Empirical research on understanding dynamics within families and decision-making by individuals within families has been seriously hindered by the fact that several constructs that play a key role in theoretical models of these behaviors have been very difficult to measure in population-based socio-economic and demographic surveys. Arguably, attitudes or preferences towards inter-personal relationships, such as altruism, are the bedrock upon which models of the family and family decision-making are built. How resources are distributed among different family members and how they are allocated over time depends on individuals’ attitudes towards each other, towards risk and uncertainty, and their attitudes towards consumption now relative to consumption in the future. In most empirical studies of the family, heterogeneity in these domains of preferences of individuals are typically treated either as fixed parameters or as unobserved by the analyst. We combine data from the Mexican Family Life Survey (MxFLS), a broad-purpose large-scale socio-economic household survey, with experimental measures of altruism and social norms of sharing to better understand resource allocation within the household. Altruism is measured using the Comparative Dictator Game, a variation of the standard dictator game, where subjects make several decisions allocating an amount of money between themselves and another person. The identity of the other person is varied, and includes two family members, a member of the same village, and a member of another village. This game allows us to gauge baseline altruism, as well as variation in altruism with social distance and the type of family member (spouse, child, parent, etc.). The combination of household survey data with experimental measures of altruism provides unique opportunities to better understand the relationship between altruism and the characteristics of individuals, their families and their communities.

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