

**Sexual División of Labor and Decision-Making Power in the Parental household and their  
Influences on the Sexual Behavior of Mexican Youngsters**

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## Introduction

Research on the sexuality of Mexican youth show the importance of family on gender socialization process and sexuality of individuals. Parents play an important role in sexual scripts socialized for their children: parent-child communication, sex of the parent with whom the child talks on sexuality, parents' relationship, parent's attitudes to gender and sexual roles, etc., all of them establish the links between gender socialization and sexuality. Relatives are also important as they exert a direct influence on their sexual behavior or play a role gender model for sexual behaviors and attitudes. Most studies have used a qualitative approach, and although they have been very helpful in informing the importance of gender socialization on sexuality, we do not know if sex-typed activities in which children and adolescents are socialized into the family have an effect on youth's sexual behavior and attitudes and the direction of that effect.

With this work I intend to fill this gap by analyzing the effect that gender dynamics in the parental household have on the likelihood of sexual debut and condom use for adolescents and young people, using a national survey in Mexico. Gender dynamics are conceptualized in this paper as the sexual division of labor and sexual division of decision-making power in the household.

The sexuality of adolescents and young adults is an issue of concern for all societies. The prevalent perspective in the analysis of adolescent sexuality focuses on the possible negative consequences of early and/or uninformed sexual behavior: unwanted pregnancy, abortions, teenage pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Additionally, the increasing spread of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)<sup>1</sup> and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as the growing recognition of problems such as sexual dysfunction and sexual violence, have highlighted the importance of sexuality and sexual health per se. However, the sexuality of adolescents and young people is becoming an important issue not just because of the negative consequences that early exercise of sexuality could have, but also because sexuality is now increasingly being seen in a human

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<sup>1</sup> In developing countries youth, and particularly women, have the highest rate of new cases of HIV/AIDS (United Nations, 2005).

rights framework. According to this new perspective, sexuality is not limited to the reproductive years but extends over the entire life span of individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Gender norms shape our sexual experiences given that they provide us with information about the appropriated behavior for men and women in sexual interactions (Rice and McCormick, 1983). Family is one of the first places where we learn about gender roles, norms and sexuality (Witt, 1997; McHale, Crouter, and Whiteman, 2003). Although it is widely accepted that family has a big influence in sexual and gender identity, it is not very well known the paths through which gender-role socialization in the family, other than parent's gender and sexual beliefs, affects our sexuality. Sex-typed activities, analyzed through the sexual division of labor and decision-making power in the household, could be one of the means through which family socialize differently each gender affecting the sexuality of individuals. Gender-role socialization might affect sexual agency, influencing the ability of individuals to follow or reject gender stereotypes in their sexual behavior, or their ability to negotiate sexual encounters.

Thus, the specific goal for this research is to analyze the effects of the sexual division of labor and decision-making power in the household on the likelihood of sexual debut and condom use for Mexican adolescents and youth (ages 15 to 24) who are single and living with both parents.

To know how Mexican adolescent and youngsters, males and females, live their sexuality could give us guidelines to make the sexual experience of men and women something positive and out of risk. Moreover, understanding how family gender dynamics affects sexuality would permit to introduce specific plans and programs for adolescents addressing gender inequality.

### **Specific question**

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<sup>2</sup> The World Health Organization now recognizes the importance of sexual health as a separate matter from reproductive health that needs resources and attention in its own right (WHO, 2004).

Compared to adolescents and youth who were raised in “traditional” families, are males and females, who were raised in more egalitarian families, less likely to be active sexually and more likely to use condoms? Do outcomes differ by gender and socioeconomic status?

### **Hypotheses**

I would expect that, as compared to individuals living in families with traditional or stereotypical gender dynamics, those individuals who were raised in more egalitarian families, regarding the division of labor and decision-making power, are less likely to be active sexually and more likely to use condoms.

The experience of empowerment/disempowerment and sexual agency can impact particularly women since they are more disempowered in Mexican society compared to men. For this reason I would expect the effect of gender dynamics on sexuality be stronger for females.

I would also expect the effect of gender practices to emerge in some family contexts but not in others. It could be that individuals from high or middle settings have access to more sources of influence for egalitarian gender dynamics or they perform in environments where egalitarian gender dynamics are more accepted, decreasing the probability of individuals to be affected by those gender dynamics in their families.

### **Methods**

To answer my research questions, I use the 2000 National Youth Survey in Mexico. It is a cross sectional survey with a total sample size of 49,312 individuals ages 12 to 29. The design of the sample was probabilistic, stratified, multistage, and clustered. It is representative at the national and state level, for men, women and quinquennial age groups. It collected basic demographic information about all the household members and also some information on gender dynamics of the parental household of adolescents and youth, even if they were already living by their own or married. The survey was implemented by the Mexican Youth Institute in coordination with the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics of Mexico (INEGI, by its acronym in Spanish). The main purpose of the survey was to gather information on young people from all the country to elaborate general programs

and public policies. The survey collected basic information of all the household members such as age, sex, civil status, level of education, occupation, health insurance, and income. After this, all the individuals in the household ages 12 to 29 were selected to be interviewed. Several topics were explored, such as parents-children and father mother relationship quality, communication with each parent on several matters as religion, sexuality, politics, etc. Other topics are schooling, job history, religion and religiosity, leisure time activities, mass-media influence. Questions about sexuality were asked only to individuals 15 to 29 years old. Also some questions about marriage and couple relationships were asked to those people living in union or married. For people 18 years of age and older, questions about culture, social and political participation, opinions, and preferences were asked. Questions about values and symbolic representations were explored for youth 15 to 29 years old. Questions on gender dynamics were asked to youth 12 to 29 years old and they were asked even if the youth were not living with their parents anymore; if they were already married or living in union the same questions on gender dynamics were asked applied to their own families.

