

Parent-Child Relationships and the Transition to Marriage in Mexico

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Introduction

Although Mexican society is frequently described as familistic with strong ties between generations, little sociodemographic research has analyzed the role of parent-child-relationships and other dimensions of family dynamics in shaping children's transition to adulthood. In other settings, however, the quality of parent-child relationships has been found to influence the life-course events that characterize this transition. Particularly, the transition to marriage has been recognized as an intergenerational process that involves both parents and children (Thornton, Axinn and Xie 2007); as such, parent-child relationships are among the family influences that significantly affect children's transition to marriage.

Studying the association between parent-child relationships and children's transition to marriage in Mexico is particularly important given that contemporary socioeconomic and demographic changes have not substantially altered marriage patterns. Any comprehensive explanation that posits cultural factors as responsible for the lack of family change should include the role of family influences, such as the dynamics between young adults and their parents.

Moreover, given that the majority of Mexican children live in the parental home until the time of marriage, parent-child relationships and family environment are likely to play an important role in shaping children's transition to marriage.

In general, Mexican children come of age under strict parental control typical of family-oriented and patriarchal societies. While there has been a decrease in domestic violence from parent to children (DIF 2005), parent-child relationships have not shown significant improvements in terms of shared authority and freedom (Stern 2001). Daughters more than sons are subject to parental control in almost every aspect of their lives. Data from the 2000 National Survey of Youth reveals a majority of daughters still require parent's authorization to go out at night (88%), spend time with friends (80%), and to have a boyfriend (55%). Although the latter decreases with age, still 40% and 30% of women 20-24 and 25-29, respectively, report needing parental permission to have a boyfriend (Uribe 2005). Thus, daughters in particular live under strong parental control, which likely leads to parent-child conflict.

In contrast, some scholars argue that new generations of Mexican men and women are experiencing more egalitarian gender relationships as a result of increasing levels of education (e.g., Garcia and Oliveira 2006). At the top of the educational scale, they argue, women are making strides toward equitable decision-making, domestic violence appears to be diminishing among couples, and men are sharing in traditional activities previously thought to be the sole domain of women (e.g., active participation in child rearing). Nevertheless, men and women show no major differences in their expected family roles—the majority of both still accept the traditional division of labor, men as

breadwinners and women as homemakers.

Under this scenario, I hypothesize that one of the factors that might be associated with the stability of the age at marriage in Mexico is the persistence of parents' authority despite improvements in gender roles. As levels of education rise, women of more recent generations are better able to negotiate autonomy with spouses than with parents; thus choosing to marry than staying much longer under their parents' authority. Consequently, the absence of more democratic parent-child relationships in combination with the presence of more egalitarian gender relationships and fewer differences in expected family roles between young men and women translate into the continued relatively early age at marriage.

This paper thus focuses on family influences and the transition to marriage. Specifically, I analyze the extent to which parent-child relationships and family environment during the transition to adulthood are associated to children's transition to marriage. I use data from the National Survey of Youth conducted in 2000, which includes information on family dynamics and parent-child relationships; and allows the study of life course events during young adulthood, including the transition to marriage.

Context and Theoretical Considerations

Family Influences

Family influences have been found to be important predictors of marriage timing. These influences go beyond the role of socioeconomic influences, which

are usually recognized.¹ Thornton and colleagues found that marital experiences of mothers, parent's attitudes toward family formation, and parent-child relationships influence marital experiences of children (Thornton 1991; Thornton et al. 2007). When developing his theoretical framework, Thornton (1991) highlights the role of social control and parental home environment as mechanisms through which the marriage behavior of parents influences the marital outcomes of children. These two mechanisms may be particularly important as direct correlates of marriage timing in this context because the majority of Mexican children co-reside with their parents until the time of marriage.

Parent-child co-residence enhances social control by facilitating parental supervision and interaction with children. In Mexico, mothers typically stay at home taking care of children, thus reinforcing parental control. Moreover, single-parent families are rather uncommon due to the low levels of separation and divorce, which in turn makes for relatively easy monitoring children's behavior. Since authoritarian models of family relations tend to make young people more anxious about obtaining their independence (Galland 1997), prolonged parent-child co-residence in Mexico might be responsible for a relatively early departure from the parental home and therefore early marriage.

The environment of the parental home has been found to be associated with the timing of both the transition to residential independence and the

¹ Among the parental socioeconomic characteristics that influences children's marriage behavior are educational attainment, work status and occupation, income, financial assets, religion, family immigration and farm background (e.g., Axinn and Thornton 1993; Barber 2000; Cherlin et al. 1995; Giulio and Rosina 2007; Thornton 1991; Thornton et al. 2007).

transition to marriage (e.g., DaVanzo and Goldscheider 1990; Galland 1997; Mitchell, Wister, and Burch 1989). Children living in poor quality family environments are more likely to leave the parental home and to marry at younger ages. The presence of conflicts between parents and children and/or within parents is likely to diminish the quality of the parental home environment (Aquilino 2006). Although the levels of separation and divorce are low in Mexico, some children are certainly exposed to parents' marital conflict and dysfunctional family relationships, which are found to affect children's outcomes in early adulthood (Cherlin et al. 1991) such as educational attainment and transitions to adulthood. Parent-child conflict, on the other hand, could be increasing during children's transitions to adulthood if parents do not recognize their growing individualization and independence (Aquilino 2006). I explain this point further in the following section.

Parent-Child Relationships During the Transition to Adulthood

When children are making the transition to adulthood, the events they experience interact to transform parent-child relationships into more mutual or peer-like relationships. Thornton et al. (1995) suggest that as children become adults, their parents are more likely to see them as mature individuals; at the same time, children who are adopting similar adult roles as their parents are more likely to identify themselves with them. For instance, Aquilino (1997) found that the transition to full-time employment is associated with closer, more supportive, and less conflicted parent-child relations. In general, those changes are the result of the individualization process initiated in adolescence, which indeed change the dynamics within families.

