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THE VULNERABILITY OF WOMAN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS: POLICY
QUESTIONS AND OPTIONS FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE
CARIBBEAN */

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INTRODUCTION

Attention to the potential vulnerability of woman-headed households in developing countries and policy interest in these households surfaced for the first time in the late 1970's. It has resurfaced again in the nineties as countries, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, are taking stock of the "lost decade" of the eighties and are in the process of shifting development strategies to emphasize economic growth with human resource development and equity. In the years that intervened, some progress was made in expanding basic knowledge on the condition of these households but the policy record remained dismal and unchanged.

As part of this resurgence in interest, the Population Council (New York) and the International Center for Research on Women (Washington, D.C.) have launched a research program on family structure, female headship and the intergenerational transmission of poverty in developing countries. The U.N. ECLAC is cosponsoring the program initiatives in the LAC region. This issue paper is based on the discussions of four seminars, held under the program, to assess the state of policy relevant knowledge on the topic. It uses cross-regional evidence presented at the seminars to illuminate the issues of female headship in the LAC region. The paper analyzes households, rather than families, and the women who head them, and recognizes that households may have single, joint or multiple headship, and house one or more families or a family and unrelated residents.

The paper briefly discusses five questions of relevance to research and policy : the usefulness of the concept of female headship; the importance or social significance of the female headship trend; the relationship between female headship and poverty; the welfare implications of female headship; and policy dilemmas and options.

1. Is Female Headship a Useful Concept?

No analysis of the issue of female headship can avoid confronting the question of the utility of the term for research and policy. At least three main limitations have led to the increasingly accepted view that the term female headship is not useful for policy purposes; this view holds that research and policy should instead focus on individuals and their condition within households.

Among the limitations are, first, that countries use different, and therefore often non-comparable, definitions of both the terms household and head of household in their census instruments. For instance, Chile, Paraguay and Peru incorporate housekeeping and dwelling unit criteria into the definition of household while Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador use only the latter criterion. Further, some censuses (those of Bolivia, Chile and Venezuela) define head of household as that person who is acknowledged as such by the other members of the household, while others (those of Brazil and Honduras) rely primarily on economic criteria to define household headship. Second, even more problematic is the ambiguity inherent in the term head of household in those countries that leave the assignment of headship to household members. Members may use different criteria to make this assignment rendering within-country comparisons invalid; comparisons are especially flawed if variations in criteria used are determined by individual or household characteristics, such as age and income level, and therefore reflect systematic differences among subgroups in the population of members. Lastly, the third and perhaps most serious limitation is that the term head of household is not neutral. It is loaded with the additional meanings of a household with a patriarchal system of governance and no internal conflicts in the allocation of household resources (Folbre 1990).

These limitations notwithstanding, the identification of woman-headed households can still be a useful research and policy tool in developing countries for three other reasons. First, the existing evidence reveals that, when using economic maintenance or responsibility as the definitional criterion, the categorization of households by the sex and the number of members in charge of economic maintenance discriminates households with characteristics and behaviors that have important policy implications. This is true irrespective of how economic responsibility is measured. Households that depend on a woman, either because she is the economically active member in Sri Lanka (Korale 1988) or works the most number of hours in Peru (Rosenhouse 1988) tend to be less well-off than households that depend on a male wage earner. In Peru, these households have significantly lower consumption levels than male-headed households. Equally interesting, multiple-earner households in Peru are as disadvantaged (or perhaps more) than woman-headed ones. They consume only half as much as single-earner households.

Second, the concept of woman-headed households is useful to identify a growing number of "manless" households or households with no permanent or temporary male resident contributing to household income. "Manless" households include those headed by widows, a growing phenomenon in urban areas in the LAC region, as well as those headed by younger, unpartnered mothers, who give birth out of wedlock or are abandoned by men soon after giving birth. Evidence indicates that this last type of household can be

particularly vulnerable economically and socially and can transmit poverty intergenerationally.

In the U.S., poverty reproduces itself through teenage pregnancy; longitudinal studies of black teenage mothers show that their children do worse in school and in the labor market when compared with children of mothers age 20 and older, and daughters, in particular, tend to be teenage mothers themselves more often and to have more economic and living problems over the long run than their mothers (Fursteberg et al 1987). In Guatemala, children in woman-headed households are disadvantaged nutritionally when compared to children in male-headed ones. Further, this nutritional deficit is explained by the interaction of the mother's lower income with the father's absence, indicating that his absence, and not only the lack of his economic contribution, is important to insure child welfare (Engle 1989). Since the welfare of "manless" female headed households depends to a large measure on the availability of support systems, the erosion of traditional supports in the absence of well-functioning modern ones can push woman-headed households into poverty. There is evidence for this phenomenon in Ghana (Appiah 1989) and in India (Jain and Mukherjee 1989).

In summary, especially in developing countries that lack advanced means testing and other statistical tools to target the poor, the concept of "manless" woman-headed households can be a reliable proxy to identify poor and disadvantaged households.

