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Intergenerational Exchanges in Mexico:

Types and Intensity of Support

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Abstract

This article analyses exchanges of support between the elderly and adult generations and by gender, based on data from the United Nations household survey in Mexico City (SABE, 2000), and the National Study of Ageing and Health (ENASEM, 2001). Results indicate that in Mexico both generations – elderly parents and adult children – provide support, such as money, services, care or gifts for grandchildren, according to gender roles and the generation's resources. Men provide monetary support and reproduce their role as family providers, but this role depends on having an income from work and, in later years, a pension, a more common situation among men than among women. Women develop their female domestic role as caregivers. They do not have a formal income, but receive informal economic support and offer services and care to their relatives, reproducing their invisible and unpaid work during their life course. Both types of support are widely exchanged between elderly parents and adult children and children-in-law.

Keywords

family; interchange; intergenerational; support

Introduction

It is estimated that over the next two decades the elderly population in Mexico will become one of the 10 largest in the world. This article discusses family and intergenerational exchanges and the Mexican ageing process, considering differences by gender and informal networks and interchanges. Different male and female generations assume different roles in society, family and community, in a complex process of networks, representations, status and stereotypes about the elderly, youth and adults (Elder, 1987; Hareven and Masaoka, 1998). Obligations are renegotiated by generations in institutions, as well as in the family and community networks. The higher life expectancy increases rates of female widowhood and leads to a complex structure of households and income during the later part of the female life course (Gomes, 2001; Uhlenberg, 1978, 1980; Young, 1987). On the other hand, adult and older generations are reinforcing the traditional female roles, which are centred around taking care of the family, and adding new female roles and routinizing domestic activities (Chant, 1991; Varley and Blasco, 2001). Inequality and lack of formal distributive

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resources put the poorer elderly at a disadvantage in intergenerational, family and community bargains, making it difficult to obtain support and less attractive to offer it (Gomes, 2001; Young, 1987).

Two recent quantitative surveys have focused on the exchanges in and between families and generations in Mexico. SABE[1] sampled 1200 residents over 60 years old in Mexico City in 2000, and ENASEM[2] surveyed 13,500 national residents over 60 years old in 2001. Both surveys focus on the elderly, their health and formal and informal support between generations. However, each survey measures different variables and uses different approaches to study these topics. While SABE is centred on identifying and measuring the total number of elderly relatives and total support exchanges with the elderly, ENASEM sought to establish the relationships between generations over 50 years old and their spouses, ascendants and descendants in a geo-referenced manner. Accordingly, the ENASEM study has a more complex approach to family and intergenerational relationships, because it allows for the establishment of links between different generations, and for analysis of family interchanges at the household level, as well as at neighbourhood, city, country and international level. Due to these differences between the two surveys, results are analysed separately, although I try to find consistency among results from both.

Results indicate that the accelerated ageing process experienced by the Mexican population is evidencing the limited availability of institutional support, and the role played by informal support to mitigate inequality. But, at the same time, evidence shows limitations in informal support to solve problems that stem from the ageing process in a historical context of social and gender inequality.

Population and Socioeconomic Context in Mexico

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of people over 60 years old increased from near 5 million to near 7 million, or from 6 percent to 7 percent of the total Mexican population. Mexico City has a concentration of some of the most important industrial and service settings in Latin America, and a concentration of elderly inhabitants also: individuals over 60 years old represent 8.5 percent of the city's population. Formal employment represents 40 percent of the total labour market, and women, children and the elderly are concentrated in the informal sector, compared to men and adults. The pension system covers only 16 percent of the population over 60 years old, and families must support the needs of their children, youth, adults and elderly (Gomes, 2001).