Tensions and contradictions in parent-child relationships, however, are common as children acquire adult roles while still depending on parents in some ways (Aquilino 2006). Parent's recognition of the adult status of their children and relinquishment of control are essential to maintain parent-child attachment. Communication is also fundamental in creating mutual expectations about family obligations, control issues, and the level of involvement parents and children will have in each other's lives (Aquilino 2006). Thus the quality of parent-child relationships, in general, and parent-child communication in particular, are associated with the level of parent-child conflict. The transition to adulthood is, therefore, a period when parent-child relationships are likely to improve, but also to become stressful. In the context of Mexico, the co-residence of children and parents until the time of marriage could intensify both sides of this relationship. As mentioned earlier, parent-child relationships in the country are characterized by strong parental control, particularly over daughters. I hypothesize that the quality of the parent-child relationship and in general the dynamics in the family are, therefore, important predictors of marriage timing.

Finally, another important aspect that must be considered when discussing parental control over Mexican young adults is the enduring belief that marriage is the only appropriate setting for a sexual life. The majority of young people in Mexico still keep their sexual life secret from their parents unless there are clear signals of marrying their partner (Juarez 2002). In addition, the small window between sexual initiation and marriage among females, and an even smaller prevalence of contraception use among young single women are strong evidence that Mexican society still sanctions and stigmatizes premarital sex

among women. For instance, data from the 2000 National Survey of Youth show that around 80% of men and women ages 20-29 agree with the statement “women should not have premarital sex”. Evidently, the sexual revolution experienced in the majority of industrialized countries (Lesthaeghe 1995; Baizan 1998) has not yet occurred in Mexico because the family still functions as the main regulator in young adults’ sexual behavior (Saenz 2001).

In sum, social control and parental home environment are some of the forces by which family influences shape children’s transition to marriage. Parent-child co-residence until the time of children’s marriage makes these two forces particularly important as predictors of marriage timing in Mexico, in combination with other socioeconomic influences. In this paper I use these two aspects of Thornton’s family influences theoretical framework combined with Aquilino’s family-experiences and support framework, which emphasizes patterns of family interactions and the strength of emotional bonds as important influences on life course transitions in young adulthood, to analyze the role of parent-child relationships and family environment to marriage.

I hypothesize that poor quality parent-child relationships, strong parental control and difficult family environments hasten the transition to marriage for both sons and daughters. Moreover, I hypothesize that women of more recent generations are more likely to improve upon their relative level of autonomy by forming egalitarian marriages than by negotiating or trying to forge a more democratic relationship with their parents, and thus contributing to the stability of marriage in Mexico.

Research Questions

The first question I investigate is the extent to which parent-child relationships, broadly speaking, are associated with children's transition to marriage. My second research question recognizes that there are multiple dimensions of parent-child relationships and that they interact with other aspects of the family environment to affect the transition to marriage. Thus, I analyze whether parent-child communication, children's participation in the household, children's freedom or independence, family's organization in terms of decision-making, and the presence of violence affect children's transition to marriage. I am particularly interested in the extent to which living in a strong-parental-control environment accelerates marriage timing (i.e., increases the risk of marriage)

My third question investigates the extent to which individual attributes and transitions to adulthood (i.e., children's stage in the transition to adulthood), such as entering into the labor market and educational attainment, attenuate or eliminate the effects of parent-child relationships and family environment on children's transition to marriage. Finally, a fourth question recognized that the association between parent-child relationships and/or family environment and children's transition to marriage might vary by level of educational attainment, both as proxy for the general socioeconomic status of the family, and as proxy for the level of autonomy children may expect from their parents.

Data, Measures, and Methods

Data

In order to answer my research questions, I use data from the National Survey of Youth (hereafter referred to by its Spanish acronym ENJ). The ENJ is a nationally representative sample of young adults aged 12 to 29 years collected in face-to-face interviews in 2000 by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI) and sponsored by the National Institute of Youth (INJ). The contents of the individual questionnaire include family of origin's aspects including parent-child relationships; young people's schooling, spare time, religion, partial work history, courtship or romantic relationships, sexuality, marital life, procreation, culture and social participation, and values and social representations; as well as socioeconomic characteristics of the household. Importantly, the ENJ contains retrospective information on transitions to adulthood: schooling, employment, living arrangements, marriage, and childbearing. These key transitions, however, were asked only to 15 to 29 year olds, for a total of 37,147 complete interviews. Because only a small proportion of teenagers are married (4.46% of men and 14.5% of women), I retain only respondents 20 years old or older, leaving a working sample of 20,223 cases.²

Depending on whether the respondent lived in the parental home at the time of the survey, the data contain either current or retrospective information about parent-child relationships and family dynamics (e.g., overall evaluation of

² The working sample excludes 766 cases with missing values in the variables included in the analysis (4% of the total number of 20-29 respondents). The variables with the larger number of missing values are the ones capturing family violence.

mother- and father-child relationship, freedoms, household-chore obligations, time and activities shared with parents). This information along with retrospective information on marriage timing made it possible to apply event history techniques to estimate the effects of parent-child relationships and family dynamics on the transition to marriage. The cross-sectional nature of the data in ENJ, however, limits the number of variables that can be reasonably included in statistical models, requiring some of them to be treated as constant or time invariant. Still, as hinted above, time-varying measures of selected events in the transition to adulthood can be included, such as ending formal education, entering the labor market and leaving the parental home. Measures of educational attainment, rural residence, sexual and romantic relationships, and of attitudes towards premarital sex and decriminalization of abortion complete the variables predicting the transition to marriage. The specific limitations of each variable are described in the following measures section.

Of particular concern is the absence of retrospective information about family socioeconomic background. Parents' educational attainment and occupation were collected only in reference to the time of the survey. Information about parent's income is only available for respondents currently co-residing in the same household with their parents. For all respondents, household characteristics such as floor and construction materials, number of rooms, electricity, sewer and water availability are also recorded in the household questionnaire and could be use as proxies of socioeconomic status. However, such information is also in reference to the time of the survey, and does not necessarily refer to the parental home if the respondent no longer lives

with their parents. This lack of retrospective information is an important weakness of ENJ and therefore of this analysis.

Finally, ENJ collected the retrospective questions of the transition to marriage that did not distinguish between consensual unions and legal marriages, mainly because both have a long history of social recognition in Mexico. To the extent that parent-child relationships and family dynamics are related differently to the kind or “quality” of children’s marital union, the results of this analysis may obscure important similarities or differences. How this limitation might affect my results is not entirely clear, however. Research conducted in different cultural contexts suggest that family background and the quality of the family environment are related differently to marriage and cohabitation, with the more negative circumstances predicting higher rates of cohabitation rather than marriage (i.e., Cherlin, Kiernan, and Chase-Lansdale 1995; Thornton 1991; Thornton, Axinn, and Xie 2007). Depending on whether we are particularly interested in the timing of legal marriages versus the broader conceptualization of union-formation, the effects of the independent variables may overstate the effect. The results should be interpreted with this in mind.