Third, the term woman-headed households is important because it singles out a category of households that usually does not have access to the benefits generated by policy and project interventions in sectors which use the household as the unit of analysis and intervention but which, following the patriarchal concept of household structure, target only the resident men. Two such sectors, of critical importance in most poorer developing countries in the region, are housing and agriculture. Examples abound of agricultural extension services, for instance, that bypass female farm managers, including those who are farm innovators, and of housing policies and projects that fail to benefit woman-headed households. A shelter sector study in Kingston, Jamaica found that female-headed households had a higher incidence of poverty, higher levels of hunger and lower assets and savings levels than male-headed households. As a consequence, they could not purchase housing and had to opt for the more costly rental alternative, while the government's housing policy benefitted squatters and other potential owners over renters (McLeod 1989).

Given the advantages and limitations mentioned, a balanced view on the debate over definition does not debunk the term female headship but tries to improve its usage because the concept is both a reliable proxy to identify a special disadvantaged category of

the poor and a tool to re-target a number of policies and projects directed to poor households in critical sectors in developing economies. Research needs to devise and test the reliability of different questions to measure household economic responsibility by sex that could be used in censuses and household surveys. Experimental modules could be included in the current round of censuses in countries in the LAC region to test different ways of measuring household economic maintenance and assess variations in the results obtained when compared with the standard ways of measuring headship.

Up to now researchers have used proxies (economic activity rates or total market hours worked) for measuring household economic responsibility. Given the potential to discriminate household conditions and behaviors, primary research needs to assess household headship by actual income earned and contributed to household maintenance. Research is also needed on the conditions or circumstances that foster different economic maintenance patterns and their welfare consequences.

2. Is Female Headship a Significant Social Trend?

Because of the problems mentioned with the definition of the concept, reliable evidence on the incidence and prevalence of woman-headed households in developing countries is lacking. Many believe, however, that the number of households that are maintained by females is rapidly multiplying in Third World countries, as a result of at least two trends associated with economic change that contribute to the emergence of fluid family structures and female headship in industrialized and developing countries alike. The first trend is the disruption, with economic development, of traditional systems of patriarchal governance which weakens explicit and implicit contracts that enforced income transfers from fathers to mothers and their children. Nancy Folbre (*op. cit.*) states that this detachment of children from fathers' earnings is a converging issue for women in developing and industrialized countries, and is more often than not indicative of a forced independence from male wages rather than women's choice not to depend on men's earnings. As evidence of this trend, the great majority of the women and mothers in the United States were dependent upon men in the 1940's while only a minority (under 25 percent) were exclusively relying upon male earnings in the 1980's (Mc Lanahan, et.al. 1986).

The second trend, closely associated to the first, is declining real household income and increasing poverty "forcing" men to abscond responsibility for family maintenance. Especially in the case of the LAC region, researchers have hypothesized that the economic crisis of the eighties and the loss of gainful employment among men have increased the numbers of households that

depend only or primarily on women's income. There is, however, no firm evidence on this phenomenon yet.

In addition, there are demographic and social trends that foster the formation of woman-headed households worldwide but appear at different stages of economic development in different societies. They include sex-specific migration leaving "left-behind" female heads in the place of origin or households headed by migrant women in the place of destination; sex-ratio imbalances due to migration or deaths from wars producing a "surplus" of women in local marriage markets; female widowhood resulting from continuing differences in age at marriage and higher female survival rates; and both marital disruption and adolescent fertility in some societies. Lastly, unlike the case of the industrialized West, there are culturally specific forces in Third World countries that give rise to woman-headed households --such as slavery in the Caribbean, separate agricultural plots, purses and economic responsibilities by sex in many West African rural households, land inheritance through matrilineal lines in some African countries such as Zaire, and specific customs in some societies, such as the ability of Ghanaian women to "retire" from marriage contracts when in their late thirties.

Census information on the rise of female headship in the LAC region is unreliable because censuses have used imprecise definitions of headship and have often varied definitions over time. In some countries (Chile and Costa Rica) the census has shown relatively little change in the proportion of female heads recorded over time, while in other countries it has shown significant increases. In Brazil, for instance, female headship increased from 5.2 percent of all households recorded in the census in 1960 to 20.6 percent in 1987. Household survey information is more reliable, and for Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, Panama and Venezuela it shows that the number of woman-headed households increased in all countries in the early 1980's (Altimir 1984).

More importantly, a number of demographic and socioeconomic trends have been prevalent in the region in the last decades, and they bolster the notion of a substantial rise in households headed by women. They include : (1) urbanization and female-dominated migration into the cities since the 1960's and civil conflicts throughout the years, which have created a demographic imbalance between the sexes in urban areas and left a "surplus" of females, especially in the younger, marriageable ages and the older age groups; (2) a troubling trend on the increase of single motherhood and adolescent fertility; and (3) the erosion of extended family systems and traditional support networks in urban areas, which leaves single mothers and widowed women to fend for themselves. In addition, some preliminary evidence suggests that the declines in living standards and male wages associated with the economic contraction of the eighties have contributed to the formation of female headship, and this trend may have been aided, especially

among the middle income groups, by the disruption of patriarchal contracts that governed the relations between parents and children.

