

Living Arrangements of Mexican Women up to Age 30: Stability and Social Stratification across Cohorts

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Background. In recent decades, Mexico has undergone significant demographic and socio-economic change, impacting young women's life course transitions. Despite declining fertility, educational expansion, rapid urbanization, and prolonged periods of economic crisis, the age at first union and first birth remain low (Fussell, 2005; Gayet & Juárez, 2022). Meanwhile, union dissolution has increased (Aguirre, 2019), and families continue to play a strong role, with marriage and childbearing often starting while residing with parents or parents-in-law (Giorguli, 2011). Early calendars, combined with union instability and the norm of family co-residence, mean that by age 30, many Mexican women have experienced several family events, reflected in diverse living arrangements. During young adulthood (ages 18-30), women may live with their parents, a partner (and children), with children alone, or as part of extended families. While early family formation is well-documented in the region (Esteve & Lesthaeghe, 2016; Rosero-Bixby et al., 2009), little is known about how it leads to diverse living arrangement trajectories in Mexico or how this reflects underlying socio-economic inequalities. In high-income societies, theories like the second demographic transition suggest that higher socio-economic groups are “forerunners” in family and living arrangement diversity (Mooyaart, 2021). However, this may not hold in Latin American contexts like Mexico (García & Rojas, 2002; Quilodrán, 1996), where socio-economic inequality is high and traditional gender and family norms persist across social strata (Gayet & Juárez, 2020). Education expansion has not led to delayed family formation (Esteve & Florez-Paredes, 2018), possibly due to persistent socio-economic stratification across cohorts despite rising absolute educational attainment. This study explores young women's living arrangements in Mexico, summarising trajectories from ages 18-30 and analysing the socio-economic family predictors across five cohorts born between the 1960s and the 1990s, both in absolute terms (parental level of education) and in relative terms (parental relative education and socio-economic status within cohorts). We make several contributions to the literature on families in Latin America and transition to adulthood. First, examining not just the timing and occurrence of events like childbirth and union formation, but the full trajectory of living arrangements. Second, highlighting inequalities in young women's trajectories, showing how these shape family experiences and have evolved across cohorts. Third, we extend research on the transition to adulthood beyond global North contexts (Fasang et al., 2024).

Data and Methods. We use data from the 2017 *Encuesta Demográfica Retrospectiva* (EDER) for Mexico. EDER includes retrospective information on living arrangements at the individual level,