In Mexico, the nuclear family is the norm: most households conform to the nucleus of head (with or without spouse) and children, followed by extended and one-person households. In the last decade, family structure has diversified due to ageing and modernization processes. Increases in rates of divorce and widowhood lead people to live alone or without a partner, with or without children. Ageing contributes to this diversification, promoting increases in

[1]The United Nations financed a series of surveys on family support and ageing in Latin American cities (SABE).
[2]The National Institute of Ageing (United States of America) initiated the National Survey of Health and Ageing (ENASEM), a panel study of individuals over 50 years old across Mexico.

the proportion of elderly individuals and couples living alone, and of extended families (Gomes, 2001; Young, 1987).

Changes in family structure occur in parallel to new contracts between generations and genders. It is assumed that exchanges between generations depend, on the one hand, on the availability of parents and children, and, on the other hand, on the availability of resources, services, care and other types of formal and informal support.

In Mexico, institutional support such as pensions is scarce. Anthropologists emphasize the importance of family networks and solidarity to support the elderly. Are institutional support and family complementary, or competing sources of support? Is the lack of institutional support leading families to reinforce networks and exchanges? Do families have limits to their support of elderly generations? Who supports who? Who are in the best situation to offer economic, physical services and emotional support in Mexican families? Are family exchanges a substitute for policies? This article draws on surveys on ageing and generational exchange to analyse the links between the ageing process and family interchanges in Mexico.

Demographic Transition: The Availability of Parent and Child Generations

Ascendants – The Parents of the Generation Over 60 Years Old—In spite of the current high life expectancy in Mexico, few individuals over 60 years old in Mexico have surviving parents. This is due to increases in life expectancy being relatively recent. Most people born after the 1950s will have survived into their sixties, whereas many of their parents' generation will probably not have lived beyond 40. As a result of this gap between the surviving oldest and old generations, currently only 2.7 percent of individuals over 60 years old have a surviving father and only 8.3 percent have a surviving mother (ENASEM, 2001). In Mexico City, these proportions are slightly higher: 3.4 percent of people over 60 have a surviving father and 11.5 percent have a surviving mother (SABE, 2000).

At the national level, there are three times more surviving mothers (645,000) than surviving fathers (207,000) of individuals over 60 years old. But mothers are younger (mean = 87 years) than fathers (mean = 90 years). In spite of these mothers' younger age, 37.7 percent of them need help, and 53.0 percent of them live with their 60 years plus children. In contrast, only 18.4 percent of this generation of fathers need help, and only 5.5 percent live with a son or daughter (ENASEM, 2001). Increasing older age is related to a higher incidence of chronic diseases and incapacity, which means a higher demand for support and co-residence. In Mexico, however, the oldest generation of mothers are not as old as the fathers, but they are more numerous and more dependent on care and co-residence than the fathers.

Descendants – The Children of the Generation Over 60 Years Old—The offspring of people now in their sixties are very numerous in Mexico. Between the 1940s and 1980s, life expectancy almost doubled (Campos Ortega, 1993), and these generations are progressively more numerous because more were being born and more have survived in this period. Both the elderly and adult generations reproduced the universal marriage, motherhood/fatherhood pattern, with very high fertility. Nationally, the current generation

over 60 has had on average 6.6 children, and 6.3 of their children are still alive. Only 6.9 percent of the over sixties have never had children[3] (ENASEM, 2001).

In Mexico City, these proportions are lower: 6 percent of the generation over 60 have never had children, while those who have had families have had between four and six children.[4] As with the national population, in Mexico City most of that generation's children have survived: 48 percent are between 38 and 45 years old. Moreover, 7.5 percent of the generation over 60 have at least one stepchild (one-third of these has one stepchild, another third has two and one-third has three stepchildren), while only 3.8 percent of them have adopted children (and of these, 80 percent have just one adopted child) (SABE, 2000).

Among the total population, 73 percent of the children of the generation over 60 years old are non-resident, and 27 percent co-reside with parents. In other words, one in every four adult children lives with their elderly parents and three live in a separate household. Almost all co-resident adult children are in good health (93 percent), their average age is 22 years and most are single (69 percent). Only 23 percent of co-resident adult children are married and 5 percent are separated/divorced; 19 percent have always lived with their parents, 77 percent of them have left their parents' household and returned; and they have an average of 1.4 children.

