

Unequal family contexts for children and adolescents in Spain

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Introduction

Childhood and adolescence are fundamental life stages for human cognitive development. During these periods of life, our understanding of the world and its effects on us are mediated by our caretakers and their nurturing practices and experience (Maté & Maté, 2022). In this context, children's exposure to unstable environments can lead them to interpret the social world as an adverse and incomprehensible one (Adam & Chase-Lansdale, 2002; Kerns et al., 2011). Research in health, psychology, education, and economics has shown the detrimental effects on children and adolescents' emotional well-being, cognitive development, and executive functioning of exposure to unstable familial and labor contexts (Adam & Chase-Lansdale, 2002; Bzostek & Beck, 2011; Cavanagh & Huston, 2006). For instance, Sandstrom & Huerta (2013), showed that children experiencing parental divorce before age five have lower vocabulary skills and more aggressive attitudes at age five than children in stably married families.

Overexposure to stressful situations can also derive from parental employment or financial instability. The association between children's behavioral and academic outcomes and parental involuntary job loss has been extensively studied, showing how unwanted parental labor instability and long-term unemployment are related to lower grades, decreases in educational attainment, and internalizing and externalizing negative behaviors (Hill et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2012; Kalil & Wightman, 2011; Pillas et al., 2014; Stevens & Schaller, 2009).

Familial and labor instability are not evenly distributed in contemporary societies. Research suggests that both the exposure to and the consequences of instability are unequally distributed across the social ladder, with the most socially disadvantaged groups being the most exposed to familial and financial instability (Perkins, 2019; Raley et al., 2015). In addition, socially unprivileged groups have less economic resources, such as income, wealth, savings, and access to credit, to cope with unplanned circumstances and to provide additional support to their children when needed (Hardy et al., 2019) —consequently, the adverse effects of familial instability for children and teenagers concentrate in low-income groups, which in turns, makes family inequality a potential factor on social inequalities.

Despite relative advances in social protection and welfare, European societies are not freed from the reinforcing connection between social inequalities (in labor, income, wealth, etc.) and family inequalities. In recent decades, structural economic change and increasing labor market de-regularization have led to a significant increase in income volatility, especially among low-income families (Western et al., 2016), which are the most exposed to precarious jobs. This, in turn, is a reinforcing process with family instability, as economic uncertainty can destabilize other life domains like housing, health, or interpersonal relationships (Hardy et al., 2019; Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013). The additive nature of changes has a cumulative effect on

a child's well-being. Greater exposure to adverse life events and changes in the family structure increases the odds of psychopathologies, and health and behavioral problems (Bzostek & Beck, 2011; Kerns et al., 2011).

Our study documents heterogeneous family formation trajectories as the contexts in which children and adolescents grow up in contemporary Spain. We correlate these family trajectories with women's social class position using a multidimensional approach for measuring social class. A strong correlation between family formation trajectories and social classes confirms the link between social and family inequalities. Next, using information on children's dates of birth, we estimate the number of person-years lived by children across different familial contexts. person-years of exposure to (un)stable family formation trajectories measure the potential implication of family inequalities for children and adolescents. These analyses suggest that the heterogeneity of family formation is a root factor on social disparities.

Theoretical focus

Inequality has a central role in moderating the impacts of familial and labor instability on children's developmental outcomes (Amato et al., 2015). Scholars measure social inequalities and inequality of opportunities typically using predefined statistical categories like household income level, parents' educational attainment, or race/ethnicity, one at a time. Yet, individuals do not experience the social world through a single characteristic (man-woman, migrant-native) but at the intersection of multiple mutually influencing factors shaped by power relations and the many axes of inequality (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). This means that individuals interact not only as men or women but as someone with a specific gender, ethnicity, social class, migration status, and familiar background (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Therefore, traditional conceptualizations of inequality remain limited and do not account for the greater complexity of social interactions.

The overarching aim of this research is three-fold. First, we propose an intersectional approach for measuring social and economic inequality among adult women in Spain using quantitative data. We compare this approach with single-variable and other existing classification scheme that aim to capture social inequalities. Some of these approaches include ESeC, ESeG, Oesch, Wright.

Second, we examine how inequalities in family formation trajectories -including partnership, (re)marriage, divorce, separation, and childbearing- interact with other forms of inequality, including economic, gender, and migration status in Spain. Intersectionality theory serve us as the guiding framework for these empirical analyses. This theory offers a qualified and nuanced understanding of social inequality focused on complexity, heterogeneity, and social justice.

Third, we estimate children's and teenagers' person-years across women's family formation paths and we analyzed class difference in the exposure to advantageous and disadvantageous family contexts. These accounts reinforce the consideration of family inequalities as a root factor on social inequality and the intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantages

Data & Methods

Our main source of information will be the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey (SFS-2018). This data source offers detailed information both on individual and contextual characteristics, and on labor trajectories and family formation and dissolution paths. We will focus on the environmental (in)stability of children from birth to age 18, analyzing how typical labor and familial trajectories distribute across social groups. This procedure will tell us the context in which children and adolescents grow, opening the possibility to analyze the time spent in a given familial configuration -stable unions, separated, divorced, single parenthood-. This also makes possible the analysis of the interaction between the time spent in different familial and labor situations and the socioeconomic characteristics of the parents.

