

Caring Across Households: Family Networks and Intergenerational Care in Mexico

This study investigates how family networks, both co-resident and non-co-resident, reorganize in response to the increasing care needs of their eldest members. It focuses on intergenerational dynamics and the interactions between households that shape caregiving in Mexico, a country experiencing rapid population aging, significant social inequality, and limited state welfare support. By examining the spatial distribution of family members and the role of non-co-resident networks in caregiving, this research seeks to enhance understanding of family networks beyond the household, with a particular focus on socially vulnerable contexts.

In recent decades, family structures have evolved beyond the traditional nuclear household, giving rise to more complex and diverse residential arrangements (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020). Scholars such as Bonvalet and Lelièvre (2012, 2016) have demonstrated that family networks are shaped by temporal and spatial dynamics, as members manage physical distance and proximity to meet the caregiving needs of elderly dependents. Their work emphasizes the importance of considering broader social, material, and spatial contexts to fully understand caregiving within family networks.

In Mexico, the population aged 60 and over has grown substantially, coinciding with deep economic inequality that restricts access to care and health services. Due to the state's limited involvement in welfare provision, the responsibility of caregiving rests primarily on family networks, especially women (Arriagada, 2002). Understanding how these networks reorganize and adapt to growing care demands in the absence of institutional support is essential for clarifying family care strategies in an increasingly uncertain context.

The study is structured in two complementary parts. The first part examines five key Mexican surveys that collect data on family dynamics, caregiving, and interactions between co-resident and non-co-resident family members: the Mexican Health and Aging Study (MHAS/ENASEM), the National Time Use Survey (ENUT), the National Family Survey (ENDIFAM), the National Survey for the Care System (ENASIC), and the Labor and Social Co-responsibility Survey (ELCOS). This section evaluates the

extent to which these surveys capture kinship and caregiving roles beyond the household, highlighting both their strengths and limitations for analyzing support networks across households.

Preliminary findings indicate that, although these surveys provide useful insights into family networks and elderly care, they often prioritize data collection centered around the household head. This focus restricts the ability to fully understand the contributions of other family members, particularly those living apart, in caregiving activities, thereby limiting a comprehensive analysis of extended family networks.

The second part of the study uses a qualitative approach to complement these quantitative insights, reconstructing family and residential trajectories to explore how caregiving responsibilities are distributed between co-resident and non-co-resident relatives. Drawing on biographical and relational studies (Bonvalet & Lelièvre, 2012), this section examines how family members coordinate care across distances. It investigates how both co-resident and non-co-resident family members must reorganize spatially to meet the care needs of their elderly relatives, especially in contexts where limited state welfare forces families to assume greater caregiving responsibilities.

The qualitative analysis is expected to reveal that non-co-resident relatives play a crucial role in caregiving, particularly in managing resources and offering support from a distance. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that, in the absence of adequate state support, relatives—such as adult children or extended kin—often take on financial and logistical responsibilities, even when living apart from the elderly dependent. The study also anticipates that family histories and geographic dispersion influence caregiving strategies. Although dispersed families may face greater logistical challenges, they often develop alternative care strategies, such as creating localized support networks or relying on the daily and residential mobility of certain family members, primarily women.

By combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how family networks respond to increasing caregiving demands in the context of limited institutional support and a rapidly aging

population. It highlights the evolving strategies families employ, particularly in socially vulnerable settings, to manage caregiving beyond household and generational boundaries.

References

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