Co-resident adult children are younger than non-resident adult children. Adult children who live separately from their parents are in a more advanced stage in the life course: their average age is 43 years old; 87 percent of them are married, 10 percent are single and only 2 percent are divorced; and they have on average four or five children. The majority of non-resident adult children live in the same city as their elderly parents (2 percent live in the same house or building as their parents, 32 percent live in the same neighbourhood and 33 percent live in a different area but within the same city); only 21 percent of non-resident children live in another city and 11 percent live in the US.

These results indicate that in Mexico co-residence with the generation over 60 years old is not a norm, but a typical pattern for younger and single adult children, while older and married children tend to live in a separate household. Most adult children prefer to leave their parents' household when they marry and have children of their own. This process of dissolution of parents' households in general happens with the creation of children's new households in proximity – in the same city – to their elderly parents. However, internal and international migration is at the centre of family decisions for one out of three children who leave their parents' households.

Descendants – The Grandchildren of the Generation Over 60 Years Old— Grandchildren of individuals over 60 years old are also very numerous: only 7.6 percent of their adult children have never had any children. However, the grandchild generation is less numerous than the adult child generation, because the latter have had a fewer number of

[3]The questions on the number of children were directed to both male and female respondents.

[4]The high number and proportion of more than 10 live births indicate that this survey did not take into account neonatal and infant mortality, which was very high in Mexico in the period when these cohorts were of reproductive age. On the other hand, this question was asked of both men and women. Men may report having children with more than one woman, and because of this the number of children is not the same as in traditional surveys focusing on female fertility.

descendants. While members of the generation over 60 has near six surviving adult children, the next generation has had three children or fewer: 23 percent have had three and 21 percent have had two; only 12 percent have had four children. The mode and median are three children for the adult generation.

In Mexico City, the fertility of adult children was lower than the national level: 30.8 percent have had two, 23.5 percent have had three, 20.7 percent have had four and 14.2 percent have had one child.[5]

The first conclusion is related to the gap between the number of individuals in the elderly generation and their parents: ageing has not advanced enough in Mexico for the generation over 60 to be living together with their elderly parents. It is not very common for current adult generations to have grandparents living, and nor is it common for the youngest generation to have surviving great-grandparents. This is due to the oldest parents of the generation over 60 being born in an era of high mortality rates.

The relatively low numbers of surviving oldest parents and the gap between old and oldest generations in Mexico imply the need to study exchanges controlling for the size of each generation, or taking into account proportions, more than the number of exchanges or individuals. Today, generations over 60 years old have very few fathers surviving (near 10 percent) with whom to exchange any kind of support. But their adult children are very numerous, and they are available in the exchange relationships and family networks. Moreover, although most of these adult children are living in a separate household, two out of three of them live in the same city as their elderly parents, which facilitates physical and emotional exchanges between generations. One out every three nonresident children live in another city or in the US, but this still allows the interchange of money with their parents. These data confirm the results of previous studies, showing that elderly women in Mexico depend mainly on national and international remittances, more than pensions, salaries or other institutional support. National and international remittances between relatives in Mexico are the main source of income for women over 60 years old (Gomes, 2001).

However, while the generation over 60 and their adult children will progressively survive to advanced ages during the coming decades in Mexico, and relational experiences like being a great-grandchild will be more frequent, current and future adult generations will be progressively more numerous, and we can expect strong changes in family relationships, and new contracts between adult parents and their children.

