

RECENT TRANSFORMATIONS IN LATIN AMERICAN FAMILIES: A SOCIO-  
DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to systematize and update existing knowledge on some of the main socio-demographic transformations that have taken place in Latin American families. Given the breadth of the issues concerned our strategy has involved choosing three important phenomena that affect families in order to illustrate the type of questions and the kind of answers they have elicited in Latin America within a context of globalization, economic restructuring and persistent social inequalities.

In the first place, we shall refer to the possible start of a second demographic transition, highlighting changes in the formation and dissolution of union patterns; secondly, we examine the existing convergence or divergence in relation to small and nuclear families, emphasizing what happens with extended units, which have always been important in Latin America. Finally, we shall focus on the increase in women-headed domestic units in connection with poverty and another set of demographic and social factors. In view of our analytical interest, we are not only interested in explaining the possible changing levels and trends observed in relation to these phenomena, and the challenges involved in establishing them over time. We also attempt to see how far these transformations are an expression of the shortages of the most needy groups, or, at the other extreme, constitute an example of the new lifestyles of a privileged minority. We have also tried to be alert to possibly different meanings among social sectors when a single pattern prevails throughout society.<sup>2</sup>

As a background to the following analysis, it should be pointed out that in the year 2000, a large sector of the Latin American population continued to have low living standards. During the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of the countries in the region were immersed in a process of globalization at the same time as they faced a severe crisis as a result of their external debt, and a subsequent process of economic restructuring. After the “lost decade” of the 1980s, most of the 1990s saw a modest increase in the per capita product (1.4% during the period from 1990-1997). During the period from 1998-1999, however, this indicator fell as low as -0.5%, partly as a result of the international financial turbulence caused by the Asian crisis and the decline in the price of raw materials. In keeping with these trends, the percentage of the poor population fell from 41 to 36% during the first period, although this descent was probably subsequently reversed. It is currently estimated that the number of Latin American poor is not less than 220 million (out of a total of approximately 518 million in the year 2000) (data from ECLA, for 19 countries) (see CEPAL, 2000). According to this same source, middle-class sectors in Latin America are undoubtedly a minority, since three-quarters of the region’s population earn an average income below four poverty lines, regarded as

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<sup>2</sup> It is a well-known fact that socio-demographic studies are based on (residential) families that are also called households or domestic units. In this study, we use these terms indistinctly and, unless there are indications to the contrary, we shall be referring to the group of people who may or not have kinship ties, and who share a common dwelling and budget. We are aware that the family system comprises many other aspects and obviously goes beyond the purely residential sphere, and in several parts of the study, we mention the limitations imposed by these units of analysis and information gathering.

insufficient to enable a typical family to emerge from its precarious condition. The countries that are worst off in terms of poverty levels in the year 2000 are Bolivia, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua, while the relatively better off ones include Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay.

Although acute socio-economic inequality continues to prevail in Latin America -both between countries and within them- for the purposes of this study, we wish to highlight significant transformations in processes such as the decrease in mortality and fertility, the increase in urbanization and average schooling attainment levels, as well as the increase in women participation in the labor markets. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the region had achieved a life expectancy at birth of 66 and 73 years for men and women respectively, a total fertility rate of just under 3.0 children per women, a gross school enrolment ratio in the primary and secondary levels above 80% in the majority of countries, and a women's labor participation rate of nearly 40% of the population ages 12 and over.<sup>3</sup> Many of these changes have particularly affected the lives of women. Nowadays, it is often said that these transformations have led to a change in the sphere of ideas and values related to a growing loss of importance of patriarchal, religious, and State control, as well as a process of some individuation and women autonomy, particularly as regards the separation between sexual and reproductive life, as a result of contraception. All this might be expected to lead to both the increasing occurrence and tolerance of new patterns of formation and voluntary interruption of unions as well as new forms of family coexistence and residence (see Jelin, 1991; Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994; Ramírez, 1995; Salles and Tuirán, 1998; Ariza and Oliveira, 2001).

It is important, however, to document the speed and extent of these changes, particularly in view of the inequities that prevail in Latin America, which could even have increased in certain aspects as a result of globalization and economic and social restructuring. From this perspective, it is useful to recall that two models of demographic transition from high to low levels of mortality and fertility have prevailed in the region: one identified with the social sectors that have benefited most from economic development, urbanization and the increase in average schooling levels, that are culturally closer to modern patterns of reproduction, based on the rise in the use of contraceptive methods. The other is characteristic of the poorer, more traditional sectors of society, that have benefited little from development, and on whom modernization was imposed. Within these marginalized rural and urban social sectors, although fertility decreased as a result of family planning programs, this was not accompanied by a substantial increase in their living standards (see Zavala de Cosío, 1996; Guzmán et al., 1996). This is the background to the following analysis of certain aspects of the socio-demographic structure of families in the region.

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<sup>3</sup> With the exception of women's participation in the labor market, Latin America is the developing region whose indicators of urbanization, schooling attainment, mortality and fertility are most similar to those of developed countries (see the tables of demographic and social indicators drawn up by the United Nations, 1998, and by the Population Reference Bureau, 2000). (See also, DeGraff and Anker, 1999, and UNESCO, 1999).

## IS LATIN AMERICA APPROACHING A SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION?

It is a well-known fact that since the 1960's, most developed countries have seen the emergence of new patterns in the formation of unions and in the shaping of families that are regarded as characteristic of a second demographic transition. According to leading scholars, some of the elements that would be present in this second transition would include: increasing postponement of first unions and a higher incidence of cohabitation and extramarital procreation, together with a rise in the dissolution of unions and reconstituted families (van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe, 1995). Several wide-ranging economic, social and cultural changes would lie behind this second demographic transition, regarded as a major symptom of the end of religious and political control over people's personal lives. A key role would be played by growing individual autonomy and women economic emancipation, which would demand better quality and less asymmetry in relations between the genders, within a framework of growing individual aspirations as regards consumption and living standards (see Lesthaeghe, 1995).

In Latin America, the question of the possible arrival of the second demographic transition -or the new trends that characterize some of its components- are increasingly present in studies on marriage and family.<sup>4</sup> However, the answers are not homogeneous, varying according to the information and methodology used, as well as the country involved, which justifies our attempts to provide a more general overview. Many aspects are involved in a comprehensive study of this issue, but the existence of previous studies, the availability of information, as well as the analytical interests of this paper led us to focus on three phenomena: the changes in age at first marital union, in marital dissolution and the growth and significance of consensual unions.

### *The postponement and dissolution of unions in Latin America*

Comparative studies on Latin American marriage have enabled us to learn about changes in age at first union in several countries in the region during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and document some of the main differences that occur in the various national contexts. They have shown that although age at first union in Latin America is not excessively young, it has been extremely stable over time and it did not play a key role in the reduction of fertility levels. In the 1980s, a significant number of countries had an average age at first union of between 20 and 21. In some countries in South America, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, this age was higher (23), while in certain Central American and Caribbean countries, it was lower (between 18 and 19) (see United Nations, 1990; Rosero-Bixby, 1996 and Zavala de Cosío, 1996).

Although there have only been slight changes in age at first union, several diagnoses for the region as a whole have highlighted the increase in this respect (see, for example, Rossetti, 1993; CEPAL, 1994 and Ramírez, 1995). Conversely, other

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Rossetti, 1993 and Quilodrán, 1999, for several countries in the region; Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994 for Argentina; Muñoz and Reyes, 1997 for Chile; Ariza and Oliveira 1999a for several Caribbean countries; and Quilodrán, 2000, Solís, 2000, Gómez de León (forthcoming) for Mexico, among others.

comparative studies are more skeptical about the existence of a *regional* pattern of increase in age at first union, at least until the late 1980s (see United Nations, 1990 and Rosero-Bixby, 1996). It is therefore useful to provide additional evidence to attempt to enrich the discussion of Latin America's possible participation in the start of a second demographic transition.

