

## **An Analysis of Exchanges amongst Kin in Mexican Families.**

### **Justification**

Family ties in Mexican society are said to be unusually strong. One of the ways we can verify this assertion is by analyzing exchanges amongst kin and comparing them to those that occur between friends and neighbors. In this paper we study the help that *ego* (the family head or spouse) receives from his most important family figures who do not live in the same household as *ego* (parents, siblings and adult children) and from friends and neighbors. We choose to focus on the help that *ego* receives in critical situations since these are moments when needs are very acute and people's first resort is asking for help from trusted relatives or friends.

We compare inter- generational exchanges (between *ego*, parents and adult children) with intra -generational ones (between *ego* and friends and neighbors). We can therefore establish the characteristics of inter-generational and intra- generational exchanges (their frequency, the type of help given, and the problems they aim to solve) and compare them.

### **Theoretical Focus**

We argue that families are immersed in a social tissue made up by relatives and others with whom family members hold frequent exchanges. This tissue can be defined as a family network and its members will supply support when needed. This support can be economical, emotional, social, etc. and can be considered part of the families' social capital.

Since we consider Mexican society to be quite traditional in spite of the fact that most Mexicans now live in an urban environment, we expect the inter- generational exchanges to be very frequent. Also, exchanges from adult children to their parents are expected to be more frequent than those that flow from the parents to their children. Another consequence of this traditional behavior is that the role of family members is much more important than that of friends and neighbors, especially in critical situations. The result is that intra-generational exchanges between friends are less frequent in these moments.

Socioeconomic differences are very strong in Mexico, so we suppose that exchange patterns will vary greatly. If family networks are a form of social capital, we would expect families with high socioeconomic status to receive help more frequently than poor families, even when help comes from the nearest relatives (parents and adult children). On the other hand, anthropologists have often shown that solidarity plays a very important role in assuring poorer families survive difficult times. We can test these assertions by comparing the exchange patterns of families from different socioeconomic status.

Gender differences define times, spaces and activities of men and women, so we would expect to find that exchange patterns are also defined by gender. There are two ways in which gender can intervene. First each gender will give different types of help with women giving emotional support and men giving money, or so the theory says. A second way in which gender differences might appear is by "segregating" the exchanges: for example, mothers will give more help to daughters and fathers more assistance to sons.

### **Data**

We analyzed data from the National Survey of Family Dynamics (2005) that was done by the Institute for Social Research, University of Mexico (UNAM), with financial support from the National System for the Development of Families (DIF). The Survey is nationally representative of the Mexican adult population in 2005 and it includes 23,839 respondents from as many households.

The Survey gathers information on many aspects of family life such as the quality of family relations, the help family members give and receive in everyday life and in critical situations, and the usual socio-demographic variables such as age, sex, marital status, employment, etc. Socio-demographic variables of relatives not living in the same household as the respondent (parents, adult children and siblings) were also gathered.

In our study we include 11 354 household heads or spouses who had lived through a critical situation. Some received help others did not. The total number of aids received was 17 487.

## Methods

We first classified assistance according to the problem it aimed to solve (economic, health, work, emotional), the type of help (financial, moral support, services and goods) and the relationship between the respondent and the donor (by generation and by types of kinship).

We then created separate subpopulations: those respondents who had a surviving father that did not live with them, those who had a surviving mother, and so on.

Since many of the respondents had received help more than once, we analyzed data using the multiple response option. When analyzing the association between categorical variables, we did residual analysis.

We estimated the probabilities of not receiving help from each of the important relatives by applying logistic regression models. We used the following explanatory variables: living arrangements (single parent, nuclear or extended family), socio-economic status, urban/rural residence, ages of respondent and donors, number of emotionally close relatives or friends as declared by the respondent, critical event (such as death, serious illness, etc.).

## Some findings

- Family organization has repercussions on the exchange system. Single parent families receive more help than nuclear ones, and extended families are the ones that receive less help.
- In critical situations exchanges are mainly economic. The second most important type of exchange is, quite understandably, moral support. In the third place donors help by taking care of family members or doing domestic tasks. Interestingly, men also contribute in the same way in these extreme situations.
- Families with high socio-economic status receive help more frequently than those that have lower status from almost all donors: parents and siblings. But the frequency of help given by adult children is independent of their parents' socio-economic status. We argue that norms regulating children's obligations towards their parents are culturally more rigid than those regulating exchanges with other relatives.
- Regarding inter-generational exchanges we found that respondents receive help more frequently from their adult children than from their parents. An important difference is that respondent's parents *lend* money, while adult children *give* money.
- Gender plays an important role in inter-generational exchanges, though not quite as much as we expected. When giving money or moral support, fathers help sons as much as daughters. Mothers, on the other hand, favor daughters in a significant way.
- Regarding intra-generational exchanges we found that siblings play the most important role in critical situations. Nearly a fifth of all assistance is given by brothers and sisters. Siblings provide money while friends give moral support.
- Gender differences in intra-generational exchanges are similar to those found among inter-generational ones. Brothers help sisters, just as much as they help brothers. On the

other hand, women move in a more segregated space since they receive help mainly from sisters.

- This segregation pattern is much stronger among friends. Moral support and money are exchanged mainly between same gender friends. We would have expected gender differences to be less strong in intra-generational exchanges, especially between friends, since these exchanges can be seen as occurring among horizontal relations. Instead, we found that kinship ties lessen the strength of gender norms.