

## *Una visión de alumnos universitarios sobre la relación de sus padres como pareja*

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### Resumen

En una relación de pareja, sus integrantes comparten expectativas relacionadas con lo que vivieron y aprendieron en su familia de origen, de manera que la nueva familia reflejará patrones que los hijos reproducirán en un futuro. Si los hijos perciben relaciones de pareja adecuadas, retomarán estas mismas relaciones en la formación de su nueva familia; sin embargo, cuando esta relación se ve afectada por la separación, es probable que existan diferencias importantes en la percepción de los hijos. El objetivo del presente artículo fue analizar la percepción de universitarios respecto a la relación de sus padres como pareja dentro de la dinámica familiar, tomando en cuenta si sus padres vivían juntos o separados. Se utilizó una muestra intencional compuesta por 566 alumnos universitarios, de los cuales 345 eran mujeres y 221, hombres. Se aplicó el cuestionario Dinámica de la Familia Nuclear Mexicana de Vásquez et al. (2003), aunque solo se abordó el área “Los padres. Su dinámica cómo pareja”. La diferencia estadística entre grupos se obtuvo a través de la prueba U de Mann-Whitney. Los resultados mostraron diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre la percepción de los universitarios con respecto a sus padres cuando viven juntos o cuando viven separados. Se concluyó que existen diferentes factores que afectan el funcionamiento de la dinámica familiar, los cuales influyen de manera diferencial en la percepción que puede tener cada miembro de la familia.

*Palabras clave:* universitarios, padres, relación de pareja.

## *Perception of university students about their parents' relationship as a couple*

### Abstract

When a couple starts a new family, both members share expectations based on what they have learned from their experience in their respective families of origin, in such a way that their offspring will repeat the same patterns in the future. If children perceive a healthy appropriate relationship between their parents, chances are that they too will have a good relationship when they start their own families. However, children will have a different perception when their parents go through a separation or divorce. Based on these facts, the aim of this article was to analyze university students' perception regarding their parents' relationship as a couple within their family environment, taking into consideration whether their parents lived together or separately. A target group comprised of 566 university students of which 345 were women and 221 were men participated in the study. The instrument used was the measurement questionnaire “*Dinámica de la Familia Nuclear Mexicana*” [The Mexican Family Dynamics] (Vásquez, et al., 2003). In this study the only area addressed was “Parents and their relationship as a couple”. The statistical difference between groups was obtained using the Mann-Whitney U test. The results showed significant statistical differences between university students' perception of their parents depending on whether they live together or separately. A conclusion was reached on the existence of different factors that affect the family environment, which has a differential influence on each family member's perception.

*Key words:* University students, parents, relationship as a couple.

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## *Uma visão de alunos universitários sobre a relação de seus pais como casal*

### Resumo

Em uma relação de casal, seus integrantes compartilham expectativas relacionadas com o que viveram e aprenderam em sua família de origem, de forma que a nova família refletirá padrões que os filhos reproduzirão no futuro. Se os filhos percebem relações de casal adequadas, retomarão essas mesmas relações na formação da sua nova família; no entanto, quando essa relação se vê afetada pela separação, é provável que existam diferenças importantes na percepção dos filhos. O objetivo do presente artigo foi analisar a percepção de universitários com respeito à relação de seus pais como casal dentro da dinâmica familiar, levando em consideração se seus pais viviam juntos ou separados. Utilizou-se uma amostra intencional composta por 566 alunos universitários, dos quais 345 eram mulheres e 221, homens. Aplicou-se o questionário Dinâmica da Família Nuclear Mexicana, de Vásquez et al. (2003), ainda que apenas a área “Os pais — sua dinâmica como casal” tenha sido abordada. A diferença estatística entre grupos foi obtida através do Teste U de Mann-Whitney. Os resultados mostraram diferenças estatisticamente significativas entre a percepção dos universitários com respeito a seus pais quando vivem juntos ou quando vivem separados. Concluiu-se que existem diferentes fatores que afetam o funcionamento da dinâmica familiar, os quais influenciam de maneira diferencial na percepção que cada membro da família pode ter.

*Palavras-chave:* pais, relação de casal, universitários.

### INTRODUCTION

The need of every human being to belong to a family takes into consideration the psychological aspect of the child – adult relationship during a child’s growth and developmental process. Based on a child’s interaction with the adults (mother and father) and siblings of his / her family, there are certain psychological processes involved that will determine the child’s personality, social skills, independence and interpersonal relationships, and prepare him / her for marriage and for a committed relationship and family life in general.

