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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

**REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON FAMILY, DEVELOPMENT AND POPULATION
DYNAMICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

(Santiago, Chile, 27-29 November 1991)

This document was prepared by the Social Development Division of ECLAC and the Population and Development Area of the Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE). It was reproduced without formal editing.

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. Place and date

1. The workshop on Family, Development and Population Dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean was convened by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE), in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Colegio de México, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC), as a contribution to the International Year of the Family, proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations for 1994. The main objective of the workshop was to identify the most significant changes that took place in the structure and functioning of the family in the region since World War II, particularly during the crisis of the 1980s, and reflect on the impact of those changes on the fulfilment of family functions. The workshop was held at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile, from 27 to 29 November 1991.

2. Attendance¹

2. Experts from 13 Latin American countries, either from the academic world or in charge of public or private family programmes, participated in their personal capacity. The backgrounds of the participants made it possible to treat a variety of situations that affect the family in different countries. Representatives of the Colegio de México and the following United Nations agencies also participated: PAHO/World Health Organization (WHO), PREALC/International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

3. Organization of work

3. Pursuant to the agenda adopted,² on 27 and 28 November the participants presented papers on changes in the situation of the family in their respective countries and in the region.³ Specialists commented on each presentation, which enriched the discussion. On the morning of 29 November, the participants extracted from the presentations emerging trends and problems and the main methodological obstacles faced by research on the family in the region. The conclusions reached by this work were presented in the afternoon of the same day in a plenary meeting.

¹ See list of participants in annex 1.

² See the provisional agenda in annex 2.

³ See the list of documents in annex 3.

4. Opening meeting

4. Mr. Rubén Kaztman, Acting Director of the Social Development Division, and Mr. Reynaldo Bajraj, Director of CELADE, spoke at the opening meeting.

5. Mr. Kaztman said that recent ECLAC studies, which served as the basis for the 1991 edition of Panorama social de América Latina, showed the importance of family composition and organization for the education of the children, and therefore for the reproduction of poverty and social inequalities. The forms of family disorganization analysed were found more frequently in lower-income groups, and disorganization affected the achievements of the children in those families in direct proportion to the degree of poverty in the home. The studies also revealed that the number of families so affected was rising.

6. ECLAC was drawing up a proposal for growth with social equity for the countries of the region, and the preparations for the International Year of the Family provided an excellent opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of the role played by changes in the situation of the family in making progress or suffering reverses in social equity. Inter alia, that entailed contributing to an updated analysis of the situation in each country, moving towards overcoming a lack of relevant statistics, and providing the necessary background information for defining the objectives of family policies and improving their design and implementation. Those policies should facilitate the constitution and consolidation of families so they can carry out the function demanded by more democratic and equitable societies and face the challenges of production.

7. Mr. Reynaldo Bajraj said that the economic deterioration of the 1980s had taken place in a social context that had begun to change long before 1980, involving demographic transition, rapid urbanization, growing transnationalization of culture, and changing composition, structure, characteristics and functions of the family.

8. It was paradoxical that, just when the concept of the family was undergoing profound changes, there was a tendency to emphasize the family over individuals, as an important element in the perception of well-being. As the concept became more changeable and difficult to grasp, its usefulness as a key element for analysis and action was discovered.

9. Finally, in the name of the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, he welcomed the participants and colleagues of the ECLAC/Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES)/CELADE system and thanked them for their support in carrying out the workshop.

5. Closing meeting

10. Mr. Rubén Kaztman, Acting Director of the Social Development Division, closed the workshop by thanking the participants for their attendance and excellent work.

B. SUMMARY OF THE DEBATES

11. The themes treated in the presentations and then discussed can be grouped under two categories: first, emerging trends and problems among Latin American families and some of the weaknesses and strengths of the different sources of information for studying those trends and problems and formulating and implementing policies, and second, identification of priority areas for confronting family problems.

12. The documents presented and the workshop discussions reached a consensus that certain processes—such as urbanization, expanded education and demographic transition— contributed to an increasing homogeneity in the constitution and dissolution of the family and its structures and functions. Countries still differ from one another, but more in the pace rather than in the nature of the changes. For example, the size of the family varies according to the time when the aforementioned processes begin.

13. The weight of national specificities, especially those arising from the mixing of aboriginal, European and African cultures and slavery, makes it more difficult to interpret changes in patterns of family organization. There is also little clarity about the impact on the family of secularization, modernity and cultural levelling in general. The discussion on the persistence or change in gender differences and the acceptance of more egalitarian forms of intra-family relations is one example that shows the need for research on the cultural components of the changes.