Households, Gender and Generations

Although the generation over 60 years old and their adult children nowadays share significantly longer periods of their respective life spans, they have not tended to live in the same household. In Mexico, nuclear households are the norm, or the most common type of household. In 2000, nuclear households comprised near 70 percent of total households, and extended families represented near 20 percent. The recent ageing process has promoted

[5]Only 75 percent of adult children reported the number of children they have.

slight increases in the number and proportions of one-person households (one-third of them are elderly), of elderly couples living alone and of extended households with an elderly female head and adult children. These changes are related to women's higher life expectancy and to the almost universal institution of marriage, a norm that prevails in Mexico across generations. New family arrangements emerge according to the new phases created in the later stages of the life course. First, adult children marry and leave their parents' home, creating a new nuclear household, while the elderly parents continue living alone in a nuclear household without children, or the 'empty nest'. Second, one of the elderly couple dies (usually the man), and the elderly widow continues living alone in a one-person household, or moves in with a child, creating an extended, multi-generational household (Gomes, 2001; Young, 1987).

Living alone or with children varies by gender and according to the needs and resources of elderly and adult children. The availability of resources dictates to the decision between establishing a separate and independent household or co-residing. Comparing the two generations, proportions of male elderly (over 60) heads of the household are lower (60.8 percent) than proportions of adult male heads (82.2 percent). However, higher proportions of elderly women are heads of their household (26.4 percent) than are adult women (14.0 percent). This higher proportion of elderly women heading the household is largely accounted for by widows heading one-person households.

On the other hand, in Mexico, institutional resources are very scarce for the generation over 60 years old. The majority of them neither retires nor gets a pension. Most of the elderly keep on working (52 percent of men and 16 percent of women 60–64 years old; 32 percent of men and 10 percent of women over 65 years old). Women experience greater economic disadvantages: 22 percent of men between 60 and 64 years old and 27 percent over 65 years old receive a pension; but only 11 and 14 percent of women, respectively, receive a pension. Another form of institutional support is Procampo, directed mainly at men in rural areas (14 percent of men over 60 years old receive this benefit) (Gomes, 2001).

Due to the lack of institutional resources, the generation over 60 resorts to other sources of income. The more common alternatives are: working in the informal labour market for men and women; agricultural support (i.e. Procampo) for men; and national and international remittances for women. Therefore, for the over sixties there is a diversification of family forms, and, moreover, a diversification of sources of income, all of which vary by gender.

First, men and women over 60 years old are experiencing different changes in their family arrangements, and second, they are experiencing different changes in their sources of income. These trends also imply changes in social and family networks, in the ability to offer and receive support, in the migration process, and in the intergenerational and gender exchange. Depending on their resources, elderly men and women can live alone or co-reside with adult children. Gomes (2001) observes that in Mexico intergenerational co-residence is likely to happen in households with a higher per capita income, but it is more common among elderly women than among elderly men. Varley and Blasco (2001) observe that higher proportions of elderly Mexican women in the city of Guadalajara co-reside with children than men. This is due to the traditional female role in the family: women offer

services and take care of grandchildren, and children, children-in-law and grandchildren accept their co-residence. On the other hand, elderly men are not viewed as domestic collaborators, and sons-in-law are very reluctant to accept them living with their family and daughters.

Another gender issue is that more elderly men are abandoned by their family. According to the Mexico City survey, there are 1050 men 65 years old living in hospitals or in elderly people's homes. Oddly, informants in the household declare that all of these elderly men living in institutions are exactly 65 years old. Obviously these data are misreported, and indicate a dissociation between family and institutionalized elderly or survey flaws.

Intergenerational Exchanges

Different generations exchange money, services, gifts, care and other kinds of support, according to gender roles. Men reproduce their role of economic provider and give monetary resources to relatives. Having money depends on having a salary and this is twice as frequent among elderly men than among elderly women, and twice as many men receive a pension than women. Those in a disadvantageous economic situation would therefore be 'dependent' on their relatives. Varying stereotypes persist about the elderly and family: on the one hand, they are viewed as 'a burden on the family'; on the other, it is claimed that in the Mexican culture 'families would never abandon their elderly'. However, income surveys in Mexico show that 60 percent of elderly men are heads of their households, 40 percent of them have a salary and 30 percent get a pension. The dependants are women, who are mainly spouses and a group comprising 'other relatives' of the household head. In Mexico, most elderly women have never participated in the labour market, and today they are eligible to social security benefits only as their husband's spouse (Gomes, 2001). Elderly women who are heads of households have scarce resources: only 10 percent get a salary, and 10 percent get a pension.