In this regard, Padilla and Díaz-Loving (2013) note that a family is the privileged socialization environment where individuals’ character is shaped by promoting ways of thinking and acting that will become habits in the long run, due to which a family also serves as a space where patterns and cultural practices are produced and passed on. It is a unit that grows and develops as something dynamic, evolving, with discipline rules, value system and attitudes that define members’ lifestyles and relationships with the other family members (Torres, Reyes, Ortega & Garrido, 2015). Likewise, Estrada (1993) points out two important objectives of all families: 1) to solve the tasks or crises that a family faces in the different stages of development, and 2) provide for the family members’ needs to ensure present satisfaction and prepare them appropriately for the future.

The role of a family goes beyond guaranteeing survival and physical growth and involves promoting children’s social and affective development which will have an impact into adulthood due to which the relationships in the family will have a consequence in such development

(Vallejo, Sánchez-Barranco & Sánchez-Barranco, 2004). Some authors deem there is a two-way relationship between parents and children, in other words, that children are no longer passive spectators, but take part in the family’s interaction, environment and in the relationships with their parents (Oudhof & Robles, 2014).

The family environment is a result of cooperation, interchange, power and conflict relationships established inside families (Torres, Ortega, Garrido & Reyes, 2008). A couple is the nuclear family’s core, where expectations are created on how future life with a partner will be, considering having sons and daughters, taking care of them, and achieving harmony in a family (Garrido, Reyes, Torres & Ortega, 2008).

Having an intimate relationship with a partner is an important part in people’s lives, because it entails feelings of affection that allow them to achieve their personal identity, meet their security, trust, love and sexual needs (García, 2010; Silva & Ortiz, 2014; Soto, 2015).

When starting a relationship as a couple, its members share expectations related to what they learned from their experience in their families of origin (Garrido, et al. 2008; Padilla & Díaz-Loving, 2013). Therefore, the new family that a couple starts will reflect patterns that their children will repeat in the future. In this way, if children perceive an appropriate relationship between their parents, it is likely that they too will have healthy relationships when starting their own families. The characteristics of such rewarding relationships are: good communication, sharing aspirations and dreams, as well as having similar ideas, expressions of love and compatibility, without overlooking how emotions such as hatred and aggressive attitudes are handled. However,

if children perceive conflictive relationships this can have a negative influence when raising their own families.

Starting a new relationship as a couple is relatively easy, but to live up to the demands and responsibilities that this involves, is not. It is necessary to identify favorable interaction patterns between a couple, and if these do not exist, a conflict between desired and actual expectations may arise which leads to a difficult relationship that will interfere in the future family's future development (Padilla & Díaz-Loving, 2013).

All couples go through different structural and functional changes after crises or difficult phases which may affect a family's stability and require readjustment which may lead to parents' separation or divorce and changes in the relationships between every one of the family members, especially between a couple.

In many cases a lack of harmony leads parents to consider living separately. Some of the most common reasons for a couple to break up are: physical or psychological abuse, irreconcilable differences, weighting of economic, personal and social interests, breach of duties towards children, addiction problems, among others. These causes build up pressure that leads to stress in a marriage and to a family breakdown (García, Rivera-Aragón, Díaz-Loving & Reyes-Lagunes 2015; Lemes, 2016).

Parents have a decisive influence on the development and upbringing of their children and a marital breakdown entails a stage in which all of the family's context changes, especially the couple's relationship, causing a loss of balance and conflicts for both the parents and children (De la Torre, 2005; Fontana & Fernández, 2011; Lemes, 2016; Valdés & Aguilar, 2012).

The way parents deal with problems prior to and after a breakup can have an influence on the way they relate to their children and between themselves. Considering this, some authors recommend not to overlook such a family environment and to assess it with the aim of identifying and proposing the best interaction strategies in order to be able to have an appropriate relationship with their children (Arch, 2010; O'Donohue, Beitz & Cummings, 2008).

In the case of young people, studies have revealed that the experience of living with their parents together or apart has enabled them to be aware of the possible difficulties that they may have to face. As for young people who have not gotten married yet, some of them express their conviction that they will be more careful and serious when choosing a partner and that they will not repeat their parents' relationship model (Durán, Medina, González & Rolón, 2007).