Measures

Marriage Timing – I conceptualize marriage broadly to include consensual unions in addition to the more conventional understanding because the ENJ question on union formation refers broadly to union formation, which includes both marriage and consensual unions. This limitation is not too problematic, because regardless of data availability, a majority of previous studies have

grouped these two models together as both are socially recognized and have coexisted in Mexico since colonial times, as in other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.³ Therefore, while I often refer to the risk of “marriage” it solely out of convenience, the outcome variable is more accurately the risk of first marriage or consensual union at a given age.

Parent-Child Relationships

Global Parent-Child Relationship Quality – here respondents were asked to rate their relationship with each parent taking things all together. Responses were coded in three categories: bad, neither bad nor good and good. Because 90% reported good relationship with their mother and 73% reported good relationship with their father, I include the variable as a categorical with “good” as reference. This measure was the most parsimonious specification according to the BIC criterion, thus providing a better fit to the data.

Parent-Child Communication – this variable includes two components. First, respondents were asked how often they talk about their personal problems with each parent; responses were coded as never, sometimes and always. Second, another four questions regarding how much the children have private talks about school, work, feelings and sex with each parent; responses were coded as none, a little, some, and a lot. I created the measure of parent-child communication by taking the mean response for each of the components listed above and then average them together. Values closer to 1 indicate poor parent-

³ The level of consensual unions decreased as a consequence of legalization campaigns conducted by the Mexican government in the second half of the 20th century. As a proportion of total unions, consensual unions decreased from 26% in 1930 to 15% in 1990 (Quilodran 2001). There are, however, signals of a reversal of this tendency during the 1990s and early 2000s.

child communications whereas values closer to 4 indicate strong communications.

Other Family Dynamics

Children's Household Participation – this dimension is measured by a set of three variables indicating if children do (1) housework and/or household maintenance and repairs, (2) if they provide care to children, the elderly or the sick, and (3) if they contribute to the family income. The last two are dummies equal to one if they are caregivers or contributed to household income. The first is the mean of participating in housework and household maintenance and repairs, it is equal to 0 if they do not do any, 0.5 if they do one of the two activities and 1 if they do both.

Children's Independence or Freedom – this dimension indicates the extent to which children live under strong parental control, contrasting a restrictive context with a more independent environment. In other words, it reflects the level of parental control over children. Respondent were asked whether they are forbidden, need permission or they decide about going out with friends, going out at night, having boyfriend or girlfriend, and dressing as they please. I create a measure by calculating the mean of the four responses, values closer to 1 represent a prohibitive or restrictive context and values closer to 3 represent freedom or independence.

Decision Making – this dimension reflects how families are organized in terms of decision-making. Thus, it measures the degree in which the decision making process was shared between the parents and among all family members,

in opposition to a one-person decision making scheme. Respondent were asked who make the decisions about money expending, grocery shopping, children's education and family's discipline. Responses were coded in three categories: father, mother, or both/all family members. I created a measure by calculating the mean of the four responses, values closer to 1 represent an authoritarian context where only the father make decisions and values closer to 3 represent a democratic environment, where decisions are taking by both parents or all family members.

Family Violence – I include two dummy variables that measure the presence of violence (physical and/or emotional) to capture how the respondent's family deals with disagreements. The first indicates whether conflicts in the family involve violence, whereas the second indicates the presence of violence, including physical punishment and/or shouting/yelling, when the respondent does not behave as expected.

As explained above, all measures of parent-child relationships and family dynamics refer to the time when the children lived in the parental home, which could be at the time of the survey or prior if the children now lives on his or her own; either way, the measure are assumed to be time-invariant. This limitation is important since parent-child relationships are likely to evolve according to changes in the life course of the family and its members.

Educational Attainment and Transition to Adulthood

Educational Attainment – educational attainment at the time of survey was collected as part of the household questionnaire in the form of two items:

educational level and highest grade completed in that level. I transformed this information into a time-varying measure of educational attainment by assigning four categories of educational attainment according to the typical age at which each level is achieved, assuming no grade retention, skipping or interrupted educational trajectories.⁴ I select this measure rather than a continuous variable of years of schooling because it may be the level of education, and not the years of schooling, responsible for exposing young men and women to nontraditional ideas, alternative role models, or modern life styles that influence their aspirations for more democratic and less authoritative family environments

School Enrollment – I used a time-varying dummy indicating the years enrolled in school. The last year of enrollment was assigned one year before the reported age of leaving school. I also construct this measure by assuming no grade retention, skipping or interrupted educational trajectories. Despite the assumptions and limitations of this measure, its inclusion is essential because it has been found that when enrolled in school, men and women have a lower risk of getting married and thus it is an important variable to control for in my investigation. The inclusion of school enrollment is also necessary to isolate the influence of educational attainment from the influence of school enrollment on the risk of marriage. Moreover, completing education is an important aspect of the transition to adulthood and when youngsters are making such transition, the events they are experienced interact to transform parent-child relationships into mutual or peer-like relationships (Aquilino 1997); accordingly, it is useful to

⁴ The Mexican educational system is divided in four segments: (1) primary education, grades 1 to 6; (2) secondary education, grades 7-9; (3) high school, grades 10-12; and (4) university or college education where the number of years required to graduate vary by the major of study.

control for whether or not the respondent is a student.

Labor Force Participation – respondents were asked two questions regarding labor force participation: “Have you ever worked?” and “At which age did you start to work?” I used these questions to create a time-varying dummy that is equal to one on and after the reported age at first job. This measure serves as a proxy of youngsters’ capability of becoming independent from their parents, and in the case of women of their exposure to a nontraditional life trajectory.⁵

Age at first sexual relationship – previous research has found that the age at first sexual relationship is positively related with the age at marriage, that is to say, that young people who had had sexual relationships have a higher risk of marriage than those not sexually active (e.g., Perez 2009; Raley et al. 2007; Thornton et al. 2007). Therefore I include this variable in the analysis. Respondents were asked two questions regarding sexual activity: “Have you ever had sexual relationships?” and “How old were you at the time of your first sexual relationship?” I used these questions to create a time-varying dummy that is equal to one on and after the reported age at first sexual intercourse.