To analyze gender dynamics in the family I am borrowing Connell's categories of labor and power. Connell (1987) proposed taking into account what he termed as structures of labor, power and cathexis in the analysis of gender dynamic in the family. The structure of *labor* is related to the sexual division of labor among family members. It is mostly based on a division of what is considered to be public and domestic work. The former is paid, highly valued, and mostly assigned to men. In contrast, the latter is unpaid, less valued, and usually assigned to women. Different class settings change the interaction between the public and domestic sphere. The structure of *power* is related to the sexual division of power. He considers the family as a micro level of power as contrasted to a macro or global level or power where women are subordinated to men.

### *Measures*

Outcome variables:

Active sexually: All the respondents were asked *Have you ever had sexual intercourse?*

Use of condom as contraceptive will be evaluated through two questions asked to those respondents who were active sexually: *Do you use any contraceptive method?*, if yes, *What do you or your partner use?*.

Independent variables:

Sexual division of labor will be analyzed through the questions: In your family who engages in the following activities:

Housework (Cleaning, cooking, laundry, etc.);

Income earning for the household

Household maintenance

Options to answer questions of labor are: 1) Father, 2) Mother, 3) Both, 4) Brother (s), 5) Sister(s), 6) Yourself, 7) Other relative, 8) Other, 9) No response. Individuals could answer each question twice. A recode was made classifying those who share the household tasks between males and females and those who do not share. For those who share the specific household task between both males and females it was assigned a value of 1, for those who do not share the household task a value of 0 was assigned. Because each individual could give two answers to the same question both answers were considered to make the recode. In the case of answers 7 and 8 where the sex of the person is unknown it was assumed that if other relative or other person is doing a specific household task is very likely that the sex of the person agrees with the traditional sex-typed division of labor. So that in the housework task an answer of other person/other relative is assumed to mean other female person/relative. In the case of income earning an answer of other person/relative is assumed to mean other male person/relative. Finally, for the house maintenance an answer of other person/relative is assumed to be other male person/relative. The sum of both categories never was higher than 6% of the distribution in each item. An index was calculated for labor but Cronbach's alpha index was very low (less than 0.40) so I decided to evaluate each task separately. The survey considers others household tasks such as the payment of utilities and attending neighborhood and school meetings, but were not

considered because they seem to respond more to time availability than to gender issues; questions on taking care of children and elderly people were not considered neither because they have many cases where such questions don not apply resulting in missing values.

Division of decision-making power will be analyzed through the question: In your family who decides on the following issues:

How to spend money

About buying food

About buying furniture

Whether or not you or other family member can go out (salir a pasear)

About children's education

About family discipline

Permits to come back home late at night

What to do in case someone in the family is sick

Options to answer questions of power are: 1) Father, 2) Mother, 3) Both, 4) Brother (s), 5) Sister(s), 6) Yourself, 7) Other relative, 8) Other, 9) All.

A recode for these answers was also created, assigning a value of 1 for those where the decision was taken between both sexes and a value of 0 for those who do not share the decision-making power. An index was calculated adding the results on the decision-making sharing. Those who share the most of decisions have the highest score and the lower scores are for those who said the decision-making for each item was not shared. As in the labor questions, answers 7 and 8 were considered as not sharing, these answers never reach the 0.50 percent of the distribution in each item .

Control variables

family: father's level of education, parental communication.

Individual: age, religiosity, job status, and level of education.

Because gender socialization effect on sexual behavior could emerge in some socioeconomic contexts but not in others and it could have the opposite effect for males than for females, I consider

pertinent to run the statistic models by gender and mother's level of education for each outcome. I am taking mother's level of education as a proxy for socioeconomic status. In addition, level of education has been shown to be related to the sharing of the household work and to the decision-making power, because more educated women are more likely to ask for sharing power and tasks to their couples, so that of mother's education level is a pertinent variable to split the data in the analysis.

I will analyze just those single youngsters, living with both parents and younger than 25 years of age, who make a total of 14,036 cases for the analysis of those who have had sexual debut (excluding 66 cases with no answer for sexual activity), and 2,982 cases for the analysis of condom use. A survey logistic regression will be used to analyze the effect of sexual division of labor and decision-making power on the probability of have had sexual debut and condom use.