Table I gives information on the singulate mean age at marital union until the 1990s, allowing one to examine the evolution of this indicator in recent decades in a group of eleven Latin American countries (in comparison with the United States and Canada).<sup>5</sup> On the basis of this information, the most perceptible changes can be said to be observed in women, among whom there has been a continuing, albeit slight, upward trend. Likewise, one is struck by the fact that towards the end of the period analyzed, the gap between the various countries has tended to narrow. Although age at first union of women in nations such as Panama, El Salvador and Guatemala was initially lower, by the of the period it had risen to nearly 21-22, bringing all these national contexts increasingly close to the level of 23 years recorded for Argentina, Chile and Uruguay at the beginning of this period. As regards men, their age at first conjugal union has not altered significantly over time, and in some countries has actually fallen, thereby leading to the known reduction of the age difference between spouses.

This shows that union or marriage continues to be a key alternative in the lives of Latin American men and women and that the postponement of this option, which is of enormous cultural significance, is still extremely slow. Apparently, this continues to be one of the most difficult aspects of family life to transform noticeably, even in the presence of socio-economic changes and those involving women lives, such as those we have pointed out. In any case, one should recall that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is a considerable age difference at conjugal union between Latin America and the United States and Canada (around 3 years difference between the mean ages at first union).

It is also worth noting that the slight increases in the singulate age at first union apparently continue to occur at different rates between social sectors, areas of greater and lesser economic development and rural and urban residence. Recent studies coincide in indicating different patterns according to these various spheres of social differentiation (although we do not know of any comparative studies regarding age at marriage that have incorporated these socio-economic dimensions over time). These investigations indicate the presence of an earlier marriage pattern among poor and marginalized social sectors in both rural settings (such as peasants, day laborers and indigenous people), and urban settings (such as non-salaried workers with unstable occupations) with low schooling attainment, than among medium and high income urban sectors and those with high

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<sup>5</sup> The data in Table I include both consensual unions and marriage. In interpreting them, one should bear in mind that the quality of information on the two types of events is different, since consensual unions -which are more common in Central America and the Caribbean- are not always registered as marital unions, despite being socially recognized as such (United Nations, 1990; De Vos, 1999). In any case, one should recall that women's mean age at first union varies according to the type of the latter, since it is a well-known fact that those who begin a consensual union do so at an earlier age than those who get married.

schooling attainment (professionals, technicians and managerial staff).<sup>6</sup> This would suggest that it is precisely the conditions of poverty and instability that foster and account for lower age at first union. Women in these circumstances often get married or begin living with their partners at an early age in order to escape from poverty or family conflicts (see Geldstein, 1994; Riquer, 1998; Oliveira, 2000, and the evidence systematized in Oliveira et al., 1999).

Are the current trends in marital dissolution as a result of separation or divorce similar to those observed in age at first union? This is a most difficult question to answer, firstly because of the shortage of studies on this issue in the region. In addition, not all available sources of information accurately record separations of either consensual unions or marriages, even though it is a well-known fact that separation rather than divorce is the preferred form of dissolving a conjugal union, regardless of its type. Thus, if separations were taken into account, the level of marital dissolution would increase considerably. Moreover, until 1985, seven out of nineteen countries in Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua and Paraguay) had no divorce law (Rossetti, 1993).

Despite these provisos, it is extremely illustrative to note the evolution of the ratio between divorces and marriages shown in Table 2 for a total of nine countries in the region (in comparison with the US and Canada). Although this is a very rough indicator of the phenomenon of marital dissolution -not only because of its nature and the fact that it concerns divorces rather than separations- it is useful in that it allows us to outline a medium-term trend and incorporate information from up until 1996.

As regards the level reached by the ratio between divorces and marriages, a striking figure is that of Cuba, which already has very similar ratios to the United States. Cuba is a country that not only has high schooling attainment and women participation in the labor market, but an institutional and legal framework that has facilitated the voluntary interruption of marriages as well as pregnancies. In the case of Cuba -as well as other countries in the Caribbean with a high rate of marital dissolution such as the Dominican Republic-<sup>7</sup> one should also consider the possible importance of the cultural heritage of matrifocality in certain social sectors, which may facilitate the dissolution of conflictive unions, as well as the formation of women-headed households (see last section of this paper).

As far as trends are concerned, the information from Table 2 shows that in most cases, there has been a sharp, systematic increase in the ratio between divorce and marriage. However, there have also been a number of differences within the region: while this ratio doubled in Costa Rica and quadrupled in Venezuela between 1980 and 1996, it remained virtually constant in Mexico and Guatemala. Despite the fact that initial levels

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<sup>6</sup> See Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994 for Argentina; Muñoz and Reyes, 1997 for Chile; Quilodrán (forthcoming) and Vázquez, 2000 for Mexico, and Rossetti, 1993, Ramírez, 1995 for Latin America in general.

<sup>7</sup> The Dominican Republic is not included in Table 2, but we know of its high rate of marital dissolution from other studies (see Rosero-Bixby, 1996).

were extremely low, we believe that this phenomenon of marital dissolution shows indications of change that warrant closer attention. It is important to obtain a more accurate measure of its true scope and to explore both the macrosocial factors behind it and those related to women's position in society and relations between the genders.

As regards socio-economic differences in the voluntary interruption of a union or marriage, the information we have is not conclusive. Some studies indicate an inverse relationship between socio-economic position and marital dissolution, which is probably closely linked to the phenomenon of consensual unions more characteristic of the most disadvantaged strata (see next section). Conversely, other studies report that severing the conjugal link is more common when there is greater socio-economic development, in urban areas and insofar as women exercise a greater degree of participation in the public sphere. Thus, they state that the propensity towards separation has increased in accordance with the social scale and that it is greater when women participate in the labor market or study and among those who earn the same or more than their spouse. They also point out that divorce (or civil annulment in the case of Chile) is more common among the middle and upper classes, either because only those who are legally married can get divorced, or due to the fact that obtaining a divorce involves legal proceedings that entail financial expenditure that people of scant resources cannot afford.<sup>8</sup>

These findings prove the need for further research in this field, since they show that it would be wrong to attribute a single meaning to the different types of conjugal dissolution (separation, divorce, annulment) within the various social sectors. In future studies, it will be crucial to take into account not only the socioeconomic factors behind these phenomena but also individual motivation.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Consensual unions in Latin American societies*

A distinctive feature of Latin American marriage patterns is the importance of consensual unions, which may constitute a common, socially recognized form of conjugal union.<sup>10</sup> It has been argued that this particular conjugal bond has significant historical roots since it constitutes a vestige of the colonial past and slavery, although some authors stress that the principal determinant factor is poverty (see Charbit, 1987). Existing statistical information has shown that, since the 1950s there has been a marked difference in its prevalence throughout the region, and that the proportion of women in consensual unions was far greater in most Central American and Caribbean countries -where this type of bond may be even more important than marriage- as opposed to what happens in several South American countries or even Mexico, where consensual unions have always been

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<sup>8</sup> See the articles by Ojeda, 1986 and Oliveira et al., 1999, for Mexico; Geldstein, 1994, Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994 and Meler, 1998 for Argentina; Muñoz and Reyes, 1997 for Chile, Rossetti, 1993 and Ramírez, 1995 for Latin America in general.