1. Emerging trends and problems among Latin American families

14. The participants agreed that one of the main obstacles to progress in family research in the region is the lack of depth with which the topic is studied through the use of censuses and household surveys, as can be seen in the inadequacy and scarcity of questions and categories of answers normally included in this kind of tool. The gap between analytical and practical requirements and available information is reflected in the fact that many of the interesting hypotheses discussed in the workshop about emerging trends among families in the region still lack empirical evidence on which to base conclusions about what is actually happening. Together with noting these lacks, the participants also recognized that even existing data was a long way from being fully exploited analytically along the lines that were beginning to be clarified in some of the papers presented in the workshop.

15. Despite the statistical inadequacy and diversity of family models in the region recognized by the participants, the comparison of national experiences made it possible to identify certain constants with respect to changes in the basic characteristics of the family. The following summary of the debates emphasizes the conclusions that were widely accepted and reasonably supported by empirical evidence.

a) Family formation

16. Most of the presentations mentioned changes, at times striking, in the ages when couples are formed, leading basically to a postponement of legal unions. The observations were backed by administrative data and indirect estimates of the age of the first union. These trends are congruent with the increase in the number of years spent attending educational establishments, rising rates of female participation in the labour market and the growing dissociation between reproduction and sexuality.

17. In some countries of the region where consensual unions were traditionally less numerous and for which information was available, consensual unions were observed to have increased notably as a proportion of the total. The participants pointed out that this fact should be taken into account in interpreting changes in the age of formation of legal unions, since the gap between that age and the age of formation of de facto unions is probably widening.

18. Taking into account all unions, both consensual and legal, an examination of household survey data from Argentina and Uruguay during the last decade revealed differential trends between young people from low-income groups and those from high-income groups. Those from high-income groups followed the general trend to postpone the age of the first union, while low-income youth tended to form unions earlier.

19. This observation suggested that in order to analyse more precisely the significance of changes in the age of formation of couples, it would be helpful to break down information by types of unions and socio-economic groups. It is important to update the data on changes in the age of formation of couples in terms of their effect on fertility rates and the stability of unions.

20. With respect to fertility, it was pointed out that although an early conjugal union raised the probability that the couple would have more children, a correct estimate of this probability depended on closely monitoring changes in the average time between the time of the first union and the birth of the first child.

21. Regarding the stability of unions, even though early union normally continues to be related to greater family instability, the dissolution of couples is increasingly associated with problems of personal fulfilment and incompatibility between individual life agendas. This takes place more frequently in groups with higher levels of education that tend to postpone the moment of their first union.

b) Consensual unions

22. The growing prevalence of consensual unions calls for some distinctions: a) those that can be interpreted as innovative responses, forerunners of forms of constitution more adapted to economic and socio-cultural changes; b) those that respond to ways of forming couples legitimated by traditional culture; and c) those that are obligatory adaptations to critical economic circumstances or that arise from an overall crisis in patterns of social integration.

23. Data were presented for three countries in the region in which consensual unions are found more frequently among lower-income groups than in middle- and high-income strata. Occurring as it does among poorer groups with low educational levels, which means women have little negotiating capacity, this kind of union does not appear to be a sign of autonomy but rather one of an undesirable context.

24. Research findings were presented that found that legal unions lasted longer than consensual unions, and that consensual-union households had less capacity for socialization, reflected in the fact that children from those households perform more poorly in school than those of the same socio-economic group whose parents are in legal unions.

c) Size of households

25. It was observed that households are growing smaller. That reduction is due to trends observed in all the countries examined: lower fertility rates and a lower proportion of extended and composite households among the total number, and an increase in female-headed households and one-person households.

26. The rise in the proportion of female-headed households has tended to lead to a reduction in their average size. This may be because of the absence of the male, or because children in households headed by a woman seem to have lower dependency rates.

27. It was pointed out that knowledge alone of changes in the average size of families is not particularly useful from an analytical or practical standpoint. The significance of such changes and their implications for policy design is only discernible when the relative contribution of different factors to reducing family size is known in each case.

d) Illegitimacy

28. Even though the precise meaning of illegitimacy varies according to the administrative definitions used in different countries in constructing their statistics, the percentage of illegitimate births rose in all the countries for which such information was available.

29. Because of the social discrimination to which they may be exposed, owing to a lack of legal protection and the probable exposure of those children to environments with little capacity for socialization, the relative increase in illegitimate births calls for more attention from those responsible for social policies.

