

FATHERHOOD IN URBAN MEXICO

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Paper prepared for the XXIV General Conference of IUSSP, Salvador, Bahia, August 19-24, 2001. Session 88, "Gender roles at change and population outcomes", organized by Therese Locoh and María Eugenia Cosío-Zavala. We appreciate the support of Virginia Levin in our handling of the DINAF data base.

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the practice of fatherhood in urban Mexico in the late 20th century. As it is known, this practice includes quite distinct, highly complex dimensions, such as deciding whether and when to have children, financially supporting them, looking after them as regards food, hygiene and health, bringing them up and aspects related to discipline and the transmission of knowledge, as well as affection, communication and closeness between fathers and children. The changes that are probably beginning to take place in Mexico in this phenomenon may involve several of these aspects. Some of the ones that have called the attention of researchers and policy makers are the loss of importance in the central role played by men in the financial support of their families and children, and the still limited variations in Mexican's men traditionally low participation in reproductive life in general.

Within this context of very low male presence in the reproductive sphere, several studies in Mexico and at the international level have highlighted the occurrence of possible changes in the amount of attention fathers give their children, as well as in various aspects related to their care and men's involvement in recreational activities. In this paper, we are particularly interested in exploring this type of transformations, on the basis of the analysis of a broad group of men and through the use of a source of information that will enable the conclusions to be extrapolated to the total population involved.

More specifically, our aim in this study is to analyze the multiple factors that help explain the higher or lower degree of men's participation in looking after

their children and supervising their homework. We obtained information from a probabilistic survey of men living in two of the main metropolitan areas in the country: Mexico City and Monterrey. We included a range of individual, familial and contextual factors in this study, and used a multivariate statistical analysis to determine which of them help to explain the variations in the amount of attention men pay to their children.

In addition to this introduction, the text consists of three sections and some final considerations. In the following section, we provide a general overview of the way various perspectives have approached men's participation in the family in general and reproductive activities in particular. We also analyze the results of research undertaken in Mexico and other countries on the sexual division of labor within families and the possible changes that are taking place in various aspects of fathering. In the third section, we begin by showing some of the socio-demographic, economic and socio-cultural features that characterize late 20th century Mexico. The aim is to outline the structural context in which the men being studied engage in fathering. We then describe the main features of the men analyzed, as well as the prevailing division of labor within their homes. In the fourth section, we proceed to discuss the logistic regression models used to examine the main factors associated with men's participation in the care of their children. Finally, by way of a conclusion, we reflect on the implications of the main findings and offer a number of final considerations on the importance and nature of the transformations that are taking place.

THE ROLE OF MEN IN THE FAMILY: GENERAL ASPECTS

The last two decades of the 20th century saw a growing interest in discovering, explaining and transforming the role of men in the family. These concerns originally arose in developed countries, in a changing socioeconomic, demographic and cultural context characterized by women's growing labor force participation, the presence of new familial arrangements (the rise in the number of dual-earner and women-headed households), the increase in divorce rates and the number of children born out of wedlock, as well as the restructuring of productive activities, greater instability and insecurity in the world of work and the decline of the Welfare State. Several analytical perspectives have contributed to the debate and led to the redefinition of the latter, such as the gender perspective, population studies, sociological and anthropological approaches to family roles and masculinity.¹

The gender perspective has helped redefine studies on family life by considering as reproductive activities or reproductive work a whole range of tasks undertaken in the domestic sphere or linked to it, that are necessary for the everyday, generational reproduction of households as well as the reproduction of the labor force. As it is known, the development of this perspective has revealed that women are primarily responsible for the organization and/or performance of reproductive work (such as household chores, looking after children, managing the family budget, organizing consumption, etc). Concern over men's

¹ For a more detailed analysis of different approaches to the study of men's role in reproductive life in general and fatherhood in particular, see Morgan, 1990, Hass, 1993, Gutmann, 1996; Hernández Rosete, 1996; Nava, 1996, Vivas Mendoza, 1996; Figueroa, 1999; Alatorre and Luna, 2000; Fuller, 2000; Keijzer, 2000; Rojas, 2000, among others.

participation in the domestic sphere increases when women's growing presence in economic activities is added to their well-known participation in these reproductive tasks, and increasingly accurate information becomes available on the significant overload caused by the double shift. Within this context, there has been a sharp rise in the number of studies on the division of labor within households to determine the varying degrees of participation of their members in the various activities and to establish the degree of involvement of men in the family sphere.²

Within the field of socio-demography, the absence of men in the analysis of fertility and birth control has been criticized since the mid-1980s, also from a gender perspective. However, it has been since the Cairo and Beijing conferences, as a result of the demands of various women's groups, that there has been particular emphasis on the need to examine the degree of men's involvement in family life and in the promotion of their participation in the various stages of socio-biological reproduction (such as the decision to have children, pregnancy, childbirth, post-natal care, and looking after and raising children in general). This change of emphasis occurred within the framework of reconceptualizing reproductive behavior in terms of reproductive health. Thus, the role of men in the family, sexuality, and biological reproduction is posited as being crucial, both for the advance of knowledge and for achieving greater equity between men and women.³

² See, for example, Thorne, 1982; Casique 1999; Oliveira, Eternod and López (1999), García and Oliveira, 2000; Wainerman, 2000 and Rendón, 2000, Ariza and Oliveira, 2001.

³ See Anderson, 1997; Szasz, 1997; Figueroa, 1998 and 1999; Lerner, 1998, Necchi, 1999; Bledsoe, Lerner and Guyer, 2000; Presser, 2000; Rojas, 2000.