<sup>9</sup> A study in Chile stated that higher income social sectors attributed the break-up of marriages to reasons linked to the relationship itself, such as incompatibility, lack of communication or immaturity. Conversely, among the poorer sectors, financial problems play a key role. It also found evidence that among the middle and upper class sectors it was mainly women who expressed a desire to end the marriage whereas among low income sectors, it was men who decided to leave their homes (Muñoz and Reyes, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Findings in this respect have been contributed since the late 1970's and early 1980's by studies undertaken by Camisa (1977) and Quilodrán (1985).

less important (Camisa, 1977; United Nations, 1990; Rossetti, 1993; Ramírez, 1995; Castro Martin, 1997; Quilodrán, 1999).

Research on the issue has confirmed that consensuality is more common among the more disadvantaged social sectors -where women subordination is greater- with lower schooling attainment and among the population living in rural and marginalized urban settings. Moreover, consensual marriages have traditionally been more common among young people, who nearly always begin their conjugal lives in this way in the hope of legalizing their union, and in several countries it has been proved that significant proportions of consensual unions are eventually legalized. Consequently, the importance of this type of unions tends to decline with age or when the observation changes from the first union to the current one, as these consensual unions are progressively dissolved or legalized. Likewise, it is a well-known fact that consensual unions tend to be more unstable than legal ones and that this instability is apparently more common in urban than rural settings.<sup>11</sup> In short, the traditional Latin American consensual union is a long way from being the symbol of women emancipation and abandonment of the norms governing the institution of marriage that it is in most developed countries<sup>12</sup>

The statistical evidence presented in several papers shows a significant increase in consensual unions in Latin America during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in countries where they were less important (such as Argentina, Chile and Brazil). This increase took place over several decades, and it continues to some extent in the period from 1980 to 1990 (see Table 3). It is also interesting to note -as has already been done in some studies- that, despite the increases, even today, several Central American and Caribbean countries still have higher percentages of consensual marriages than several South American countries, in addition to Mexico and Costa Rica (see Rosero-Bixby, 1996; Castro Martin, 1997 and Quilodrán, 1999).<sup>13</sup>

Are the most recent increases due to an accentuation of the phenomenon of the traditional consensual union, or do they also indicate the emergence of a different type of union with similar characteristics to those of developed countries? This is a key question in current studies on Latin American marriage and family and requires to take into account the socio-economic characteristics of the new unions being formed.

Studies of this kind have been undertaken at least in the cases of Mexico, Argentina and Chile, with somewhat different results. In the case of Mexico, for example, Quilodrán (2000) and Solís (2000) begin by stating that the late 1990s saw a significant increase in cohabitation. However, they conclude that this is not a new phenomenon, but

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<sup>11</sup> See Quilodrán, 1985 and 1999, Charbit, 1987; Ojeda, 1988; United Nations, 1990; Rossetti, 1993; Ramírez, 1995; Rosero-Bixby, 1996 and Castro Martin, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> See the discussion in this respect in Castro Martin, 1997 and Quilodrán, 2000, and a similar reflection in the case of “visiting unions” in Ariza and Oliveira, 1999a.

<sup>13</sup> In interpreting these trends, one should bear in mind the fact that in some of these countries, the option of divorce did not exist during this period, meaning that consensual union was sometimes the only possible option after a separation.

rather the same type of consensuality known about much earlier, and associated with rural spheres, and the poor population with low schooling attainment.<sup>14</sup>

Conversely, in the cases of Chile and Argentina -where an increase in the number of consensual unions has also been observed-<sup>15</sup>, certain authors place more emphasis on the changes that have taken place, although further truly comparative studies are required to determine the extent of these unions among various social groups. For the time being, authors such as Wainerman and Geldstein (1994) indicate that around 1989 in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, consensual unions increased mainly among the low income sector; they also noted, however, that more people from higher income sectors adopted this form of conjugal union. Among these better off groups, cohabitation was an option that was mainly chosen by men over the age of 40 and women over the age of 25. In the view of these authors, these facts constitute significant indications of a social and cultural change. The shift towards consensuality would therefore be due to different causes and have different meanings. Among young people in low-income sectors, it would be due to their financial difficulties in setting up a home, whereas among older people with high incomes it would be the result of new unions following separations and divorce (Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994).

In keeping with this reasoning, in the case of Chile, consensual unions are beginning to constitute a genuine option of conjugal union among the higher income sectors. Indeed, Muñoz and Reyes (1997) conclude that consensuality is similar in urban and rural areas and that, although it is more common among the poorer population, there is currently a high degree of acceptance of this type of union among all social sectors nationwide. They argue that among well-to-do sectors, the decision to live together is spurred by the need to remain together for affective reasons, that living together is a trial period before marriage, a way of rejecting legal formalism or a pattern that is beginning to become more common.

In short, the trends examined in the patterns of couple formation and dissolution in Latin America show that certain signs of change may be emerging in certain countries that are indicative of a second demographic transition. Most of the evidence, however, prevents one from stating that a transformation of this scope is fully underway and that the changes observed are due to greater individual autonomy and women emancipation, since in fact the opposite is true. In any case, the modifications to date have more to do with the type of unions and/or patterns of dissolution than with their deferment. The

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<sup>14</sup> Quilodrán, 2000 analyses the characteristics of consensual unions from the younger age group (15-19) in 1997; Solís, 2000 uses a hazard model for studying differences in socioeconomic characteristics for the cohorts of women born from 1943 to 1952 and from 1968 to 1972.

<sup>15</sup> Between 1982 and 1992, Chile experienced a reduction in the number of married couples and an increase in consensual unions among all age groups, a trend that had been observed since the 1970s. In 1992, over half a million people ages 15 or more lived in consensual unions, accounting for 9.9% of all those living with their partners. Of all those under the age of 20 living in consensual unions, those who have opted for cohabitation account for just over a fifth (21.6%) (Muñoz and Reyes, 1997). In Argentina, an analysis of marital status in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires between 1980 and 1989 showed a decline in the married population (from 58 to 54 per cent) together with a marked increase in the number of consensual unions during the course of this decade (from 4 to 7 per cent) (Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994).

choice of markedly postponing one's first marital union (or rejecting it altogether) is still less common in Latin America.<sup>16</sup>

#### SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF DOMESTIC UNITS: HOW FAR ARE WE MOVING TOWARDS SMALLER, NUCLEAR FAMILIES?

Household size and kinship ties among members constitute the basic analytical spheres in the socio-demographic analysis of domestic units. Researchers have long supported the hypothesis that as countries become more industrialized and urbanized, large, complex households are transformed into small, nuclear households in various parts of the world.

This hypothesis has been criticized from a number of angles, since it assumes that families in the past were largely extended families. Moreover, it tends to focus on the external configuration of households without exploring the different meanings that this may have in various family regimes. For example, historical research has shown that most families have been nuclear since before the start of industrialization in Europe –and Latin America- and that demographic conditions of high mortality would have made it extremely difficult for several generations to co-exist under one roof. Moreover, it is not clear whether the uniformity of certain family characteristics such as small, nuclear families means the same in strong and weak family systems, in other words, whether the tendency towards equality in these aspects necessarily implies convergence in patterns of family formation and co-existence in various parts of the world.<sup>17</sup> Despite these reservations, we feel it is important to accurately determine current levels and trends in household size and composition, provided we are aware that this is a starting point, albeit one that is both useful and essential to increasing the understanding of the Latin American family system. In our case, we are interested in determining how close Latin American families are to the small, nuclear families common in many developed countries, particularly after several decades of rapid demographic, economic and social transformation.