### **Literature review**

Children learn about gender roles and norms through their exposure to sex-typed behaviors in the interaction of their parents, among other sources of influence; one example could be the sex-typed division of labor. Division of paid and unpaid labor in the household are also models of gender interaction, and children pay attention not just to who does what, but who is in charge or is responsible for different assignments (Crouter, Manke, and McHale, 1995; McHale, Crouter, and Whiteman, 2003). Berk (1985), talking about American society, proposed that families are "gender factories", that is, social institutions where gendered behaviors and attitudes are formed, enforced, and reproduced, referring to Western culture, and particularly to advanced countries. Although it is widely accepted that gender socialization is a process that occurs mainly during the childhood and adolescent years in the family context, McHale, Crouter, and Whiteman (2003), in a review of the literature on the subject, suggest that the family's role in gender development is still underestimated. They note that a lot of the research has been focused on the dyad parent-child, and emphasize the importance of taking into account other subsystems in the family beyond the dyad parent-child, such as the marriage and siblings subsystems. In addition to parents, other family members or others living in the household and their



gender interactions also influence the gender development of children and adolescents. Studies in Bombay India, suggest that gender inequalities among adults are influenced by the family and household gender dynamics during the childhood and adolescent years. The differentiated assignment of household roles and tasks for boys and girls impact the women's ability to communicate, make decisions, and seek information and services (Weiss, Whelan, and Gupta, 2000).

Gender inequalities bring about unbalanced power in sexual relationships, particularly affecting the ability of women to negotiate sexual encounters, with negative consequences for their sexual health (Dixon-Mueller, 1993). The stereotype of men as more interested in sex, more aggressive, and more powerful than women increases the probabilities of a risky sexual behavior. The stereotype of women as passive-receptive, interpersonally oriented, and incompetent out of the private sphere, decreases the women's possibilities of perceive themselves as sexual actors (Rice and McCormick, 1983). According to traditional gender roles, the sexual behavior expected for women is passivity and willingness to pleasure the masculine partner (Checa, 2003) making women more vulnerable to sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies, HIV, STDs, and sexually coerced relationships. Geldstein and Pantelides (2003) and Moore (2006) found that those girls following a stereotyped sexual behavior are also more likely to have suffered a coerced sexual initiation. Traditional gender roles also demand a high level of sexual activity for men and can increase the probability of risky sexual behavior. Pleck et al. (1993) found that those individuals who held traditional attitudes toward masculinity are less likely to use condoms and more likely to have more sexual partners in the last year. Castañeda, Castañeda, and Brindis, (2001) observed that in a rural area in Mexico male adolescents are encouraged by their community to initiate sexual intercourse, and are expected to be active sexually; if they don't, their virility is in doubt. Stern et al. (2003) found that some young people living in poor areas in Mexico City, have a conceptualization of masculinity that is linked to be active sexually. They also found that peers make a lot of pressure to the sexual initiation of youth. Those who don't want to follow this pattern are characterized as homosexual ("maricón"). Villaseñor-Farías and Castañeda-Torres (2003) described that in Guadalajara, Mexico, some youth perceive violence as a

masculine characteristic that in some cases justifies sexual violence. These findings suggest that gender socialization is an important process in the sexual well-being of individuals. The analysis of gender structures in the family, that is sexual division of labor and decision-making power could be applied to the analysis of gender socialization of children and adolescents and its influence on sexuality.

Regarding gender dynamics, Mexico was characterized mostly as a typical example of patriarchal familial regime (Lewis, 1961) for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where “traditional” families, regarding the roles of men and women in the household, were the most common gender arrangement. However, Oropesa and Hogan (1994) mention several studies in Mexico that show a questioned male authority in the marriage: Sheridan, 1988; Lomnitz, 1977; Belshaw, 1967; Scrimshaw, 1978; and Elu, 1969. Studies in Mexico (Benería and Roldán, 1987; Garcia and De Oliveira, 1994, De Oliveira, 1998) have found that particularly the oldest and poorest women consider to themselves responsible for the domestic work and the husband for the household income. The most of Mexican traditional families follow a sexual division of labor and decision-making power according to gender roles stereotypes, where males are mainly assigned tasks related to income earning and females are in charge of reproduction related tasks in the household, in this patriarchal relationship pattern, male superiority is accepted as something natural and given (Mier y Terán and Rabell, 2005). Then, in a “traditional” family, we could expect housework to be primarily a woman’s responsibility, particularly a mother’s responsibility, while the men, and particularly the father, would be the primary breadwinner and would have decision-making power regarding family issues. The personal experience of each member in a family will also differ according to age, place in the kinship structure, and gender (Ariza and Oliveira, 2004).

Nowadays it is clear that gender dynamics are adjusting due to economic and cultural process linked to globalization since several decades ago. Economic crisis since 80’s and demographic changes such as lower fertility, lower mortality, increased age at marriage, and migration, originated an increased female participation in the labour market, a larger percentage of female-headed households, an increase in the proportion of extended households, and an increase in the number of family

members participating in the labour market, among others. The increased female participation in the labor market challenge the traditional gender roles since men are not anymore the only income earner. In addition, national and international movements of gender equality have also influenced the social structures of the Mexican society questioning gender dynamics in the family with traditional gender roles (De Oliveira,1998). However, transformations in gender dynamics in the family have been very slow and are reduced to some spheres, while others still resist changing (Benería and Roldán, 1987; Oropesa, 1997; Casique, 1999). Asymmetric relationships are more remarkable in sexuality and in the sexual division of labor (De Oliveira, 1998). Nevertheless, there seems to be a more open attitude toward gender equality for more educated people, those living in urban areas, and for middle and high income settings (De Oliveira, 1998; Casique, 1999; Aragón and Díaz Loving, 2002). Some authors find acceptance of masculine authority varies according to the union status of the couple (De Oliveira, 1998).