These same authors indicate that young people and / or university students, express feelings of pain and anguish,

beliefs, memories and worries concerning their parents' separation / breakup, even when they may perform well, but others accept this situation and do not show clinical indicators. Those that live in broken families have more problems in their family relationships than students with close-knit families. There is evidence that tensions and worries are associated with matters such as children deciding which parent to live with, how often they will see the parent that leaves home and the conflict between their parents. Moreover, research stresses the importance of children from broken families to remain in touch with their absent father or mother, and that the distress a breakup causes is not attributed to the situation itself, but to the tension caused by parental issues.

Furthermore, parents absence can be a risk factor that affects children's perception as to their own marriage, and increases the likelihood of their repeating their parent's breakup, which can cause them to be less optimistic regarding their future marriage success (Durán, Medina, González & Rolón, 2007).

Some research ((Durán, Medina, González & Rolón, 2007; García, 2010; García & Guzmán, 2010; Silva & Ortiz, 2014) has been conducted to analyze which are the favorite personal characteristics when choosing a partner. In this regard, women want to build a stable, committed, mutually beneficial, nurturing and emotionally mature relationship, with a good, respectful, sincere and faithful companion with a similar level of education to theirs. On the other hand, men want an honest, respectful and flexible partner with a nice physical appearance as well as sexual compatibility.

For their part, Silva and Ortiz (2014) and Soto (2015) mention that men prefer physical attraction, sexual satisfaction and celibacy, whereas women look for emotional stability and maturity, education and intelligence, as well as a similar level of education.

Nowadays, young people do not see the choice of a life partner and marriage as an institution, but as a form of companionship where there is a more open chance of choosing a partner, find love, trust and affection, these being the contemporary values when choosing a partner to start a family (García, 2010).

In the past, the choice of a life partner was influenced by insistence of parents, the community, heads or family. Despite the fact that such a decision is currently free and personal (García, 2010; García & Martínez, 2010), family patterns can have an influence on the future partners that children choose.

The aim of this paper was to analyze university students' perception of their parents' relationship as a couple within

the family dynamics, taking into account whether their parents lived together or separately.

## METHOD

### *Type of study*

A comparative study was conducted, considering that this type of studies analyze the relationship between variables by examining the differences between two or more groups of individuals, according to their characteristics. These studies are non-experimental designs, so they do not use manipulated variables, and participants are not randomly assigned. (Ato & Vallejo, 2015).

### *Participants*

The study was conducted with a sample comprised of 566 single, 18 to 22 year old university students from Mexico City, with a 20.58 age average and a 2.97 standard deviation, of which 345 were women and 221 men. All of them were Psychology first to seventh semester students at one of the Schools of the National Autonomous University of Mexico; 68% of them lived with their parents and the rest (32%) in broken or separated families.

Students were chosen intentionally through non-probabilistic sampling and participated voluntarily, signing an informed consent in which the following was described: objectives of the study, institution, confidentiality with which the collected information would be kept and researchers' general information in case any doubt arouse.

### *Instrument*

The "*Dinámica de la Familia Nuclear Mexicana*" (The Nuclear Mexican Family Dynamics) measurement questionnaire designed and validated by Vásquez, et al. (2003) was used. Such questionnaire consists of 160 questions and 8 behavior areas: 1) Parents and their relationship as a couple; 2) Identity formation; 3) Communication, expression and solidarity; 4) Authority structure; 5) Conflict and aggressiveness management, 6) Discipline and method, 7) Value system, and 8) Sociocultural isolation and integration. The instrument was validated in different studies and Mexican populations, showing a significant internal consistency (Vásquez, Sánchez, Navarro, Romero, Pérez & Kumazawa, 2003), where Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.941. The instrument comprises two answer options (yes = 1 and no = 0) for each one of the questions. All of the affirmative answers had a value of 1 if the item was

positive in the "yes" answer and a value of 1 was assigned to it. However, if the item was negative in the "no" answer, a value of 1 was also assigned. The range of answers for this work was from 0 to 36, where the higher value indicated a better family environment. Typically, values are shown in terms of percentages and the average scores are used to compare populations.

Participants answered the whole questionnaire and in this study the only area that was analyzed was the one pertaining to "*Parents and their relationship as a couple*" to comply with the proposed objective. In this behavior area, a couple is considered the core of the nuclear family which entails a family unity process: father, mother and children. This area was assessed taking six indicators into consideration: a) aspirations and common goals; b) hatred – aggressiveness; c) similar ideas; d) love, e) character compatibility and f) communication.