##### *On household size*

Information on family size has been the most easily available over the years. It may also be the most reliable and certainly achieves the greatest consensus. The trend towards a reduction in family size is a well-known fact in Latin America and one that is frequently associated with a decrease in fertility and increased schooling attainment and urbanization in the region. However, further studies will be required to determine the specific importance in this trend of changes in fertility, age at first union, separations and other related variables that determine the size of domestic units. Table 4 presents the available information in this respect for fifteen Latin American countries and Canada and the United States during the 1950s-2000s period. Although these data confirm a systematic downward trend, it is important to note both the slowness with which these

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<sup>16</sup> Although this paper does not deal with the prevalence of conjugal unions in Latin America, we know that such prevalence is high in several countries in the region, especially when better information has become available (see United Nations, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> See Goode, 1963; Burch, Lira and Lopes, 1976; Laslett, 1977; Roussel, 1992; Tuirán, 1993a; Reher, 1998.

transformations take place and the gap that still exists between Latin America and Canada and the United States. Of the countries shown in Table 4, Argentina and Uruguay are the two that achieved a smaller average size in the early 1990s (3.2), which is still high in comparison with figures for the United States at roughly the same time (2.6).

Another important feature to be borne in mind is the fact that in the 1990s there were only very slight variations between most Latin American countries and that the great majority of countries for which we have recent information -except Argentina and Uruguay- have an average household size of between 4.0 and 4.5 members. Also, as far as we know, there are no significant differences in household size at present either, according to certain basic groups of social differentiation (schooling attainment, occupation, rural-urban residence). For example, in a recent study, Bongaarts (2001) calculated an average size of 4.8 in nine Latin American countries between 1990 and 1998 from demographic and health surveys (DHS), on the basis of which he estimated differences of 0.4 members between rural and urban areas, and 0.3 between schooling attainment levels.<sup>18</sup> In short, there seems to be a clear indication of convergence towards small household size, which appears to be a long-term trend that is unlikely to be affected by the economic crises of recent years. It is interesting to note, however, that there is still a difference of an average of between 1.5 and 2 members between the majority of Latin American countries and the continent's developed nations.

#### *On household composition*

Unlike size, transformations in the composition of Latin American households are less well-known. Most of the region's households are nuclear (with a father and/or mother and/or children), although not to the same extent as they are in many developed Western countries, since the family system in the region is characterized by a significant number of extended and compound households (with relatives and non-relatives in addition to the father, mother and children). These are extended units that have been described as having an intermediate degree of complexity, since they mainly consist of a conjugal nucleus with single relatives. In other words, in Latin America, extended families with two resident conjugal nuclei are less significant, except perhaps in the case of very young or elderly couples.<sup>19</sup>

It is a well-known fact that the incorporation of relatives into previously existing conjugal nuclei is due to economic and demographic factors that operate within a cultural context of strong family ties, in which indigenous heritage combines with that of southern Europe. Some of the most commonly mentioned aspects include rural-urban migration – which explains the fact that extended households are often more frequent in urban areas-, the shortage of housing and resources among the poorest sectors, intra- and inter-generational solidarity when certain relatives separate or are widowed, as well as the need

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<sup>18</sup> The countries included in this study of Bongaarts (2001) are Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru. In this context, it is useful to remember that the differences in fertility in Latin American by social groups have also decreased in recent years. See Chackiel and Scholnick, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> For further references on extended and compound households in the region, see Burch, Lira and Lopes, 1976; Rossetti, 1993; De Vos, 1995.

for domestic support for married women and/or women household heads when they join the labor market.

In keeping with the above hypotheses, many authors believe that the reduction of extended households in certain Latin American countries is either feasible, likely, or actually underway, particularly in the medium and long term.<sup>20</sup> Some, however, also believe that changes could take place in the opposite direction, or report findings in this respect, and often attribute this tendency to the recurrent economic crises and the persistence of poverty in the region. In particular, the literature on survival strategies has suggested that both the shortage of housing and of economic resources may lead various population groups to remain under one roof as a means of maximizing existing alternatives for survival. Several theoretical essays that seek to outline family strategies on the basis of the “lost” decade of the 1980s, as well as case studies or those using small samples, have emphasized the possibility of this rise in the number of extended families or have actually reported increases in this respect in the groups analyzed.<sup>21</sup>

What is the most recent available evidence for population totals? To what extent does this support or refute the above proposals? The information on household composition in Latin America is far more scarce and fragmented than that on size, in addition to the fact that it is often affected by problems of comparability between the various sources. Table 5 contains data on household composition that we regard as comparable for a set of five Latin American countries (in addition to Canada and the United States for comparative purposes), while Table 6 contains recent evidence based on household surveys in urban areas in ten national contexts.

Table 5 shows that there is a downward trend in complex households in the majority of these countries, with the exception of Mexico, which displays an upward trend. At the same time, the data in Table 6 offer a mixed overview, showing increases in the number of extended and compound units in certain urban areas and decreases in others. Although this set of information does not allow one to reach definitive conclusions, it seems clear that extended domestic units continue to be an important phenomenon in the region, even in countries where households are evidently becoming more nuclear. This aspect of the Latin American family system continues to differentiate it sharply from that of countries such as Canada and the United States. These units are virtually irrelevant (or non-existent) there, and what calls one’s attention is the importance of single-person households (approximately a quarter of the total). Although this type of household is also increasing in Latin America, it barely accounts for 13-14% of the total in countries with an older age structure such as Argentina and Uruguay.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Several of these studies also stress the fact that the nuclear family is the “ideal type of family” to which most of the population aspires (see Rossetti, 1993, Goldani, 1993; Ramírez, 1995; Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994; Muñoz and Reyes, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> See Selby, 1990; Tuirán, 1993b; Chant, 1994; González de la Rocha, 1994. In general, the introduction of changes in patterns of residence is a theoretical possibility that is often also mentioned in the international literature on survival (see Cornia, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Reher (1998) believes that an important element that continues to differentiate strong and weak family systems in Europe is the percentage of single-person households. At the beginning of the 1990s, they

Another striking aspect is the persistent diversity between countries in the region regarding household composition (particularly in the case of urban areas) which is regarded as being greater than the variations in size, even though different types of indicators are involved. This is shown particularly clearly in the data in Table 6, which show that in 1994, the percentage of complex domestic units varied from 13% in urban areas of Argentina to 31% in those of Venezuela. This is an additional aspect to those mentioned earlier which confirms the differences within Latin America as regards living standards, cultural heritage and demographic transformations, which have been extensively documented in the case of mortality and fertility rates.

The importance of complex households in Latin America forces us once again to examine the link between this phenomenon and the prevailing living conditions in the region. How far do the sharp economic and social inequalities that persist in Latin American countries explain these tendencies? To what extent does the most disadvantaged sector of the population resort to this family arrangement to cope with its many shortages?

Several recent studies provide reasonable support for the hypothesis that extended households are more common among the less advantaged sectors or, in other words, that these households become less important when the population has sufficient financial resources to be able to establish separate households offering greater autonomy and privacy. On the one hand, some studies at the international level have shown that improved living standards are accompanied by an increase in the amount of the population living in nuclear households (see Lloyd, 1998 and Bongaarts, 2001; in this last study, however, although the association is in the expected direction, it is not statistically significant). In the same token, in the case of Latin America, at least two studies sponsored by ECLA for various countries in the region in the 1980s and mid-1990s also point out that there is a link between greater financial needs and extended households, although both include caveats and shed light on the nature of this association (see CEPAL, 1993, chapter III; Arriagada, 1997).<sup>23</sup> The data presented in these studies indicate that extended households are more significant among low and middle income sectors, yet less so among the destitute or extremely poor (and are never relevant among high income sectors). This may happen because the relationship occurs in the opposite direction to that postulated, in other words, the fact of living with other relatives enables people to mitigate the most severe shortages which is why extended households are less common among the extremely poor sectors.