Age at first romantic relationship – Not only sexual relationships but also romantic relationships are related to the risk of marriage. Recent studies by Raley et al. (2007) and Thornton et al. (2007) found that young adults involve in adolescent romantic relationships have a higher risk of marriage relative to those not romantically involved. To my knowledge, no previous research in Mexico

⁵ The ENJ also collected respondents’ work status and occupation at the time of the survey. However, using this information would be problematic because a significant proportion of Mexican women leave the labor force at the time of or directly following marriage and/or childbearing.

has explored this relationship, which makes the inclusion of this variable important. In the ENJ respondent where asked if they have ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend, and the age they were when they initiate the relationship. I used these questions to create a time-varying dummy that is equal to one on and after the reported age at first romantic relationship.

Living arrangements – since the majority of Mexican young adults live in the parental home until they marry, the inclusion of this variable in the analysis is essential. Young never-married adults living independently do represent a special group of the population. Co-residence with parents is particularly high for women; for instance 80% of never married women 15-29 years old were living in the parental home in 1995 (Perez-Amador 2004). Therefore, I used two questions “Have you ever left the parental home to reside somewhere else for more than six months?” and “At which age did you leave the parental home?” to create a time-varying dummy that is equal to one at and after the reported age at leaving home.

In addition to those key variables, a last set of four variables is included in the models predicting the transition to marriage. The first two are respondent’s attitudes towards premarital sex and decriminalization of abortion at the time of survey. The others are fixed measures of age group, as a proxy of birth cohort, and locality of residence. Each of these variables is detailed in the following paragraphs.

Attitude Toward Women’s Premarital Sex – I consider this variable as a proxy of traditional values and sex-role or gender attitudes since it was only

formulated for women not for men. Respondents were asked whether they agree, neither agree nor disagree, or disagree with the statement: “Women should not have sex before marriage”. In preliminary analyses I examined the original interval-level specification, a three-category specification, and a dummy indicating if respondent agrees with the statement. The later proved to be the most parsimonious according to the BIC criterion.

Attitude Toward the Decriminalization of Abortion – I also consider this variable as a proxy of traditional values. The respondents were asked whether they agree, neither agree nor disagree, or agree with the statement: “Abortion should not be a crime”. In preliminary analyses a dummy indicating if respondent disagrees with the statement proved to be the most parsimonious according to the BIC criterion.

Birth Cohort/Age Group – although I recognize it is unlikely to detect cohort changes in the effects parent-child relationships and family dynamics on the risk of marriage for such a small window of time, I divided the sample into two age groups because as children get older, they are more likely not only to have more mutual and peer-like relationships with their parents, but also to enjoy more freedom. The measure is a dummy equal to one if the respondent is 20-24 years old.

Locality of Residence – the size of the area of residence is available for the respondent at the time of survey. The measure is dichotomous: 1) localities with less than 15,000 inhabitants, and 2) localities of 15,000 or more inhabitants. The first category is considered a rural setting. Although this measure requires the

assumption of constant place of residence, its inclusion is important because rural areas are recognized as more traditional, thus it is reasonable to expect parent's authority to be stronger in such localities. In addition, previous research consistently found a higher mean age at marriage in urban settings than rural (e.g. Echarri and Perez-Amador 2007; Gomez de Leon 2001; Parrado and Zenteno 2002; Perez-Amador 2008; Quilodran 2001). The measure also serves as proxy of contextual and normative environment.

In Table 1, I present the respondents' characteristic by sex. The data show that a substantial majority of both men and women report having a good relationship with their parents. The relationship with mother, however, is more often rated as good than the relationship with their father. Gender differences are noticeable regarding communication between parents and children. Sons report better communication with their fathers than do daughters. Both, however, report having more communication with their mother than with their father, suggesting the possibility of mothers acting as mediators in father-child communications.

The household participation index shows no major differences between men and women mainly because the former participate more in household repairs and maintenance, while the latter do housework. Women are also caregivers in bigger proportions than men, which is not surprising given that women mostly perform this role. Conversely, men participate more as income providers than women. Finally, the independence or freedoms index is larger for men, indicating that women are more subject to parental control. In sum, the parent-child relationships and other family environment measures reflect

traditional gender roles and gendered behaviors that are common, but not unique, to the Mexican society.

Methods

In order to provide answers to my research questions, I estimated a set of nested discrete-time hazard models (Allison, 1982) to evaluate the effects of parent-child relationships and family dynamics on children's transition to marriage. To do so, I transformed the cross-sectional data into person years, generating one record for each year of exposure to the risk of marriage. I assumed the beginning of exposure to be at age 12 (the earliest reported age at marriage in the sample), and censored the never married at the age at the time of survey. Consequently, the total number of person years was 111,350 for men and 93,524 for women. Separate models were estimated for men and women.

The dependent variable in the analysis is a dummy indicator of whether marriage occurred within a specific time-interval; that is to say, each model estimates the log-odds of marriage occurring in a given time-interval conditional on remaining single in the previous interval. In order to control for the duration dependency, I specified the duration of exposure as a linear spline with knots defined at 18 and 25 for both men and women. Hence, the hazard rate changes linearly within each of the segments separated by the knots. The models are specified as follow:

$$\text{Model 1: } \ln[p_{it}/(1-p_{it})] = \beta_1\text{FCR}_i + \beta_2\text{MCR}_i + \beta_3\text{DUR}_i(t)$$

$$\text{Model 2: } \ln[p_{it}/(1-p_{it})] = \text{Model 1} + \beta_4\text{FCC}_i + \beta_5\text{MCC}_i + \beta_6\text{CHP}_i + \beta_7\text{CF}_i + \beta_8\text{FDM}_i + \beta_9\text{FV}_i$$

Model 3: $\ln[p_{it}/(1-p_{it})] = \text{Model 2} + \beta_{10}\mathbf{U}_i(t) + \beta_{11}\mathbf{W}_i$

