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**MALE FERTILITY, REPRODUCTIVE VALUATIONS AND SEXUAL PRACTICES IN
MEXICO: TRANSFORMATIONS UNDERWAY?**

(Abstract)

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 20th century, Mexico, a country in the midst of a demographic transition, underwent significant changes characterised by a rapid decline in fertility and a systematic increase in life expectancy. The decrease in the total fertility rate, which was in the order of 7 children per woman in the 1960s and 1970s, as opposed to 2.21 nowadays, has been so great that the country may achieve generational replacement rates by about 2005 (CONAPO, 2004).

It is often pointed out that this significant demographic transformation in fertility was and is mainly due to the advance of family planning programs through the use of contraceptive methods (both modern and traditional) that have been fully incorporated by most couples. Nevertheless, it has been widely recognised that institutional family planning programs¹ have largely oriented their strategies towards women, making them primarily responsible for the effective use of contraception. Proof of this is the fact that in 1997, vasectomy and condom use was only mentioned by 1.8% and 5.5% of female users of contraceptive methods. Even if methods of fertility regulation requiring men's direct and indirect co-operation are included, they account for no more than 20% of total use (CONAPO, 2004).

Although in general terms, there is obviously very little male participation in contraceptive use, some research results point to the existence of new attitudes among several Mexican males-particularly younger men, with higher educational attainment living in urban settings²-to contraceptive practice, characterised by a tendency to create spheres of communication and shared decisions by the couple.

Despite limited male participation in contraceptive practice, it has been suggested that the scope of family planning programs in Mexico has been such that it has contributed to the emergence of new reproductive preferences and a reformulation of the value placed on children among the female and male population. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the fact that various micro-demographic, and qualitative studies have shown that nowadays, for Mexican men, regarding paternity as a demonstration of virility and the transition

¹ Implemented nationwide since 1976.

² Between 1992 and 1997, the relative importance of methods requiring males' direct participation rose slightly in Mexico, particularly in urban settings and as a result of a slight increase in condom use (CONAPO, 2004).

towards adulthood no longer involves procreating the largest possible number of children. Nowadays couples prefer to have fewer children with high educational attainment.

At the same time, it is important to note that in Mexico, sexually-transmitted diseases (STD) constitute a major health problem, since they have experienced a significant increase, making them one of the ten leading causes of morbidity, with an average of 200,000 cases per year. In particular, AIDS, which primarily affects the male population and is usually sexually transmitted, rose substantially during the 1990s, since its accumulated incidence rose from 8.4 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in 1990 to 39.7 in 1998. In fact it is now the 16th leading cause of death, with a rate of 4.2 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants (CONAPO, 2004).

In this respect, the findings of various studies reporting that condom use among Mexican men varies according to the type of women with whom they engage in sexual relations are particularly important. It is also worth noting that sexual activity is beginning at an increasingly early age and usually involves very little use of practices to prevent either unwanted pregnancies or STD.

Only recently has the Mexican government made efforts to spread the notion of reproductive health among the male population and to promote reproductive health programs that seek to increase male participation in reproductive decision making and contraceptive use as well as to increase information on and expand the supply of contraceptive methods for male use, particularly condoms, as a temporary means of regulating fertility and preventing STD and HIV-AIDS.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

In our opinion, the issues we have raised constitute new dynamics that are undoubtedly currently redefining the patterns of fertility among Mexican males. Therefore, in this talk we analyse the changes that have taken place in the aspects mentioned earlier and their possible influence on the dynamics of male fertility in the Mexican context, characterised by profound social and demographic changes. These three dimensions include: a) male attitudes to contraception; b) men's appraisal of their children and their relationship with new reproductive preferences and c) males' sexual behaviour, perceptions of risk and protective attitudes towards STD and HIV-AIDS.

DATA

The data come from the very recent National Reproductive Health Survey on the male population, applied in 2003 to approximately 1,000 Mexican males between the ages of 20 and 59. This is a broad survey taken in various parts of the country, which, despite not being representative at the national level, will provide valuable new information on the diversity of male sexual, reproductive and contraceptive behaviour. It is important to note that this database has not yet been exploited.

METHOD

The information will be exploited in two stages:

- 1) The first stage of analysis involves the changes that have taken place over time in each of the dimensions described (attitudes to contraception, value placed on children and family size and sexual behaviour and protection regarding STD and HIV-AIDS), for which a longitudinal analysis will be carried out on the basis of three generations of males:
 - a. Pre-transitional: those aged between 45 and 59 at the time of the survey (born between 1944 and 1958).
 - b. Transitional: those aged between 25 and 44 at the time of the survey (born between 1959 and 1978).
 - c. Post-transitional: those aged between 20 and 24 at the time of the survey (born between 1979 and 1983).

- 2) The second stage involves using multivariate regression analysis to study the influence of changes in these three dimensions on changes in the fertility of Mexican males.

We consider that modifications of these dimensions constitute an important factor which, together with state intervention in the dissemination of family planning practices, helps explain the significant changes observed in the reproductive practices and fertility levels of Mexican couples in recent decades. We also appreciate the opportunity to compare these results from a highly specific context, such as the Mexican one, in the midst of a phase of demographic transition, with those of other societies.

REFERENCES

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