In developing economies, including those of the LAC region, research needs to confront the questions of incidence and prevalence and devise ways to quantify, and therefore establish empirically, the social significance of the phenomenon of female headship. Very little is known on the effects of social and economic variables on the rise of woman-headed households in developing countries while the policy relevance of generating this evidence is the greatest. As the next section indicates, there is suggestive evidence that different antecedents lead to the constitution of female headship with different poverty risks. In investigating the links between economic variables and the rise in female headship, it would be especially important to establish the relationship between declining household income and declining male wages with female headship.

3. Is Female Headship a Sign of Economic Vulnerability?

Not all woman-headed households are poor, and the evidence suggests a link between antecedent factors and the economic situation of these households. First, it appears that woman-headed households that emerge out of traditional customs that have been sanctioned by society are relatively well-off and should not be the subject of concern for policy (while they may be of interest to family sociology). Examples of these households are wives of polygamous men that set up independent households in West African societies or women, also in Africa, who inherit land and a right to set up a household as a result of matrilineal descent. Second, the evidence reveals heterogeneity in the situation of left-behind female heads of household as a result of male migration. In impoverished rural areas such as Southern Botswana where the returns from agriculture are uncertain, male remittances, if any, do not begin to offset the costs of labor required to maintain adequate productivity and female-headed farm households tend to be the poorest. In other, more promising rural situations, however, such as those of woman-headed cash cropping farm households in Kenya, of left-behind women heads in Uttar Pradesh in India, or of female-headed households of the Teba tribe in Malawi, female-headed households with access to resources or remittances can be better-off than male headed ones. But these cases are more often the exception rather than the rule, and this is especially the case in societies, such as those in Spanish speaking Latin America, where the culture strongly disapproves of the --however common-- condition of female headship.

Overall, the majority of the studies shows a positive association between female headship and poverty, and this is especially the case in the LAC region where the evidence clearly

indicates that woman-headed households are at a higher risk of poverty than male-headed households. Already in the early 1970's in Santiago, Chile, and in Guayaquil, Ecuador, the median monthly income of poor households with women heads was consistently lower than the income of male-headed households (Elizaga 1970; JNPCE 1973). The more recent and richer evidence only confirms this pattern. For instance, 1985 data for five Latin American cities replicates the above findings and, in addition, shows that the income differential is greater between woman-headed households and men-headed households than between men and women in the population. (Arriagada, 1990). Table 1 summarizes the findings of 22 studies and shows that, with the exceptions of Panama and metropolitan Venezuela in Altimir's analysis (1984) and of Bogota in the study by CEPAL (1985), all other investigations find that woman-headed households are over represented among poor households.

An understanding of the factors contributing to the poverty of these households and the implications of impoverished female heads for capital formation and children's welfare is useful in designing effective development interventions. What are the determinants or the sources of these households' economic vulnerability? The studies point to three sets of factors that determine the greater poverty of woman-headed, compared to male-headed, households. They emerge, respectively, from characteristics of household composition, the gender of the main earner, and the unique condition of being a woman-headed household.

First, households with female heads are poorer than households with male heads because, although they may have fewer household members, they have to support comparatively more dependents. Female-headed households in, for instance, Brazil, Mexico and Peru, have fewer other adult earners or secondary workers in the household, unlike male-headed households who can count on the wife to work, and a greater dependency ratio, that is, relatively more dependents when compared to workers, both young and old.

Second, the economic vulnerability of woman-headed households is explained by the fact that because heads are women, they have lower average earnings, fewer assets, and less access to remunerative jobs and productive resources, such as land, capital and technology, than male heads. For instance, a comparative analysis of the earnings of household heads in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, revealed that the inferior jobs open to women in the labor market explained most of the differential in earnings between male and female heads. Fifty-three percent of the female heads had low-paid jobs in the informal sector, as compared to only 30 percent of the males (Merrick and Schmink 1983). In Peru, the lower earning power of women heads of household was a function of their lower education (Tienda and Salazar 1980). And in Jamaica and El Salvador woman-headed households were poorer because they had less access to land and credit (Lastarria-Cornheil 1988).

This second set of factors, then, emerges from gender differences between men and women, and the vulnerability of woman-headed households should improve as the condition of all women in the population improves.

