

***THE FAMILY IN LATIN AMERICA
REALITIES, QUESTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES***

Bernardo Kliksberg

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I. AN INTENSE AND SILENT DISCRIMINATION

The expectation for a society based on the overcoming of discrimination lies at the very heart of the “Latin American dream.” It is present throughout the whole history of the Continent, it is deeply reflected at national level in almost every country, and it is currently the object of ongoing struggle. Nowadays, peoples have developed, with huge sacrifice, true democratization processes, and efforts continue to report all forms of discrimination and to eliminate them.

Nevertheless, dreams are not enough to modify the painful realities in the region. The region witnesses severe trends to poverty and social polarization that raise deep concern at both national and international level, and are a favorable context for deepening discrimination even further. Thus, extreme inequalities in access to socioeconomic opportunities maintain and turn more severe such dramas as the misery of indigenous communities, the marginal situation of colored people in some countries, the inferiority of women –particularly of poor women in various areas– and the marginal status of disabled persons and the elderly. All this arises from a society with deep fractures that generates exclusion, social tension and quite often intolerant ideologies that intend to rationalize such a situation.

In this work we wish to focus on one aspect of the discriminations that are present in the region’s reality and that should be the object of a far greater attention. Increasing work is done on the inequities that characterize discrimination on such areas as access to labor, income distribution, education opportunities, access to health services, but there are very limited analysis on what happens in a vital area: the possibilities of the various social strata for creating a sound and stable family unit. Figures show that such possibilities are quite different and that a silent drama of huge proportions is taking place there.

Notwithstanding their willingness to do so, many young couples have no actual opportunities to create or support a family. Several families are destroyed by the attack of poverty and inequality, others just degrade, and many of them not even reach to exist. There is a crude discrimination in this area which is reinforced by the absence of active public policies targeted on the protection of the family unit. This has a visceral impact on the approach of a pluralist and diverse society. The elementary right to create and develop a family should be one of its basic grounds.

Above all, this work intends to promote research, reflection and exchange on these issues. Thus, some elements are initially considered on the key roles played by the family in present societies, as well as on the development process itself. Secondly, some data are

provided on the severe social problems that affect the region and characterize the living context of families. In the third place, some impacts of this context on the family unit are analyzed. Finally, an overall reflection is made.

II. REDISCOVERING THE FAMILY

The early 21st century shows an increasing reevaluation of the family role within society. From a spiritual perspective, the family always appeared as the basic unit of human kind. The major religious views of the world stressed that its moral and affective weight had a decisive importance for live. In recent years such perspective was supplemented by the findings of social science research which show that the family unit also makes valuable contributions in very concrete areas.

Among other aspects, research notes the role of the family in educational performance, in the development of emotional intelligence, in the ways of thinking, on health and crime prevention.

School quality has a strong incidence on educational performance. Curricula, teachers' qualifications, school texts, other supporting material, and school infrastructure bear an influence on all aspects of learning processes. But research shows that there are other influential factors. According to ECLAC (1997) 60 percent of differences in performance would relate to the educational climate at home, its socioeconomic level, housing infrastructure (overcrowded or not), and the type of family. Therefore, some basic aspects of the family structure would have a strong influence on educational performance, including such elements as the level of organization of the family unit, the cultural assets of parents, their decision to follow up their children's studies, their support and permanent encouragement.

There are numerous studies that confirm this trend and the key role of the strength of the family unit. The US Secretariat for Health and Human Services conducted a survey on 60,000 children. Wilson (1994) reported its findings:

“At all income levels, except for the highest one (more that 50,000 US dollars per year), in both sexes and for white, black and Hispanic people on an equal basis, children living with divorced or unmarried mothers were in a clearly worse situation than those living in families with both parents. As compared with children living with both natural parents, those living with only one parent were twice more prone to be expelled or suspended at school, to suffer emotional or behavioral problems and having difficulties with their fellow students. They also showed a greater tendency to antisocial behavior.”

Family characteristics have also influence on a different type of education, the emotional one. There is at present a significant interest on the so-called “emotional intelligence”. As shown by Goleman’s research (1995) and others, the good performance and success in the productive life of individuals is not only linked to their intellectual quotient but is also closely related to their emotional qualities. The components of this particular order of intelligence include self-control, persistence, self-motivation capacity, easy establishment of healthy inter-personal relations and group interaction, and the like. It has been verified that persons with a high emotional intelligence usually obtain better results than other persons with a greater intellectual quotient but with a lower emotional quality. Family has a great weight in the construction and development of emotional intelligence. In their parents’ relations, and in their relations with their parents, children perceive ways of relating to the emotional area that will influence their own behavioral styles. Goleman notes that: “Family life is our first school as far as emotional learning is concerned.”

One further aspect where family dynamics shapes children’s behavioral profiles is the area represented by the “ways of thinking.” In this sense, Naum Kliksberg (1999) highlights that children relate to their parents, brothers and sisters, through three basic modes: passive acceptance, authoritarian imposition and democratic dialogue. One of those interaction models usually prevails at home.” The researcher also notes that, if passive acceptance prevails, it generates a “subordinate” way of thinking that accepts arguments and positions without further inquiring on their reasons. If the usual interaction is of an authoritarian nature, a way of thinking will developed aimed to impose his/her own views on the other and exclusively focused on the coercion required for such purpose. On the contrary, if the interaction model is of the “democratic dialogue” type, the way of thinking has a critical nature, the other’s views are listened, efforts are made to understand and to explain.

