

## **A Longitudinal Analysis of the Effect of Migration on Union Stability in Mexico**

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### **Introduction**

Marital unions in Mexico are rather stable compared to developed countries and other Latin American countries of similar level of socio-economic development. Nevertheless, the proportion of men and women ending their union has increased among younger cohorts (Samuel and Sebille 2005). In the first five years of marriage, the percentage of separated women increased from 5% in the cohort born between 1936 and 1938, to 10% in the cohort born thirty years later, and after ten years of marriage it rose from 8 to 16%. Among men, separation and divorce have also increased but at a slower pace: by the end of the first five years of union, 5% of men in the oldest cohort have dissolved their union, and after ten years of marriage, the proportion increased to 8%.

At an individual level, the risk of union dissolution increases with an early age at first marriage (Ojeda 1986), living in urban areas (Pérez-Amador 2006, Goldman 1981), participating in extra-domestic activities (García and Rojas 2004), and sharing a household with the spouse's family of origin (Samuel and Sebille 2005). Although less examined in the socio-demographic

literature, migration and residential mobility are events that can also affect the likelihood of dissolving a conjugal union. Among the reasons cited to expect an effect of migration on the probability of union dissolution, the literature mentions the stress of the move itself, strained relationships or family instability caused by long periods of spousal separation (Frank and Wildsmith 2005, Flowerdew and Al-Hamad 2004), and the fact that partners gain uneven benefits from family migration.<sup>1</sup> Since long-distance moves are frequently undertaken for the benefit of the male partner's career, this inequality might put a strain on the relationship and thus contributes to increasing the probability of separation (Boyle *et al.* 2008). A similar situation of marital tension occurs when migrating women increase their earning power in places of destination, and progressively participate in decision-making processes and influence family matters (Pauli 2008, Hill 2004).

Using a life-course approach, this paper examines the effect of migration on union stability among men and women in Mexico. Given the expansion of educational opportunities, the growing presence of women in the labor market, and new migration profiles in the last decade, I examine if the pattern of union dissolution has changed across birth cohorts.

## **Data and Methods**

In order to explore the effect of migration on union dissolution, this paper uses longitudinal data from the Mexican Family Life Survey (MxFLS), a broad-purpose multi-topic, nationally representative survey of individuals, households, and communities. The MxFLS contains

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of Mexican migration to the United States, Gupta (in Frank and Wildsmith 2005) has estimated that in any given year, around 85 percent of all migrants were separated from their partners.

detailed information on a wide array of social, economic, demographic and health behaviors of every adult household member, and it provides detailed retrospective life histories on events such as migration and union formation for adult men and women in reproductive ages. The baseline survey, conducted in 2002, covered around 38,000 individuals, in 8,440 households, in 150 communities across Mexico. The second wave, conducted during 2005-2006, had a 90% re-contact rate at the household level.

I will use both waves to explore the effect of migration on union dissolution. The longitudinal nature of MxFLS data will allow me to clearly assess the effect of migration events on the likelihood of dissolving a marital union between wave I and wave II among married and cohabiting couples that lived together in wave I.

To determine the effect of migration on the likelihood of dissolving a first marital union, I estimated separate discrete-time event-history models for men and women. Union dissolution was treated as a dichotomous variable, and the effect of migration experience and other individual characteristics are estimated using logistic regressions, with the general model

$$\ln \{ \lambda(t | \chi) / [1 - \lambda(t | \chi)] \} = \beta_{0t} + \sum_j X_{ic} \beta_j + \sum_k Z_{ict} \beta_k$$

where  $\lambda(t | \chi)$  is the conditional probability of an event occurring in year  $t$  to man or woman  $i$  given that it had not yet occurred;  $\beta_{0t}$  equals the log-odds for the baseline group;  $X_{ic}$  are time-invariant covariates that describe characteristics of man or woman  $i$  at the time of the event of interest;  $Z_{ict}$  are time-varying covariates of man or woman  $i$ ; and  $\beta_0$ ,  $\beta_j$ , and  $\beta_k$  are coefficients.

In the discrete-time logistic regression models, migration experience was included as the main predictor variable and several variables were constructed to capture important distinctions regarding place of destination and timing of migration. Given the nature of the information collected in MxFLS-1, all migration variables in these models are time-variant.

### **Preliminary Results**

Preliminary results using the first wave of MxFLS suggest that migration increased the likelihood of ending the first marriage but the effect varied between men and women. Women showed a higher likelihood of union dissolution associated with migration experience, but union stability among men was unaffected by migration experience, although having migrated before marriage slightly changed the odds of separation. Since no migration histories were collected for former partners, this model underestimates the effect of migration on the odds of dissolving a union. By using data collected in the second wave, this paper will provide a more reliable estimate of the effect of migration on union stability among Mexican couples.