Sociological and anthropological analyses have also traditionally paid a certain amount of attention to men in their role as fathers. Since the 1950s, functionalists have emphasized the predominantly economic nature of the paternal role (Parsons and Bales, 1956). In the 1980s, this notion of fatherhood centered on the role of provider was questioned as a result of the influence of the gender perspective.⁴ New light has been shed on the fact that the structured set of rights, obligations and expectations that define a father's activities goes beyond the role of provider and includes looking after one's children and establishing closer relations with them. Importance has also been placed on the social and cultural variations in the performance of paternal roles, the various ways of fathering (in dual-earner families, as adoptive fathers or step-fathers, as teenage fathers, widowers, divorced or separated fathers, fathers who do not have custody of their children, homosexual fathers, etc.) and its dynamic nature which has changed over the course of the lives of men and their children.⁵ Finally, within the framework of studies on masculinity, fatherhood -understood as a socio-cultural construction- is analyzed as part of the formation of male identity, together with other important aspects such as the role of family economic provider or the exercise of an active sexuality.⁶

The confluence of these different analytical perspectives has led to the elaboration of a critical view of traditional male roles and encouraged research that seeks to examine the extent to which men's role in the family has been redefined towards patterns that imply greater involvement in reproductive work in

⁴ See Pleck, 1987; LaRossa, 1988; Morgan, 1990; Cohen, 1993.

⁵ See Roopnarine and Miller, 1985; Morgan, 1990.

general and fathering in particular. The concept of a new type of fathering in keeping with a more equitable view of the relations between genders and generations implies the shared, committed and responsible participation of men in a wide range of aspects, such as deciding whether and when to have children, their presence during the various stages of gestation and procreation, legal recognition of their children, sharing children's physical and emotional care from an early age, supporting them and taking care of their everyday reproduction, socialization, education and discipline, providing moral support and establishing an intimate relationship of communication and emotional closeness with them.⁷

The results of studies conducted in various socio-cultural contexts show that while some aspects have changed, others have remained the same. Two aspects appear to be particularly resistant to change: the view of men as being primarily responsible for the family's economic support and the low degree of male participation in reproductive activities regarded as typically feminine (especially household chores). Despite women's growing labor force participation, being a provider continues to have an extremely symbolic connotation; it is associated with the idea of male power, and the notion of support, protection, representation of the family (wife and children), responsibility and the defense of one's honor. It is also valued as an indicator of masculinity. Males who are unable to maintain their families lose power and prestige, sometimes fail to meet their family obligations and may engage in violent behavior towards their wives and children. These conceptions have partially

⁶ See Gutmann, 1996; Vivas Mendoza, 1996, Minello, 1999.

⁷ Morgan, 1990; Doherty, Kouneski and Ericson, 1998; Rojas, 2000.

contributed to the relative stability of the role of the male as the sole, major or most constant financial provider.⁸ Findings on men's participation in reproductive tasks have been conclusive: their presence in this type of activities continues to be much lower than female presence in the labor market, although there are differences between men's activities related to children and their involvement in household chores, which are relevant for the purposes of this study.⁹

Indeed, one of the findings that is constantly repeated is that -in a context with low male participation in reproductive life in general- men spend more time looking after their children than performing household chores (Wainerman, 2000). From this perspective, fathers' increased involvement in the physical and emotional care of their children is regarded as an element that may prove decisive in eroding one of the key mechanisms in the reproduction of the gender inequities that involve delegating responsibility for the care and raising of children to mothers (Chodorow, 1978). Added to these findings is the fact that researchers have begun to systematically question and provide evidence against the supposed absence or hindrance of men in various aspects of biological reproduction in general, and in decisions concerning when to have children and how many, as well as the use of contraceptives in particular (Greene and Biddlecom, 2000).

In Mexico, findings derived from probabilistic surveys and qualitative studies undertaken in the 1990's point in a similar direction. As far as continuity is

⁸ Morgan, 1990; García and Oliveira, 1994; Engle and Leonard, 1995; Katzman, 1993; Fuller, 2000.

⁹ It is worth noting that behind the search for these differences there has been a previous conceptual effort to identify the various reproductive activities and to distinguish the particularities of household chores

concerned, the role of economic provider continues to be crucial for men -even though they are increasingly less likely to be the sole economic providers of their homes- with all that this implies in terms of exercising power and authority. At the same time, male participation in reproductive tasks continues to be low, particularly among sectors with the lowest educational attainment, although differences have also been recorded between looking after their children and other types of activities.¹⁰

On the one hand, on the basis of a probabilistic survey undertaken in the mid-1990's, Casique (1999) confirms that in Mexico, men participate more in child care than in most other activities such as dishwashing, doing the laundry, cooking, ironing, shopping and housecleaning, (the percentage of male participation reaches 70% -sometimes or always- where looking after children is concerned, while fluctuating between 19 and 67% for other tasks.) On the other hand, Rendón (2000), using another probabilistic, countrywide survey undertaken in the mid-1990's, indicated significant gender differences within a broad range of reproductive tasks. In the ones involving the running of the home (such as shopping, paperwork, transport), for every hundred women, approximately half the men participate; in the production of goods and services for the home (preparing food, making clothes, housecleaning and dishwashing) and looking after children, this figure is reduced to approximately forty men for every hundred women. (Despite this, it is important to note that men participate far more than women in the construction of dwellings and household repairs and

(cleaning, washing and ironing, and cooking) in comparison with activities linked to children's care and recreation. For a systematization of existing studies, see Wainerman, 2000 and Rojas, 2000.

in collecting firewood in rural areas.) As for the number of hours spent on each activity, men spend more time looking after children than on producing goods and services for the home. Likewise, men spend more time on recreational activities with their children than on the latter's physical care (including food and cleanliness).

