. Also, on health. The fact that this was much cleaner across all sections (above). Unlike, say, Case 2 in Xochi where there were sections that were clearly unhealthful (rear area, garbage and pigs pens). Paty noted the cleanliness - bathrooms especially (and

wasn't just for us – always the same). Pride that Irma has in having built out (with brother's help) the front end – out of her own earnings as a seamstress (costurera) and later through the shop.

Not on health, but PMW mentioned the contrast in interior furniture – this case has – Xochi furniture and decoration at a minimum.

Not on health, but ownership. Carlota (mom) has a will. These lands were inherited from her abuelos (ejidatarions) and various predios allocated to their children and grandkids (such as Irma). However, her mother is the owner and has a will which makes allocations to kids. Owner of the lot will be Irma's 2nd brother in whom everyone trusts. Will remain the family home.

VR- There was a large amount of space in the house, especially when compared to the houses in Xochi. Each person that lives there has their own space and seemingly has to share very little with other family members. They even had multiple storage spaces for different things. It was also interesting to see how the lot was separated, but the cousins still kept in touch and allowed each to easily access each other's properties. They had a chain link door connecting the backyard and a small chain link "window"/door at eye level through which to share food and stuff w/o having to go out the front.

AQ: ***Irma's House***; MODERATE  
Main Area (garage and entrance gate): CO2=713 (M)  
Baño 1: CO2=720 (M)  
Bedroom 1: CO2=841 (M)  
House Storage: CO2=768 (M)

### **Health Commentary**

#### **Health Hazards**

Although the main area is the space most open to the outside, the garage, which is located next to the street, seems to have moderate air quality. Proximity to the street may cause a rise in CO2 levels if, for example, the road appears to be busy or used by vehicles.

The CO2 concentration in the bathroom appears moderate. This may be due to the fact that the boiler and washer, all of which emit CO2 among other elements, are located right outside of the bathroom.

On Irma's lot there is a small shop that is accessible inside the house and to the street. To enter the shop from inside the house, there are a series of steps because it is located at a lower elevation than the rest of the house. Irma's mother, Carlota, is often inside the shop and has knee problems. Using these steps could potentially cause discomfort or lead to an accident. There are other areas in the house that have steps, including near the garage that could impede mobility. While the house is overall fairly smooth, there are slight changes in elevation from the outdoor area or inside the house that could decrease ease of mobility.

On the property they have a small convenience store where Carlota works. The store has chips, candy, and sugary beverages, which in turn increases access to unhealthy foods and beverages; potentially affecting the nutritional practices, purchasing patterns, and weight status of individuals of the family. Availability of unhealthy foods may negatively impact preventative measures to decrease obesity, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. When controlling for other variables, proximity to a supermarket, rather than to a small convenience stores, appears to be related to diet quality. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3071013/>)

In Carlota's room there was moisture damage present near a bed. The room was neither near the street nor near the bathroom. Irma stated that this gets worse when it rains, meaning the water is likely due to poor drainage infrastructure on the roof of the house. Humid walls can increase the likelihood of mold growth, which can negatively impact health and manifest in upper respiratory infections.

([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317345950\\_Humid\\_Wall\\_Review\\_on\\_Causes\\_and\\_Solutions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317345950_Humid_Wall_Review_on_Causes_and_Solutions))

### **Housing Improvements to Decrease Health Hazards**

In the bedroom of Carlota there is a tile that was put down to decrease slipperiness and prevent falls. Due to her knee issues she struggles with safe mobility but this change has made it easier for her to walk around. While the outside area has some cracks, Carlota has not had problems inside the house with the improvement of the indoor flooring.

The living area is very clearly separated from the garden or animal pens. This separation of space is integral in improving sanitation and decreasing illnesses related to animals, including zoonotic enteric parasites. Irma does not allow animals to enter the housing area, even the two pet dogs, are kept in the backyard area. This prevents animal feces, dander, or diseases from being introduced to the main living area. Pastoral communities are at risk of a variety of zoonotic enteric parasites due to animal contact, food preparation and diet, and household characteristics, including closeness to animals, but Irma's lot layout seemingly decreases these risks. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5708844/>)

The family primarily uses propane gas for cooking, decreasing the particulate matter in the air and improving air quality. The use of propane gas is a measure of relative wealth in these communities as the gas is bought and is expensive for community members.

The house has a large outdoor area, improving air quality due to increased ventilation within the rooms. They also keep doors open when the weather permits, further increasing air flow into the rooms.

Due to perceptions about the water quality and chlorine levels, Irma drinks water from bottles regularly, preventing any water-borne illnesses. In her tap water, there was high TDS readings (372ppm) and 0.11ppm chlorine reading. The well had hard water at 191ppm.