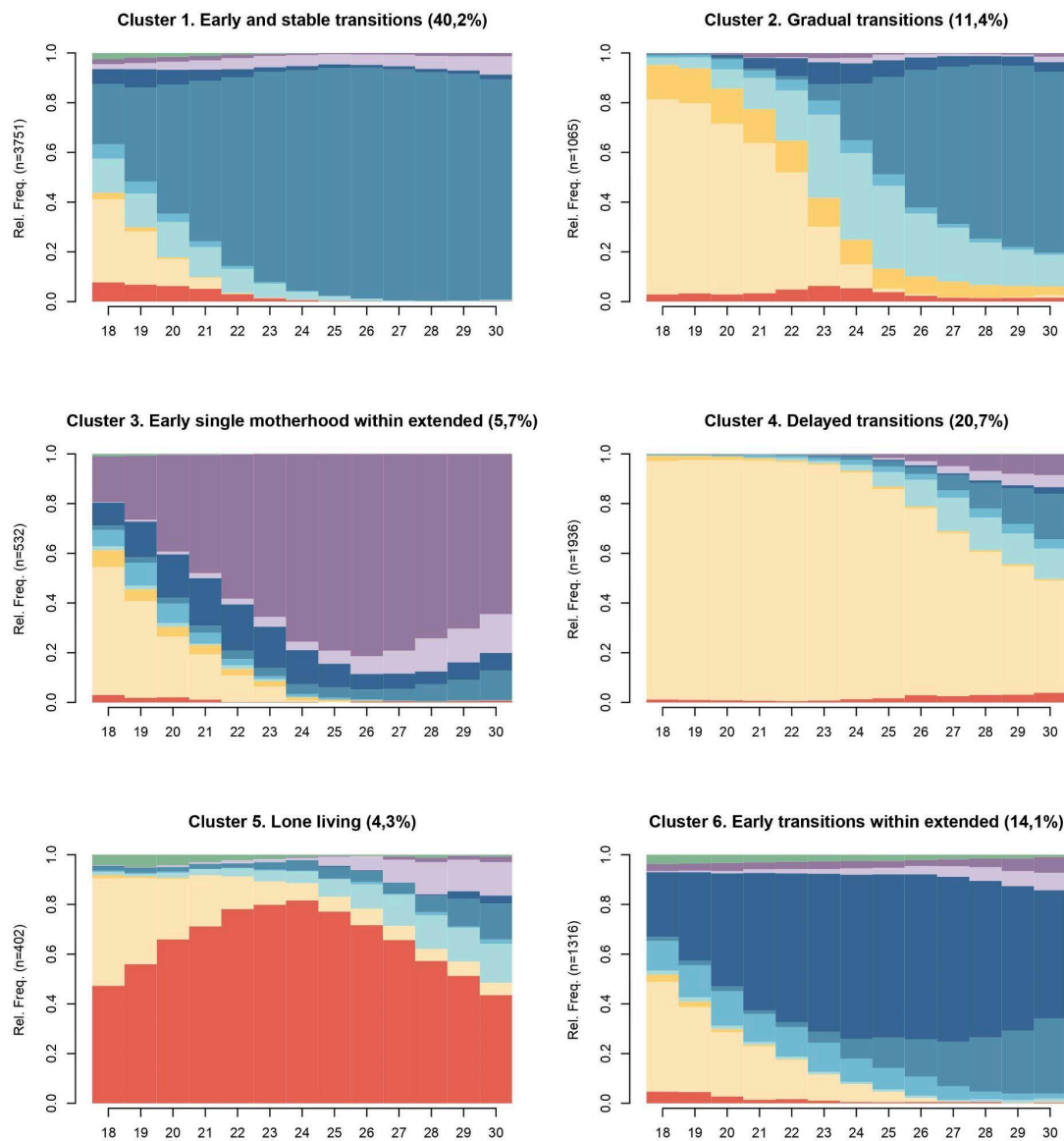
allowing us to reconstruct women's trajectories of living arrangements between ages 18-30. Our sample includes 9341 women born between 1962 and 1987. We classify living arrangements into living alone, with parents, with a partner, with a partner and children, with children, and any extended version of these. 'Extended' involves any other kin members in the household in addition to direct kin (parents, partner and/or children). First, using sequence and cluster analysis we identify different typologies of living arrangement trajectories among Mexican women. Second, using multinomial logistic regressions we estimate the predicted probabilities of belonging to different trajectories by parental socio-economic status (SES). Parental SES is measured in terms of parental education, for which we use two measures: (a) absolute education and (b) education relative to the cohort to adjust for the changing composition of parental education across generations of young women.

Findings. Figure 1 shows the clusters for women's living arrangement trajectories. The first group, comprising up to 40% of women, follows traditional family transitions with early family formation, mostly living with partners and children. Cluster 2 features gradual transitions, where women leave the parental home later, first living with a partner or with a partner in extended households, and eventually forming nuclear households. Cluster 3 includes early single mothers, typically living in extended households, with nearly 20% in this situation already by age 18, while the rest become single mothers after union dissolution. Cluster 5 (4.3%) consists of women who live alone or transition to lone living from the parental home before marriage or children. Cluster 6, like cluster 1, involves early union formation and childbirth, but within extended households. Cluster 7 includes pathways toward single motherhood from nuclear families, either due to union dissolution or early single motherhood. Figure 2 shows that these heterogeneous trajectories are stratified by parental SES (measured by absolute education). Women from high SES backgrounds are more likely to delay family formation and live alone (clusters 2, 4 and 5), while those from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to follow traditional, early transitions (clusters 1 and 6), either independently or in extended arrangements. However, early transitions to living with a partner and children remain common across SES groups. Women from low SES families have a 54% probability of following early transitions and women from high SES backgrounds 32%. Single motherhood (clusters 3 and 7) is associated with lower SES groups, although the gradient is weaker for single mothers living in extended households. The evolution across cohorts (not shown here) shows little change, except for a decline in stratification of gradual transitions and higher probabilities of living in extended dwellings among recent cohorts. Results based on relative parental education (not shown) are also similar.

Discussion. We determine that young women's living arrangement trajectories are heterogeneous, and that this has remained stable over time. Despite major social and political changes, early family formation—including early unions and motherhood—persists, consistent with regional patterns. Strong family ties continue to support young couples and single mothers. The diversity of life course

trajectories is accounted for by differences in parental SES. Women from higher SES families experience lower transitions to adulthood, likely due to larger access to higher education, contraception, and delayed motherhood. Their longer educational trajectories and delayed entry into the workforce lead to postponed household independence. However, the stability of socio-economic stratification across generations indicates that parental education alone does not fully explain variations in women's living arrangements. Lower SES women consistently face higher probabilities of early transitions, regardless of whether they were born in the 1960s or late 1980s. This suggests that Mexico's educational expansion has not altered socio-economic trajectories, either in absolute or relative terms. Understanding the implications of parental SES on living arrangement trajectories is therefore essential to reveal their links to the reproduction of disadvantage.