Other evidence obtained from qualitative studies based on small samples in Mexico City and the rest of the country provides additional elements for supporting hypotheses on possible changes in fathering, particularly among the younger, more educated sectors of the population.¹¹ This points to similar changes to those in other countries; from a type of fatherhood based on contributing financial resources to a more active, participatory form of fatherhood, with more opportunity for care, communication and expressing affection towards one's children. These are incipient changes and some might say that the new fathers are a species in construction in Mexico that will sometimes be the butt of jokes or disqualified as a means of controlling and discouraging change in gender relations (Keijzer, 2000). Middle-class men in the present generations would tend to participate more in reproductive activities, particularly in the recreation and care of their children than those in their parents' generation. Changes would also be beginning to emerge in the way they relate to their children, with the younger generations placing more emphasis on communication and dialog than scolding and punishment, which was more common in their parents' generation (Esteinou, 2001). A comparison of different age cohorts also

¹⁰ Casique, 1999; García and Oliveira, 2000; Rendón, 2000; Rojas, 2000.

reveals a closer, more affectionate relationship with their children and greater participation in their care and raising among young parents than among older fathers (ages 40 and older) who placed more emphasis on the physical and material wellbeing of their children and on teaching them to be financial providers (Rojas, 2000).

However, there are also signs that these changes have been slow, and loaded with resistance and ambivalence on the part of both men and women and that they are expressed more at the discourse than at the practical level as far as looking after children is concerned (Nava, 1996; Vivas Mendoza, 1996). In Mexico, even young, middle-class fathers (those who are most willing to change) would have continued to regard tasks concerning children's long-term training, such as the transmission of knowledge or discipline, as more important than everyday care involving food and cleanliness. Moreover, the types of relationship and fathering would vary according to whether the children are girls or boys, and with fathers tending to draw closer to children of either sex when they are older than when they are infants.¹² Research undertaken in other countries show that these aspects tend to recur in several socio-cultural contexts (see Engle and Leonard, 1995 and our discussion above).

These changes in the discourse and practice of fatherhood -that are probably taking place in Mexico at different rates in various social sectors and generations- are framed in a structural context characterized by global transformations of a socio-demographic, economic and socio-cultural nature that

¹¹ See Nava, 1996; Vivas Mendoza, 1996; Hernández Rosete, 1996; Gutmann, 1993 and 1996; Keijzer, 2000; Rojas, 2000; Esteinou, 2001.

affect individuals differently according to their personal features and those of their spouses and children. Suggested analytical frameworks (Doherty, Kouneski and Ericson, 1998; García and Oliveira, 1994) and the results of research projects mentioned earlier suggest that the ways men and women organize their socio-biological reproduction and perform their roles as fathers and mothers depend on numerous factors of various types that develop at the individual, familial and contextual level.

The *individual features* include those of a socio-demographic nature (such as age, marital status and educational attainment) as well as socioeconomic characteristics (type of occupation, employment status and income levels) and socio-cultural features (knowledge, skills and subjective aspects such as ideas on how children should be looked after and raised). *Familial features* generally include those linked to the family of origin (the way of relating to one's own parents, for example); the wife (economic participation, acceptance of male involvement in child rearing), the children (age, sex, attitude towards parents, character and behavior); the relationship between the parents (marital status, residence, how well they get on, and their degree of commitment to the relationship). Finally, there are *contextual factors*, such as rural-urban residence, living in more or less developed areas, or in different metropolitan areas, characterized by different productive structures and socio-cultural heritages, as in the case of the cities where our interviewees live. Although we do not have information on all these aspects, we felt it was important -in keeping with the trajectory followed in several of our previous studies- to bear in mind the

¹² See Nava, 1996; Vivas Mendoza, 1996; Hernández Rosete, 1996; Rojas, 2000.

conditioning factors that develop in these distinct spheres of reality in the following analysis.

THE MEN STUDIED IN LATE 20TH CENTURY MEXICO

The information analyzed in this paper is drawn from a survey on Family Dynamics (DINAF) that included a questionnaire with open and closed questions applied to two separate probabilistic samples: one on men (1,644 cases) and another on women (2,532) in Mexico City and Monterrey in late 1998 and early 1999.¹³ We used the sample of men to explore the factors that would help to explain their varying degrees of participation in the care of their children. Below is a brief account of the structural context in which these male interviewees exercise their fatherhood. We have also described their socio-demographic and economic characteristics and their opinions and behavior concerning their participation in reproductive work, using this context and the results of previous research as a frame of reference.

Since the second half of the 20th century, Mexican society has undergone fundamental demographic, socio-economic and socio-cultural changes that have shaped the characteristics, behavior and opinions of the men analyzed. At the end of the century, Mexico –like several Latin American countries- had already entered the last stage of demographic transition, its mortality and fertility levels

¹³ The DINAF obtained information on very different subjects related to the characteristics of the interviewees' homes and dwellings, their basic demographic and socio-economic features and those of their families of origin, the dynamics of their present families (such as the division of labor both inside and outside the home, decision-making, freedom of movement, domestic violence), the interviewees' views on male and female roles in Mexican society, and finally aspects related to sexuality and contraceptive practice. Information is therefore available on both the productive and reproductive lives of men and women in late 20th century Metropolitan Mexico (see García and Oliveira, 2000).

having significantly declined. The use of modern contraceptives has been primarily responsible for the decline in fertility in Mexico, whereas age at first union or marriage has played a less important role.¹⁴ The population's life expectancy has also significantly increased, while the number of years spent as a couple and living with one's children has been prolonged as much because of the decline in mortality as because of the fact that in Mexico, unlike other countries, separation and divorce rates have not yet reached high levels (García and Rojas, 2001).¹⁵ As regards the population's spatial distribution, Mexico has become increasingly urbanized since the mid-20th century, due to the importance of migratory flows from the countryside to the cities. In the year 2000, the urban population of 15,000 inhabitants and over had already reached 66%, while the population living in cities with over one million inhabitants accounted for 51% of the urban population (Sobrino, 2001).