At the opposite end of the social scale, the data provided by Arriagada (1997) at least show that single-person units are most common among the better-off sectors of society, in other words, among groups for whom living in these circumstances constitutes

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accounted for 17% of the total in Spain and Portugal, compared with 27 to 44% in countries in northern Europe.

<sup>23</sup> The countries included in ECLA's comparative studies are: Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Uruguay and Venezuela in the 1980s and Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela in 1994.

a viable alternative (see also Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994, with results in the same direction for the case of Argentina, as regards both single-person and extended residential families).

The above results must be interpreted cautiously and as indicators of general trends or initial approaches to knowledge of the links between living standards and patterns of residence or family life. On the one hand, one should begin by recognizing the restrictions involved in using income or family income as a measure of well-being and the implicit assumption that resources are equally distributed between genders and generations, when it has been shown that this is not necessarily true, particularly when financial difficulties are most acute (see Lloyd, 1998; Basu, 2000 and Salles and Tuirán, 1999). The use of alternative indicators concerning the well-being of the various members of domestic units should be encouraged, even if this complicates matters and makes it more difficult to reach definitive conclusions, as has happened with women-headed families (see next section).<sup>24</sup>

Finally, in addition to using different types of indicators, greater efforts must be made to generate more information on the vast amount of economic and social exchanges that take place *among* residential units –in fact extremely common in Latin America– which might lead us to substantially modify our overview of the prevailing living standards in the various types of domestic units.

#### WOMEN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND THEIR LINK WITH POVERTY

The significant number of women-headed households has long been a well-known aspect of the family system in Latin America. The historical roots of this phenomenon have been explored in several studies that present information on women-headed households that accounted for 25 to 45% of the total in several Latin American settlements during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (see Tuirán, 1993a, and Quilodrán, forthcoming). Factors that encouraged matrifocal families at the time include the social hierarchies and the imbalance between Spanish males and indigenous women and the rules preventing marriage between slaves in places where this phenomenon was significant (the Caribbean is perhaps the region that has been most extensively studied in this last respect). There is apparently a consensus that one of the main proximate determinants of families with women headship in countries such as those in the Caribbean is the continued importance of consensual and visiting unions, as shown in the first part of this study (see Massiah, 1983; Charbit, 1984; Folbre, 1991 and the discussion systematized in Ariza and Oliveira, 1999b).

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<sup>24</sup> At least two studies focusing on children's well-being and academic performance in extended households reach opposite conclusions. One study finds that extended units are better off in this respect (several Latin American countries during the 1980s) whereas the other (for the case of Mexico) concludes that these households do not encourage academic development, particularly in the case of boys (see CEPAL, 1993, Chapter III and Giorguli, forthcoming). Moreover, De Vos (1995, for several countries in the region during the 1970s) concludes that socio-economic characteristics –such as rural-urban residence and schooling attainment– do not significantly account for belonging to complex households once other demographic factors have been controlled for.

Nowadays the theme of women headship is inextricably linked to research and action concerning poverty and this has been a key issue of concern, particularly when the gender perspective into socio-demographic studies on the Latin American families was introduced in the 1980s. It is a phenomenon that has stimulated the interest of many researchers, particularly the younger generations of scholars.

It has been argued that the number of women-led households is on the increase – not only in Latin America but also in several parts of the developed and developing world- due to demographic and social factors that are closely linked to disadvantaged living conditions: early pregnancy among women who remain single, in consensual unions or in sporadic unions, desertion by unemployed or poorly paid men who are unable to fulfil their role as economic providers or internal or international male migration in search of better opportunities. However, researchers are also aware that increased schooling attainment together with women participation in the labor market may encourage more women than before to end an unsatisfactory or violent relationship with their partner and set up home elsewhere. Moreover, several studies point to the role played by the overall increase in separations and divorces, greater women life expectancy and a lower incidence of subsequent unions among widows as factors that currently exist among various social groups and affect the formation of women-headed households (see Buvinic, 1990 and Acosta, 2000).

Does the most recent information support an increase in women-headed households in Latin America? Various studies and information from censuses and demographic surveys record a marked increase in this type of households during the period from 1970-2000 (see Table 7 containing information about fifteen Latin American countries and Canada and the United States). In approximately half of the national contexts considered for the 1990s, women-led households already accounted for a quarter of the total or were close to this level. Also, as expected, very high percentages were reached in Caribbean countries such as Cuba and the Dominican Republic.<sup>25</sup>

These data point to a distinct upward tendency in the number of women-headed domestic units in Latin America, as well as the fact that there are fewer exceptions to this trend than in the 1970s and 1980s (see García, 1998, for information on this period). This ever-expanding group of women household heads constitutes a very heterogeneous group, due as much to the various factors that give rise to the phenomenon as to the definition of *declared headship* used in censuses and socio-demographic surveys in Latin America. It is a well-known fact that *declared headship* (person recognized as such by household members) usually only allows women without a husband or partner in the home to be identified as heads of households, thereby producing a biased estimation of the number of women who support their families financially. Moreover, this definition may erroneously identify as household heads elderly women who do not necessarily play

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<sup>25</sup> This table does not include other Caribbean islands for which even higher rates of women-headed households have been reported. For example, in Barbados, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Vincent/Granadina, St. Lucia, and San Cristobal/Nevis, over 40% of all households had women headship in the 1970s and 1980s (Ariza and Oliveira, 1999b). Likewise, recent studies have shown that during the 1980s, women-headed households in Havana city accounted for nearly 50% of the total (Franco, 1999).

an economic role in the maintenance of their domestic units or act as the central figure in decision making. The simplicity of the procedure regarding *declared headship* or perhaps even the inertia of censuses has contributed to the continued use of this concept. It is important to be aware of its limitations and to realize that the number and characteristics of women household heads depends largely on the definition used.<sup>26</sup>

Within a context of an increase in the number of women heads and greater recognition of their heterogeneity, research on various aspects of this phenomenon has multiplied in (and about) Latin America. Without meaning to be exhaustive, the following is a sample of some of the aspects explored in the enormous amount of literature on the subject.

On the one hand, there are a number of studies based on socio-demographic and health surveys that attempt to explore the demographic and social determinants of women headship and the living conditions that prevail in these households, including not only the characteristics of women heads themselves (age, schooling attainment, extra domestic work, income) but also those of their children (school attendance, incorporation into the labor market, mortality and nutrition levels).<sup>27</sup> In addition to demographic surveys, current studies on the poverty and vulnerability of women-headed households also tend to be based on the important amount of information yielded by income-expenditure surveys on the region (see for example, Arriagada, 1997 for various countries; Cortés, 1997; Rubalcava, 1998 and Sosa, 1999 for the case of Mexico).

At the same time, there are several case studies or investigations using small samples on women household heads that have continued to make a valuable contribution to this issue because of the variety of aspects they cover and the versatility of the hypotheses that can therefore be put forward. Particularly important in this group are the studies on teenage motherhood in connection with women headship and poverty, the investigations on life trajectories that enable one to link patterns of family formation and dissolution and fertility patterns to the formation of women-led households, the studies that attempt to identify and theorize about the influence of gender inequality and other factors such as kinship, culture, religion, law and economic development –as well as demographic changes- to explain the variations in frequency and types of women household headship and the analyses that record women's perceptions of their role as household heads.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mostly in the case of surveys, attempts have been made to find alternatives to this concept of declared headship that will make it possible to specify its meaning, such as *financial headship* (the person who earns the highest income), or *work headship* (the person who works the greatest number of hours) (see Rosenhouse, 1989). Also, several criticisms have been leveled at the concept of headship itself, and at least in the case of Brazil's household continuous surveys, it has been already changed for the "reference person" (Goldani, 2001). (See Presser, 1998, for the change which has taken place in this respect in the United States Census).

