

# FAMILIES AND INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN MEXICO: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES <sup>1</sup>

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In Mexico, the different types of families are the basis of the social networks and are the source of intergenerational solidarity. The National Survey of Values, in 1994, showed that 85% of those surveyed considered the family to be very positive in such areas as: unity, children, love, home, well-being, parents, understanding, house, affection, education, happiness and support (National Survey of Values, 1994, cited in Tuirán 1995).

In recent times family relations and solidarity have been affected by migration, economic crisis, unemployment and an increase in poverty. Simultaneously the rate of child mortality fell from 317 per every 1000 live births in 1930 to 31 in 2000. The life expectancy increased in Mexico from 30 years in 1910 to 74.6 years in 2005. The birthrate went from 7 children per woman of reproductive age in the 60's to 2.6 children in 2000. [INEGI (National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics)], 2000).

## 1. Changes in the families and households in México 1976-2006

Today Mexico is in advanced process in the demographic transition, it has effects to the families and households, for example the most recent evidence shows that in Mexican the size of household are reduce (5 to 4.1 members), households there has been a decrease in the nuclear structure<sup>4</sup>, the number of extended households remains unchanged and there has been an increase in what are considered to be non-family households, among which are one-person households. It is also shown that there has been an increase in households headed by women and a process of ageing in Mexican households. This process of change since the 70's to date shows that the decrease in the birthrate has mainly affected nuclear households. On the other hand, in extended households there has been an increase of children under 5 as a strategy to create descendants (López, 2001; Montes de Oca and Garay, 2009).

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4 Among nuclear households there has been an increase in households consisting of only a couple due in part to ageing, but also to putting off pregnancies among young couples.

Table 1. México. Distribution of households based on composition of relationships, 1976-2006.

TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD	EMF-1976(1)	ENADID-1992(2)	ENADID-1997(3)	ENADID-2006(4)
<b>Nuclear</b>	<b>71.1</b>	<b>68.4</b>	<b>67,4</b>	<b>66,7</b>
Childless Couple	6.1	6.4	6,9	8,9
Couple with Single Children	58.1	55.0	52,6	48,1
Father or Mother with Single Children	6,8	7,0	7,9	9,6
<b>Extended</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>24,4</b>	<b>23,2</b>
Couple with no children and other relatives	1,4	3,3	3,3	2,3
Couple with single children and other relatives	13,3	12,6	11,7	11,9
Father or Mother with Single Children and other relatives	5.2	3.9	4,3	3,3
Father or Mother with other relatives	2,8	4,6	5,1	5,7
<b>Complex</b>	<b>1,5</b>	<b>1,0</b>	<b>1,3</b>	<b>1,9</b>
Childless Couple and other non-related persons	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,4
Couple with single children and other non-related persons	1,0	0,6	0,7	1,2
Father or Mother with single children and other non related persons	0,3	0,2	0,2	0,2
Father or Mother with other relatives and non related persons	--	--	0,2	0,1
<b>One person</b>	<b>4,2</b>	<b>5,5</b>	<b>6,6</b>	<b>7,8</b>
<b>Coresidents</b>	<b>0,6</b>	<b>0,6</b>	<b>0,4</b>	<b>0,5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Sources: (1) Tuirán (1993) (2) Tuirán (1997) (3) Estimations by Council National of Population (CONAPO) with the National Dynamic Demographic Survey (ENADID 1997) (4) Montes de Oca and Garay, 2009.

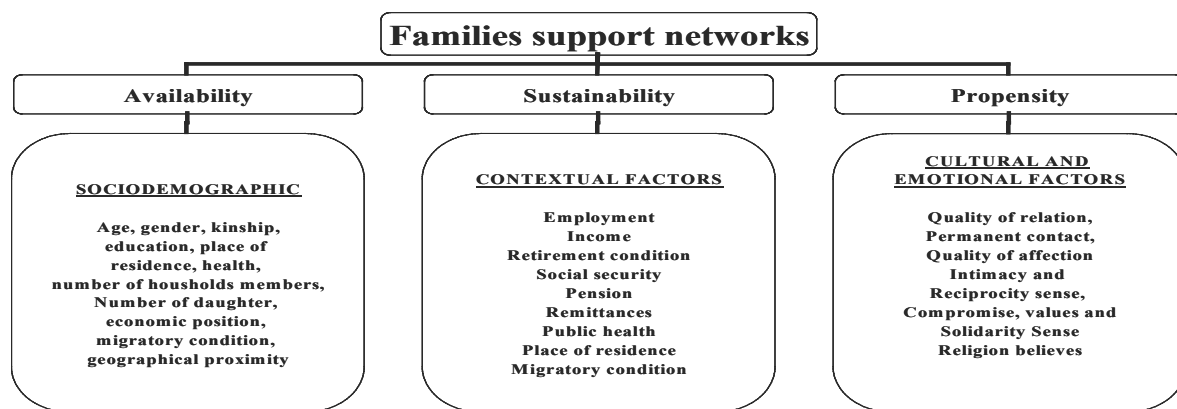
The social, economic, political and demographic transformations have contributed to changes in the concept of the family model, as well as the meaning of maternity, paternity, children, ageing mothers/fathers, marriage in old age, as well as intergenerational relationships which are a result of longer life expectancy. Today in Mexico there is greater intergenerational coexistence: 13% of all household have more than 3 generations. Likewise, households include the cycles of longer lives and undergo fundamental changes as a result: retirement, widowhood, illness, the empty nest syndrome and progressive weakening of social networks resulting from the death of piers (Montes de Oca and Hebrero, 2006). This context is very important because families and the social support networks are the most important providers of economic, instrumental and emotional support for elderly and frail members of families.