The majority of the men interviewed lived in Mexico City, an urban area with nearly 17 million inhabitants in 1995 and only 15% lived in Monterrey, a city with nearly 3 million inhabitants at that time. They came from a clearly urban background (only 23% said that they had spent most of their childhood in the countryside or a village). They were men who were 20 to 50 years old at the time of the survey and all of them were either married or living with their partners

¹⁴ In the mid-1960s, the Global Fertility Rate was 6.1 children and it is estimated that by 1999, this figure had fallen to approximately 2.5 children (CONAPO, 1999). The level of contraceptive use reported nationwide was 69% for women living in some kind of conjugal union in 1997 (CONAPO, 1999).

¹⁵ In the year 2000, women's life expectancy at birth was 78 years, while that of men was 73 years (CONAPO, 2000).

and/or had children, since this was a criterion for the selection of the sample (Table 1).¹⁶

As regards their families, most of the men in the study (54.5%) lived with one or two of their children; those with three or more resident children accounted for nearly a third of the total, while only 10% had no children living with them in their household. The fact of living with a relatively small number of children may be due to the fact that they had already left the paternal home and/or to the control and reduction of fertility. Given the age of the men included in the sample and their levels of contraceptive use, they have undoubtedly decided –either alone or in conjunction with their partners- how many children to have and when to have them, which may ensure more favorable conditions for improving the quality of care given to children who are now both fewer in number and planned.¹⁷ Since the ages of resident children differ,¹⁸ we also have a range of possibilities for exploring men's level of involvement in their care at various stages, as well as the factors associated with this.¹⁹ (See Table 1).

Another feature common to most of the interviewees is that they declared themselves to be the head of their households in an important proportion (89% of all cases). Of these, 78.2% cohabited in nuclear households, with their spouse

¹⁶ Nationwide, the mean age at first union for men in the mid-1990s was 25.1 (Quilodrán, forthcoming).

¹⁷ Two thirds of the men interviewed said that they used contraceptive methods (García and Oliveira, 2000).

¹⁸ Since we did not have information on the age of the interviewees' children in our individual questionnaire, we approached this important aspect through the data on the age of the youngest person in the household questionnaire. This person may be a son or daughter of the head of the household (the majority of our population belong to nuclear households) although he or she may also be the child of an additional conjugal nucleus.

¹⁹ Since the age when a child is still regarded as needing care is a subjective criterion that is difficult to standardize between the different strata of the population, in the multivariate analysis of child care, we selected those individuals who answered the questions on this subject, in other words, those who regarded them as pertinent and applicable to their particular circumstances (see next section).

and children and 10.7% were heads of complex households that include other relatives and/or non-relatives. Only a minority (11% of all cases) said that they were not the heads of their households and that they formed part of an additional conjugal nucleus in complex households (see Table 1).²⁰

We would like to point out that by focussing our study on males who live with their children in nuclear or complex households, we are not underestimating the importance of the presence of fathers who do not live with their children, either for reasons of internal or international migration, divorce, separations or deserting their families. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that, given the high levels of teenage fertility, the number of children born out of a union or wedlock may be significant, despite the social pressure exerted on males to assume their responsibilities as fathers. Figures on the growing importance of lone-parent, women-headed families are indirect indicators of the importance that fatherhood without joint residence may have in Mexico.²¹

As for *socioeconomic transformations*, it has been widely documented that since the mid-1980s, Mexico has experienced considerable hardship due to the recurring economic crises and the implementation of adjustment and economic restructuring policies aimed at the consolidation of an export-based development model. Mexico City has been one of the urban areas most severely affected by the crisis of the 1980's and its economic recovery during the 1990's was slow. Conversely, Monterrey, which also bore the brunt of the crisis, has experienced a

²⁰ It is important to bear in mind that, at the end of the 20th century, the majority of Mexican households were still nuclear. Nevertheless, the presence of extended families is still a distinctive feature of the country. According to figures from the 2000 census, 69% of Mexican households were nuclear and 24% complex (García and Rojas, 2001).

far more dynamic process of economic restructuring (García and Oliveira, 2001). However, the decline of living conditions, resulting largely from the implementation of salary control policies and the increased flexibility of the labor market -within the framework of the decline of the State's role in the provision of social services- has affected both metropolitan areas in a similar fashion. The drop in salaries together with the reduction of benefits has exacerbated the already acute social inequalities that have existed since the import-substitution era in Mexico as a whole as well as in major urban areas.

Indeed, in socio-economic terms, the universe of our interviewees is both heterogeneous and polarized. On the one hand, 41% had only completed elementary school or a technical course that merely required this level, while at the other extreme, 34% of the men had completed high school or higher education.²² If we combine the information on educational attainment with occupational data (virtually all these men are economically active) in order to classify our male population by social sectors, it appears that the majority (73%) can be regarded as being from the *working-class sector*, in other words, they have manual occupations such as workers, service workers and street vendors, with a maximum educational attainment of having completed secondary school, but not high school. The other interviewees (27%) were identified as belonging to the *middle class sector*, since they are relatively better off, with non-manual

²¹ According to figures from the 2000 Population Census, 21% of all households were headed by women (García and Rojas, 2001).