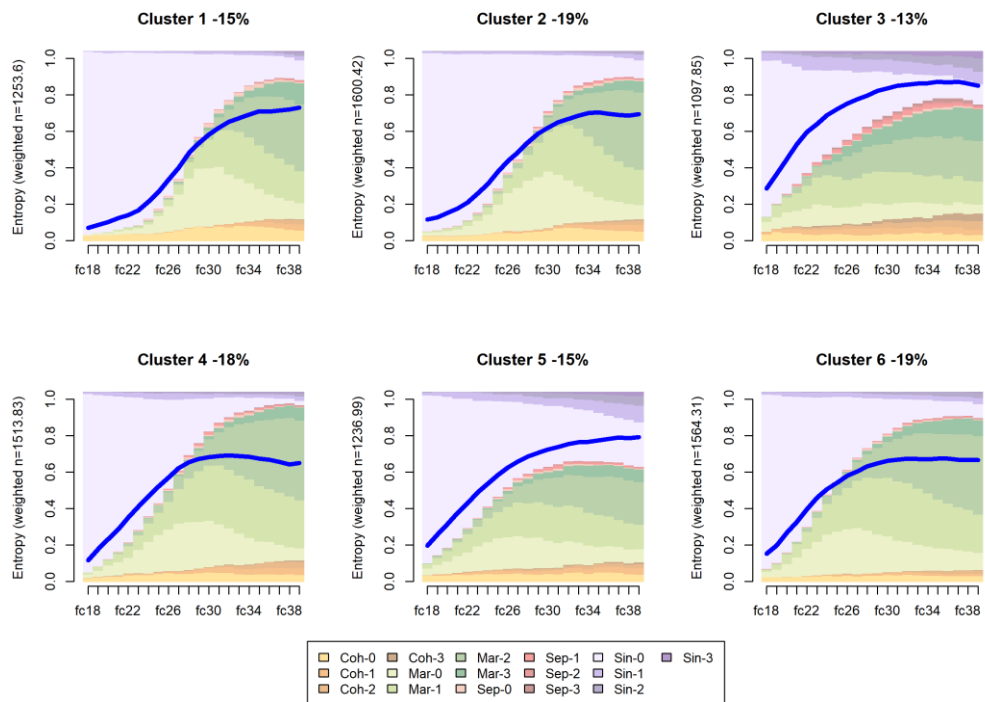
The methods used for the analysis will combine regression models with geometric data analysis, hierarchical and non-hierarchical cluster analysis and sequence analysis. Applying them to individual characteristics will allow us to identify the social groups that make up Spanish society. We will then be able to analyze the (in)stability of the labor and familial trajectories of each of the groups identified and compare the results among them.

Preliminary results

Our first contribution is a multidimensional and intersectional measure of inequalities among adult women in Spain; borrowing a term from Bourdieu, we call this measure probable social classes. In a nutshell, different forms of inequality in contemporary Spain interact. Our six-cluster solution is a sensible representation of such interactions. Cluster 1 can be defined as a privileged urban class, mainly with upper tertiary education, and more than 80% of the individuals comprised in the highest income groups. In Cluster 2, a higher share of individuals lives in intermediate cities than in Cluster 1 and exhibit lower average income and education levels. Cluster 3 is predominantly made up of immigrant population (76%); more than two-thirds of the individuals in this cluster have reached secondary education or below, and there is an overrepresentation of primary and elementary occupations. Cluster 4 is a Spanish low-middle class with average income levels, and most of its population in elementary and qualified occupations in the service sector. Clusters 5 and 6 are lower Spanish classes with low educational attainment and income levels and high unemployment and inactivity rates.

Our second contribution is examining how intersectional inequalities captured by our probable social classes relate (or not) to specific family formation trajectories and their variability (measured by the standardized entropy over age). Figure 1 shows the distribution of family and parity status for our analytical sample from ages 18 to 39. The blue lines represent the standardized entropy capturing the degree of variability of individual statuses at each age. According to the bottom label, grey colors represent singleness (Sin), green colors represent marriage (Mar), dark yellow represents cohabitation (Coh), and red represents separation, divorce, and widowhood (Sep). The shades of the colors indicate the number of children, with light colors indicating zero or one child and darker colors representing women with two, three, or more children (3 = 3+).

Figure 1. Distribution plots and normalized entropy over the life course regarding family formation trajectories by probable social classes among Spanish women.



Note: The analytical sample comprises Spanish women between ages 39 and 55, interviewed by the Spanish Fertility Survey 2018.

The two most privileged clusters display similar entropy over age and similar distributions of family formation statuses. Marriages are relatively stable, and transitions to first and second births are compressed within a few years. Very few women have more than two children in these two clusters. On the contrary, the transition to higher-order births in cluster three is more spread, from the twenties to the late thirties, and there is more separation in this cluster. Also, women in cluster three spend more time as single mothers, as reflected by the purple shade at the panel's top. Regarding the other three clusters, we observe a rapid increase in entropy in the early twenties that stabilizes after age 30 for clusters four and six but not for cluster five. Among this latter cluster, entropy continues to rise, potentially driven by single motherhood and separation, divorce, and widowhood.

In sum, our results suggest a connection between socioeconomic inequalities, and processual inequalities in partnership and childbearing paths. In addition, these plots also indicate that the children of these women grow up in reasonably distinct familial contexts regarding parental age, parental relations, and the presence or absence of siblings.

Our third contribution will be to estimate, based on children's dates of birth, person-years within different familial contexts, including intact marital unions, separated parents, remarried parents, and single parenthood with and without siblings. We will prepare these results for the conference's days. We will also conduct robustness checks for our cluster analysis and formal testing for assessing differences across clusters and the explanatory power of this cluster solution compared to other data partitions, such as educational attainment, occupation, and region of origin.

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