<sup>27</sup> See for example, Buvinic, 1990 and Buvinic and Gupta, 1994 for various developing countries in Latin America and other parts of the world; Pedroso, 1999 for the case of Cuba; Echarri, 1995, Acosta, 2000, Gómez de León and Parker, 2000, Giorguli, (forthcoming) for the case of Mexico.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Geldstein, 1994; Chant, 1997; Rodríguez Dorantes, 1997; Engle and Smidt, 1998; Alatorre and Atkin, 1998; Buvinic et al., 1998; Russell-Brown, et al., 1998; González de la Rocha, 1999;

On the basis of this previous research, how far have we advanced in our knowledge of the nature of households with women headship in Latin America? To what extent are they yet another expression of persistent poverty and how far do other demographic and social factors explain this phenomenon? From our point of view, we are still a long way from being able to answer these questions fully, at least in a comparative perspective that takes several countries in the region into account. As we mentioned earlier, the most commonly asked question is whether these households face a greater risk of becoming poor, which is the main argument for making them the key focus of social policies. The hypothesis of greater poverty in this type of households is supported by recent systematizations of the literature, such as the study by Buvinic and Gupta (1994), which finds that in two-thirds of a total of 64 studies for different parts of the world, women-headed households face a greater risk of being poor than those with men headship. A number of studies conducted on the region in the 1990s by United Nations organizations such as CELADE and ECLA, also argue in the same direction, while certain authors have clearly linked the increase in the number of these households to the growing difficulties faced by men in the Latin American labor markets (see Kaztman, 1993; CEPAL, 1994 and Ramírez, 1995). Specific factors that may contribute to the higher prevalence of poverty in women-headed households include the greater number of dependents, since the spouse is usually absent, and the difficulties faced by these women in the labor market due to their lack of job qualifications and less time available due to their domestic responsibilities.

Although there are studies with broad regional and thematic coverage that support the lower levels of well-being in households with women headship, there are also a considerable number of studies that question this link or report findings in the opposite direction, and in this case, we find that the objections are more frequent than those we pointed out when we analyzed extended domestic units. For example, Lloyd (1998, with data for eighteen developing countries) finds that there is no significant link between women headship and poverty. Likewise, the information provided by Arriagada (1997) suggests a mixed panorama as regards the incidence of poverty in this type of households (data for twelve Latin American countries in the mid-1990s). In this context, one should also recall the results of certain studies based on small samples and the proposals of some of their authors who stress the diversity of women household heads and the fact that they may constitute a group of women who choose and are able to maintain a separate household, in addition to the fact that their domestic units may have certain positive aspects (such as less domestic violence when there is no male spouse and a better quality of life for children in comparison with households where both parents are present yet have a conflictive relationship) (see García and Oliveira, 1994; Chant, 1997; Gómez de León and Parker, 2000).

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Acosta, 2000, for recent studies of this type on Argentina, Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Mexico.

The difficulty of reaching definitive conclusions about the relationship between women headship and family well-being may be due to the fact that quantitative comparative research sometimes uses very rough and/or dissimilar indicators to diagnose the prevailing living conditions of a very heterogeneous group of households. The diverse nature of women-headed domestic units requires examining what happens in more specific, homogeneous groups, in addition to refining our analytical tools. This is borne out by some of the research carried out in Mexico.

Indeed, several authors have reached the conclusion that in the case of Mexico, households with women headship are not usually the poorest. However, these same studies, or parallel studies provide information that allows one to detect sub-groups within the women heads that evidently live in more precarious conditions. These include women heads in urban as opposed to rural areas, those under 55 and with children ages 0 to 8, or women heads in working class as opposed to middle-class sectors. It is also clear from these and other pioneer studies in this field that any investigation on women headship and levels of well-being may be limited if it fails to take into account the household heads' marital status (primarily whether or not they are widows) and the existence or otherwise of a spouse, given the varying economic and social possibilities, as well as the different social legitimization of these subgroups.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, a methodological analysis of some of the studies mentioned earlier highlights the dependence of their results on the indicator used to measure levels of poverty or well-being. These indicators may include those that refer to housing characteristics, access to health services, credit and land, type of employment and the existence of savings and capital goods, as well as children's well-being, academic performance, domestic violence and patterns of authority and income. In the case of income, it has been shown that conclusions may vary according to whether the study uses total income, per capita income or a combination of declared headship with information on the men or women origin of household income.<sup>30</sup>

In short, the growth of households with women headship, their heterogeneity and the experience accumulated to date in Latin American research on this issue calls for more diversification and increased complexity of the questions that have to be asked, and for the design of more accurate methodologies and indicators so as to be able to detect the women, young people and children in this group who are particularly vulnerable and warrant priority attention in public policies.

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<sup>29</sup> See Bouvinic, Youssef and Von Elm, 1978; Echarri, 1995; Cortés, 1997; Gómez de León and Parker, 2000; Muñiz and Hernández, 2000; García and Pacheco (forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> See Bouvinic, Youssef and Von Elm, 1978; Folbre, 1991; García and Oliveira, 1994; Echarri, 1995; Cortés and Rubalcava, 1995, Cortés, 1997, Rubalcava, 1998; Acosta, 2000; Gómez de León and Parker, 2000; García and Pacheco (forthcoming). Other factors mentioned by Acosta, 2000, that may explain the ambiguities found in empirical research on women headship and poverty include the different ways income is declared in either type of household and the fact that both women and men-headed households may be equally poor in many situations.

## SUMMARY OF MAIN RESULTS

The systematization of studies and the analysis of information that we have undertaken in this paper enabled us to reach the following conclusions on socio-demographic transformations in the Latin American family sphere during the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*Patterns of marital formation and dissolution:* the principal changes have to do with marital dissolution and consensual unions that have increased significantly in many countries. Age at first union continues to be the aspect in which fewest changes have been observed over time, although in the 1990s, none of the countries considered had very early female mean ages at marital union (under 21). Although changes in dissolution and consensual unions seem to be moving towards what has been called the second demographic transition, we believe that this transition has not yet taken place in Latin America, since many of the transformations have a different nature and meaning. In the case of consensual unions at least, it is clear that their principal origin is still poverty and women subordination, although signs of the opposite trend were observed in certain countries in the southern cone.

*Household size:* a slow but steady convergence was observed towards the low levels that prevail in the more developed countries. However, there is still a considerable gap between the two levels, since in the 1990s, the majority of national contexts analyzed had an average size of between 4.0 and 4.5 members, with the exception of Argentina and Uruguay that showed household sizes of an average of just 3.2 members. As far as we know, the differences recorded in this respect, according to various scales of social differentiation, are very small.

*Household composition:* nuclearization is undoubtedly taking place in many national contexts, although this tendency is not completely uniform. In any case, complex units continued to be extremely important in the 1990s in all the countries considered (accounting for 20 to 34% of the total) which led us to confirm that this continues to be a distinctive feature of the family system in Latin America. We also found sufficient support for the proposal that this type of household is more characteristic of the most disadvantaged sectors and suggest that their permanence is one of the indicators of the numerous socio-economic drawbacks faced by Latin American countries that have been exacerbated by recurrent economic crises. On the other hand, single-person households may account up to 14%, and this happens in countries with an older age structure, and their presence is more pronounced among the more privileged sectors.