²² This last percentage of the metropolitan male population (interviewed in DINAF), that has at least completed high school, is certainly important and constitutes a significant indicator of the concentration of the population with more educational credentials in the country's major urban areas. By way of a comparison, the 2000 Population Census found that 27% of the Mexican male population aged 18 years old or more had completed high school or more (see INEGI, 2000).

occupations such as professionals, technicians, supervisors, teachers, administrative workers and established shopkeepers, all of whom have at least completed high school. Finally, this inequality is particularly evident when income levels are considered. Of the men interviewed, 40% can be regarded as extremely poor (earning between one or two minimum salaries at the end of the 1990's) while only a very small minority of the interviewees can be considered as being non-poor (12%, who earn over 5 minimum salaries) (Table 1).²³

Structural changes have also left their mark on the way domestic life is organized by contributing to the erosion of the family model of the male head as the sole financial provider for the family in various social sectors, particularly the poorest (Oliveira, 1999)²⁴. According to our interviewees, they are the sole wage earners in 60% of all cases, which is higher than the national level (48% in 1996). This may be due to the current stage of the lifecycle of their homes: as we have seen, they are males aged between 20 and 50, whose children are still too small to participate in the labor market, or else the mothers spend more time looking after them than on earning an additional income, given the division of labor that has traditionally been established between men and women. However, in a substantial number of households (30%), the wife or partner participates in the labor market, which may influence men's engagement in fathering in a way which

²³ The corresponding proportions are very similar nationwide (42 and 12% respectively), which suggests that income distribution in Mexico City, the place of residence of most of the interviewees, is as inequitable as it is in the rest of the country. Indeed, in a recent study, Hernández Laos (2000) estimates a slightly higher income inequality co-efficient for the capital than for the country as a whole, which he says is due to the fact that in Mexico City, "highly productive services and productive activities co-exist with large contingents of people in extremely precarious conditions of employment..."(p.110).

²⁴ In 1984, 59.9% of the households that were headed by men had a single wage earner, a figure that had fallen to 47.9% by 1996 (ENIGH data, presented in Oliveira, 1999).

can be different from the traditionally one, as has been noted earlier (see Table 1 and García and Oliveira, 2000).²⁵

The loss of importance of the role of provider has probably had different repercussions on males and their participation in family life. In other countries, researchers have found that, paradoxically, when men experience serious difficulties in maintaining their role as providers, they become even more distant from their children. Conversely, in other situations, sharing the financial support of the family with their wives and/or other household members contributes to the appreciation of other spheres of male identity, by repositing the role of the men in the family and their involvement in child care and raising.

We think it is important to underline the fact that the cultural changes associated with the emergence of new images concerning the role of men and women in society and families will undoubtedly help to explain some of the incipient transformations in fathering that could have taken place in Mexico (see Flores, 1998; Ariza and Oliveira, 2001; López and Salles, 2001) Within this context, it is interesting to note that when the interviewees were asked to give their views on whether small children could be looked after properly by either the mother or the father, they were very open to this idea (81% answered affirmatively). Thus, at least at the discourse level, this population is open to the possibility of a change towards a more active, participatory form of fathering. This type of opinion has undoubtedly been shaped by the launching –within the

²⁵ In the mid-1990s, according to the National Employment Survey (ENE), nearly 30% of married women were economically active at the national level. The increase in the number of wives participating in the labor market has undoubtedly been one of the most significant changes in the profile of family labor throughout the country (for an analysis of Mexico City in this respect, see García and Pacheco, 2000).

framework of a population policy implemented in Mexico in the mid-1970s- of large-scale media campaigns that sought to spread the notion of responsible fatherhood. It should be recalled that this notion –as we have said- would imply greater participation on the part of men at different stages of the process of socio-biological reproduction, and consequently a type of fatherhood involving more affection and closeness to one's children.

However, conceptions about the role of provider would appear to be more resistant to change, as we have pointed out on the basis of other studies. In the case of the men interviewed, a high proportion (42%) still believe that the most important thing in a man's life is to support his family (other options included studying, financial independence, getting married or starting to live with one's partner and being a father).

As regards the interviewees' participation in several activities within the reproductive sphere (household chores, looking after children, recreation and transport, self-construction of housing, etc.), information from the DINAF (Table 2) confirms one of the central findings of previous studies on this subject which we pointed out earlier, in other words, that men prefer activities directly related to looking after children to household chores such as cleaning, cooking or washing and ironing, which are also undoubtedly crucial aspects of fathering and the reproduction of everyday life.

According to the DINAF, male participation reaches its lowest level in the case of washing and ironing (15%), compared to 36% in the case of looking after children and supervising their homework, or 57% for children's recreational

activities. In any case, men's participation in childcare (*of any type or duration*) is not very high, with figures only rising in the case of recreation. Men's participation is highest -as one would expect- in tasks related to building or repairing houses and car-related chores (which existed in 36% of the cases).²⁶ Finally, it should be added that the women interviewed in the DINAF (as we have already pointed out, these women were part of a separate sample, but one that was representative of the female population in the cities in question) also coincided in pointing out that male participation was greater in the sphere of looking after children and the latter's recreational activities than in domestic chores, although the levels that they reported for this participation were much lower than those declared by the men.²⁷

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF FATHERING

On the basis of the studies mentioned earlier, we identified the principal variables at the contextual, familial and individual level that we believe might have the greatest influence on men's participation in looking after their children and supervising their homework. From the beginning, we have thought that it would be useful to point out that we used various methods to explore the possible

²⁶ It is difficult to compare the *levels* achieved by male participation in the various areas with those obtained in other studies for the case of Mexico (for example, Casique, 1999; Rendón, 1999) or for other countries (Wainerman, 2000) since our questions are very open and seek to record any type and duration of men's participation in various tasks.

