Mexico-U.S. Migration and Stages of the Family Life Cycle

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Short Abstract

We use retrospective life history data for married men and women collected in 93 Mexican communities by the Mexican Migration Project to examine how the likelihood of migration to the United States and return migration to Mexico changes as couples progress through the family life cycle. We define four migration states based on the migration status of the husband and wife: (1) husband and wife together in Mexico, (2) husband in the United States and wife in Mexico, (3) husband in Mexico and wife in the United States, and (4) Husband and wife in the United States together. Corresponding to each state is a set of possible transitions into each of the other states, which represent distinct types of migration. Using these states and transitions, we estimate multinomial discrete-time hazards models to identify the relative influence of prior migration experience and socioeconomic status on the migration of husbands and wives as they progress through the family cycle.

Extended Abstract

The temporary and long-term migration of men and women from Mexico to the United States has been closely linked to the family life cycle. Shifts in the household demand for income and the supply of labor produced by the birth and maturation of children, along with the gendered division of labor, encourage and discourage the migration of husbands and wives at different stages in the family cycle. Massey et al. (1987) provided one of the first systematic treatments of the relationship between men's migration from Mexico to the United States and the life cycle. In the four communities that Massey et al. studied they documented relatively low levels of men's migration after marriage but before the onset of childbearing, followed by a sharp rise in men's migration when childbearing begins and children are too young to work, and finally a gradual decline in men's migration as children start working and leave to establish their own households. While subsequent research on Mexico-U.S. migration by Massey and others make reference to the curvilinear relationship between migration and the family life cycle, little additional work has been done to verify the strength of this relationship in other communities or in the post-IRCA period.

In this paper we use retrospective life history data for married men and women collected in 93 Mexican communities by the Mexican Migration Project to examine how the likelihood of migration to the United States and return migration to Mexico changes as couples progress through the family life cycle. In contrast to earlier work by Massey and others that look at the migration of husbands, our analysis treats married couples as the unit of analysis. Our analytic sample includes 188,566 couple years from 10,103 couples. We define four migration states based on the migration status of the husband and wife: (1) husband and wife together in Mexico, (2) husband in the United States and wife in Mexico, (3) husband in Mexico and wife in the

United States, and (4) Husband and wife in the United States together. Corresponding to each state is a set of possible transitions into each of the other states, which represent distinct types of migration. For instance, in state (1) where the husband and wife are together in Mexico, three types of migration are possible: the husband migrates to the United States alone, the wife migrates to the United States alone, or both migrate together to the United States. Each of these types of migration represents a transition into one of the other three states. Using these states and transitions, we track the individual and shared migration of husbands and wives as they progress through the family cycle. Figure 1 presents the different migration states and the possible transitions, along with the number of actual events or transitions made. Couples who remain in a state without making a transition are right censored at the time of the survey. We use multinomial discrete-time hazard regression models to estimate the relative influence of stage in the life cycle, prior migration experience, and socioeconomic status on the likelihood of making each type of transition, conditional on starting in a particular state.

We define five non-overlapping stages in the family life cycle: (1) married with no children, (2) fifty percent or more of children preteens, (3) fifty percent or more of children teens, (4) fifty percent or more, but not all, children adults, and (5) all children adults. Other covariates in the models include measures of husband's and wife's premarital and postmarital U.S. migration experience, the prevalence of male and female U.S. migration in the Mexican community of origin, husband's and wife's education, husband's current occupation, and husband's birth cohort. Table 1 presents the distribution of couple years spent in each of the four migration states. Close to 88 percent of the couple years are spent together in Mexico, and 9 percent are spent apart with the husband in the United States. Only 3 percent of couple years are

spent together in the United States, and 0.3 percent of couple years are spent apart with the wife alone in the United States.