Model 4: $\ln[p_{it}/(1-p_{it})] = \text{Model 3} + \beta_{12}(\text{FCC}_i \times \text{EDU}_i) + \beta_{13}(\text{MCC}_i \times \text{EDU}_i) + \beta_{14}(\text{CHP}_i \times \text{EDU}_i) + \beta_{15}(\text{FDM}_i \times \text{EDU}_i) + \beta_{16}(\text{CF}_i \times \text{EDU}_i) + \beta_{17}(\text{FV}_i \times \text{EDU}_i)$

In model 1, I included only father-child global relationship quality (FCR) and mother-child relationship quality (MCR) with the goal of showing the extent to which they are associated with children's risk of marriage. In model 2, I added father-child and mother-child communication (FCC and MCC, respectively), children's household participation (CHP), children's freedom or independence (CF), family decision-making (FDM) and family violence (FV), which are certainly individual aspects that conform the global parent-child relationship. Thus, model 2 disentangles the effect of parent-child relationships on children's risk of marriage into more specific domains, providing answers to my first and second research questions.

In model 3, I included two sets of control variables (vectors \mathbf{U} and \mathbf{W}). First, I added time-varying indicators of children's educational attainment, school enrollment, first labor force incorporation, sexual initiation, romantic-relationship initiation, and home leaving; which investigates the extent to which the effect of parent-child relationships and family dynamics on children's risk of marriage is mediated by the experience of events in children's transition into adulthood. ⁶ Second, I included fixed or time-invariant variables indicating children's attitudes toward women's premarital sex and the decriminalization of abortion, as well as, children's age and locality of residence at the time of survey. This model provides an answer to my third research question, which asks if the

⁶ All time-varying covariates are lagged to the previous year to diminish endogeneity.

influences of parent-child relationships on children's risk of marriage disappear or attenuate after controlling for children's attributes.

Finally in model 4, I allow the relationship between each dimension of family dynamics to vary by level of educational attainment, with the goal of investigating if the effects of these family dimensions are constant across educational groups. It is among the higher educated group where I hypothesize strong parental control to have the most substantial effect on the transition to marriage. Thus model 4 is designed to provide an answer to my fourth research question.

Results

Women's transition to first marriage

In Table 2, I present the estimated coefficients for the three model specifications of women's transition to marriage. Results from model 1, presented in the first column, indicate that the global parent-child relationships quality has a negative and significant effect on women's transition to marriage. Specifically, relative to daughters who report having a good relationship with their father, those whose relationship is neither good nor bad have 10% (i.e., $\exp(.10)=1.10$) higher risk of marriage, whereas those with bad father-daughter relationship have 25% higher risk of marriage. Similarly, relative to daughters who report having a good relationship with their mother, those whose relationship is neither good nor bad have 39% higher risk of marriage, whereas those with bad mother-daughter relationship have 36% higher risk of marriage. The results for model 1, therefore,

suggest not only a strong association between parent-child relationships and daughters' transition to marriage, but also that the overall quality of father-child and mother-child relationships have independent effects on daughters' relative risk of marriage even after controlling for the mediation effect that mother-child relationship usually has on parent-child relationships (e.g., Rossi and Rossi, 1990).

Results from model 2 indicate that the better the parent-child communication is, the lower the risk of marriage. Specifically, the risk of marriage is reduced by 22% (i.e., $1 - \exp(-.24) = .22$) for each additional increase in the father-child communication scale; whereas the risk is reduced by 13% for each additional increase in the mother-child communication scale. It is important to highlight the significance of both father-daughter and mother-daughter communication in their effects on daughters' relative risk of marriage, given that daughters score substantially higher in communication with their mothers than with their fathers. Thus, holding daughter-mother communication constant, a good father-daughter communication further reduces daughters' relative risk of marriage. Therefore, as expected, daughters with closer relationships with their parents, at least in terms of communication, have lower risk of marriage than daughters with poor parent-child relationships.

Regarding daughters' participation in the household, being a caregiver and participating in the household income are associated with a lower risk of marriage, whereas doing housework is not significantly associated with the risk of marriage. More specifically, daughters who provide care for children and/or the elderly have 10% lower risk of marriage than those who are not caregivers.

At the same time, those who contribute to the household income have 40% lower risk of marriage than those who do not. From the direction of these results, it seems that daughters postpone marriage when their families are in need for their contribution to the household, reflecting the strong family ties between generations in the Mexican society.

Moving from daughters' obligations to their rights or freedoms, the results from model 2 indicate that for a one-point increase in the freedom or independence score, the risk of marriage decreases 65%. Similarly, an increase in the family's decision-making score is associated with a decrease in 12% in the risk of marriage. Therefore, daughters who enjoy more freedom and independence (i.e., are free to go out with friends, go out at night, have a boyfriend, and dress as they please) and live in more democratic families in terms of decision-making have lower marriage rates than their peers in the opposite situation. On the contrary, the presence of physical or emotional violence in the family is positively associated with the risk of marriage. Specifically, daughters exposed to any sort of family violence have 36% higher risk of marriage than those who are not.

Overall, these results support the idea that daughters marry early to escape a negative relationship with their parent, strong parental control, and in general, a negative family environment. This association, however, might be spurious due to the effects of other individual characteristics. Therefore, in model 3, I included controls for educational attainment, life course events in the transition to adulthood, as well as other fixed attributes. In general terms, their inclusion resulted in little or no change in the family dynamics' coefficients; but

those of parent-daughter communication, although still significant, were attenuated. Nonetheless, the influence of parent-daughter relationships and family dynamics on daughters' transition to marriage persists and it is independent of other aspects that also influence this transition.

Among those aspects, women who have experienced the transitions to first job, first sexual relationship, first romantic relationship and leaving the parental home have higher risk of marriage relative to those who have not yet experienced these transitions. Particularly, the effect of having the first boyfriend is substantially large: daughters that debut into romantic relationships have 4.6 times larger risk of marriage than daughters that have not yet had a boyfriend. This result is in the line of what Raley and colleagues (2007) found for American women.

Concerning school enrollment, women enrolled in school have 52% lower risk of marriage than those who do not. Once controlling for enrollment, neither primary-educated nor college-educated women's risk of marriage is significantly different from that of their secondary-educated peers. Relative to them, however, women with high school have 12% lower risk of marriage.