### *Procedure*

The questionnaire was administered to the young students in the facilities of the university they attended. First of all, they were informed about the objective of the research and were asked to cooperate voluntarily. After this, those who accepted to answer the questionnaire were asked to sign an informed consent. The questions that arose on the research were answered stressing the aim of this and its importance from a scientific standpoint; students were assured that the information obtained would be kept confidential. Once the questions and comments regarding the study were clarified, the questionnaires were handed out and students were asked to complete the general information.

Later, the following instructions were read together with them:

"Read the following questions carefully and mark the option that best reflects your family dynamics. Bear in mind that there are no correct or incorrect answers and that the information that will be used for research purposes will remain confidential."

In each question participants had to answer affirmatively or negatively, in accordance with what best represented their family dynamic regarding their biological father or mother. Students were informed that there was no time limit to answer the questionnaire and that they should try to be as truthful as possible. The approximate time it took students to answer the questionnaire was 30 minutes.

When finished, the questionnaires were collected and the students were thanked for their participation. Later, the information was entered into the SPSS statistical program

with the purpose of performing the analysis pertaining to the area that would be studied.

#### Data analysis

The results were analyzed through the SPSS statistical package, considering university students' perception on their parents' relationship as a couple. For this purpose, the following 6 indicators were taken into consideration: a) common goals and aspirations; b) hatred – aggressiveness; c) similar ideas; d) love; e) compatibility and f) communication, in relation to their father and mother.

In order to compare university students' perception related to the family dynamics in which they live, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was run, finding a

negative asymmetry in the distribution, which indicates that the sample does not correspond to a normal distribution, due to which comparisons were made with the Wilcoxon – Mann - Whitney or Mann Whitney U test.

## RESULTS

With the aim that the reader may identify the contents of each one of the indicators, the questions that were specified for each one can be found in Table 1.

Figure 1 represents the percentages of students' affirmative answers in the six indicators taking into account if their families lived together or separate. Data show that

Table 1

*Questions of each one of the indicators involved in the behavior area: Parents and their relationship as a couple*

Indicators	Questions	Total
1. Aspirations and common goals	30.- Does your father share management of the family's income with his partner?	6
	31.- Does your mother share management of the family's income with her partner?	
	76.- Does your father believe his relationship / marriage is for life?	
	77.- Does your mother believe her relationship / marriage is for life?	
	131.- Does your father share his goals, aspirations and projects with your mother?	
2. Hatred and aggressiveness (physical and psychological)	132.- Does your mother share her goals, aspirations and projects with your father?	6
	26.- Has your father ever assaulted his partner physically?	
	27.- Has your mother ever assaulted her partner physically?	
	46.- Does your father frequently think that his partner hates him?	
	47.- Does your mother frequently think that her partner hates her?	
3. Similar ideas	48.- Has your father ever beaten his partner?	7
	49.- Has your mother ever beaten her partner?	
	13.- Does your father criticize his partner's personality frequently?	
	14.- Does your mother criticize her partner's personality frequently?	
	33.- Does your father consider that your mother is a good example?	
4. Love	34.- Does your mother consider that your father is a good example?	6
	54.- Do your parents have very similar ideas?	
	88.- Is your father completely dependent on your mother?	
	89.- Is your mother completely dependent on your father?	
	73.- Does your father admire your mother?	
	74.- Does your mother admire your father?	
	83.- Does your father think your mother loves him?	
	84.- Does your mother think your father loves her?	
	126.- Does your father feel emotionally distant from his partner even though they live together?	
	127.- Does your mother feel emotionally distant from her partner even though they live together?	

Indicators	Questions	Total
5. Compatibility	40.- Does your father generally dislike the way his partner behaves?	6
	41.- Does your mother generally dislike the way her partner behaves?	
	50.- Do your mother and father argue constantly?	
	69.- Has your father left the house for more than 24 hours after an argument?	
	70.- Has your mother left the house for more than 24 hours after an argument?	
6. Communication	90.- When they argue frequently, does any of them lose control completely?	5
	55.- Does your father make most decisions at home taking your mother into consideration?	
	56.- Does your mother make most decisions at home taking your father into consideration?	
	61.- Do your parents usually solve problems and go through hard times together?	
	108.- Does your father believe he really knows your mother after living together for years?	
	109.- Does your mother believe she really knows your father after living together for years?	

the indicators with the highest percentage (80%) such as aspirations and common goals, as well as communication, were identified when families live together. On the other hand, the percentage in these same indicators, such as the aspirations and common goals (23.63%), as well as the communication indicator (39.26%), were lower when families lived apart.