²⁷ This is a common finding in research on the issue and similar reports may be found in studies that adopt very different perspectives in the analysis of gender relationships. In our case, women stated that men participated in certain household chores (cooking, housecleaning, dishwashing, grocery shopping, washing and ironing) in 21% of cases while men said that they did so in 45%. As regards involvement in child care, supervising their homework and school transport, women said that men participated in 29% of all cases, while men stated that they did so in 49%. (These data do not coincide with those in Table 2 because they are percentages obtained for broad sets of activities rather than for specific tasks. See García and Oliveira, 2000).

influence of the wives' or partners' extradomestic work on the degree of men's participation in childcare. It is a well-known fact that this is one of the main aspects noted in virtually all the research on this issue that we have seen. This variable initially proved to be highly significant, although we were aware of a possible problem of endogeneity (to a certain extent, there is a circular relationship between the wife's labor force participation and a man's greater participation in looking after the children.) Although we attempted to solve this problem of endogeneity, the results proved unsatisfactory.²⁸ We therefore decided to adjust alternative models without including the wives' work outside the home and obtained fairly coherent results in terms of the hypotheses we had put forward and the conceptual systematization we had carried out.²⁹

The model with the best goodness of fit is shown in Table 3.³⁰ We believe that this is the best model on the basis of the percentage of predicted observations and various measures of goodness of fit (see indicators at the end of the tables) as well as the fact that it included the greatest number of significant coefficients and also yielded the most coherent results. After various attempts, the variables that were eventually included in the best model were: age, educational attainment, position in kinship structure of current household, rural or urban

²⁸ In order to solve the problem of endogeneity, we adjusted a regression on wives' extradomestic work in order to obtain an independent set of probabilities that replaced the first variable we had on female labor force participation (see Casique 1999, SPSS, 1999). However, the results obtained in this way proved unsatisfactory. This is probably due to the fact that we did not have enough additional information to estimate the independent model on women's extradomestic work.

²⁹ We realize that this procedure failed to solve this problem satisfactorily, because now the effect of the wife's labor force participation could have been expressed through some of the other variables selected (see King, Keohane and Verba, 1994, for a discussion of the bias of the variable omitted).

³⁰ In order to facilitate interpretation of this table, we have –as is standard practice– included a reference category in each of the variables and pointed out the changes in the rest in relation to this category (those that are significant are indicated with an asterisk).

residence during childhood, current residence in Mexico City or Monterrey, employment status and income at the *individual* and *contextual* level; age of youngest household member, at the *familial* level, and finally, a variable that concerns the subjective aspect, the *attitudes* of these men towards care, in other words, whether or not they agreed that small children could be properly looked after by either the mother or the father.³¹

In the following analysis, we shall first refer to the results that confirm the hypotheses or approaches of other research projects mentioned earlier, or those that clearly refute them. We shall then focus on unexpected findings (such as the one referring to the age of the interviewees).

Higher educational attainment and urban background in childhood clearly predict greater involvement by men in looking after their children. This is an expected result, since these are the variables traditionally associated with more significant socio-demographic transformations, such as the decline in mortality and fertility. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in other countrywide studies, men's greater participation in reproductive tasks was more clearly associated with their partners' educational attainment (see Casique, 1999). Our result in the case of the main metropolitan areas shows how important it is for men to have higher levels of educational attainment in order for them to begin to engage in a different type of fathering. It is extremely likely that both this higher educational attainment and residence in a city (whether large or small) during childhood brings men into closer contact with new forms of relating to their

³¹ The proportion of males who participate in the care of their children according to the variable included in the model is given in Table 1-A of the appendix.

children, or that this is precisely how men become aware of the need and benefits for both them and their offspring of expanding their role as fathers beyond the financial sphere (for results on Mexico and other countries in the same direction, see Engle and Leonard, 1995; Oliveira, Ariza and Eternod, 1996; Casique, 1999; Rojas, 2000).

Another variable at the *individual level* that proved significant was being *the head of the household*. One possible interpretation of this result is that men who form part of additional conjugal nuclei in households may have a greater number of men or women who are willing to look after their children, which may prevent them from engaging in this new form of fathering.

As regards *individual economic variables*, it could be argued that various aspects of poverty may prevent more closeness and communication with children, due to the need of many poor men to spend several hours outside the home, either at their main job, or at a second job when the first does not allow them to meet their basic needs, or on transport, which may be a crucial aspect in places such as Mexico City. Nevertheless, one could also surmise that males who work at home or near the home would not be subject to these restrictions which, in principle, would enable them to become more involved in the various reproductive activities.

However, our results do not support either of these hypotheses. In the case of the occupational status (salaried, non-salaried) the negative sign of the coefficient of salaried workers occurs in the expected direction, but is not significant. As far as income is concerned, the results of the regression indicate

that -once all the other variables have been controlled for- this is not an important aspect that is significantly linked to differential behaviors concerning childcare and homework supervision. It is surprising that the coefficient for medium and high income is negative, although it is only significant at a higher level than that we have chosen for this study (0.1%) This result shows that earning a higher income does not in itself guarantee greater closeness to one's children and that it is in fact possible that the change in fathering is more the result of higher educational attainment and urban residence from an early age, key aspects when transformations in ways of thinking and acting are involved and when the traditional roles of men and women become more flexible. Within this context, it is worth noting that current residence in Mexico City or Monterrey did not prove significant, meaning that what is probably more important is living in a clearly urban environment, as opposed to living in rural settings where the diversification of activities for men and women and contact with different forms of communication and new ideas may be more restricted.

The results of the *family variable* that was included in our model –*age of youngest household member*- were similar to the findings of many studies on paternal care and children's ages, even though our information on this aspect is approximate.³² Indeed, it was initially confirmed that more care is provided when the offspring are 6 to 12 years old (in comparison with 0-5 years old) which corroborates the fact that fathers begin to draw closer to their children when the latter are old enough to engage in verbal communication and when looking after them involves fewer activities linked to food and personal cleanliness. As we

have seen, this is a common result. Suffice it to recall that authors such as Engle and Leonard (1995) report that only 2% of the cases in the 186 studies examined indicated that fathers maintain a regular, close relationship with their children during infancy (and only 5% have these relationships when their children are small.) Our study also shows that in late 20th century metropolitan Mexico, fathers interact more with their children when they are older. However, after the age of twelve, we also find that men participate less in their care, although this may be due to the fact that at this age, children in fact require less direct attention from their parents.