*Women-headed households:* We highlighted the systematic increase in women-headed households and the interest that this phenomenon has elicited among specialists from (and about) Latin America (and the rest of the world). In half the countries considered for the 1990s, this type of household already accounted for a quarter of the total or was close to this level. Although many authors have concluded that there is an unquestionable link between women-headed households and poverty, we recorded different results in this particular respect. These findings, however, should not prevent further studies from

attempting to determine which women household heads are the most vulnerable and warrant more attention in public policy design.

*Differences within Latin America:* in the first place, our study enabled us to confirm previous findings that separate the southern cone from the rest of the region as regards various characteristics of their families. We found that Argentina and Uruguay (as well as Chile in nearly all cases) -countries with relatively better living conditions and that were at the forefront of the first demographic transition- are quite different from the rest as regards the relatively later ages at first union, the lower prevalence of consensual unions, smaller household size, and the relatively higher percentage of single-person units. Second, the results of this study also confirm that many Central American and Caribbean countries -where the economic outlook is the most difficult- continue to stand out from the rest as regards the higher prevalence of consensual unions. Finally, the Caribbean – where the cultural heritage of matrifocality is perhaps stronger- differs from the other countries as regards women headship and the greater prevalence of union dissolution.

*Proximity to or distance from Canada and the United States:* we indicated considerable differences between Latin America and the developed countries on the American continent as regards a series of family aspects. In Canada and the United States, average age at first union is much later, family size is much smaller and the importance of single-person households is considerably greater than in Latin America where extended units continue to prevail. The significance of consensual unions in particular continues to be diametrically different in the two contexts, but there are signs of changes in the Latin American southern cone that could alter this statement at some time in the future. Although one could argue that the trends analyzed in several of these aspects will tend towards an eventual convergence, there are sufficient signs to date that the Latin American family system is significantly different from that of the United States and Canada, which has its roots in different cultural heritages and highly dissimilar levels of economic development.

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Table 1  
Latin America (11 countries), Canada and the United States. Singulate mean age at marital union  
(1950s-1990s)

	<i>Hombres</i>					<i>Mujeres</i>				
	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s <sup>a</sup>	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s <sup>a</sup>
<b>Argentina</b>	-	26.7	26.1	25.3	25.8	-	23.1	22.9	22.9	23.3
<b>Bolivia</b>	24.6	-	24.5	25.2	25.1	22.5	-	22.1	22.8	22.7
<b>Chile</b>	27.0	26.4	25.5	25.7	-	23.7	23.5	23.3	23.6	-
<b>Ecuador</b>	25.6	25.1	24.8	24.3	25.2	21.1	20.7	21.1	21.1	22.0
<b>El Salvador</b>	25.3	25.0	24.7	-	25.3	19.7	18.8	19.4	-	22.3
<b>Guatemala</b>	24.0	23.8	23.7	23.5	23.8	18.6	18.8	19.7	20.5	21.3
<b>Haiti</b>	28.5	28.1	27.3	27.3	27.3	21.9	22.4	23.8	23.8	23.8
<b>Mexico</b>	-	23.9 <sup>b</sup>	23.9 <sup>b</sup>	23.5 <sup>b</sup>	24.2-25.1 <sup>b</sup>	-	20.7 <sup>b</sup>	20.8 <sup>b</sup>	21.1 <sup>b</sup>	22.0-22.9 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Panama</b>	24.6	24.8	24.8	25.0	25.4	18.3	18.9	20.4	21.3	21.9
<b>Paraguay</b>	26.7	26.3	26.5	26.0	25.8	20.9	20.8	21.7	21.8	21.5
<b>Uruguay</b>	-	26.9	25.4	25.2	-	-	22.8	22.4	22.9	-
<b>Canada</b>	25.3	24.8	24.4	25.2	28.9	22.5	21.4	22.0	23.1	26.2
<b>United States</b>	23.8	23.3	23.5	25.2	-	20.8	20.3	21.5	23.3	-

Source: a) Demographic Yearbook, 1997; b) In the 1990s, the first figure is for 1990 and the second for 1995, Quilodrán (forthcoming); all other figures from United Nations (1990).

Table 2  
Latin America (9 countries), Canada and the United States.  
Ratio of divorces to marriages.  
(1960-1996)  
(Percentages)

	1960 <sup>a</sup>	1970 <sup>a</sup>	1980 <sup>a</sup>	1989 <sup>a</sup>	1993 <sup>b</sup>	1996 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Costa Rica</b>	2.12	2.05	9.89	12.69	17.33	18.79 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Cuba</b>	5.34	21.55	35.76	44.01	48.05	63.42
<b>Ecuador</b>	-	3.63	5.67	8.99	10.71	12.14
<b>El Salvador</b>	4.82	7.20	6.80	10.77	-	-
<b>Guatemala</b>	3.50	3.71	3.45	-	3.24	-
<b>Mexico</b>	3.08	2.71	4.40	7.28	4.96	5.75
<b>Panama</b>	10.46	7.84	10.89	16.75	16.03	15.84
<b>Uruguay</b>	8.72	12.37	20.17	-	-	-
<b>Venezuela</b>	4.75	4.10	4.96	19.54	16.82	21.51
<hr/>						
<b>Canada</b>	5.36	15.52	32.46	42.34	49.10	48.44 <sup>c</sup>
<b>United States</b>	25.80	32.80	49.74	48.38	50.86	49.06

Sources: a) For 1960-1989: Suárez (2000), based on the Demographic Yearbook 1976, 1982, 1991 and 1993. b) For 1993 and 1996: own calculations based on the Demographic Yearbook, 1997. c) Figures are for 1995.

Table 3  
Latin America (19 countries). Consensual unions among  
women 15-49 in marital union.  
(1970s-1990s)

	1970s	1980s	1990s	Change 1970s-1980s	Change 1980s-1990s
<b>Argentina</b>	10.5	12.3	21.1	17.1	71.5
<b>Bolivia</b>	-	17.0	22.1	-	30.0
<b>Brazil</b>	7.5	12.0	15.3 <sup>a</sup>	60.0	25.0
<b>Colombia</b>	19.8	31.5	45.9	59.1	45.7
<b>Costa Rica</b>	16.7	19.0	21.0	13.8	10.5
<b>Cuba</b>	40.9	37.5	-	-8.3	-
<b>Chile</b>	5.0	7.1	11.6	42.0	63.4
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	51.8	57.0	59.7	10.0	4.7
<b>Ecuador</b>	27.4	29.2	29.6	6.6	1.4
<b>El Salvador</b>	52.6	57.6	56.4	9.5	-2.1
<b>Guatemala</b>	54.0	45.9	40.1 <sup>b</sup>	-15.0	-12.6
<b>Honduras</b>	56.1	-	50.1 <sup>c</sup>	-	-
<b>Mexico</b>	16.1	14.4	15.3	-10.6	6.3
<b>Nicaragua</b>	40.8	-	56.3	-	-
<b>Panama</b>	56.0	53.5	53.6	-4.5	0.2
<b>Paraguay</b>	24.5	25.4	29.2	3.7	15.0
<b>Peru</b>	29.0	26.7	32.1	-7.9	20.2
<b>Uruguay</b>	8.8	12.6	-	43.2	-
<b>Venezuela</b>	32.9	33.4	34.8	1.5	4.2

Source: Adapted from Castro Martin (1997) based on Population Censuses and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for the different countries; a) 1986; b) Women 15-44, 1987; c) 1988 (see also Rosero-Bixby, 1996; Quilodr n, 1999).