The percentage in the hatred and aggressiveness indicator was 11.2% when families live together, whereas when families live separately, this percentage was higher (27.68%). As far as the compatibility indicator is concerned, the percentage was lower (26.01%) when families live together than when they live separately (42.42%).

In the similar ideas and love indicators, the results reflect similar percentages in both families that live together and those that live separately.

With the aim of identifying if there were significant differences between the two groups of families, the statistical analysis was performed using the Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples in each one of the studied indicators.

As can be seen in Table 2, significant statistical differences between university students' perception regarding their parents' relationship as a couple when they live together or separately can be observed in all cases.

With the purpose of clearly identifying the differences perceived by the university students regarding their parents' relationship as a couple in each one of the indicators' aspects, the following tables show the percentage of answers for each question per indicator.

Table 3 shows the percentages obtained in indicator 1: Aspirations and common goals. Differences in university

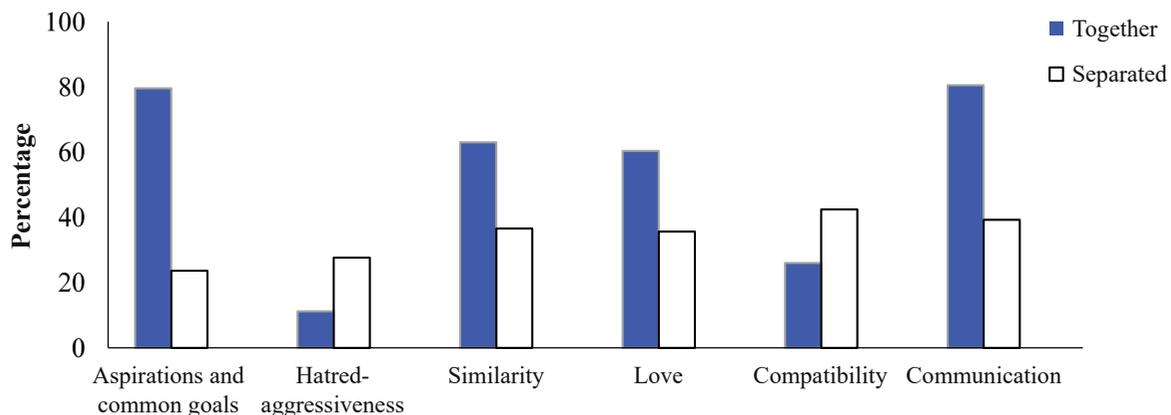


Figure 1. Percentages of affirmative answers in each one of the indicators of the relationship as a couple when families live together or separate

Table 2

*Results of statistical analysis (Mann-Whitney U Test) in accordance with being a father or mother and the family's life status (together or separated)*

Mothers / Fathers	Family life	Average	U	Sig.
Mothers. Aspirations	Together	2.3874	6646.00	.05
	Separated	.7273		
Fathers. Aspirations	Together	2.3874	6791.00	.05
	Separated	.6909		
Mothers. Hatred / aggressiveness	Together	2.7277	27077.50	.05
	Separated	2.5030		
Fathers. Hatred / aggressiveness	Together	2.5995	20591.50	.05
	Separated	1.8364		
Mothers. Ideas	Together	2.1414	24369.50	.05
	Separated	1.7879		
Fathers. Ideas	Together	2.3639	21071.50	.05
	Separated	1.8182		
Mothers. Love	Together	2.2435	13953.00	.05
	Separated	1.0364		
Fathers. Love	Together	2.3377	13000.00	.05
	Separated	1.1030		
Mothers. Compatibility	Together	1.5079	27847.00	.05
	Separated	1.3455		
Fathers. Compatibility	Together	1.5314	17332.00	.05
	Separated	.8485		
Mothers. Communication	Together	1.6335	10895.00	.05
	Separated	.6121		
Fathers. Communication	Together	1.5471	11533.00	.05
	Separated	.5515		

students' perception can be observed in relation to the family environment in which they live in, in such a way that when families are together percentages are higher, in other words, university students consider that their parents do not share aspirations or common goals when they live separately. A significant difference between the groups was found ( $X^2 = 293.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ) when the statistical analysis was performed.