Due to the lack of institutional resources, families have developed complex networks of informal support: economic transfers such as national and international remittances, donations and gifts between relatives and friends (Gomes, 2001; Wong et al., 2000), physical and emotional support or exchanges of services (Robles, 2000). These networks guarantee status and social relationships, and promote the capacity to negotiate and assume an important role in the informal interchange.

The National Study of Ageing and Health

As indicated earlier, fewer than 10 percent of the generation over 60 have surviving parents. In this section, I first analyse support given by the generation over 60 and their siblings to these aged parents, drawing on data from the ENASEM study of 2001. Among individuals over 60 years old with a surviving father and/or mother, 39 percent of them (294,000) support their parents economically. The study reports that half of them gave their parents more than US$20 a month in the preceding two years. On the other hand, only 16 percent (121,000) of individuals over 60 help their parents with health care, or with basic personal care, such as dressing, eating or washing for at least one hour a day. Eighty-six percent of

this support is given to the aged mother, and only 14 percent to the father. Moreover, the survey respondents over 60 reported that most of their siblings and/or siblings' spouses also helped their parents with economic support (63 percent), and 66 percent of this economic support exceeded US$20 a month. Must siblings/siblings' spouses also help the parents with personal care (37 percent). In general, it is their mothers (70 percent) who receive the help, and for over one hour a day, as reported for the preceding two years. One-third of individuals over 60 and their siblings have come to an agreement whereby they share economic support and the physical care of surviving parents.

I now analyse support between this generation and their adult children. Support given by the generation over 60 to their adult children is less common than support received by these elderly parents. Fewer than 5 percent of the generation over 60 years old reported giving economic support to their adult children, while 28 percent of adult children support their elderly parents. Economic support is more frequently given by the adult children to their elderly parents than vice versa. The mean value of this support from children to their elderly parents was 6680 pesos a year (approximately US$25 dollars a month). Most of this support (58 percent) was higher than 2500 pesos and 92 percent of this support was higher than 5000 pesos a year.

On the other hand, the mean value of support given by elderly parents to their children was 2892 pesos a year over the preceding two years (or almost US$12 a month). This mean value is 57 percent lower than the mean value of support from children to elderly parents. Therefore, although support offered by elderly parents to their children is more frequent, its value is much lower than the support the parents receive from their children. For example, the median value from elderly parents to children is half, and the standard deviation is lower too, compared to support from the adult children to their elderly parents.

To summarize, the generation over 60 years old offers important support to their parents: 39 percent of them give money and 16 percent give care, but they interchange less with their adult children: they receive economic support only from 14 percent and they give support to only 5 percent of their adult children. Although there are far more adult children providing than receiving economic support from the generation over 60 years old, the mean value given by adult children to their parents is much lower than the mean value received.

However, 59 percent of individuals over 50 years old believe that they will count on their children's economic support in the future, and 36 percent believe they must reciprocate this help in the future. Results show that this expectation is not yet a reality or a norm in Mexico.

Taking into account that the same children can give and receive economic support from the generation over 60 years old, I rested the value received from that given by each child (given–received). Results show that there are 41 percent of children who receive but who do not give money to their parents. The rest of the children, who are in the majority (59 percent), exchange money with their parents, sometimes giving money, sometimes receiving it. But the final balance is positive: they contribute more money than they receive from their parents.