30. The increase in illegitimate births is mostly found among adolescent mothers and is consistent with the fact that fertility rates in that age group are declining less rapidly than overall fertility rates.

e) Family composition

31. It was observed that the long-standing trend towards a relative increase in the number of nuclear households, formed by parents and unmarried children living together, is continuing; in all of the countries studied, more than 50% of households are nuclear. In countries for which information was available (Bolivia, Peru and the Dominican Republic), nuclear households were more frequent in rural than in urban areas. This fact calls for a revision of one of the most common views in social science: that the extended family is associated with more traditional contexts.

32. The reduction in the proportion of extended and composite households not only leads to an increase in nuclear households; the percentage of one-parent and one-person households is also growing, particularly those headed by a woman, now around 20% of all households.

33. Given the phase of the demographic transition in which most of the countries of the region find themselves, the majority of families are in the formation and expansion stage, even though the sharp drop

in fertility rates and a rise in life expectancy are leading to a situation where the elderly members of families are becoming one of the most important areas of action for social welfare policies.

34. The participants took into consideration that the concept of the family normally used, which defines the boundaries of the family in the household, does not lend itself to an analysis of the relative importance that broader networks of family relations might have in different national, regional, socio-economic and ethnic contexts in the day-to-day fulfilment of functions usually attributed to the family. At the same time, it was recognized that, with a few exceptions, generally limited to case studies, available sources of information do not allow for weighing the significance of those networks for the various aspects of family life.

f) Dissolution of the family

35. If union between the sexes is considered to be the element that defines the family, separation, divorce, widower- and widowhood can be seen as causes of its dissolution. The spread of divorce laws among the countries of the region (12 of 19 countries had them in 1985) and the rise in life expectancy for both sexes —with women almost always above men by five or six years— make the dissolution of the family by separation or divorce more probable, whereas postponing the age of union has the opposite effect.

36. The participants mentioned the difficulty of adequately evaluating trends in divorce rates, since the denominator of those rates (the number of marriages per year) was affected by later marriages and by the higher relative weight of consensual unions detected in some countries.

37. Judging by trends based on statistics taken from administrative registries, divorce rates have risen in most of the countries of the region. For the 1980s, household survey data compiled in several metropolitan areas also reveal increases in the proportions of separated and divorced heads of household. One consequence of these trends is a rise in the proportion of families composed of a woman and her children.

38. Research results were mentioned that show the relationship between this kind of family and the reproduction of poverty from generation to generation. Touching on one of the mechanisms for this reproduction, data were presented on the effect of the absence of the father on the educational performance of the children.

39. It was observed that there are more widows than widowers (and most of those forming one-person households 55 years and over are women), related to their longer life span and their greater reluctance to form another conjugal union after dissolving a previous one for whatever reason.

g) Women in the labour market and the family

40. Undoubtedly, changes in rates of female participation in the work force, particularly of mothers, act as both cause and effect of transformations in family structures, the economy and society. The participants emphasized that, rather than determining those causes and effects, what is important is to highlight the synergetic relationship between growth in women's participation rates and the above-mentioned changes in the family, such as reduction of its size, nuclearization and an increase in female

heads of household, a relationship which causes those trends to reinforce one another. It was pointed out, however, that those processes move at different rates and have different meanings, depending on the socio-economic conditions of the group.

41. In order to deepen studies on the family and compile useful information for designing family policies, emphasis was given to the importance of having information on female participation broken down by women's marital status and age, their place of work (in or outside the home) and the number of their children. Household surveys were recognized to be useful as tools for obtaining that kind of information on a periodical basis, but that the questionnaires currently in use would need to include the place of work, marital status and the number of children.

2. General guidelines for family policies

42. With a view to beginning to draw up an agenda for an eventual regional conference on family policies, an overall frame of reference for designing family programmes was discussed.

43. The following were mentioned as points that could be considered in such a framework: a) the lack of access of large segments of the population to the basic material conditions needed to constitute a family; and b) the absence or weakness of institutional mechanisms to support the allocation of more equitable roles and a more democratic decision-making process within the family, which would entail better adjustment to new economic and political realities.

44. Actions designed to promote adequate family functioning should harmonize policies for creating the material conditions and providing services for consolidating families with policies designed to change family roles.

45. By way of example, it was stated that employment policies should take into account the work-related needs of heads of household and those of their spouses; child care policies should support shared responsibility by both parents, and family subsidies should also be distributed equally between the parents. Improved access to material resources and services should accompany actions to educate family members about the requirements for a democratic and equitable functioning of both the distribution of their resources and the allocation of their rights and obligations.