In the contemporary Mexican culture, gender roles, family gender socialization and sexuality seems to be linked. Amuchástegui (1998, 2001) through in-depth interviews, found that sexual behavior of Mexican adolescents is strongly influenced by gender norms and gender roles sexual expectations. She describes how sexual agency is downplayed for girls in social groups in Mexico that assume a bipolar (the virgin and the “puta” (whore)<sup>3</sup>) representation of female sexuality. The study found that parents play an important role in the definitions of approved and unapproved sexual behavior for each gender. Rivas (1994) discusses a more direct influence of family on the sexuality of Mexican women. She says that family, and particularly the mother, is displacing the church and its representatives as the means of controlling women’s sexuality. Thus, in some contexts, female virginity is seen as a good that should be preserved until marriage. If it is lost earlier, that is the shame of the mother because she couldn’t educate her daughter to preserve it. Through in-depth interviews

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<sup>3</sup> One side represents a good woman who is not a subject of sexual desires, except when her goal is reproduction and maternity. The other side is a negative one, with a woman that is able to feel sexual desire, who has access to pleasure and erotism. and who can exert this sexual power on men. Endorsement of this stereotype is higher in rural than in urban areas.

with pregnant teenagers in an urban place in Sonora, Mexico, Roman et al. (2000) comment that in the process of the transition from being a little girl to becoming a woman, she finds adolescents' family to have a primordial role in molding and modeling feminine and masculine stereotypes.

Sexual agency is an intrinsic part of sexual and gender identity. Agency is also related to resources, the older someone is and the more education, social status, knowledge, income, etc. an individual has, the greater his/her sense of sexual agency is likely to be. Favored individuals with these attributes have more options, resources, and possibilities to control their life and exert their will. How is sexual agency linked to socialization in the family? I believe that gender stereotyped assignment of labor and decision-making power in the household, will affect the sexual agency of adolescents and young people. Because stereotyped gender role attitudes and beliefs were mentioned above to affect sexual behavior and sexual agency, sex-typed activities in the family following gender roles stereotypes, could decrease the agency of individuals affecting their well-being, because they have the same bases of inequality as stereotyped sexual roles. Due to gender inequalities, sex-typed activities are valued differently; masculine activities are valued more than those activities usually performed by women (Connell, 1987, Burin and Meler, 1998). For the same reason men usually have the decision-making power in the most of issues regarding the well-being of the family, while women exert a more limited power on these kind of decisions. Children are aware of these differences since age two (Burin and 1998), and as they get older they learn from their gender role models that these inequalities and sex-typed activities are part of being a woman or a man (Corona, 1989). These different perspectives will, in turn, impact how they perceive to themselves as men and women, and how they perceive to others, that is, their gender identity, which, translated to the sexual field, means affecting their sexual agency. The perception of a lower empowerment for women than for men, and the lower value allocated to female activities as contrasted to male activities, could make girls feel they are also less empowered in the sexual field than men, and could make boys feel they are in higher position related to women. However, in order to keep this position, they should follow those traditional views of what is considered being a man, making them less able to perform some decisions, which in some cases

could affect his sexual health and safety (Amaro, 1995 and Wingood & DiClemente, 1998 in Kornreich et al., 2004). The result for both sexes is a low sense of sexual agency. Stereotyped perceptions make them more vulnerable to exert a sexuality that endorses the traditional views of masculinity and femininity, reproducing in the sexual field the same inequalities and unbalances of power that they learned in the domestic sphere.

### *Sexual Debut*

The reduction in the age at first sexual intercourse is nearly a universal pattern during the last two or three decades (Paul et al., 2000; Singh and Darroch, 1999). In the US, several studies have shown an increase in sexual experience among youths during the 1980s and a later decline through the 1990s. Also well documented has been a decline in teen pregnancy in the US in the 1990s (Santelli et al., 2004). However, a different picture emerges when we examine Latin America. Ali and Cleland (2004) showed, using data for eight Latin American countries from DHS surveys conducted between 1990 and 2000, that there is an increase in the proportion of women who ever had sexual relationships and in conception rates as a consequence; although there is an increase in the use of contraceptives, particularly condoms, it is not enough to offset the early increases in sexual experience. Moreover, in Latin American countries and in nearly all countries, age at marriage or consensual union has increased as have the rates of education (Florez and Nuñez, 2000). This results in an increased lengthening of the exposure to unstable sexual relationships and, thus, to STDs, abortions, unwanted pregnancies, and nonmarital births. (McCauley and Salter, 1995).