## 2. Families, transnationalism and social supports

In recent years the economic crises and the deterioration of farming and agriculture in Mexico since the signing of NAFTA have caused more young migrants to leave the country in search of better working conditions and income for their households. Statistics show that in 2000 Mexicans made up 7.4% of the population of the USA, or about 20 million people (Saéñz, 2003).

In this context and with the globalization, the transnational families are a very important type of family as outcome to the dynamic migratory and the global economic change. However different types of families, including transnational families, are a starting point for understanding the new strategies between migrant and non migrant children with parents in old age, especially in rural and urban areas where are serious differences in elderly's quality of life.

The evidence in different studies shows that some factors get involved in the families support networks for obtain availability, sustainability and propensity. The socio-demographic factors of the children, spouse or the men and women in old age are very relevant in the availability. Some contextual socio-economic factors act for the sustainability, and some cultural and emotional factors are relevant in the propensity. each characteristics have different significance depending the type of support (instrumental, material, care, information, monetary, and else). The sustainability not depends only of the personal characteristics, the contextual institutional environment is very important to sustain the social supports and the networks between the members of the families and generations (Montes de Oca, 2001; Gomes y Montes de Oca, 2004; Salgado and Wong, 2007)



Source: Elaborated by Montes de Oca, V.

### 3. Old age, families and social support networks

In Mexico the intergenerational relationships may be interdependent or dependent, and there is almost always a sense of exchange and reciprocity that vary for the socio-cultural formation and between generations. In contexts of great migration in Mexico, the substantial role played by remittances take the place of the pension, but just a third of the children who have migrated send remittances. This monetary support goes towards medical emergencies, health treatments, family investments, and the construction of houses which are seldom used. Economic dependence exists of elderly men and women on their sons and daughters. However parents contribute household help for their children, caring for grandchildren and other material and non-material support. The most important resources for the rural elderly are their children; economic security in old age depends on the success on the job of the descendants. The provision support for the elderly varies between migrants and non migrants children; and with the time in the reception place for the migration. The migration is as important like the migration condition (with documents or without documents) as the age of children. The migrant children to another country, the dynamics of family support changes significantly, concentrating non-economic support activities on the children who live in the same place as the parents. The supports of the non migrant children are more permanent than

the migrant children. The migrant children are a non regular support. The elderly who have non migrant children have regular economic and non economic support. The elderly who have migrant children have an irregular support (rural areas). But the migration experience makes difference in the ageing process for the elderly.

Respect to the health, there is a positive correlation between receiving formal and informal transferences and health status. But better health is only guaranteed with formal transferences or with a combination of formal and informal transferences. The elderly who are most vulnerable to deterioration in health and inefficient transferences live in rural areas, are women and are over 80. There is an inverse relationship between a favorable quality of life in relation to health and less dependence on informal family support. With deterioration in health also comes economic and non-economic dependence.

#### 4. Final thoughts

Finally, is very important for the public policies take in consideration the changes in the families and household as a consequence of the demographic transition but with especial focus in the rural migration. The lack of social security and the children migration affect the families and the social supports for the elderly. The social supports networks are modified for cultural, social and demographic changes. The sustainability, availability and propensity in the families social support needs factors socio-demographic, socio-economic context, cultural and emotional factors but each one are different by type of support. The public policies and the social programmes needs to know the negative effects of the migration.

Migration is not a solution to the problems of ageing in Mexico. To the contrary, it reveals intergenerational relationships which in the long run are unsustainable and which do not guarantee quality of life for ageing relatives. The elderly will continue to depend on governmental programs, work, remittances and pensions, and will continue the dependence on co-resident offspring or on those who decided to migrate. Migration and ageing transform families in Mexico and modify existing social networks and thus intergenerational relationships are also modified when support is provided to the ageing. What takes place in Mexico also takes place in other developing countries and therefore there must be mechanisms by means of which descendants can keep their economic and emotional ties with their relatives, be these children or ageing parents. Migratory policies between Mexico and the United States, as well as among other countries, must take into consideration demographic processes which are experienced and propose ethic responsibility in relation to generational reciprocity at the state as well as the family level.

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