The two variables measuring attitudes are significantly associated with the risk of marriage. Those who agree that women should not have premarital sex have 9% higher risk of marriage than those who do not, suggesting that more conservative women have higher marriage rates. Similarly, those who disagree with the decriminalization of abortion have 10% higher risk of marriage than women who do not. Although these two variables only serve as proxies of

traditional values, and are measured at the time of survey, they hint a positive relationship between having traditional values and the risk of marriage.

The area of residence is not significantly associated to the risk of marriage after all other attributes are taken into account. Being a member of the younger cohort (i.e., being 20-24 years old at the time of survey) is significantly associated with a lower risk of marriage; that is to say, women born around 1975-1980 have 16% lower risk of marriage than women born around 1970-1974.

Model 4 allows the effects of each of the family dynamics' dimensions to vary by educational group. Only the interaction between daughters' freedom or independence scale and educational attainment was significant. Although model 4 significantly improves the model fit (a 57-point increase in the chi-square statistic for 24 degrees of freedom, $p < .001$), I estimate an additional model that only includes this interaction. This new model also improves the model fit (a 26-point increase in the chi-square statistic for 3 degrees of freedom, $p < .001$) and is more parsimonious than model 4 according to the BIC criterion (43,431 vs. 43,218), all other main coefficients remain similar across both of these models.

The results from this new model, presented in the last column of Table 2, indicate that for everyone one unit increase in the freedom or independence score, the risk of marriage decreases 55% among primary-educated women, 61% among secondary-educated, and 70% among both high-school- and university-educated women. These results, therefore, support the idea that highly educated daughters who enjoy more freedom and independence from their parents had lower risk of marriage not only among their peers who enjoy less freedom, but

also relative to less-educated women with the same levels of independence. In other words, at the top of the educational scale, independence and freedom are even more likely to delay marriage.

In summary, the results for women indicate a strong association between parent-daughter relationships and other family dynamics on the risk of marriage. This association continues even after controlling for the individual attributes available in the data. The variables related to daughters' transition to adulthood attenuate the association between parent-daughter communication and the risk of marriage; nonetheless, better parent-daughter communication is associated with lower rates of marriage. Finally, daughters that enjoy more independence and freedom from their parents have a lower relative risk of marriage; what is more, the relative risk of marriage lessens as education increases.

Men's transition to first marriage

In Table 3, I present the estimated coefficients for the three model specifications of men's transition to marriage. Results from model 1, presented in the first column, indicate that contrary to theoretical expectations, the overall quality of the father-son relationship is not significantly associated with son's relative risk of marriage. Only the global mother-son relationship quality is significantly associated with son's relative risk of marriage, denoting substantial gender differences in parent-child relationships between daughters and sons. Relative to sons who report having a good relationship with their mother, those whose relationship is neither good nor bad have 24% (i.e., $\exp(.21)=24$) higher risk of marriage. The results for model 1, therefore, confirm the positive association

between a good mother-child relationships and the relative risk of marriage, regardless of children's sex. They also suggest, although do not confirm, the possibility of mothers being mediators in the relationships between father and sons.

The results from model 2, which disaggregates parent-child relationships into some of their possible components, further confirms the importance of mother-child relationships. Specifically, the risk of marriage is reduced by 15% for each additional increase in the mother-son communication scale. Once more, the relationship between fathers and sons, this time on the topic of communication, is not significantly associated with sons' transition to marriage. A more detailed examination of this finding indicates that father-son communication is in fact associated to sons' risk of marriage but once controlling for mother-son communication the direct relationship disappears, suggesting that the effect of father-son communication on the risk of marriage is mediating by sons' communication with mother.⁷

Young men who participate in household activities have significantly lower risk of marriage relative to those who do not. For instance, the risk of marriage is 54% lower for caregivers than for non-caregivers; and household income providers have 27% lower risk of marriage than non-providers. In contrast to the results for daughters, the participation in household chores is significantly associated with son's risk of marriage: sons that do housework have 28% lower risk of marriage than those who do not. These results indicate that, similar to daughters, sons postpone marriage when their families are in need for

⁷ Results from this analysis are not shown, but are available upon request.

their contribution to the household, further highlighting the strong family ties between generations in the Mexican society.

Comparable to daughters, sons who enjoy more independence and live in more democratic families in terms of decision-making have lower marriage rates than their peers in the opposite situation. Specifically, for a one-unit increase in the freedom or independence score, the risk of marriage decreases 56%, whereas an increase in the family's decision-making score is associated with a decline in 12% on the risk of marriage. Also similar to daughters, sons exposed to any sort of family violence have 67% higher risk of marriage than those who are not; however, the difference in the coefficients between sons and daughters (i.e., .52 vs. .31) suggest that the former tolerate even less the presence of violence and get married even at higher rates.⁸

When including controls for educational attainment, life course events in the transition to adulthood, and other sons' attributes in model 3, the majority of the family dynamics coefficients change modestly. Exceptions are the family's decision making score that turns non-significant and the mother-son communication score that was attenuated. Nevertheless, the influence of mother-son relationships and other family dynamics on sons' transition to marriage persists and it is independent of other characteristics that also influence this transition.

The transitions to first job, first sexual relationship, first romantic relationship and first departure from the parental home are strongly associated

⁸ The difference between the coefficients is significant at $p < .05$.

with a higher relative risk of marriage. Particularly, the effect of having the first girlfriend is substantially large: the risk of marriage is 2.8 times larger for men that debut into romantic relationships than for those who are yet to have the first girlfriend. This result is similar to women's, but the difference in the magnitude of the coefficients (i.e., 1.0 vs. 1.5), indicates stronger effects for women than men.

Regarding school enrollment, young men enrolled in school have 44% lower risk of marriage than those who do not. Once controlling for enrollment, the risk of marriage is 21% and 33% lower for high-school- and college-educated men, respectively, than for secondary-educated. Conversely, relative to the latter, primary-educated men have 9% higher rates of marriage.

The two variables measuring attitudes are significantly associated to the risk of marriage. Men who agree that women should not have premarital sex have 12% higher risk of marriage than those who do not, suggesting that more traditionalist men have higher marriage rates. Similarly, those who disagree with the decriminalization of abortion have 20% higher risk of marriage than men who do not. This results hint a positive relationship between having traditional values and the risk of marriage in the case of men, just as it was for women.