Several studies have found a decreased age at first sexual intercourse for Mexican youngsters just as worldwide trends. A survey in Mexico city in 1987 situated this age at 16 for women and 17 years old for men (Garcia-Baltazar et al. 1993), while other survey in the Morelos state found this age to be 13.6 for men and 14.3 for women in 1998-1999 (Tapia-Aguirre et al., 2004). The survey Young People of the Mexican Foundation for Familiar Planning (MEXFAM), interviewed in 1999 people from 13 to 19 years, obtaining an average age at sexual initiation of 15 years without difference

between males and females. The National Health Survey 2000 found an average age at sexual debut of 15.7 with no significant difference between males and females for youths from 13 to 19 years old. The National Youth Survey (2002) reports a sexual debut of around 16 years. Results from the survey for total population 15 to 29 years old show that the 57 percent of males had initiated sexual intercourse, while this was true for only around 50 percent of females (all civil status included).

Lammers et al. (2000) establish identified factors by previous researchers that affect the early onset of sexual intercourse and those include biological factors such as gender, age, pubertal timing, and, testosterone levels; social factors as poverty, violence, family marital disruption, lack of family connectedness, parents' lack of education, lack of parental supervision, substance use, peer pressure, sexual abuse, poor academic performance, and low educational expectations; factors associated with attitudes and beliefs; influence of the media, low self-esteem and self-efficacy, hopelessness, mother's early sexual intercourse, teen's perceptions of parents' rules and attitudes, and single mother-headed households; also psychological variables or values such as value of independence, tolerance for deviance, and lower value on academic achievement. Santelli et al. (2004) found that personal and perceived peer norms regarding sexual abstention delays sexual initiation, but being male and black race were found to increase the likelihood of starting sexual intercourse.

Rostosky et al. (2004) found that a conservative religious affiliation delays sexual initiation on females. Some researchers have also found that lack of religious affiliation is associated to an early onset of sexual intercourse (Lammers et al., 2000), Hardy and Raffaelli (2003) found that teens with higher levels of religiosity delay sexual initiation more than those with lower levels of it. Nonnemaker, McNeely, and Blum (2003) found that attendance at religious services and frequency of participation in religious youth group activities were both associated with a lower probability of having ever had sexual intercourse. Other predictors for sexual activity in Mexican context are: low levels of education, living in urban centers, and not having access to health services (González-Garza, 2005; Rojas and Castrejon, 2007).

### *Condom Use*

Comparisons of prevalence of condom use through the time result conflictive due to the different measures used to evaluate use. Some surveys ask about condom use at first sexual intercourse, others ask about frequency of use, while others ask its use as a contraceptive method, without specifying frequency, which is the case for the source employed in this analysis. According to the National Youth Survey (2002), condom use is reported by 53.2 percent of those active sexually, but males are who mostly use it. Intrauterine Dispositive and contraceptive pills are the most used methods by females. 78 percent of those males active sexually and 23 percent of females active sexually reported condom use as a contraceptive method. Use of IUD was reported by 37 of females and 8 percent of males, while use of contraceptive pills was reported by 11 percent of males and 23 percent of females. The younger individuals are who have the higher use of condoms in both sexes. 92 percent of males in the 15-to 19 age group reported use condoms as a contraceptive method, while this was true for only the 67 percent of those in the 25 to 29 age group; for females these figures go from 34 percent to 21 percent for the same age groups.

Among the variables found to be related to condom use, Thato et al. (2003) observed that, among Thai students in vocational schools, are the perception of benefits from using condoms, the knowledge of STDs, HIV, AIDS, pregnancy and peer norms, and alcohol use and age, the factors affecting condom use. Pleck et al (1993), found that males with traditional attitudes toward masculinity had a lower use of condoms. Shearer et al. (2005), found that those males who endorsed the idea that males should not behave femininely were more likely to have had unprotected sex in their lifetime, but, they also found an unexpected marginal effect at most recent intercourse, because the more men believe high status is a masculine characteristic the higher the probability of having used a condom in the last sexual intercourse. Gutierrez, Oh, & Gillmore (2000), reported gender dynamics and empowerment predict condom use among females but no association with condom use among males in an African American and European American urban youth population. Tapia-Aguirre et al. (2004), analyzed condom use, knowledge of HIV/AIDS, and other sexual behaviors among students at public schools in Morelos,

Mexico. They found, that those male students with more knowledge of HIV/AIDS had higher likelihood of condom use, this effect was the opposite for females. Magnani et al., (2001) found that among Peruvian male secondary students, high and medium household economic status and living with other than both parents are predictors of condom use at the first sexual intercourse. Herlitz and Ramstedt (2005), showed that being in an older age group than 16-17, in other relationships status than married or cohabiting, living in a non-rural area, and being from a younger cohort than 1989, are predictors for a higher likelihood to have had multiple sexual partner during the last 12 months, and to have had casual sexual intercourse without a condom, among Swedish population ages 16 to 44. Gayet, Juarez, and Pedroza (2003) analyzed factors affecting condom use at first sexual intercourse using the National Health Survey in Mexico for teenagers aged 15 to 19; they found that males, older youngsters, those living in urban areas, those who do not speak an indigenous language, and with higher level of education, are who have the higher probabilities of condom use at first sexual intercourse. Caballero and Villaseñor (2001) found high socioeconomic stratum, being male, peer support, and high level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS were predictors for consistency of condom use in Mexican population. Older age at first sexual intercourse, being a male Findings about parenting styles report that those parents that are more affective, democratic and who talk with their children are more likely to protect them to be involved in risky behavior [such as non-use of condoms], on the other hand, rigid families increase the risk of teenager pregnancy (Baumrind, 1987 and Romig and Bakkens, 1990 in Boruchovitch 1992). Polit-O'Hara and Kahn (1985, in Boruchovitch, 1992) and Perez de la Barrera and Pick (2006) mention, as indicators of condom use, effective communication, verbal competence of adolescent and assertive communication, because the higher the verbal competence or assertive communication the higher the probabilities that adolescent can convince their partner to use contraceptives.