The third set of reasons for the higher poverty of woman-headed households is the result of the unique combination of having a head who is a woman. That is, there is an independent effect of female headship on household economic vulnerability that cannot be reduced to the characteristics of women or of the household. This effect, in turn, can operate through three different mechanisms. First, because women heads also have to fulfill home production or domestic roles, they have greater time and mobility constraints, which can result in their "preference" for working fewer hours for pay, for "choosing" lower paying jobs that are nevertheless more compatible with childcare, and for spending more for certain services, such as water and housing, because they cannot contribute time to offset transaction costs. Second, women who head households may encounter discrimination in access to jobs or resources beyond that which they encounter because of their gender or may themselves, because of social or economic pressures, make inappropriate choices that affect the household's economic welfare. Last, female heads may have a history premature parenthood and family instability that tends to perpetuate poverty intergenerationally.

Premature parenthood is a significant problem in the LAC region and, while its association with female headship has yet to be investigated, it is likely that a substantial number of teenage mothers become responsible for the economic welfare of their children and influence their lifecourse trajectories, as investigations in the United States have demonstrated. These studies show that early sexual experience and early fertility, as well as non-marriage and low education, are key links in the intergenerational transmission of poverty between mothers and their children (Fursteberg et al. op. cit.).

Single motherhood, and especially teenage pregnancy, is on the rise in the region. Table 2 gives a sense of the magnitude of the problem of single motherhood in a sample of countries that compile such statistics. The percentage of single mothers as a percentage of the total single female population in their reproductive years varies from 27.5 percent in Guatemala to 52 percent in Colombia, 66 percent in Peru, and almost 84 percent in Jamaica. Not all of these women are teenage mothers. Table 3 gives a better indication of the incidence of teenage motherhood by giving the percentage change in levels of adolescent fertility, that is, the number of births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years, for the last decade and a half or so, and the percentage change in the total fertility rates (children born to women 15 to 49 years) for comparison purposes. As the table shows, the proportion of these "at risk" adolescent birth rates has increased in a number of countries and

has decreased less than the decrease in the total rates in others, indicating that teenage childbearing is a more serious problem in the 1980's than in the 1970's. Independent studies support this analysis. In Chile, for instance, there has been a significant increase in adolescent fertility in the last 10 years, and this phenomenon is especially pronounced for non-married adolescents. While in 1970, 44 percent of the births of younger women were of unmarried mothers, by 1985 this percentage had risen to 55 percent (Valenzuela et.al., 1989). The percentage of young mothers with one or more children increased in Brazil from 7.9 percent of females in the age group 14 to 19 in 1970 to 9.9 percent in 1980; in Peru this percentage increased from 10 percent in 1972 to 41 percent in 1981 (U.S. Bureau of the Census International Data Base 1989).

It is likely that the three set of factors mentioned above all contribute to explaining the poverty of woman-headed households in countries in the LAC region, but it is also likely that the contribution of each weighs differently in different environments. Research needs to investigate the relative contribution of the different factors in determining the poverty of female-headed households to design appropriate and effective interventions. At least in theory, the solutions to the poverty of female headship should be the simplest if household composition factors are the main determinants of their poverty and should be the most complex if the interaction of headship and gender predominates in explaining the economic vulnerability of female headship. In the former case, targeting interventions that alleviate these households' dependency burden (income generation programs and transfers) should do the trick, while in the latter case the targeting should include, in addition to expanding income earning opportunities and providing child care support, affirmative policies to prevent discrimination in access to markets and resources, aggressive health and education campaigns and services for pregnant teenagers, and the establishment of effective social support networks through formal or informal organizations. While the solutions are certainly not easier, targeting woman-headed households may be less justified or needed if the main independent factor explaining the poverty of these households is the gender variable. In this case, interventions designed to improve the economic situation of women, regardless of their position in the household, should improve the situation of woman-headed households.

Additional questions for policy oriented research on female headship and poverty are those of causality (does poverty lead to female headship or does female headship cause poverty ?) and duration of the poverty condition and its perpetuation into the next generation. Once a woman becomes a head of household, is this a permanent or a temporary condition, and which characteristics of the women and their households affect the permanence of the condition?. Life course information on women and households

obtained by longitudinal designs or through recall and intergenerational methods can help answer both questions.

4. Is Female Headship a Bad Choice for Women and their Children?

The fourth question with significant policy implications is what are the consequences of female headship for both women and their children. Data is lacking on the consequences for women's own opportunities and future. The evidence to date on the consequences for children in developing countries shows marked regional differences and begs further study. The evidence for the LAC region clearly shows a negative effect of female headship on child welfare. Of the fifteen studies in Table 1 that gave information on welfare consequences, only two (a study in Guatemala and one in Mexico) reported mixed effects. All others reported negative effects of female headship on child welfare.

During the recession of the early 1980's, there were more children living in poverty in female- rather than male- headed households in urban areas in Chile, Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela (Altimir *op. cit.*). In Chile, children in woman-headed households had a higher infant mortality rate than children in male-headed households (Castañeda 1985). Similarly, the survival probabilities of children in woman-headed households in Brazil were significantly lower than those of children in male-headed households (Woods 1989). This difference in child mortality was not the result of female headship per se, but rather was the outcome of differences in race, region, education, housing quality, monthly household income and other standard of living indicators that accrue to women in Brazil. Reporting mixed results, however, a study in urban shantytowns in Mexico found that children in female-headed households lived in an improved family environment, with less spouse and child abuse, but they tended to drop out of school more often than other children because of their need to earn extra household income (Chant 1985).