The area of residence is not significantly associated to the risk of marriage after all other attributes are taking into account. Being a member of the younger cohort is significantly associated with a lower risk of marriage; that is to say, men born around 1975-1980 have 15% higher risk of marriage than women born around 1970-1974.

Finally, results from model 4 indicate that the effects of all family dynamics' dimensions on sons' transition to marriage are constant across educational groups. Since the coefficients from these interaction are not significant, their inclusion does not improve the model fit (a 17-point increase in the chi-square statistic for 24 degrees of freedom, $p < .867$). For simplicity, I excluded these results from Table 3.

In summary, the results for men's models indicated a strong association between mother-son, but not father-son, relationships on the risk of marriage. With the exception of the decision-making score, the other dimensions of family dynamics are also significantly related to the risk of marriage. These associations continue even after controlling for the individual attributes available from the data. The variables related to sons' transition into adulthood attenuate the association between mother-son communication and the risk of marriage; still strong mother-son communications are associated with lower rates of marriage. In contrast to daughters, sons' relationships with their father are not associated to the risk of marriage. A surprising finding given that they consistently score higher than daughters on those dimensions. Also contrary to daughters, sons' all associations between family dynamic variables and the transition to marriage are constant across the educational groups, including the level of independence of freedom.

Discussion

In this paper I investigated the association between parent-child relationships and family environment and children's transition to marriage. I began with the

hypothesis that poor parent-child relationships, strong parental control and difficult family environments accelerate the transition to marriage for both sons and daughters. I also hypothesized that because contemporary-young-adult women may be more likely to improve upon their relative level of autonomy by forming egalitarian marriages than by negotiating or trying to forge a more democratic relationship with their parents, daughters living under strong parental control have higher risk of marriage than their counterparts. I found support for both hypotheses.

Specifically, the results indicate a strong association between parent-daughter relationships and other family dynamics with daughters' risk of marriage, net of individual attributes. Daughters, who have high levels of communication with their parents enjoy more independence from them, live under democratic family environments with low levels of violence, and have a lower relative risk of marriage. What is more, highly educated daughters who enjoy more freedom and independence from their parents have lower risk of marriage not only relative to their peers who enjoy less freedom, but also relative to less-educated women with the same levels of independence. Therefore, my findings suggest that daughters under relatively low parental control have even lower relative risk of marriage at the top of the educational scale.

Similar to daughters, sons who are more independent from their parents and live under good quality family environments have a lower relative risk of marriage. Contrary to daughters, however, sons with better father-son relationships and communication do not have a different risk of marriage than their counterparts. Only mother-son relationships and communication are

associated with son's risk of marriage and in the same direction as that of daughters, suggesting the role of mothers as a mediator of father-son relationships, meriting further attention. It appears, therefore, that the quality of mother-child relationships and communication are important predictors of children's transition to marriage.

Another interesting aspect of my findings is the apparent lack of gender differences in the effects of care giving and income provision on children's risk of marriage, both daughters and sons postpone marriage when their families are in need of their contribution to the household, highlighting the strong family ties between generations in the Mexican society.

Finally, although the majority of children report an absence of family violence, another key finding suggests that those who are exposed to physical or emotional violence marry at higher rates than those who are not. Furthermore, sons seem to tolerate even less the presence of violence, thus getting married at even higher rates than daughters.

Because few studies of the transition to marriage in Mexico have included parent-child relationships and family environment as correlates, my results are interesting in themselves. However, my analysis has two fundamental limitations due to data availability that must be acknowledged. First, previous research finds that children no longer living in the parental home are more likely to see parent-child relationships with a softer look (e.g., Aquilino 1997); yet, my analyses rely on retrospective information of parent-child relationships from children not living in the parental home, resulting in possible recall bias. Second,

parent-child relationships have been found to change through the life course of the family and its members (Aquilino 1997; Thornton et al. 1995). Although research has also found continuity between parent-adolescence and parent-young adult relationships, there is little evidence of continuity in relation to childhood. Given the data analyzed in this study, which did not specifically limit the window of time children were to consider when reporting on the relationship with their parents, the results might be biased to the extent that children not living in the parental home summarize more broadly.

When analyzing the transition to marriage and cohabitation in the U.S., Thornton and colleagues emphasized that parental influences on children's transition to marriage and cohabitation come in different forms and from multiple directions (Thornton et al. 2007). Accordingly, my results confirm that some of the mechanisms through which parent influence their children's transition to marriage are the quality of their relationships and the quality of the family environment they provide to children living at home. Although I recognize that further research is necessary to draw more solid conclusions, my findings do provide initial empirical evidence supporting the idea that poor-quality parent-child relationships, strong parental control over young adults, and difficult family environments accelerate the transition to marriage among Mexican young adults.

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Table 4.1 Descriptives of variables in the models predicting the effect of parent-child relationship on children's transition to first marriage in Mexico

Measure	Women	Men
Global Father-Child Relationship Quality		
Good	71.89	75.37
Neither Good not Bad	16.75	15.01
Bad	11.36	9.62
Global Mother-Child Relationship Quality		
Good	88.65	90.53
Neither Good nor Bad	8.49	7.33
Bad	2.87	2.14
Parent-Child Communication		
Father-Child Communication Index	1.79 (0.62)	2.02 (0.62)
Mother-Child Communication Index	2.46 (0.68)	2.31 (0.60)
Participation in Housework Index	0.18 (0.27)	0.15 (0.26)
Participation in Caregiving		
No Caregiver	81.77	88.56
Caregiver	18.23	11.44
Participation in Household Income		
No Contributes to Household Income	89.03	79.10
Contributes to Household Income	10.97	20.90
Freedom and Independence Index	2.28 (0.43)	2.70 (0.34)
Family Decision-Making Index	2.31 (0.51)	2.30 (0.52)
Family Violence Index	0.24 (0.35)	0.20 (0.31)
Educational Attainment		
Primary	31.17	25.86
Secondary	29.34	31.15
High School	21.67	22.65
University	17.81	20.33
School Enrollment		
Not Enroll	63.12	66.68
Enroll	36.88	33.32
Work Status		
Never had a job	19.23	4.34
First Job	80.77	95.66
First Sexual Relationship		
Not sexually experience	30.24	18.21
First sexual relationship	69.76	81.79
First Romantic Relationship		
Never had boyfriend/girlfriend	7.38	6.41
First boyfriend/girlfriend	92.62	93.49
Living Arrangements		
Living in the parental home	40.69	50.08
Left the parental home	59.31	49.92
Marital Status		
Never married	38.27	52.79
Ever married	61.73	47.21
Birth Cohort (Age in 2000)		
20-24	55.02	56.17
25-29	44.98	43.83
Area of Residency		
Urban	63.29	66.28
Rural	36.71	33.72
N	11,655	8,568

* Mean and (Std. Dev)

Source: ENJ. Young population 20-29 years old.