46. Another set of actions should offset the negative effects of dysfunctional families; for example, policies for the legal protection of children, regardless of the kind of union their parents have.

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AGENDA

Wednesday 27 November

- 09:00 Registration of participants
- 09:30 Opening remarks of the Director of CELADE, Mr. Reynaldo Bajraj
- 09:40 Opening remarks of the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, Mr. Gert Rosenthal
- 10:00 Break

National-level presentations

Moderator: Mariana Schkolnik, Head, Social Studies Department, MIDEPLAN, Chile

Commentator: Rubén Kaztman, Principal Social Affairs Officer, ECLAC

- 10:30 "La familia en Chile": Mónica Muñoz and Carmen Reyes (Chile)
- 10:50 "Algunas hipótesis sobre los cambios recientes en la familia en la Argentina": María del Carmen Feijóo (Argentina)
- 11:10 "Transformaciones recientes de la familia uruguaya: cambios coyunturales y estructurales": Carlos Filgueira and Andrés Peri (Uruguay)
- 11:30 Comments on national-level presentations. Discussion

Regional-level presentations

Moderator: Hanna Binstock, Project Officer, UNICEF-Chile

Commentator: Violeta Sara-Lafosse, Catholic University of Peru

- 14:45 "Hacia un perfil de la familia actual en Latinoamérica y el Caribe": Josefina Rossetti (CELADE)
- 15:05 "¿Por qué los hombres son tan irresponsables?": Rubén Kaztman (ECLAC)

- 15:25 "La familia expulsora": Gloria Guzman (UNICEF-Colombia)
- 15:45 Comments on regional-level presentations. Discussion
- 16:15 Break

National-level presentations

Moderator: Hanna Binstock, UNICEF-Chile

Commentator: Marcela Villarreal (PREALC)

- 16:30 "La perdurabilidad de los lazos de parentesco en la reproducción social": Amalia Mauro and Mauricio García (Ecuador)
- 16:50 "Bolivia en el marco de las políticas de ajuste estructural": René Pereira
- 17:10 "Guatemala: contexto social de la familia guatemalteca": Edílzar Castro
- 17:30 Comments on national-level presentations. Discussion

Thursday 28 November

National-level presentations

Moderator: Susana Lerner, El Colegio de México

Commentator: Rolando Franco, Coordinator, Area of Social Programmes and Policies (ILPES)

- 09:00 "El cambio social en Colombia y su impacto sobre la familia": Rafael Echeverri and Carmen Florez
- 09:20 "La familia en una época de crisis y transformaciones de la sociedad venezolana": Francisco Javier Velasco and Miguel Bolívar
- 09:40 "Las familias peruanas en el corto, mediano y largo plazo": Ana Ponce and Violeta Sara-Lafosse
- 10:00 Comments on national-level presentations. Discussion
- 10:30 Break

Regional-level presentations

Moderator: Susana Lerner, El Colegio de México

Commentator: Carlos Filgueira, Director CIESU (Uruguay)

- 11:00 "¿Tiene futuro la familia? Una visión comparativa": Raúl Urzúa (UNESCO)
- 11:20 "Ajuste estructural, mujer y estrategias de supervivencia": Molly Pollack and Marcela Villarreal (PREALC)
- 11:40 "Organización familiar y equidad": Rubén Kaztman and Pascual Gerstenfeld (ECLAC)
- 12:00 "Familia, trabajo y política de ingresos: escenarios emergentes": Francisco León (CELADE)
- 12:20 Comments on regional-level presentations. Discussion

National-level presentations

Moderator: Rodrigo Vera, Regional Information Consultant, Education and Communication on Population Issues

Commentator: Raúl Urzúa, Coordinator, Population Programmes (UNESCO)

- 14:45 "Estrategia familiar de reproducción en tiempo de crisis: el caso de México": Susana Lerner and Rodolfo Tuirán
- 15:05 "Tendencias de la formación y disolución marital frente a la crisis económica de México": Norma Ojeda
- 15:25 "A família brasileira em transição: evolução e perspectivas futuras": Ana Marfa Goldani
- 15:45 Comments on national-level presentations. Discussion
- 16:15 Break

National-level presentations

Moderator: Rodrigo Vera, Regional Information Consultant, Education and Communication on Population Issues

Commentator: Francisco León, Social Affairs Officer (CELADE)