In contrast to these findings, a number of studies in sub-Saharan Africa reveal that children of woman-headed households do better nutritionally than children of male-headed households, and that this difference is not explained by differences in household income. The standard explanation for these positive findings is that women have a greater preference to invest in children, and this preference is more easily realized in a woman-headed household where there are no intrahousehold conflicts or difficult negotiations between men and women as to how to spend income. Since it is likely that women's preferences to invest in children do not vary regionally, the negative findings of female headship

on child welfare in the LAC region, when contrasted to those of sub-Saharan Africa, must be due to the fact that women heads in the LAC region face greater constraints (income as well as social ones) to realize their preferences. It is likely that the female heads in the sub-Saharan Africa samples had more access to food and other resources more easily available in rural environments than their urban counterparts in the LAC samples. And it is also likely that these female heads encountered fewer social obstacles than their LAC counterparts since they probably were adult women "left behind" by male migrants with intentions to return rather than single or abandoned adolescent mothers in the LAC region.

Research needs to probe more in depth the factors that contribute to the successes as well as the failures of female headship in insuring child nutrition and other less well explored aspects of child welfare, such as cognitive and emotional development. In addition, information is needed on the effects of female headship status on women's social and economic opportunities by life cycle stages.

5. Is Female Headship an Appropriate Targeting Criterion?

There is already sufficient evidence in the LAC region on the close linkages between female headship, poverty and negative consequences in terms of child nutritional status to justify the design of anti-poverty policies directed to female heads or their households. But there is almost no policy experience in developing countries on interventions for female-headed households at risk of poverty while there are two major policy issues or dilemmas. One is the question of the desirability of targeting interventions to these households and a related issue is the question of the desirability of targeting income-generation and employment oriented interventions to women heads of poor households.

Targeting woman-headed households or their heads with public assistance programs or preferential access to resources and services raises the concern of possible perverse incentive effects of these interventions resulting in an overall increase in female headship, as women learn that they can manage without men's economic assistance and these, in turn, know that they can abandon women and children without major negative consequences in terms of their welfare. However, and contrary to common belief, an analysis of public assistance programs directed to impoverished female heads in the U.S. reveals that these have been a response to rather than a catalyst for the rise in female headship (Folbre op. cit.). While targeting may have no perverse effects, it still may not be a desirable alternative, especially if the economic vulnerability of female-headed households is largely explained by gender differences that affect all women and not solely women heads. In this case, policies and programs directed to redressing gender

inequalities should benefit women heads as well as women in men-headed households and, unless there are special circumstances, such as periods of economic contraction and adjustment that call for the establishment of safety nets for the most vulnerable, the focus of long term action should be all poor women.

On the other hand, targeting should be a preferred option if the economic disadvantage of woman-headed households is accounted for primarily by the unique vulnerability that arises from both being a woman and a head of household. In this case, interventions designed to improve the situation of women, regardless of the position they occupy in the household, should not be enough to redress the condition of women heads. Two other reasons argue for targeting interventions to female-headed households.

First, targeting specific vulnerable subpopulations, such as females heads of household is desirable in order to obtain quick results with limited resources, and has worked well during periods of economic contraction, as is shown in the case of Chile in the 1980's with primary health care interventions targeted to pregnant and nursing women (Castañeda 1989). One problem that may arise is misreporting, especially if women shift in and out of headship status, and another is leakages of benefits to non-poor female heads depending on the rigor of the selection criteria. India offers one of the few experiences of having targeted female heads of household with anti-poverty programs, and it experienced both kinds of problems. Devaki Jain (1989) has reported on the inherent awkwardness of targeting state policies to women heads of households in shifting statuses in India, resulting in significant misreporting and leakages, and negatively affecting the chances of other poor women of having access to state benefits. Jain recognizes that targeting gives recognition to the vulnerability of females who head households, but argues that targeting becomes more efficient through less centralized projects carried by non-governmental organizations, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad (SEWA). Interventions, therefore, that target female heads or their households could prove to be effective anti-poverty measures, especially in periods of economic vulnerability and/or where resources are scarce, if they are carried out by competent institutions and guard against the problem of the non-poor taking advantage of benefits directed to the poor.

Second, targeting economically vulnerable female-headed households may be desirable in housing and agriculture, two sectors that rely on the household as the unit of analysis and intervention, and where the relatively minor modification of identifying household headship by sex may significantly shift productive resources and services to female heads and their families. These sectors offer a unique opportunity to weave in gender concerns into mainstream institutions and programs by way of entry through the analysis of female headship.