Table 4  
Latin America (15 countries), Canada and the United States.  
Average number of household members.  
(1950s-2000s)

<i>Country and</i>	<i>Average number of members</i>					
	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
<i>Latin America</i>						
<b>Argentina</b>	-	4.5 <sup>a</sup>	3.6	3.4	3.2	-
<b>Bolivia</b>	-	-	4.4	4.6 <sup>b</sup>	4.3	-
<b>Brazil</b>	-	-	5.1 <sup>b</sup>	4.4	4.2-3.6 <sup>c</sup>	-
<b>Cuba</b>	4.9 <sup>b</sup>	4.5 <sup>b</sup>	4.1 <sup>b</sup>	4.0 <sup>b</sup>	-	-
<b>Chile</b>	-	-	5.0 <sup>b</sup>	4.6	4.0	-
<b>Costa Rica</b>	-	5.7	-	4.7	-	-
<b>Ecuador</b>	-	5.1	-	5.1	-	-
<b>El Salvador</b>	-	-	-	-	4.1	-
<b>Mexico</b>	-	-	4.9	5.5	5.0	4.3 <sup>d</sup>
<b>Panama</b>	-	-	4.9	4.6	4.4	-
<b>Paraguay</b>	-	-	-	5.2	4.8	-
<b>Peru</b>	-	4.9	-	4.6	-	-
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	-	5.1 <sup>b</sup>	5.3 <sup>b</sup>	5.0 <sup>b</sup>	4.5 <sup>b</sup>	-
<b>Uruguay</b>	-	3.3	3.5	3.3	-	-
<b>Venezuela</b>	5.3 <sup>b</sup>	5.5	5.7 <sup>b</sup>	5.4	-	-
<b>Canadá</b>	-	3.6	3.2	2.8	-	-
<b>United States</b>	-	-	3.2	2.7	2.6	-

Source: a) Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC) National Population and Housing Censuses, according to Feijóo (1993); b) Ramírez, (1995); c) In the 1990s the figure is for 1991 (Population Census) and the second for 1996 (National Household Survey-PNAD), see Goldani (2001). d) Accompanying survey to the XII Population and Housing Census, 2000. All other countries and years: United Nations, Demographic Yearbook.

Table 5  
Latin America (5 countries), Canada and the United States.  
Household composition  
(1960-2000)

<i>Country and year</i>	<i>Nuclear</i>	<i>Complex*</i>	<i>Single- person</i>	<i>Other</i>
<b>Argentina</b>				
1970 <sup>a</sup>	59	31	10	-
1980 <sup>a</sup>	58	32	10	-
1991 <sup>b</sup>	64	21	13	1
<b>Brazil</b>				
1960 <sup>c</sup>	69	26	5	-
1970 <sup>d</sup>	73	20	5	1
1980 <sup>d</sup>	72	20	7	1
<b>Chile</b>				
1970 <sup>e</sup>	30	64	6	-
1982 <sup>e</sup>	53	40	7	-
1992 <sup>e</sup>	58	34	8	-
<b>Mexico</b>				
1970 <sup>f</sup>	81	-	-	-
1980 <sup>f</sup>	73	-	-	-
1990 <sup>g</sup>	75	20	5	-
2000 <sup>g</sup>	69	24	6	-
<b>Uruguay</b>				
1981 <sup>h</sup>	62	26	12	-
1984 <sup>h</sup>	62	25	13	-
1989 <sup>h</sup>	63	23	14	-
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>				
<b>Canada</b>				
1991 <sup>b</sup>	65	8	23	3
<b>United States</b>				
1994 <sup>b</sup>	76	-	24	-

Source: \* Includes extended households with relatives besides the conjugal units as well as a minority of households with non-relatives (compound). a) National Population Censuses of 1970 and 1980, according to Feijóo (1993); b) United Nations, Demographic Yearbook, 1995; c) Lira (1976); d) Special tabulations of National population censuses of 1970 and 1980, according to Goldani (1993); e) Population and Housing Censuses of 1970, 1982 and 1992, according to Muñoz and Reyes (1993); f) López (1989); g) López (2000), based on the 1990 Population Census and the Accompanying survey of the 2000 Population Census. h) Continuous household surveys, second semesters of 1981, 1984 and 1989, according to Filgueira and Peri (1993).

Table 6  
Latin America (9 countries). Household and family composition  
(1986-1994)

<i>Países</i>	<i>Nuclear</i>		<i>Complex</i>		<i>Single-person</i>		<i>Other</i>		<i>Total</i>
	1986	1994	1986	1994	1986	1994	1986	1994	
<b>Argentina</b>	71.9	66.6	12.7	13.7	11.3	15.3	4.1	4.5	100.0
<b>Brazil<sup>a</sup></b>	76.8	70.9	12.3	17.2	6.9	7.9	4.0	4.0	100.0
<b>Chile<sup>b</sup></b>	61.6	64.1	27.6	22.4	6.4	8.0	4.5	4.2	100.0
<b>Costa Rica<sup>c</sup></b>	68.2	67.1	22.5	23.4	4.4	5.8	4.9	3.7	100.0
<b>Mexico</b>	70.3	70.8	19.9	19.0	5.2	6.0	4.6	4.3	100.0
<b>Panama</b>	61.0	60.7	20.1	25.5	12.0	8.2	6.9	5.8	100.0
<b>Paraguay</b>	53.0	54.9	36.2	32.6	6.0	7.8	4.8	4.8	100.0
<b>Uruguay</b>	63.3	62.9	18.6	16.9	11.9	15.2	6.2	5.0	100.0
<b>Venezuela</b>	56.4	57.0	33.8	33.3	4.5	5.5	5.3	2.6	100.0

Source: ECLAC, Arriagada (1997), based on household surveys in urban areas for the different countries. a) Data for 1987 and 1993; b) Data for 1987 and 1994; c) Data for 1988 and 1994.

Table 7  
Latin America (15 countries), Canada and the United States.  
Percentage of households headed by women  
(1970s-2000s)

<i>Country and year</i>	<i>Households headed by women</i>			
	<i>1970s</i>	<i>1980s</i>	<i>1990s</i>	<i>2000s</i>
<i>Latin America</i>				
<b>Argentina</b>	-	-	22	-
<b>Bolivia</b>	-	-	24	-
<b>Brazil</b>	13 <sup>a</sup>	14	18-24 <sup>b</sup>	-
<b>Chile</b>	-	22	25	-
<b>Colombia</b>	-	20 <sup>a</sup>	23 <sup>a</sup>	-
<b>Costa Rica</b>	16 <sup>a</sup>	18	20 <sup>a</sup>	-
<b>Cuba</b>	18 <sup>a</sup>	28	-	-
<b>Ecuador (urban<sup>c</sup>)</b>	-	15	18	-
<b>Guatemala</b>	-	15 <sup>a</sup>	17 <sup>a</sup>	-
<b>Mexico</b>	-	-	17	21 <sup>d</sup>
<b>Paraguay</b>	-	18 <sup>a</sup>	21	-
<b>Peru</b>	22 <sup>a</sup>	22 <sup>a</sup>	17 <sup>a</sup>	-
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	20 <sup>a</sup>	22 <sup>a</sup>	25 <sup>a</sup>	-
<b>Uruguay</b>	21 <sup>a</sup>	23 <sup>a</sup>	-	-
<b>Venezuela</b>	22 <sup>a</sup>	22	21 <sup>a</sup>	-
<b>Canada</b>	-	-	30	-
<b>United States</b>	-	31	34	-

Source: a) Ramírez, 1995. b) The first figure is for 1991 and the second is for the 1996 PNAD which used the "reference person" concept, see Goldani (1991); c) Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INEC), household surveys, according to García and Mauro, 1993. d) Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), accompanying survey to the XII National Population Census, 2000. All other countries and years: United Nations, Demographic Yearbook.