- 16:30 "La familia cubana: principales rasgos sociodemográficos que han caracterizado su desarrollo y dinámica": María Elena Benítez
- 16:50 "Características demográficas, de empleo y de composición familiar en Puerto Rico": Jaime Gutiérrez, Olga Hernández and Havidán Rodríguez
- 17:10 "Menores en circunstancias especialmente difíciles en República Dominicana: un estudio sobre la relación menor, familia y pobreza": Ara Gena Martínez
- 17:30 Comments on national-level presentations. Discussion
- 18:15 Working groups
- Group 1: Cambios en la estructura y funcionamiento de la familia y en los roles de sus miembros; problemas emergentes.
- Group 2: Políticas, programas y proyectos de acción que inciden en la constitución y consolidación de la familia; problemas necesarios de tratar en una conferencia sobre formulación de políticas.
- Group 3: Fuentes de información relativas a la familia y hogares: debilidades y potencialidades, desde el punto de vista de la formulación de políticas; vacíos de investigación.

Friday 29 November

09:00 Group work, drafting of reports and conclusions

Group reports

Moderator: Rubén Kaztman (ECLAC)

- 14:45 Group 1
- 15:05 Group 2
- 15:25 Group 3

- 15:45** **Break**
- 16:00** **Plenary session**
- 17:00** **Elaboration of conclusions**
- 17:30** **Elaboration of the Tentative Programme of the 1992 Conference**
- 18:00** **Closing remarks of the Acting Director of the Social Development Division of ECLAC**

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Argentina

MARIA DEL CARMEN FEIJOO, Algunas hipótesis sobre los cambios recientes en la familia en la Argentina (DSC/21)

Bolivia

RENE PEREIRA, Bolivia en el marco de las políticas de ajuste estructural (DSC/1)

Brazil

ANA MARIA GOLDANI, A família brasileira em transição: evolução e perspectivas futuras (DSC/2)

Chile

MONICA MUÑOZ and CARMEN REYES, La familia en Chile (DSC/3)

Colombia

RAFAEL ECHEVERRI and CARMEN FLOREZ, El cambio social en Colombia y su impacto sobre la familia (DSC/4)

Cuba

MARIA ELENA BENITEZ PEREZ, La familia cubana: principales rasgos sociodemográficos que han caracterizado su desarrollo y dinámica (DSC/5)

INES CRISTINA RECA MOREIRA, Modo de vida y función formadora en familias obreras y de trabajadores intelectuales, con hijos adolescentes y jóvenes (DSC/22)

Ecuador

MAURICIO GARCIA and AMALIA MAURO, La perdurabilidad de los lazos de parentesco en la reproducción social (Ecuador) (DSC/6)

Guatemala

EDIZAR CASTRO, Guatemala: contexto social de la familia guatemalteca (DSC/7)

Mexico

SUSANA LERNER and RODOLFO TUIRAN, Estrategia familiar de reproducción en tiempo de crisis: el caso de México (DSC/13)

NORMA OJEDA, Tendencias de la formación y la disolución marital frente a la crisis económica en México (DSC/14)

Peru

VIOLETA SARA-LAFOSSE and ANA PONCE, Las familias peruanas en el corto, mediano y largo plazo (DSC/8)

Puerto Rico

HAVIDAN RODRIGUEZ, JAIME GUTIERREZ and OLGA HERNANDEZ, Características demográficas, de empleo y de composición familiar en Puerto Rico (DSC/9)

Dominican Republic

ARA GENA MARTINEZ, Menores en circunstancias especialmente difíciles en República Dominicana. Un estudio sobre la relación menor, familia y pobreza (DSC/10)

Uruguay

CARLOS FILGUEIRA and ANDRES PERI, Transformaciones recientes de la familia uruguaya. Cambios coyunturales y estructurales (DSC/11)

Venezuela

MIGUEL BOLIVAR and FRANCISCO JAVIER VELASCO, La familia en una época de crisis y transformaciones de la sociedad venezolana (DSC/12)

ECLAC

RUBEN KAZTMAN, ¿Por qué los hombres son tan irresponsables? (DSC/17)

RUBEN KAZTMAN and PASCUAL GERSTENFELD, Organización familiar y equidad (DSC/18)

CELADE

JOSEFINA ROSSETTI, Hacia un perfil de la familia actual en Latinoamérica y el Caribe (DSC/16)

FRANCISCO LEON, Familia, trabajo y política de ingresos. Escenarios emergentes (DSC/19)

PREALC

MOLLY POLLACK and MARCELA VILLARREAL, Ajuste estructural, mujer y estrategias de sobrevivencia (DSC/20)

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GLORIA GUZMAN, La familia expulsora (DSC/15)