The second question asks about the desirability of benefitting female heads with income generation and employment oriented interventions when these women are, in theory at least, also primarily responsible for home production and child care. The quandry is that any positive income effects of these women's increased participation in market production on child welfare (through the ability to purchase more food, among others) may be offset by the negative effect on child welfare derived from the need to cut-back time spent in child care and to alter breast-feeding and weaning practices. Obviously, the potential tradeoffs between child welfare and market work affect all low-income women but they should be especially extreme in the case of women heads who have the least resources and the fewest alternatives for income earning and child care.

But, are these real tradeoffs ? A common belief in developing countries is that they are, and that women's market work outside the home does not compensate for lost time in child care and results in reduced child welfare. On this basis, government policies are sometimes designed to actively discourage low-income women from working outside the home. For instance, Chile in the early 1980's established a parallel minimum employment program for heads of household (POJH) with the explicit purpose of discouraging women who had flocked into a minimum employment scheme (PEM) created to cope with recession. More generally, policies do nothing to encourage or expand the labor market opportunities of poor women. However, studies that empirically measure the tradeoffs between increased mother's income and less time at home for child care and breast-feeding show little negative association between child nutritional status and maternal employment. On the contrary, some of the more rigorous empirical designs have shown that children of mothers who earn higher wages and/or who have adequate substitute caretakers are better-off nutritionally than children of mothers who earn lower wages or have no access to substitute caretakers (Leslie 1989).

For instance, in Panama, mother's time at home decreased with her employment but her lower input was compensated for by increased inputs of substitute caregivers at home, such as grandmothers and sisters (Tucker and Sanjur 1988). An in Santiago, Chile, the additional income of a sample of low-income working mothers, when compared to their non-working counterparts, more than compensated for their shorter breastfeeding duration and resulted in better child nutrition (Vial et al 1989).

The expansion of economic opportunities and adequate wages for poor women in general, and for poor females heads of household in particular, and the existence of quality child care alternatives become key government investments to insure the welfare of the next generation. In addition, however, preferential access to housing and other government services and income transfers or coupons to pay for housing rental, transportation or childcare, among others,

may be wise government investments to cushion economically vulnerable woman-headed households in the short term.

Social security systems in the LAC region tend to reinforce the unequal distribution of the costs of childbearing between men and women and of benefits between those working in the formal sector of the economy and low wage, low productivity workers in the informal sector (Folbre op. cit.). Country-specific analyses of these systems with the situation of vulnerable woman-headed households in mind are needed as a first step in a major regional initiative that would call on governments to overhaul security benefits and family allowances to benefit working women and men more equally as well as those in the formal and informal sectors. New or revised child support laws should also be proposed to the legislatures in the different countries as a way to raise public awareness of the situation of abandoned mothers, even if their enforcement may be difficult in practice (Folbre op. cit.). Finally, the worrisome trend of adolescent pregnancy and single motherhood in LAC countries needs to be countered by an aggressive public education campaign on the risks of teenage childbearing for both women's and children's welfare, sex education in schools, access to safe contraceptives and, above all, expanded educational and economic opportunities for adolescent girls.

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ANNEX: TABLES

Table 1
Summary of Studies on Poverty and Welfare Effects
of Woman-Headed Households (WHHs)

Country	Source	Sample/ Size	Methodology	Are WHHs Poorer than Other Types of Households?	Welfare Effects
Brazil	Wood (Research in progress)	Urban & Rural	Secondary analysis of census data; multivariate analysis	Yes - More likely to be poor - Average income half that of women in WHHs. - More vulnerable to effects of poverty - lack of housing, child care, health care. - Race is an important intervening variable.	Negative: Survival probabilities of children in WHHs are significantly lower.
Recife, Sao Paulo & Puerto Alegre, Brazil	Paes de Barros, Fox & Pinto de Mendoca (Research in progress)	Urban	National HH survey; Multivariate analysis.	Yes - Female headship is negatively correlated with income. - Race an important intervening variable.	Negative: Nearly two-thirds of children in WHHs live in poverty. Negative: Children in WHHs are more likely to participate in the labor market, to be left unattended or in care of older siblings and to drop out of school in order to work.
Belo Horizonte, Brazil	Herrick & Schmink (1983)	Urban 2,445 HHs.	Secondary analysis of census data, (1950, 1960 & 1970) and reanalysis of 1972 HH Survey	Yes Higher incidence of poverty in WHHs than WHHs.	Negative: Older children often must work or provide child care.
English Speaking Caribbean	Massiah (1980)	Urban & Rural	Secondary analysis of census data (1970 & 1980)	Yes - A higher incidence of WHHs in the lower socioeconomic strata. - Within labor force, predominance of women in lower paying jobs. No - While in absolute terms family income is lower in WHHs, income distribution is more equitable.	Negative: Probability of independence and of rising above poverty line diminishes with each additional child. Positive: Perception of female heads interviewed that they were better off. Female heads perceive that they have higher income since its distribution is more equitable in these WHHs.

