
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

FAMILY AND FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET IN LATIN AMERICA

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In 1975, the CLACSO Employment-Unemployment Group held a meeting in La Plata, Argentina, about employment in Latin America. Due to the diversity and specificity of the interests involved, several subgroups were created to permit a flexible and decentralized working scheme. Zulma Recchini de Lattes, from the Centro de Estudios de Población (CENEP), was appointed coordinator of the subgroup on female participation in the labor market. Her first task was the compilation of a bibliography on the subject in Latin America, and a thorough survey of studies in progress by Latin American investigators and institutions. The results of this effort were presented at a meeting of the CLACSO Employment-Unemployment Group in May 1976. In August 1977, the subgroup met in Mexico to discuss future activities.

After some postponements, the first formal meeting of the subgroup, dealing with "Female Participation and the Family in Latin America," was held 11–14 December 1979, in the headquarters of the Centro de Informaciones y Estudios del Uruguay (CIESU), Montevideo. The meeting was organized by Recchini de Lattes, with the collaboration of Víctor Tokman (coordinator of the Employment-Unemployment Group) and of CIESU, with funds from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

The purpose of the meeting was to gather together a group of Latin American social scientists from different disciplines with an active

interest in the topic of female participation in the labor force, and to discuss research in progress in different countries of the region. It was felt that the reports should come from diverse disciplines in order to contrast approaches, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and results.

The meeting started with a review of the history of the subgroup, by its coordinator, and a short account of their respective research areas by each of the members. The authors then presented their papers, which were followed by observations by one or two commentators and then general discussion by all the participants.

The first paper was Leo Melo da Silva's "Married Women's Participation in the Labor Force: Compatibility between Their Extradomestic Activities and the Number of Children." This research starts from the premise that a married woman's participation in the labor market depends on the influence of salaries and wages and the value she assigns to the time used in domestic work; this, in turn, depends on factors such as number of hours of work out of the home, family composition, husband's income, and presence of other persons able to take the mother's place in the care of children. A simultaneous regression analysis was used and the sample was divided into two subsamples: one corresponding to families in which compatibility between mother's economic participation and children's upbringing is assumed; and another in which the assumption is incompatibility between both activities. The most important result showed that the hypotheses are valid only for women working in the formal labor market.

Catalina Wainerman presented "Conceptions about the Position of Women in the Family and in the Labor Market in Argentina," a paper centered on methodological and theoretical questions, rather than on the results obtained. Her research has two main purposes: the identification and description of the attitudes prevailing in Argentina since the beginning of the century concerning women's economic activity; and the study of the predominant definitions of woman in general and of the roles she plays in the family, in particular, and in relation to man. The principal decisions at the start of her study were: on what level to pitch the analysis, and how to detect ideational phenomena. For the former, she chose the national or societal level; for the latter, she selected as sources labor and civil law, Catholic Church texts, compulsory school texts, scientific texts, and women's magazines. Her methodology combined content and semiological analysis.

The next paper was a joint work by Magdalena León de Leal and Carmen Diana Deere, presented by the former: "Theoretical and Methodological Outlines for the Study of Rural Woman and the Process of Capitalist Development." She stressed the need for a theoretical framework to integrate the production and reproduction processes at their

different levels. She also expressed her concern about the underestimation that results from using census data to analyze female participation in the labor force. She emphasized that, in this study, an effort was made to understand female labor in the rural sector and how it changed over time, particularly with the appearance of agrarian capitalism. She divides the study into three stages: (1) historical analysis of the national process of development and characterization of the agrarian structure; (2) regional studies about the process of development of capitalism and the changes in the social division of labor; and (3) quantitative analysis of the sexual division of labor within peasant households (this last stage included interviews).

Lourdes Arizpe presented a paper on "Female Participation in Agriculture and the Selectivity of Migrants." This work is an attempt at inductive generalization from different studies of migration from rural to urban areas in the region. The author expressed the need to identify historical patterns, and noted the existence of a sexual division of labor with different types of migration for relief when family conditions deteriorated.

"Labor Division and Life Cycle" was presented by Beatriz Alasia de Heredia. She began with the idea that each individual act is part of a family strategy that is put into motion under differing circumstances. She described two mechanisms of social reproduction among the peasantry in Pernambuco and Alagoas, Brazil, pointing specifically at sexual divisions of labor within the family.

Orlandina de Oliveira introduced the ongoing project she is carrying out with Brígida García and Humberto Muñoz. She explained that this investigation was based on data from a migration survey carried out in Mexico City in 1970, and that, at present, they are working on the analysis of the family group in general and, within this group, of women in particular. In their first paper, "Family Participation in Economic Activity, Mexico 1970," Brígida García drew attention to the innovative methodological aspects of the work, which included the use of the household as the unit of analysis. She detailed the most significant results, especially the low female economic participation in domestic units whose head is a manual employee and the high participation when the head of household is an own-account worker. In "Household, Labor, and Reposition of Social Groups," presented by Orlandina de Oliveira, the characteristics of members of the household unit other than the head who participate in economic activity, differentiated by sex and age, were considered. As in the previous paper, domestic units were classified according to the occupational characteristics of the head of the unit; only units with male heads were considered. A detailed presentation of the results was also delivered.

Zulma Recchini de Lattes presented "Female Participation and

Family Dynamics in Argentina, 1960–1970.” This study shows a cohort analysis of female participation in the labor force using census data. The unit of analysis is the individual woman, but, in addition to individual variables—age, marital status, etc.—there are family variables such as type of household unit, stage of family life cycle, economic participation of other family members, etc.

“Women and Family among Craftsmen and Public Officials: A Comparison” was presented by Arackcy Martins Rodrigues. She outlined the theoretical framework and the methodological problems that had to be solved in the course of the research, and gave a detailed description of the research techniques used.

The last paper was “Woman’s Work and Her Domestic Role: Preliminary Notes.” This report was prepared by Elizabeth Jelin and Mary Feijoo and delivered by Jelin, who indicated that the report referred to only part of a larger research in progress.

Future activities of the subgroup were discussed, and Recchini de Lattes agreed to continue as its coordinator. The participants proposed to publish two documents: a short note in one or more of the regional magazines, giving a brief summary of the meeting; and a volume presenting the working papers from the meeting. It was agreed that since one of the major topics concerned the quality and quantity of existing information for the study of the female labor force, and considering that some of the participants were at work on the evaluation and improvement of census data to measure the female labor force, that this would be the subject of the next meeting.