The Mexico City Household Survey

Support Given by the Generation Over 60 Years Old

The Mexico City survey (SABE, 2000) analyses all relatives who exchange support with the over-60 generation. Results show that 87 percent of individuals over 60 years old offer some type of support, such as money, services, gifts or taking care of children for relatives or friends. Of these 90 percent are women. Ranking first is the support exchanged between spouses: men support their wives with money (33 percent), gifts (14 percent) and services (7 percent); women offer money to their spouses (28 percent), services (18 percent), gifts (12 percent) and childcare (7 percent) (see Table 1).

Second is the support given by the elderly to their children, who receive 20 percent of the total support given by their parents. Leaving aside the support given to the spouse, children are the beneficiaries of more than half the support given by their parents. Half of the support children receive from both parents is financial; the other half comprises services, gifts and taking care of grandchildren from both parents.

Third, elderly men and women support different relatives. Elderly men offer mainly money and gifts to their parents. Elderly women support their sons and daughters-in-law financially and with services and gifts.

Finally, elderly men and women also support different members of their family as follows: men basically provide money to their children-in-law, but also give money to siblings and other relatives. Women support siblings more and other relatives with all types of support.

In sum, services are a very frequent type of support, typically by women and offered to all relatives. Men tend to provide money, mainly to spouses, children and children-in-law, but also to all relatives. Gifts are part of the support that the elderly provide, but elderly mothers give more gifts to their spouses and children, while elderly fathers give five times more gifts to parents and children-in-law. Elderly women provide nearly three times as much childcare as elderly men; they care for their grandchildren but also for the children of other relatives, while men only take care of their own grandchildren.

The gender perspective applied to intergenerational interchanges highlights the family role of elderly women. In Mexican families they are usually married, and in general do not participate in the labour market. However, they offer a wide diversity of support to different family members and are at the centre of the family interchange relationship. On the other hand, it is interesting to observe a strong interchange of services between elderly spouses, from women to men and vice versa. These results suggest that assumptions about lack of gender solidarity and *machismo* in Mexico are not accurate, because clearly elderly spouses collaborate with each other.

The results of the SABE study refer to Mexico City only. In Mexico, there is a higher number of elderly heads of households in rural localities compared to urban areas (Gomes, 2001). In rural areas, the role and dynamics of support networks would be more specific due to the lack of institutional support or steady income and the fact that a subsistence economy

prevails and there have been huge migration flows of adult generations to the cities and to the US.

In both rural and urban contexts family support systems can supplement the lack of economic resources and institutional support, but gender differences are accentuated, to the disadvantage of women, who help several generations and relatives providing services, physical support to adults, caring for children and giving gifts.

Support Received by the Generation Over 60 Years Old

In Mexico City, just 12 percent of men and 6 percent of women over 60 years old receive no kind of support at all. There are more than 1 million elderly people receiving support, of whom the overwhelming majority are women (945 million vs only 130,000 men).

Men receive support mainly from their wives (50 percent) and children (29 percent), and less from other relatives (7 percent) and children-in-law (6 percent). Spouses give money, services and other types of support to elderly men.

The most frequent kind of support men received by men is money (43 percent), mainly from their spouses, followed by other support (22 percent), services (19 percent) and gifts (16 percent). Economic support for elderly men comes from the spouse (19 percent) and their children (15 percent). In all these forms of support, the wife is the main interchange actor, except for gifts, where children also play an important role.

Women receive support first from their spouses (58 percent), mainly in the form of money (37 percent), other (10 percent) and gifts (8 percent). Moreover, they receive support from their children (25 percent), and a little from children-in-law (7 percent); in both cases the support is mainly economic (Table 2).

In sum, taking into account not only economic but other forms of support, in Mexico City the generation over 60 years old are providers as well as receivers of support. Support is exchanged first between elderly spouses, and second between elderly parents and adult children. Parents and children-in-law are the next to benefit from support relations. The elderly generation receives most of the total support given by children-in-law, but provide a great deal of support to them. There are differences in the type of support exchanged by gender and generation. Elderly women provide mainly services and care, but receive usually money and services. Elderly men provide money and receive services from different relatives.