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Chile	Vial (1988)	Urban	Secondary Analysis of HH survey.	Yes More than half of WHIs were in the lowest quartile of income distribution.	Negative: Women heads of household face constraints in participating in food distribution programs, so negative effect on children's nutrition status. Negative: Depend on children's income, so children not likely to attend school.
Chile, Costa Rica, Peru & Venezuela	Pollack (1987)	Urban	Secondary analysis of HH survey data.	Yes - In the four countries WHIs are overrepresented in the lowest income category, while HHs are underrepresented in this category.	-
Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama & Venezuela	Altamir (1984)	Urban & Rural	Secondary analysis of HH surveys for two time periods.	Yes & No - Proportion of WHIs among poor increased in Colombia and rural Venezuela, but decreased in Panama and urban Venezuela. - WHIs fared worse than HHs in Chile.	Negative: More children live in poverty in WHIs in these 5 countries.
Colombia	Alonso (1989)	Urban	Secondary analysis of 1978 HH survey data.	Yes - WHIs are concentrated in the poorer socio-economic strates, oscillating between 23%-28% compared to only 7% of the highest strata. - A significantly higher proportion of women heads (27.0%) earn below the minimum wage compared to male heads (20.8%).	Negative: 65.7% of working children comm from single-headed HHs, typically headed by women. Negative: WHIs with only the mother and children experience higher infant mortality (86%) than HH with other individuals percent (58%).

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Colombia	Lemmoine (1987)	Urban	HH survey	Yes - 7% more female heads of households earn less than the average blue collar wage compared to their male counterparts.	Negative: Female heads have a longer work day since it is comprised of remunerated labor, housework and child care.
Colombia	Rey de Marulanda (1981)	Urban	HH Poverty & Employment survey (1980).	Yes - Of the HH surveyed, women heads held lower paying jobs in smaller firms or on their own, partially due to limitations caused by exclusive responsibilities for housework and child care.	Negative: While the income of women is lower they remain principally responsible for house work and child care.
Colombia	Rey de Marulanda (1982)	Urban	HH Poverty & Employment survey (1977) secondary analysis of employment HH survey.	Yes - Replicated results of 1981 study.	Negative: Replicated results of 1981 study.
Dominican Republic	Gomez (1988)	Urban & Rural	Secondary analysis of 1981 national data and review of 1971, 1984 & 1988 data and analyses.	Yes - 46.5% of HHs are concentrated in service occupations. - 46% of HHs are in the lowest income bracket compared to 38% of HHs. - Unemployment among female heads is higher than for male heads, especially in the rural sector.	Negative: Female heads work long hours as both paid and non-paid labor.
El Salvador	Lestarría & Cornhiel (1988)	Rural survey I: 1,172 HHs; and rural survey II: 1,410 HHs.	Review & reanalysis of 2 1984 post land reform surveys.	Yes - Less access to credit, capital and land than HHs, even when land reforms take place. - Less off-farm employment opportunities for women.	

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El Salvador	Balakrishnan & Firebaugh (1987)	Urban & Rural Total hhs 1,366; of which 1,223 are WHIs & JHIs.	Secondary analysis of data. Review of previous 1978 survey using recall method.	Yes - Less access to land and credit than MHIs. - 56.4% of female heads are engaged in informal sector work. - Low paid jobs in formal sector.	Negative: Female heads are more likely to work longer hours, paid and nonpaid labor, than wives of male heads. Positive: WHIs spent greater percentage of income on food. Negative: In low income groups children in WHIs suffered low nutritional status (height for age). Negative: Single mothers more likely to use child below 12 yrs as child care assistant.
Guatemala	Engle (1988)	Rural 302 mothers.	Survey & Interviews		
Kingston, Jamaica	McLeod (1988)	Urban	Interviews and secondary analysis of census data	Yes - Areas with higher incidence of poverty had a greater number of WHIs. - WHIs had lower dwelling ownership. - Least likely to receive credit because of low income and lack of collateral. - Higher incidence of female headship in lowest paying jobs.	Negative: WHIs must depend on 'yard' system of friends, neighbors, and HH members for child care or leave children unattended.
Kingston, Jamaica	Bolles (1986)	Urban 127 working- class HIs	Survey & case studies	Yes - Women who are heads of HH have fewer financial resources than women in stable unions: - - Fewer total earners and more women earners, therefore less income. - - Women in WHIs more likely to participate in informal sector for lower pay than in formal sector. - Single-wage subsistence pattern more common among WHIs. - Women's median wage 13% lower than that of men.	