Tables 2-4 present the odds ratios from the multinomial models predicting migration to the United States or return migration to Mexico. We do not estimate a model for the transition out of the third state, Wife in the U.S., because there of the relatively small number of couple years spent in this state. Our main findings are:

- Consistent with earlier findings, husband's migration to the United States reaches a peak during the early childrearing stage of the family life cycle when the dependency ratio and the demands for income are the greatest. Once children reach adolescence and move into adulthood, husband's migration declines. In contrast to husbands, the odds of a wife's migration to the United States are at its lowest during childrearing.

- Husband's U.S. migration experience is associated with being apart from one's wife. Men who begin a migration state with considerable U.S. migration experience, are likely to remain, or to transition into, a migration state in which they are separated from their wife.

- On the other hand, wives who begin a migration state with considerable U.S. migration experience tend to remain, or transition into, a migration state in which they are together with their husband.

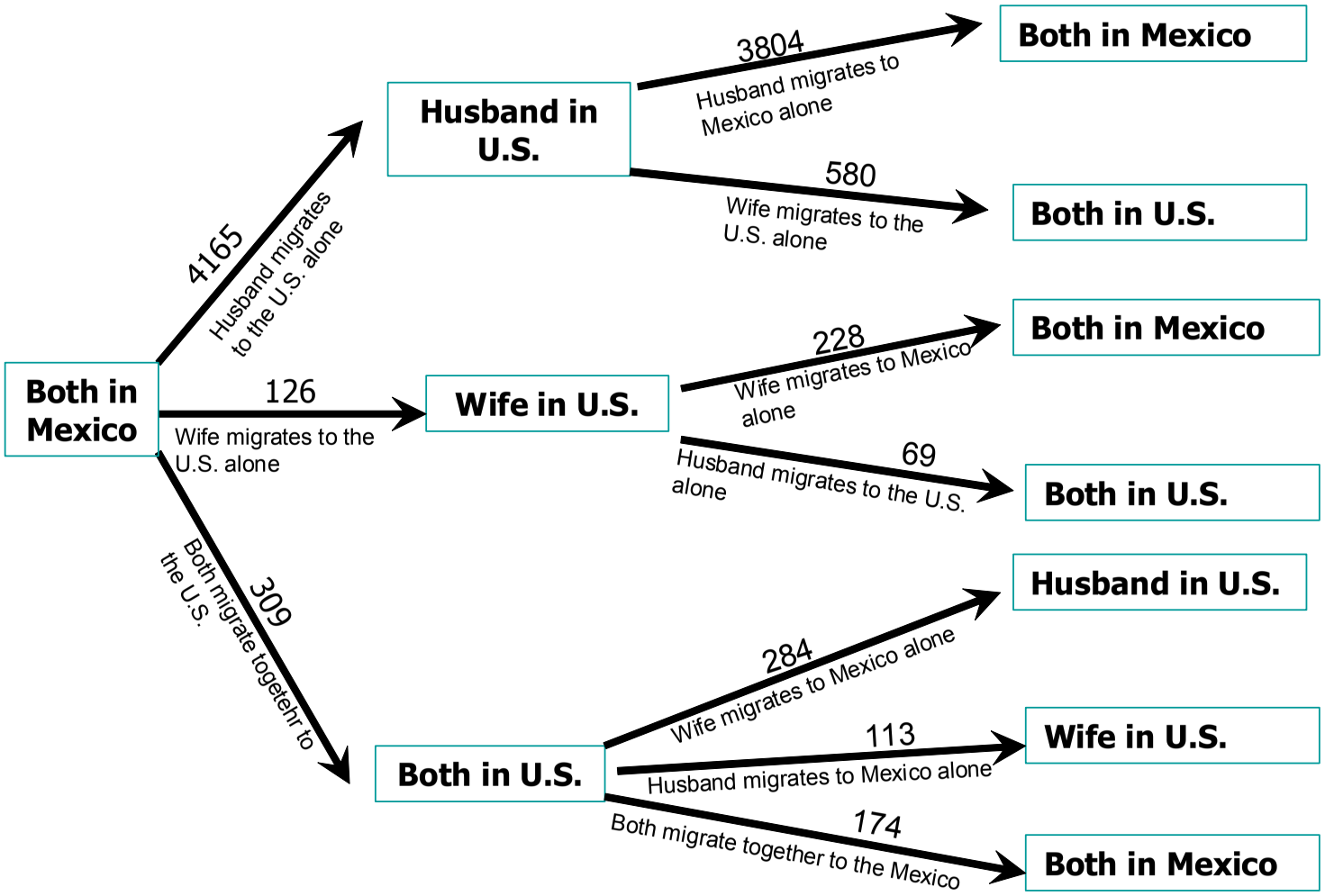
- U.S. migration experience early in the life course has important implications for subsequent migration. For both men and women, premarital U.S. migration experience is strongly associated with continued U.S. migration after marriage.