In the Mexican context, use of condoms in a stable relationship (*noviazgo*) could be questioned, because there are some populations where the social construction of “*noviazgo*” includes an implicit agreement of fidelity between the couple, and female submission to male. There is the



implicit statement that those who use condoms have several sexual partners. Asking for use of condoms, especially from women to men, has been reported to be considered as an evidence or doubt of fidelity, this is especially true in low socioeconomic settings. In compensated sex, although there is evidence of infidelity, females don't ask for condom use to keep the benefits of the relationship, because asking for it could put in evidence the infidelity and the relationship in risk; however, when there is no fidelity implicit in the relationship, females could be more able to ask for use of condoms (Luna, et al., 2004).

## **Results**

Results from the National Youth Survey (2002) for the total population (all civil status) 15 to 29 years old, show that 57 percent of males had initiated sexual intercourse, while this was true for only around 50 percent of females. From those active sexually, 78 percent of males, and only 24 percent of active sexual females, reported using condoms as a contraceptive method. For the subpopulation analyzed in these paper (youngsters 15 to 24 years old, single, living with both parents, and without children) only 33 percent of males and 8 percent of females had had sexual debut. From those active sexually, the 62 percent of males and the 29 percent of females use condom as one of the contraceptive methods. These figures show the subpopulation considered in this analysis has a lower percentage of sexual activity and a higher use of condoms as compared to the total population.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for each subset of population analyzed. It shows that mother's level of education works well as a proxy for socioeconomic status. We can see that level of education of the youngster and father's level of education are much related to the mother's level of education. More than 25 % of the youngsters under the category of mother with less than secondary education only completed elementary school, while this is the case for less than 5% for both males and females whose mother has secondary education or higher. For males and females whose mother's education is lower than secondary school, around 80% declared the father has also less than secondary school, while this is true only for around 20% of those whose mother studied secondary education or

beyond. Youngsters whose mother studied only elementary education or lower have a higher percentage of having ever worked than those whose mother has higher level of education. In both groups males declared more frequently they have ever worked than girls. Religious participation is very similar between the same sex and different level of mother's education. For girls it is around 12% and for males is around 6%, girls' participation doubles that of boys in both subsets of mother's education level. It seems also that those youngsters whose mother has secondary education and beyond have a higher religious participation than those with a lower educated mother. The most of the youngster in this sample said they communicate with their parents. More than 90% for each category of mother's education and sex said they talk with their parents. 96% of the girls with a higher educated mother said they talk with their parents having a slight advantage over the other youngsters on this issue. Youngsters with a higher educated mother have higher percentages on the sharing of decision-making power and labor than those whose mother has less than secondary education. Around 20% of individuals whose mother has less than secondary education are classified living in a family with low levels of sharing decision-making power, while only around 10% of those individuals with a higher educated mother are in this category. In the same way, individuals with a higher educated mother are better represented in the highest level of sharing decision-making power. Among the three tasks representing the sexual division of labor, household income providing seems to be the most shared between males and females (from 14% among males with a lower educated mother to 40% among females with a higher educated mother), but those whose mother has secondary education have higher percentages of sharing on this and on the other two tasks, confirming that level of education is related to the sharing of power and labor between males and females. We could say that higher educated parents are more likely to create a less sex-typed gender socialization environment in the household for their children.

Regarding the factors predicting sexual debut, Table 2 shows that as age increases so does the probability of having initiated sexual intercourse, and this affects both genders and mother's education groups, significance of this variable is very high although the effect is small. Those males whose

mother studied less than secondary education are more likely to be initiated sexually if they have ever worked, and if they studied high school, as compared to have studied only secondary school. For males in this group age has the greatest significance. The rest of the variables behave as expected but with no statistical significance. Concerning females whose mother studied less than secondary school, in addition to age, if they have ever worked increases the probability of having had sexual debut, the opposite effect have religious participation and communication with parents. The greatest and more significant effect on sexual debut is if they have ever worked and age.

For males whose mother studied less than secondary school having studied high school as compared to only secondary school, if they have ever worked, and if income providing is shared between both genders, increases the likelihood of sexual initiation. For females in this subgroup, if they have ever worked and their father studied secondary or higher, increases the likelihood of sexual debut, but religious participation decreases it. The highest effect on sexual initiation is for age, but the significance is lower than for the rest of the subgroups.