Support of the Elderly with Physical Limitations

One in four individuals over 60 years old (24.4 percent) receives some kind of support in terms of daily activities: 15.5 percent of them receive help with one activity, 5.6 percent receive help with two activities and 3.3 percent receive help with three or more physical activities. The elderly generation need support with heavy housework (10.4 percent of individuals over 60 years old) and to buy food (6.8 percent). Other activities for which they need support are light housework (5.5 percent), taking medicine (5.5 percent), having a shower (4.7 percent), dressing (4.6 percent) and preparing food (4.4 percent). They also need

help to go to bed (3.7 percent), to manage their finances (3.3 percent), to cross a room (2.7 percent), use the toilet (2.4 percent) and to eat (1.7 percent).

This help is provided mainly by children (48 percent), grandchildren (14 percent) and spouses (13 percent). But, to a smaller degree, it might also be provided by a paid careworker (9 percent), stepchildren (6 percent) or another relative (5 percent). In general, physical help occurs within the same household (80 percent), but it can mean that children and grandchildren travel across the city (11 percent) or within the neighbourhood (8 percent) to support parents or grandparents who have some physical limitation.

Finally, results from the Mexico City study reveal an overall lack in the health system: one out of four individuals over 60 years old receive family support for daily activities, and many of them receive help to do activities such as heavy housework, buying and preparing food, doing light housework, taking medicine, having a shower, dressing, going to bed, managing money, getting from one side of a room to the other, using the toilet and eating. This help is provided mainly by children, grandchildren and spouses. It might be paid care or provided by stepchildren or another relative, but in far smaller proportions.

Conclusions

Individuals over 60 years old in Mexico tend not to have surviving parents, but they have numerous children and grandchildren, and mostly do not co-reside with them. The co-residence among generations is basically among parents and younger and single adult children.

Higher infant survival rates increase the possibility of children co-residing with the elderly, but the migration of adult children decreases it. Economic support is very important in intergenerational exchanges in Mexico. National and international remittances among relatives are the main source of income for women over 60 years old. Therefore, changes in the size and availability of each generation in interplay with the availability of resources and migration impact on contracts between adult parents and their children.

In spite of the fact that the majority of elderly parent and adult children do not live together, extended households with an elderly member are increasing proportionally, as are elderly one-person households, as a result of ageing and increased rates of female widowhood.

The increase in intergenerational co-residence and remittances from children to elderly women are support alternatives in a context of scarce institutional resources for people over 60 years old. On the other hand, families have developed complex networks of informal support, which apart from economic transfer or remittances also include donations, gifts and services interchanged between relatives and friends.

Although the elderly are supposed to be ‘dependent’ on their relatives, most of them are in fact heads of their households and most of the elderly males have an income (salary and/or a pension). These data contradict stereotypes about the elderly being a burden or, alternatively, being the respected patriarch of the family. Elderly men are economic providers and give monetary resources to their relatives, in particular their spouse and children. Elderly women

are usually economic dependants: most of them do not work or get a pension, and need to receive monetary support from relatives. However, they are not socially dependent. Women are the main actors in exchanges networks, supporting all their relatives with services and care.

Although few Mexican elderly have surviving parents, when they do, more than half of them offer some type of support for their ascendants, mainly in the form of money and care. However, they receive economic support more frequently than give it to adult children, and the value of the support they give is much lower than the mean value received.

Most of the support exchanged does not occur between generations, but between elderly spouses. Myths about a lack of gender solidarity in Mexico are deconstructed: in the domestic space elderly men and women collaborate with each other. Men reproduce their provider role, while women reproduce their domestic role in interchange relationships. Family and intergenerational interchanges reproduce gender differences, and highlight the lack of institutional pensions and health support for the elderly in Mexico. It is important to deconstruct myths and extreme representations about perfect or excessively conflictual intergenerational relationships, and to know that obligations are being renegotiated by generations in institutions, as well as in the family and community networks, according to the increased longevity of successive generations.