Figure 1. Clusters of women's living arrangement trajectories (ages 18-30).



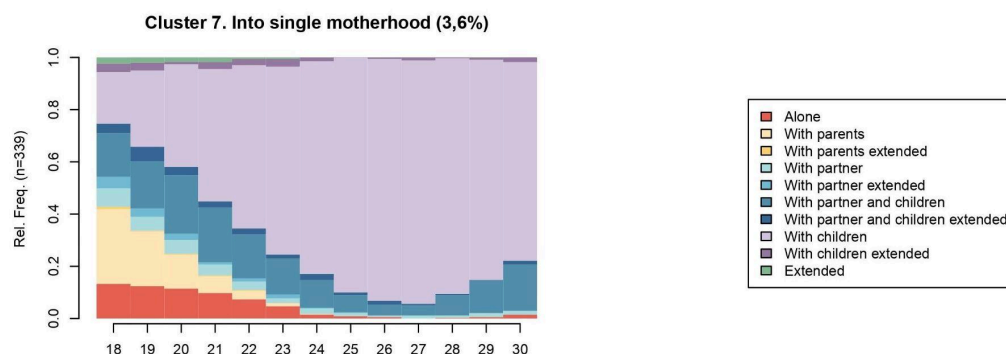
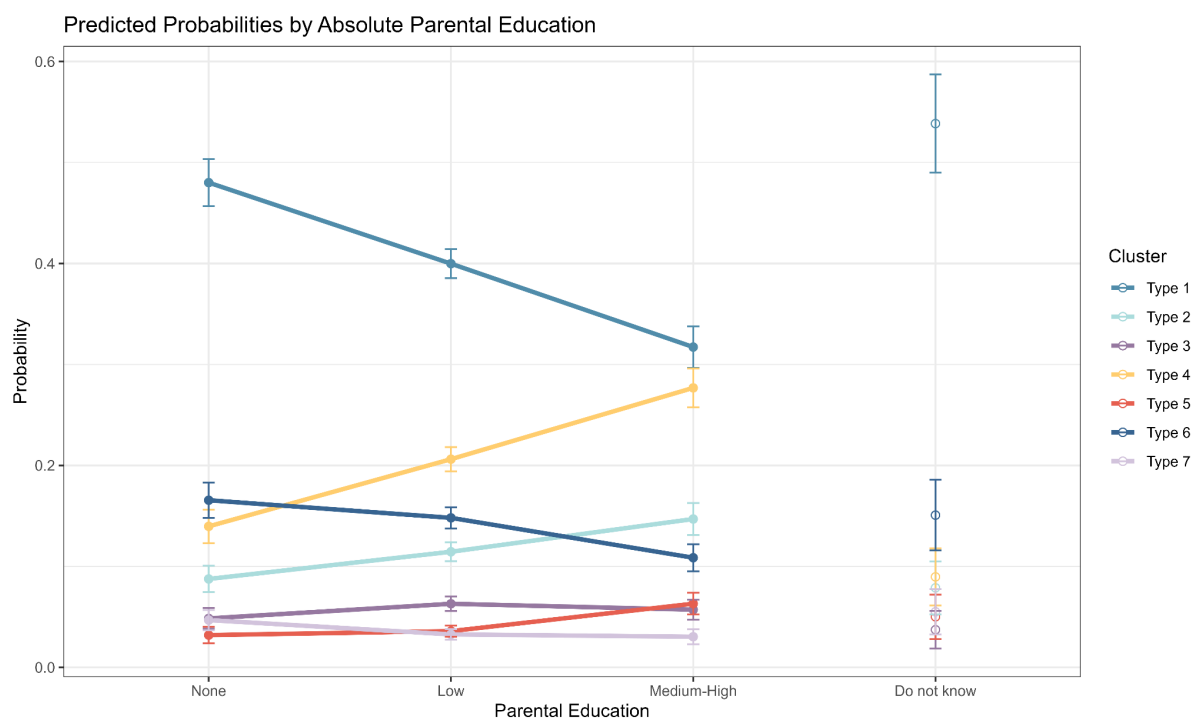


Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of being in each cluster, by parental socioeconomic status. The probabilities are obtained by controlling for birth cohort, rural-urban location; having lived with a single parent for most of the childhood; number of siblings and indigenous status.



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