- Higher education and occupational status is associated with staying together as a couple either in Mexico, or as migrants in the United States. Low education and occupational status is associated with husband's solo migration to the United States and couple years spent apart.

Overall, these selected results highlight the important influence that the gendered division of labor has on family migration strategies. They also suggest that the disruptive effects of U.S. migration are greater among low socio-economic status families. Men with higher education and better jobs are less likely to migrate, and when they do they are more likely to be accompanied by their wife. In interpreting our results there are a number of important caveats to bear in mind.

First, the sample includes only Mexican couples who remain in Mexico or who returned from the United States, it does not include couples who settle in the United States. Second, the failure to control for influential latent or unobserved variables may result in biased estimates of our covariate effects. In subsequent analyses we will estimate multi-state hazards models with controls for couple-specific unobserved heterogeneity using the hazards program CTM developed by James Heckman. We will also introduce period control variables, and interactions with period to test for period changes in the underlying relationship between migration and the family life cycle.

Figure 1: Migration States and Transitions, Mexican Migration Project.



Note: Each arrow between states represents a possible transition, as indicated under the arrow. The number of transitions from one state to the other are presented above each arrow. The unit of analysis is couple-years

Table 1: The Distribution of Couple Years across Migration States, Mexican Migration Project.

	Percent
Couple together in Mexico	87.8
Husband alone in the U.S.	8.5
Wife alone in the U.S.	0.3
Couple together in the U.S.	3.4
Total (Couple years = 188,566)	100.0

Source: Estimations based on data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP93).

Table 2: Odds Ratios from Multinomial Discrete-time Hazards Model Predicting Migration to the United States when Couples are in Mexico, Mexican Migration Project.

	Husband US mig vs couple stay in Mex		Wife US mig vs. couple stay in Mex		Couple US mig vs couple stay in Mex	
Family life cycle stage						
No children (ref.)	--		--		--	
Preteens	1.57	**	0.35	**	0.42	**
Teens	1.03		0.77		0.32	**
Teens and adults	0.82		1.81		0.74	
Adults only	0.61	*	2.51		1.02	
U.S. migration experience						
Husband premarital U.S. exp.	1.17	**	1.59		2.24	**
Wife premarital U.S. exp	1.24		2.98	*	0.91	
Husband ln(months U.S. exp)	1.48	**	1.14		1.21	**
Wife ln(months U.S. exp)	0.83	**	1.70	**	1.88	**
Child born in the U.S.	1.03		0.44		1.34	
U.S. migration in community						
Prevalence of male migration	21.93	**	3.46	*	3.39	**
Prevalence of female migration	0.07	**	4.25	*	2.52	*
Husband's years educ	0.99	*	1.06	*	1.08	**
Wife's years educ	1.00		1.02		1.02	
Husband's occupation						
Agriculture (ref.)	--		--		--	
Unskilled	2.13	**	0.77		2.85	**
Skilled	0.57	**	0.64		0.81	
Professional	0.10	**	0.85		0.03	**
Not working	1.20		1.49		1.14	
Husband's birth cohort						
1922-1939 (ref.)	--		--		--	
1940-1949	1.32	**	0.96		1.49	
1950-1959	1.58	**	0.89		2.18	**
1960-1977	2.14	**	1.34		2.96	**
Community type						
Rural (ref.)	--		--		--	
Town	1.05		0.96		0.69	*
City	0.98		1.67		0.99	
Metro	0.63	**	1.53		0.86	
Duration in state	0.89	**	0.97		0.89	**
Duration^2	1.00	**	1.00		1.00	**
Number of couple years	165,649					

Note: $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table 3: Odds Ratios from Multinomial Discrete-time Hazards Model Predicting Migration when Husband is alone in the United States, Mexican Migration Project.