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Biography

Cristina Gomes is an advisor in population and development at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and researcher at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO-Mexico. Her research interests are population dynamics, development and family, poverty and inequality, generational availability and interchange, resources and institutions, health and ethnicity. Recent publications in English include *Social Development and Family Changes* (Cambridge Scholar Press, 2006); 'Social Security in Mexico', in J. M. Eric and P. H. Stuart (eds) *Encyclopedia of Social Welfare History in North America* (London: Sage, 2005); 'Ageing in Mexico – Families, Informal Care and Reciprocity' (co-author with Montes de Oca), in P. L. Sherlock (ed.) *Living Longer* (London: Zed Books, 2004); 'Intergenerational Transfers: Income: Brazil, Colombia and Mexico', in *Exclusion and Engagement: Social Policy in Latin America* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 2002); and 'Life Course, Households and Institutions', *Comparative Studies of Family* (2002).

Table 1

Types of Support Given by Generation Over 60 Years Old to Relatives (in percentages)

	Types of support					
Relative	**Money**	**Services**	**Gifts**	**Care**	**Other**	**Percentage of elderly giving support**
Support given by men						
Spouse	33.31	7.01	14.12	2.80	1.39	58.63
Children	11.11	7.81	0.98	1.70	0.94	22.54
Parents	3.23	1.92	2.63	0.00	0.00	7.79
Siblings	2.54	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.54
Children-in-law	4.67	0.00	1.34	0.00	0.00	6.01
Stepchildren	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other relatives	1.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.25	2.50
Total	**56.12**	**16.74**	**19.07**	**4.50**	**3.57**	**100.00**
Support given by women						
Head of household	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Spouse	27.80	17.71	11.75	7.44	0.89	65.60
Children	8.85	5.85	2.25	2.10	0.99	20.03
Father only	0.35	0.12	0.00	0.12	0.12	0.71
Siblings	1.20	0.94	0.52	0.25	0.16	3.07
Children-in-law	2.42	1.43	0.78	0.48	0.42	5.55
Grandchildren	0.38	0.38	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.97
Other relatives	1.09	0.58	0.25	0.51	0.27	2.71
Non-relatives	0.52	0.52	0.00	0.00	0.10	1.13
Domestic employees	0.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.24
Total	**42.86**	**27.53**	**15.56**	**11.11**	**2.95**	**100.00**

Source: Own estimations based on SABE, 2000.

Table 2

Types of Support Received by Generation Over 60 Years Old from Relatives (in percentages)

	Types of support				
Relative	**Money**	**Services**	**Gifts**	**Other**	**Percentage of elderly receiving support**
Men					
Spouse	19.04	12.13	6.27	12.28	49.72
Children	15.45	2.27	6.29	5.15	29.15
Parents	1.30	1.30	0.00	1.30	3.91
Sibling	1.15	0.00	1.15	0.00	2.29
Children-in-law	2.99	0.00	1.69	1.56	6.24
Stepchildren	0.50	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.50
Other relatives	2.68	2.90	0.00	1.60	7.19
Total	**43.10**	**18.61**	**16.39**	**21.90**	**100.00**
Women					
Head of household	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.19
Spouse	37.34	3.07	7.87	9.80	58.09
Children	14.06	1.42	4.86	4.62	24.96
Father only	0.20	0.11	0.09	0.09	0.50
Siblings	1.36	0.22	0.64	0.65	2.86
Children-in-law	3.82	0.92	1.56	1.06	7.37
Grandchildren	0.57	0.00	0.22	0.40	1.20
Other relative	1.75	0.10	0.49	0.35	2.69
Non-relatives	0.85	0.57	0.52	0.21	2.15
Domestic employees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	**60.06**	**6.41**	**16.26**	**17.28**	**100.00**

Source: Own estimations based on SABE, 2001.

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