In relation to the hatred and aggressiveness indicator, the highest percentages, for both families that live together or separately, are associated with the father (questions 26, 46 and 48), in other words, students identify more aggressiveness in him, a situation that is evident when families are separated (see table 4). A significant difference between the two groups ( $X^2 = 58.79$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was found in the statistical analysis.

Table 3

*Percentage of affirmative answers of the indicator on aspirations and common goals in families that live together or separately*

Question	Together	Separated
30.- Does your father share management of the family's income with his partner?	88.7	29.7
31.- Does your mother share management of the family's income with her part	85.6	31.5
76.- Does your father believe that his relationship / marriage is for life?	79.1	17
77.- Does your mother believe that her relationship / marriage is for life?	78	20.6
131.- Does your father share his goals, aspirations and projects with your mother?	70.9	22.4
132.- Does your mother share her goals, aspirations and projects with your father?	75.1	20.6
Total	79.56 %	23.63 %

Note:  $X^2 = 293.07$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Question number 54: “Do your parents have similar views / mindsets?” is the best example of the similar ideas indicator. The fact that 42.7% university students agree with this statement can be observed when they come from families that live together and only 17% when their families live apart (see table 5). The datum that attracts attention is the one in question 13 where the highest percentage was identified in the separated parents group (50.9%) due to which it can be inferred that the father criticizes his partner’s personality more frequently in this case. The difference found between the groups was statistical significant ( $X^2 = 65.22, p < .05$ ).

On the other hand, in the love indicator, questions 83 and 84 show university students’ perception of the love between their parents. Obviously, percentages are higher

when parents live together than separately (see table 6). Using  $X^2$  as a statistical test to compare data, results were significant ( $X^2 = 158.25, p < .05$ ).

Question 69: “Has your father left the house for more than 24 hours after an argument?” stands out in the compatibility indicator where the highest percentage can be found when the family is separated (63%), in contrast with the same question number 70 for the mother (15.8%). When parents are separated, the same dissatisfaction pattern can be found in the other questions, in other words, that there is no compatibility between parents (see table 7), due to which a significant statistical difference was obtained ( $X^2 = 41.71, p < .05$ ).

Table 4

*Percentage of affirmative answers of the hatred and aggressiveness indicator in families that live together and separately*

Question	Together	Separated
26.- Has your father ever assaulted his partner physically?	14.7	39.4
27.- Has your mother ever assaulted her partner physically?	9.4	15.8
46.- Does your father frequently think that his partner hates him?	12	38.2
47.- Does your mother frequently think that her partner hates her?	9.4	21.2
48.- Has your father ever beaten his partner?	13.4	38.8
49.- Has your mother ever beaten her partner?	8.4	12.7
Total	11.2 %	27.68 %

Note:  $X^2 = 58.79, p < .05$ .

Table 5

*Percentage of affirmative answers of the similar ideas indicator in families that live together and separately*

Question	Together	Separated
13.- Does your father criticize his partner’s personality frequently?	33	50.9
14.- Does your mother criticize her partner’s personality frequently?	42.1	46.7
33.- Does your father consider that your mother is a good example?	81.7	53.3
34 Does your mother consider that your father is a good example?	73.8	63.3
54.- Do your parents have similar views / mindsets?	42.7	17
88.- Is your father completely dependent on your mother?	87.7	13.9
89.- Is your mother completely dependent on your father?	80.1	10.9
Total	63.01 %	36.57 %

Note:  $X^2 = 65.22, p < .05$ .

Table 6

*Percentage of affirmative answers of the love indicator in families that live together and separately*

Question	Together	Separated
73.- Does your father admire your mother?	75.1	38.2
74.- Does your mother admire your father?	70.7	28.5
83.- Does your father think that your mother loves him?	83.2	23.6
84.- Does your mother think that your father loves her?	81.2	24.8
126.- Does your father feel emotionally distant from his partner even though they live together?	24.6	48.5
127.- Does your mother feel emotionally distant from her partner even though they live together?	27.5	50.3
Total	60.38 %	35.65 %

Note:  $X^2 = 158.25, p < .05$ .