In relation to condom use, Table 3 shows the predictors for all the subgroups. Among males with a mother whose level of education is lower than secondary school, those who talk to their parents and have a shared income providing for the household between males and females, are more likely to use condoms, however significance are small. For females in this subgroup, those who studied less than secondary school and participate in religious activities are less likely to use condoms. Low education has the higher effect and significance, but the effect of religious participation is also important.

For males whose mother had studied secondary school or a higher level, only education variable predict condom use. Those who studied less than secondary school are less likely to use condoms as a contraceptive method. About females whose mother has secondary or higher level of education, the older, those with higher than high school education, and those who live in households where their families share the decision-making power between males and females, are more likely to use condoms than younger females, than those with only secondary level of education, and that those

who live in households where decision-making power is not shared. Among the latter variable, the higher the level of sharing the higher the effect and significance. The smaller effect is for age and the greatest is for decision-making power variable.

### **Discussion**

The goal of this paper was to test the effect of gender dynamics on the sexual behavior of Mexican youngsters who were single, aged 15 to 24, and living with both parents at the time of the survey. The source used was the National Youth Survey (2000). The purpose of analyzing a very selected population was to isolate the effects of family structure, civil status, and the effect of gender dynamics other than family of origin. Outcomes analyzed were sexual initiation and condom use. Previous findings in both outcomes have shown the importance of socioeconomic stratum and gender in the sexual activity and condom use, in addition gender norms and sexual scripts dictate opposite sexual behavior between males and females. All these reasons were considered to divide the population analyzed in several subgroups according to sex and mother's level of education, as a proxy for socioeconomic stratum. Results show that this decision was pertinent because different variables have different effects on the outcomes of each subgroup, indicating that sometimes differences could be masked by the analysis of all combined groups.

Some variables predicting sexual initiation are in the same direction that previous findings such as communication with parents and religious participation, which decrease the likelihood of sexual initiation. It is interesting that religious participation affects only females sexual initiation. It could mean that women feel more compelled to follow religious precepts about pre-marital sex than males. In the Mexican context, gender norms reinforce limitation to sexual expressions of females, while for males the opposite is expected, intersection of both factors could be a partial explanation of why religious participation has an effect, about sexual initiation, on females, but not on males. Explanations for the effect of parental communication on sexual initiation are that if parents communicate with their children are more likely to transmit the risks of an early sexual debut and their norms, values, and expectations about sexual behavior, decreasing the likelihood of adolescent to

engage in sexual activity, although in this population it was significant only for females with a less educated mother. If youngsters have ever worked increases the likelihood of sexual initiation for all subgroups. This is a variable not commonly evaluated on this outcome, however, it was very significant and with big effects for females whose mother studied lower than secondary school. To my perception, this could imply that youngsters that gain their own income feel more independency of their parents and feel empowered to act as adults, where sexual activity is expected as part of adult behavior. It could be specially significant and higher for females in the more vulnerable group because they are the less empowered of the four subgroups. Regarding gender dynamics only shared income providing resulted significant and it was only for males whose mother has secondary education level or higher. However, it had the opposite effect to the expected, it increases the likelihood of sexual initiation. One of the reasons of this to occur could be that, if both parents are busy (working) that means lower surveillance on youngsters, and so more freedom to engage in sexual activity. What is not clear is why it affects only males of one of the subgroups and not all the individuals. It also could mean that sharing income providing between males and females is not a sign of more egalitarian gender dynamics, because, as many studies have found, although females are participating in the income providing, some still perceive their husbands as the principal income provider and this task as their obligation as a male, with no changes in other spheres of gender dynamics, this is true particularly in low income settings (Garcia and Oliveira, 1994).

Concerning variables predicting condom use, as expected, lower education decreases the likelihood of condom use and the opposite, higher education increases condom use. Religious participation decreases the likelihood of condom use with high coefficients among females in the vulnerable group. If religious participation could decrease the risk of an early sexual debut among females, amid those that are already active sexually has a negative effect, affecting the ability of those more vulnerable women to have protected sexual intercourse. Communication with parents increases the likelihood of condom use as previous findings have shown, but it was significant only for males in the vulnerable subgroup. If both genders provide income to the household, it increases the likelihood of

condom use among males whose mother is less educated. Sharing income providing variable behave as expected, but is not clear why does not have the same effect in all the subgroups. Regarding sharing decision-making power the effects are big and very significant but only for those whose mother studied secondary and higher, contrary to the expectations. A possible explanation of why it does not work for all the subgroups is that, maybe the effect of a more egalitarian socialization in the family, increases the agency of those who are more vulnerable to have a low sexual agency (females), but is not enough to beat the social and economic inequalities that restrict agency for women of lower socioeconomic stratum.