Our approach to the *subjective dimension* of looking after children (the man's views on how appropriate it is for fathers and mothers to become equally involved in this aspect of parenting), also proved to be an important aspect. Agreeing with this proposition is positively and significantly associated with greater male involvement in children's care. This result is important, because it shows that fathers who have a closer relationship to their children may have a different attitude towards the division of labor between the sexes, while their behavior may begin to respond to an incipient personal transformation in which the role of fathering in the construction of male identity is re-assessed.

Unlike previous findings, those referring to *the age of the interviewee can be regarded as unexpected*. Men aged 30 to 39 are more involved in the care of their children than others, whether younger or older. We thought that younger men would be different from older men (aged 40 to 50) in this respect, in keeping with the hypotheses posited by several studies in Mexico, particularly qualitative

³² See note 18.

ones. One possible explanation for this result is that these young men tend to have very small children, and we know –even from our own results- that this is the time when a close relationship between fathers and their children is most difficult. This hypothesis and others referring to the avant-garde role that might be played by young men with higher educational attainment led us to explore the effect of the respective interactions, although none of them was significant. As an alternative, we attempted to analyze this group separately from the rest and in more detail.

Unfortunately, adjusting several logistic models for the population aged 20 to 29 alone failed to yield any results that would help explain why their involvement in the care of their children was similar to that of the older population, rather than the group aged 30-39. Since many important variables are already controlled for in our models, all that remains to be said is that the adaptation and acceptance of a new role in looking after one's children may also involve the aspect of greater psychological maturity and adaptation to one's partner, which may occur at a relatively later age (see Engle and Leonard, 1995; Doherty, Kouneski and Ericson, 1998). In any case, it is worth noting that our study confirms the lower participation of older men (40-49) in the care of their children, which would corroborate the hypothesis of a possible generational change in this aspect of fatherhood (see Rojas, 2000).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There has been a growing interest in studying and transforming the role of men in family life in both Mexico and many other countries. In the specific realm of fathering, several previous studies undertaken in the country show that a change may be taking place from a relationship of authority, based on financial support, to one in which there is more room for direct care and affection. In this study, we have contributed to this discussion through the analysis of information on a broad group of men residing in two of the country's main metropolitan areas: Mexico City and Monterrey. As mentioned earlier, we used a probabilistic survey aimed specifically at men aged 20-50, meaning that the results of this analysis can be extrapolated to the whole male population of this age group in these two cities.

Although we are aware of the various aspects that might be present in fathering, our study focussed on looking after children, since this is an aspect of reproduction that is traditionally delegated to women, and therefore any male presence in this sphere might be an indication of either a more equitable gender relationship or a different type of fathering. We initially confirmed that male involvement in looking after their children is low in relative terms, since barely a third of our interviewees stated that they had some form of participation in the more direct care of their children. However, we also proved -as other studies have done- that this is one of the reproductive tasks with the greatest relative presence of men, outside what happens with family recreation and activities regarded as typically male, such as household repairs or self-construction, and car maintenance in the event that the family has a car.

The importance that this aspect of looking after children has undoubtedly led us to specify the different types of factors that may be linked to the degree of men's involvement in this process. On the basis of a review of the national and international literature, as well as of our previous experience in the study of changes in gender relations, we felt it was necessary to explore the possible effect of different individual, familial and contextual features, as well as certain aspects within the sphere of individual representations. The association of these different types of factors with men's participation in looking after their children was explored through a multivariate, logistic regression analysis.

Our results also prove the relevance of higher educational attainment and residence in an urban area since childhood, as well as the importance of sharing egalitarian views on children's being looked after by mothers and fathers in explaining men's greater direct involvement in the care of their children. In our late 20th century metropolitan context, this type of aspects are more important than economic factors such as income levels or engaging in a paid activity, which helps to determine the nature of the transformations we are analyzing and the aspects of reality which it is possible to influence more immediately in order to accelerate them.

Our findings also offer elements that may help refine and specify the arguments concerning a possible generational change in fathering in Mexico. Once we had controlled for the effect of different types of variables such as educational attainment, income, occupational status, rural or urban residence during childhood, position in the kinship structure, age of the youngest household

member, as well as city of residence and the interviewees' views on maternal or paternal care of children, we found that the men with the greatest involvement in this type of care were those in the middle age group (30-39 years) as opposed to younger men or those over 40. The results involving older men were expected on the basis of the hypothesis posited in several previous studies on a generational change in fathering. However, we were surprised by the result for younger men (20-29 years) whom we had assumed would be in the vanguard of new types of fathering. This confirms the view of certain researchers who emphasize the slowness of the changes that interest us and point to the fact that it may also be necessary to achieve a certain maturity and family adjustment for men to spend more time looking after their children.

Another result that alerted us to the slowness of the changes being observed and analyzed, as well as the type of care Mexican men are giving their children, involves the children's age. In any situation, and regardless of the men's age, fathers spend more time looking after their children when they are between the age of 6 and 12 than when they are younger. This finding leads us to conclude that in our case, the hypothesis that men tend to approach children more when they can communicate more easily with them verbally, as well as when they require less effort by their parents as regards food and personal cleanliness, is still very valid.