Table 7

*Percentage of affirmative answers of the compatibility indicator in families that live together and separately*

Question	Together	Separated
40.- Does your father generally dislike the way his partner behaves?	30.4	52.1
41.- Does your mother generally dislike the way her partner behaves?	38.7	49.7
50.- Do your mother and father argue constantly?	31.7	37.6
69.- Has your father left the house for more than 24 hours after an argument?	16.5	63
70.- Has your mother left the house for more than 24 hours after an argument?	10.5	15.8
90.- When they argue frequently, does any of them lose control completely?	28.3	36.4
Total	26.01 %	42.43 %

Note:  $X^2 = 41.71, p < .05$ .

Table 8

*Percentage of affirmative answers of the communication indicator in families that live together and separately*

Question	Together	Separated
55.- Does your father make most decisions at home taking your mother into consideration?	73.8	21.8
56.- Does your mother make most decisions at home taking your father into consideration?	78.8	24.2
61.- Do your parents usually solve problems and go through hard times together?	84.6	80
108.- Does your father believe he really knows your mother after living together for years?	80.9	33.3
109.- Does your mother believe she really knows your father after living together for years?	84.6	37
Total	80.54 %	39.26 %

Note:  $X^2 = 201.97, p < .05$ .

In question 61: “*Do your parents usually solve problems and go through hard times together?*” of the communication indicator, similar percentages are shown both when families are together (84.6%) or separated (80%), in contrast with the other questions where lower percentages can be seen when parents are separated. Considering this, when families live together, university students perceive that there is a better communication between their parents as a couple (see table 8). However, when using statistical test  $X^2$ , significant differences were found ( $X^2 = 201.97, p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

According to Soto (2015) it is important to take several aspects into consideration to achieve a stable and successful relationship as a couple. These aspects are: sexual satisfaction, compatibility, aspirations and common goals, similar ideas and values and the same life project which have to do with those areas of daily life related to education, values, habits, lifestyles, views, nationality, language, work, hygiene, nutrition and leisure.

Likewise, the author emphasizes the fact that a perception of satisfaction is an important factor to build strong relationships. This perception is related to different areas: a) daily life (roles, household chores, rituals, leisure, agreements on resource generation and distribution; b) emotional

(nurturing, compatibility, appreciation and support, and c) cognitive (values and beliefs).

Mexico's divorce rate has increased 136.4% over the last 15 years and in 2015, 123,883 cases were registered. Most divorces are by mutual consent (50.8%) and unilateral voluntary separation (34.4%) [The National Institute of Statistics and Geography in Mexico (INEGI, by its acronym in Spanish); 2017]. This situation leads us to consider that a large proportion of young people live in a family environment with separated or divorced parents and therefore this fact must not be overlooked.

The results of this study show that there were significant differences between university students' perception of their parents' relationship as a couple when these live together or apart. Thus, those students that live in a family where their parents are together perceive higher communication levels in their parents' relationships as a couple. Such results are similar to those indicated by Garcés & Palacio (2010) in which a better degree of communication was found in families that live together than in those families where the student only lives with one of his / her parents.

As far as shared aspirations, expressions of love, compatibility and little aggressiveness are concerned, results show that these aspects have been identified as key factors in some studies on the choice of a partner and starting a family (García, 2010; Garrido, et al. 2008; Padilla & Díaz-Loving, 2013).

On the other hand, in the case of university students that come from broken families, results reflect that they perceive more demonstrations of hatred in their parents' relationship as a couple. In this indicator there was evidence that fathers (males) are more aggressive and create conflict in the family, in agreement with greater paternal physical abuse reported by Garcés & Palacio (2010) in his study.

A contradictory finding is the one shown in the compatibility indicator where data reveal that university students perceive greater compatibility in their parents when they are separated or divorced than when they are together. A possible reason for this would be that in view of the need of reaching agreements regarding their children, parents are more willing to deal with family matters that can be shared, understood and accepted by both of them to strengthen their previous decision (Soto, 2015).

Based on the foregoing, we can conclude that:

- There are differences in university students' perception on their parents relationship as a couple when these live together or separately.

-The indicators that reflected stability in a couple were: aspirations and common goals, similar ideas, love and communication.

-The indicators that reflected a lack of stability in a couple were: hatred, aggressiveness and compatibility.

-Young people's perception of their parents' relationship as a couple can have an influence on their future choice of a partner and starting their own families.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that this study opens future lines of research on the influence that young people's perception of their parents' relationship as a couple can have on aspects such as: academic performance, self-esteem, life project, career development, relationships, depression, anxiety or addictions, among others.

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