	Wife US mig vs Husband stays alone in US		Husband returns to Mexico vs Husband stays alone in US	
Family life cycle stage				
No children (ref.)	--		--	
Preteens	0.27	**	1.13	
Teens	0.26	**	1.49	**
Teens and adults	0.37	**	1.55	**
Adults only	0.26	*	0.89	
U.S. migration experience				
Husband premarital U.S. exp.	1.34	**	0.86	*
Wife premarital U.S. exp	0.47	**	0.82	
Husband ln(months U.S. exp)	0.79	**	0.50	**
Wife ln(months U.S. exp)	1.68	**	0.93	
Child born in the U.S.	1.27		0.48	**
U.S. migration in community				
Prevalence of male migration	0.69		0.33	**
Prevalence of female migration	12.15	**	2.42	**
Husband's years educ	1.00		0.96	**
Wife's years educ	1.07	**	1.01	
Husband's occupation				
Agriculture (ref.)	--		--	
Unskilled	1.80	**	0.47	**
Skilled	1.64	**	1.47	**
Professional	0.91		3.28	**
Not working	1.68		5.66	**
Husband's birth cohort				
1922-1939 (ref.)	--		--	
1940-1949	1.04		1.10	
1950-1959	1.17		1.12	
1960-1977	1.69	**	1.24	*
Community type				
Rural (ref.)	--		--	
Town	1.19		1.32	**
City	1.09		1.05	
Metro	0.59	*	0.72	**
Duration in state	1.00		0.69	**
Duration^2	1.00		1.01	**
Number of couple years	15,843			

Note: $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table 4: Odds Ratios from Multinomial Discrete-time Hazards Model Predicting Return Migration to Mexico when Couples are in the U.S., Mexican Migration Project.

	Husband returns alone vs. couple stay in US		Wife returns alone vs. couple stay in US		Couple returns together vs. couple stay in US	
Family life cycle stage						
No children (ref.)						
Preteens	1.24		0.90		1.62	
Teens	1.34		0.75		1.04	
Teens and adults	1.12		0.53		0.60	
Adults only	1.17		0.20	*	1.11	
U.S. migration experience						
Husband premarital U.S. exp.	0.81		0.68	*	0.49	**
Wife premarital U.S. exp	0.55	*	0.66		0.45	*
Husband ln(months U.S. exp)	0.62	*	2.37	**	0.74	
Wife ln(months U.S. exp)	1.00		0.04	**	0.11	**
Child born in the U.S.	0.46	**	0.78		0.50	**
U.S. migration in community						
Prevalence of male migration	2.50		12.19	**	0.25	
Prevalence of female migration	0.59		0.11	**	2.73	
Husband's years educ	1.01		1.04		0.98	
Wife's years educ	0.95		0.97		0.97	
Husband's occupation						
Agriculture (ref.)						
Unskilled	0.18	**	0.83		0.12	**
Skilled	0.23	**	0.95		0.45	**
Professional	0.52		1.29		1.63	
Not working	2.51		1.62		1.12	
Husband's birth cohort						
1922-1939 (ref.)						
1940-1949	1.16		0.72		0.44	*
1950-1959	1.32		0.82		0.74	
1960-1977	1.07		1.01		0.73	
Community type						
Rural (ref.)						
Town	0.91		0.57	*	0.73	
City	0.98		0.77		0.92	
Metro	0.69		1.33		0.53	
Duration in state	0.99		1.90	**	1.45	**
Duration^2	1.00		0.98	**	0.99	
Number of couple years	5,978					

Note: $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$.