Table 4.2 Parameter estimates from discrete-time hazard models predicting the effect of parent-child relationships and other family dynamics on the transition to first marriage among Mexican Women

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Parent-Child Relationships			
Global Father-Child Relationship Quality			
Good (omitted)			
Neither Good nor Bad	0.098 ** (0.036)	-0.101 ** (0.038)	-0.116 ** (0.039)
Bad	0.221 ** (0.040)	0.012 (0.045)	0.028 (0.046)
Global Mother-Child Relationship Quality			
Good (omitted)			
Neither Good nor Bad	0.328 ** (0.045)	0.069 (0.049)	0.007 (0.883)
Bad	0.309 ** (0.072)	0.013 (0.077)	0.032 (0.688)
Parent-Child Communication			
Father-Child Communication Index		-0.244 ** (0.026)	-0.127 ** (0.027)
Mother-Child Communication Index		-0.144 ** (0.022)	-0.077 ** (0.023)
Child's Participation in the Household			
Child's Participation in the Housework Index		-0.030 (0.052)	-0.045 (0.054)
Child is a Caregiver		-0.101 ** (0.037)	-0.088 * (0.038)
Child Contributes to Household Income		-0.521 ** (0.048)	-0.542 ** (0.049)
Child's Freedom and Independence Index		-1.031 ** (0.030)	-0.952 ** (0.031)
Family Decision-Making Index		-0.129 ** (0.025)	-0.116 ** (0.026)
Presence of Violence in the Family		0.308 ** (0.038)	0.218 ** (0.039)
Educational Attainment			
Primary			0.054 + (0.033)
Secondary (omitted)			
High School			-0.127 ** (0.038)
University			-0.086 (0.061)
Transition to adulthood			
Enrolled in School			-0.739 ** (0.035)
First Job			0.254 ** (0.030)
First sexual relationship			0.634 ** (0.036)
First boyfriend / girlfriend			1.529 ** (0.041)
Left the parental home			0.122 ** (0.033)
Attitudes			
Agrees women should not have premarital sex			0.089 ** (0.027)
Desagrees with the decriminalization of abortion			0.096 ** (0.037)
Age 20-24			-0.170 ** (0.027)
Residency in rural area			0.044 (0.029)
Exposure			
T(12-18)	0.525 ** (0.010)	0.564 ** (0.011)	0.275 ** (0.013)
T(18-25)	-0.051 ** (0.007)	-0.017 * (0.007)	-0.109 ** (0.008)
T(25+)	-0.165 ** (0.045)	-0.164 ** (0.046)	-0.181 ** (0.046)
Constant	-11.421 ** (0.175)	-8.631 ** (0.195)	-5.231 ** (0.236)
Chi-Square	4,562	6,867	10,450
df	7	15	27
N (PY)	111,350	111,350	111,350

Note: Estandar errors in parenthesis.

+p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01

Table 4.3 Parameter estimates from discrete-time hazard models predicting the effect of parent-child relationships and other family dynamics on the transition to first marriage among Mexican Men

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Parent-Child Relationships						
Global Father-Child Relationship Quality						
Good (omitted)						
Neither Good not Bad	-0.033	(0.051)	-0.097	(0.054)	-0.091	(0.055)
Bad	-0.087	(0.059)	-0.051	(0.068)	-0.018	(0.069)
Global Mother-Child Relationship Quality						
Good (omitted)						
Neither Good not Bad	0.214 **	(0.068)	0.038	(0.070)	0.022	(0.071)
Bad	0.109	(0.115)	-0.078	(0.120)	-0.077	(0.121)
Parent-Child Communication						
Father-Child Communication Index			-0.003	(0.035)	0.034	(0.035)
Mother-Child Communication Index			-0.167 **	(0.033)	-0.078 **	(0.034)
Child's Participation in the Household						
Child's Participation in the Housework Index			-0.323 **	(0.081)	-0.258 **	(0.083)
Child is a Caregiver			-0.598 **	(0.068)	-0.502 **	(0.069)
Child Contributes to Household Income			-0.318 **	(0.051)	-0.452 **	(0.053)
Child's Freedom and Independence Index			-0.830 **	(0.044)	-0.792 **	(0.045)
Family Decision-Making Index			-0.111 **	(0.032)	0.001 **	(0.033)
Presence of Violence in the Family			0.516 **	(0.051)	0.456 **	(0.052)
Educational Attainment						
Primary					0.084 *	(0.042)
Secondary (omitted)						
High School					-0.232 **	(0.048)
University					-0.394 **	(0.072)
Transition to adulthood						
Enrolled in School					-0.575 **	(0.049)
First Job					0.366 **	(0.059)
First sexual relationship					0.347 **	(0.038)
First boyfriend / girlfriend					1.018 **	(0.064)
Left the parental home					0.226 **	(0.038)
Attitudes						
Agrees women should not have premarital sex					0.109 **	(0.035)
Desagrees with the decriminalization of abortion					0.183 **	(0.045)
Age 20-24					-0.159 **	(0.036)
Residency in rural area					0.036	(0.037)
Exposure						
T(12-18)	0.822 **	(0.025)	0.833 **	(0.025)	0.579 **	(0.028)
T(18-25)	0.082 **	(0.008)	0.102 **	(0.008)	0.041 **	(0.009)
T(25+)	-0.174 **	(0.041)	-0.154 **	(0.041)	-0.154 **	(0.042)
Constant	-14.693 **	(0.466)	-14.693 **	(0.466)	-11.974 **	(0.502)
Chi-Square	4,109		4,973		6,267	
df	7		15		27	
N (PY)	93,524		93,524		93,524	

Note: Estandar errors in parenthesis.

+p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01