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Mexico	Paz Lopez (Research in progress)	Urban & Rural	Secondary analysis of census data	Yes - Seems to be a strong correlation between poverty and declared female headship	
Mexico	Chant (1985)	Urban shanty-town 244 HHs 189 home owners (22 female owners)	Survey & semi-structured interviews	Yes - WHIs earn a total household and per capita income lower than MHIs No - However, per capita household income of WHIs is lower than presumed because male heads distribute money less equitably (male heads retain as much as 50% of their income for their own use).	Negative: Children in WHIs tend to drop out because of need for extra income. Negative: Children in WHIs provide a greater proportion of HH-income than those in MHIs. Negative: Female heads tend to work longer hours Positive: Greater emphasis on female education for children in WHIs. Positive: Improved family environment; i.e., less spouse and child abuse. Positive: Children face less discriminatory division of household chores and decision-making process. Positive: Female heads perceive themselves as better off, in part because of more equitable income distribution.
Peru	Tienda & Salazar (1980)	Urban & Rural 3,974 HHs (not including single member HH)	National 1970 survey; multivariate analysis.	Yes Lower earning power of WHIs because lower educational attainment in WHIs than MHIs.	Negative: As a HH extends its demand for money increases, but does not necessarily provide sufficient income to cover the additional costs.
Peru	Rosenhouse (1988)	Urban & Rural	Large household survey (LSMS); multivariate analysis.	Yes - WHIs are more disadvantaged than MHIs. - Within multiple earner families, both male and female headed households equally disadvantaged in terms of consumption; but work burden of female heads is higher.	

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Concl.

Five Latin American Cities (Bogota, Colombia; San Jose, Costa Rica; Panama, Panama; Lima-Callao, Peru; & Caracas, Venezuela)	CEPAL (1984)	Urban	Samples of varying size for each of 5 HH separate & non-uniform surveys taken in different yrs between 1970 and 1984	Yes - The lower the economic strata the higher the incidence of WHHs (all cities except for Bogota). - High % of female heads in low paying service occupations. No - In Bogota % of WHHs in lower income groups was lesser than % of WHHs in all income groups.
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✓ HH = Household

JHH = Joint-headed Household

MHH = Male-headed Household

Source: Buvinic, Mayra, (1990), "Women and Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Primer for Policy Makers", Washington, D.C. : International Center for Research on Women.

TABLE 2

**Single Mothers as Percent of Single Female Population
15 Years and Older for Selected Countries**

Country	Year	Single Mothers	Single Women 15 and Older	% Single Mothers
Belize	1970	3,248	8,831	36.8
Chile	1970	157,744	386,694	40.8
Colombia	1973	1,188,826	2,281,044	52.1
Guatemala	1973	109,630	399,359	27.5
Guatemala	1981	190,962	422,017	45.2
Guyana	1970	20,117	56,754	35.4
Jamaica	1982	55,431	66,166	83.8
Peru	1972	770,747	1,169,065	65.9
Trinidad & Tobago	1970	30,278	91,340	33.1

SOURCES: Buvinić, Mayra and Nadia Youssef. 1978. "Women Headed Households: The Ignored Factor in Development Planning." Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women.

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Table 3

RATE AND PERCENT CHANGE IN ADOLESCENT (15-19 YEARS) AND
TOTAL (15-49 YEARS) FERTILITY RATES FOR SELECTED
COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
WITH AROUND 1970 AS THE BASE YEAR

Subregion & country	Adolescent rates		Total rates	
	Rate (per 1,000)	% change	Rate (per 1,000)	% change
<u>Caribbean</u>				
Barbados	91.7	22.3	2400	-2.8
Bahamas	97.0	52.8	2874	13.3
Cuba	94.0	-26.6	1904	-48.5
Dominican Rep.	104.0	-15.4	3800	-33.5
Guadeloupe	103.0	74.6	3540	-9.9
Haiti	90.0	57.9	6210	12.8
Jamaica	143.0	-2.7	3669	-26.5
Martinique	49.0	-14.0	2876	-22.1
Puerto Rico	67.0	-8.2	2384	-24.6
T. & Tobago	84.0	1.2	3140	-7.9
<u>Central America</u>				
Costa Rica	96.0	-3.0	3539	-21.9
Guatemala	126.0	-6.7	6015	4.2
Honduras	138.0	-22.9	6201	-16.8
Mexico	80.0	-35.5	3775	-44.5
El Salvador	135.0	-9.4	4216	-31.5
Panama	97.0	-27.6	3211	-35.6
<u>Temp. South America</u>				
Argentina	82.0	18.8	3351	5.6
Chile	61.0	-11.6	2368	-27.7
Uruguay	66.0	10.0	2656	0.4
<u>Tropic. South America</u>				
Bolivia	93.0	-2.1	5565	-14.4
Brazil	81.0	8.0	3715	-35.5
Colombia	79.0	-21.8	3375	-28.1
Ecuador	92.0	-22.0	4335	-30.4
Peru	84.0	0.0	4218	-24.3
Venezuela	90.0	-18.9	3692	-22.1

Source: United Nations, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, 1989, "Adolescent Reproductive Behaviour: Evidence from Developing Countries", Vol. II, Population Studies, N° 109/Add.1, ST/ESA/SER.A/109/Add.1.