**Table 1. Weighted Descriptive Statistics for Analysis of Sexual Debut and Condom Use among Youngsters Who Are Single and Live with Both Parents by Mother's Education and Sex**

	Mother's education lower than secondary school		Mother studied secondary education or higher	
	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %
<b>Age</b>				
15-19	65.47	67.28	63.63	70.35
20-24	34.53	32.72	36.37	29.65
<b>Level of Education</b>				
Elementary school or lower	27.4	27.1	3.3	4.2
Secondary school	42.9	39.6	26.9	28.9
High school	23.3	23.9	44.0	44.1
Higher than high school	6.4	9.5	25.9	22.8
<b>Father's education</b>				
Less than secondary	81.8	78.7	22.7	20.2
Secondary and higher	18.2	21.3	77.3	79.8
<b>Have ever worked?</b>				
No	15.4	41.1	31.1	47.2
Yes	84.6	58.9	69.0	52.8
<b>Religious participation</b>				
No	94.5	88.4	93.3	85.2
Yes	5.5	11.6	6.7	14.8
<b>Parental communication</b>				
None	7.9	6.5	7.1	4.2
Yes	92.1	93.5	92.9	95.8
<b>Decision-Making Power shared between males and females</b>				
Low level of sharing	24.0	20.1	11.1	12.5
Medium level of sharing	36.3	36.7	34.5	31.9
Share the most	39.7	43.2	54.5	55.6
<b>House cleaning, cooking, washing is shared</b>				
No	87.4	92.3	80.2	88.2
Yes	12.6	7.7	19.8	11.8
<b>Providing income to the household is shared between males and females</b>				
Not shared	86.0	78.7	65.3	60.5
Yes	14.0	21.3	34.7	39.5
<b>House maintenance is shared between males and females</b>				
No	91.4	90.1	85.4	83.7
Yes	8.6	9.9	14.6	16.3

N=14036

Data: National Youth Survey 2000, Mexico

**Table 2. Logit Coefficients of the Effects of Sexual Division of Labor and Decision-Making Power on the Sexual Onset of Mexican Youngsters, Single and Living with Both Parents**

	Mother studied less than secondary school		Mother studied secondary school or higher	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
<b>Age</b>	0.3690 ***	0.2691 ***	0.4403 ***	0.1933 **
<b>Level of Education (Secondary school)</b>				
Elementary school	-0.0160	-0.2013	0.0724	-0.1744
High school	0.3008 *	0.1902	0.5804 *	-0.3615
Higher than high school	0.3058	0.1195	0.0783	0.0082
<b>Have ever worked? (No)</b>				
Yes	0.3875 **	1.5112 ***	0.8782 **	0.7204 *
<b>Religious participation (No)</b>				
Yes	-0.3682	-0.8058 **	0.1130	-0.9704 *
<b>Father's education (Less than secondary)</b>				
Secondary and higher	0.0971	0.3371	-0.4029	0.3448 *
<b>Parental communication (None)</b>				
Yes	-0.1566	-0.8519 **	-0.4578	0.2305
<b>Sharing decision-making power (Low)</b>				
Medium level of sharing	0.1177	-0.2125	-0.3998	0.6220
Share the most	-0.0107	-0.2441	-0.4805	0.4478
<b>Both sexes provide income to the household (No)</b>				
Yes	0.2021	0.1599	0.7394 **	0.0486
<b>Sharing house cleaning, cooking &amp; washing (No)</b>				
Yes	-0.0044	-0.4425	-0.4270	0.4230
<b>Sharing house maintenance (No)</b>				
Yes	-0.1413	-0.0697	-0.6672	0.3677
Subpopulation number of observations	4744	4977	2149	2166
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

Number of observations 14,036



**Table 3. Logit Coefficients of the Effects of Sexual Division of Labor and Decision-Making Power on Condom Use of Mexican Youngsters Who Are Single and Living with Both Parents**

	Mother studied less than secondary school		Mother studied secondary school or higher	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
<b>Age</b>	0.0148	0.1113	0.0261	-0.4584 **
<b>Level of Education (Secondary school)</b>				
Elementary	-0.0566	-3.2517 ***	-1.4408 *	
High school	0.2272	1.1871	0.3227	-0.8690
Higher than high school	-0.0392	0.4036	0.7668	2.1119 *
<b>Have ever worked? (No)</b>				
Yes	0.2829	0.8242	-0.0623	0.9212
<b>Religious participation (No)</b>				
Yes	0.2402	-1.3498 *	-0.6974	-1.1900
<b>Father's education (Less than secondary)</b>				
Secondary and higher	-0.2556	-0.2984	-0.0003	0.7370
<b>Parental communication (None)</b>				
Yes	0.8163 *	0.5501	0.4362	-0.8082
<b>Sharing decision-making power (Low)</b>				
Medium level of sharing	0.1372	0.7168	0.0829	1.7199 *
Share the most	0.1490	0.6187	-0.0422	2.8043 **
<b>Both sexes provide income to the household (No)</b>				
Yes	0.6979 *	0.6111	0.6148	-0.6809
<b>Sharing house cleaning, cooking &amp; washing (No)</b>				
Yes	0.1619	-0.3318	-0.1571	0.4061
<b>Sharing house maintenance (No)</b>				
Yes	0.2574	-0.1126	0.4741	0.8902
Subpopulation number of observations	1501	366	775	197
Prob > F	0.0819	0.0000	0.0102	0.0166

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

Number of observations 2,839

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