On the whole, our study describes a complex phenomenon of change, with progress and resistance, in which the groups that advance or resist these changes are not always those one would expect. It is essential to continue

making efforts in different directions in order to be able to identify the nature of changes more clearly, together with the different aspects involved and the characteristics of those who are at the forefront of these changes, as well as the stage in the life-cycle in which they take place. Analyses of looking after children and other aspects of fathering must include more information on aspects such as the relationship between parents and children in the family of origin and the wife's work outside the home as well as the quality of the conjugal relationship in the event that there is one, or the care of children born outside wedlock or a consensual union. In addition to qualitative research that will enable us to put forward new hypotheses on these aspects and explore the significance of the latter, we hope to have clarified the potential contributions of studies such as ours, based on standardized information referring to large groups of men, that will enable us to simultaneously trace the possible effect of various aspects on different styles of fathering.

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Table 1
Mexico City and Monterrey. Distribution of men interviewed
by selected characteristics
Males aged 20-50 (1998-1999)

<i>Selected characteristics</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Selected characteristics</i>	<i>%</i>
Current residence	100,0	Social sector	100,0
Mexico City	84,6	Middle-class	25,8
Monterrey	15,4	Working-class	73,2
Residence in childhood	100,0	Income	100,0
Urban	76,6	Very low	41,8
Rural	23,4	Low	45,4
		Middle or high	12,8
Age	100,0	Household provider	100,0
Young (20-29)	26,2	Head of household alone	60,3
Adult (30-39)	36,8	Head of household and others	38,8
Mature (40-50)	37,0	Others	0,9
Resident children	100,0	Activity of wife or partner	100,0
None	10,6	Participates in economic activities	30,0
One	21,6	Does not participate in economic activities	70,0
Two	32,9		
Three or more	34,9		
Age of youngest member	100,0	Opinions on gender roles	100,0
0-5	47,6	Agrees children can be equally well looked after by either gender	81,6
6-12	25,6		
13-15	6,5		

16 or over	20,3	Disagrees	18,4
Position in kinship structure	100,0	Opinions on men role	100,0
Head of household	88,9	To support the family	41,9
Other	11,1	Other	58,1
Educational attainment	100,0	Occupational status	100,0
Did not complete elementary	7,7	Salaried	74,3
Completed primary school	33,0	Non-salaried	25,7
Completed secondary school	25,2		
Completed high school	34,1		

Source:

Encuesta sobre Dinámica Familiar (DINAF), 1998-1999.

Table 2
 Mexico City and Monterrey. Percentage of
 men who said that they participated
 in certain reproductive tasks

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>%</i>
Cooking	19,9
Housecleaning	27,9
Dishwashing	24,5
Grocery shopping	28,2
Washing and/or ironing	15,0
Looking after children and/or supervising homework	36,4
Taking charge of children's recreation	56,9
Taking children to school	31,1
Looking after elderly relatives	39,6
Building or repairs	82,1
Paperwork	68,3
Car maintenance (when there is one)	88,4

Source: DINAf, 1998-1999.

Table 3
 Mexico City and Monterrey. Logistic regression on looking after children.
 Men (1998-1999)^a

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Sig</i>	<i>Exp(β)</i>
Age		0,0110	
Young (20-29)	0,1193	0,5573	1,1267
Adult (30-39)	0,4302 *	0,0065	1,5376
<i>Mature (40-50)^b</i>			
Educational attainment		0,0026	
<i>Did not complete elementary school^b</i>			
Completed elementary school	0,7326 *	0,0196	2,0805
Completed secondary school	0,6232 *	0,0426	1,8649
Completed high school	1,0745 *	0,0008	2,9285
Position in kinship structure			
Head of household	0,6228 *	0,0065	1,8641
<i>Other^b</i>			
Residence in childhood			
Urban	0,5885 *	0,0003	1,8012
<i>Rural^b</i>			
Current residence			
Mexico City	-0,1889	0,2603	0,8278
<i>Monterrey^b</i>			
Occupational status			
Salaried	-0,1392	0,3357	0,8701
<i>Non-salaried^b</i>			
Income			

Very low ^b			
Low	0,0294	0,8337	1,0298
Middle or high	-0.3728	0,0969	0,6888
Age of youngest household member			
0-5 ^b			
6-12	0.3141 *	0,0403	1,3690
13-15	0.3231	0,2758	1,3814
Opinions on gender roles			
Agree children can be equally well looked after by either gender	0.3971 *	0,0168	1,4876
<i>Disagrees^b</i>			
Constant	-2.6650	0,0000	

^a This model predicts 65% of cases (89% of does who do not look after their children and 26% of does who do).

-2 Log Likelihood 1 489.686

Goodness of fit 1 186.042

^b Category omitted in model

* Significant to $P \leq .05$

Source: DINAf, 1998-1999

APPENDIX
Table 1A
Mexico City and Monterrey. Proportion
of men who participate in looking after their children
according to the characteristics included in the
regression model
Men aged 20-50 (1998-1999)

<i>Selected characteristics</i>	%
Age	
Young (20-29)	32,8
Adult (30-39)	42,5
Mature (40-50) (40-50)	31,6
Educational Attainment	
Did not complete elementary school	16,7
Completed elementary school	33,8
Completed secondary school	36,8
Completed high school	43,5
Position in kinship structure	
Head of household	37,2
Other	27,3
Residence in childhood	
Urban	25,1
Rural	39,9
Current residence	
Mexico City	35,3
Monterrey	42,0

Occupational status

Salaried	38,5
Non-salaried	35,8

Income

Very low	33,4
Low	40,7
Medium or high	36,4

Age of youngest household member

0-5	34,6
6-12	40,6
13-15	38,4
16 and over	24,7

Opinions on gender roles

Agrees that children can be equally well looked after by either gender	37,8
Disagrees	30,1

Source: DINAF, 1998-1999

DINAF, 1998-1999