In the health area, Katzman (1997) summarized recent studies developed in Uruguay and pointed out that children born out of wedlock show a far higher rate of child mortality and children who do not live with both parents suffer from more severe damage on various aspects of their psychomotor development.

A major concern at present is the increase of crime in several countries. Relevant research shows that the family appears as one of the basic resources of society to prevent crime. The values that children learn from their families in their early years and the behavioral examples that they witness will considerably affect their future decisions and conduct. A study conducted in the U.S. (Dafoe Whitehead, 1993) examined the family situation of youth at a

juvenile detention center in that country and verified that more than 70 percent of them came from families where fathers were absent.

In brief, the family, with its historical and decisive emotional and moral functions that have been extolled by such religions and Christianity and Judaism, performs key roles for collective well being.

On the basis of such approach, several developed countries have witnessed an active movement aimed to creating favorable conditions for the adequate development and strengthening of the family. Public policies in the member countries of the European Economic Community provide, among others: full assurance of adequate medical care for women during pregnancy, birth and post-birth periods; large paid periods for maternity ranking from three months in Portugal up to 28 weeks in Denmark; subsidies to families with children; tax exemption. Nordic countries have established extended supporting services to families such as day-care centers and at-home support services for the elderly and disabled.

The need for strengthening the family institution and supporting it in a concrete way has numerous advocates. As a reflection of several similar views, a study conducted in Spain (Cabrillo, 1990) states that “the family is a significant source for the generation of human capital. On one hand, it provides health services through the care of sick persons and children which would otherwise be extremely costly in the regular market or the public sector. On the other hand, child’s early education –which is ultimately the most profitable one– is received within the family.” And he wonders: “in practice, is the public sector actually funding a large part of education expenditure in most countries? One further immediate question is: then, why does it fund only one part of the education, provided in either public or private institutions? If such education is subsidized, there should be no reason for not doing the same in home education.” Another study (Navarro, 1999) proposes “to make family support services universal (in Spain)” and demonstrates its feasibility in economic terms.

Taking into account this international reevaluation of the family role and the verification of its huge potential contribution to society, what are the actual facts in Latin America? What is the current socioeconomic context and how does it affect the families in the region?

III. THE DEEP SOCIAL QUESTIONS

The evolution of the social situation in the region has been the cause for serious alarm in many sectors. Several international organizations, such as the United Nations and the IDB, have drawn the attention on the concerning social deficit. The highest authorities of the Church

have repeatedly claimed for assigning a top priority to the severe difficulties experienced by large groups of the population. Citizens have indicated by several ways that their major problems are focused in the social area.

According to the Social Overview prepared by ECLAC (2001) the population below the poverty line represented 41 percent of total population in the region in 1980, a very high figure as compared to the average in the developed world and in medium developed countries. Portugal, which is the country with the highest poverty rate in the European Union, has a 22 percent of poor population, Figures worsened in the last two decades and the Latin American poverty percentage increased to 44 percent of a largest population in 2002.

TABLE 1
Evolution of poverty in Latin America, 2000-2002
(percentage of the population)

Year	Extreme poverty	Poverty
2000	17.8%	42.1
2001	18.6%	43
2002	20.0%	44

** In 2000-2002, newly poor people amounted to 15 million.

National estimates show that poverty has a strong presence throughout the region, with a very few exceptions. In Central America, 75 percent of people in Guatemala are poor, 73 percent in Honduras, 68 percent in Nicaragua, and 55 percent in El Salvador. In Peru, 53 percent of the population is in poverty conditions, more than 70 percent in Ecuador and 63 percent in Bolivia. Mexico has a poverty rate of 51,7 percent, while in Brazil 44 million people are estimated to be in extreme poverty and earning less than one US dollar per day (*Fome Zero Project*, 2004). Argentina represents quite clearly the difficulties in the region. A country having a poverty rate lower than 10 percent in the early '60s, reached late 2002 with 58 percent of its population below the poverty line.

The region shows high rates of unemployment and informality which are the major cause of poverty evolution. The average unemployment rate increased as follows:

TABLE 2
Latin America: Growth and Unemployment.
1980-2003

Period	Urban unemployment rate
1981-90	8.4%
1991-97	8.8%
1998-03	10.4%

Source: ECLAC. Annual Reports.

These high rates add up to the increasing percentage of active labor in the informal economy, a significant portion of which is formed by unstable jobs without any sound economic basis, a limited productivity, low revenue, and lack of any social protection. According to Tokman (1998) informality implies a decrease in the quality of existing production. In 1980, the informal sector represented 40.6 percent of non agriculture labor; at present, it represents 59 percent. Precarious labor should be also included. There are an increasing number of workers without contract or under temporary contracts. About 35 percent of workers in Argentina, Colombia and Chile are in such condition and 74 percent in Peru.

One of the major concerns, with multiple consequences, is that severe labor difficulties are even more severe in the younger groups, as shown in the following table:

TABLE 3
Latin America: Youth Unemployment
1990-2002 (Annual Rates)

Country	Age	1990	1995	2000
Argentina	15-19	21.7	46.6	39.5
	15-24	15.2	30.1	..
Bolivia	10-19	13.3	5.0	..
	20-19	9.5	5.4	..
Brazil	15-17	..	11.0	17.8
	18-24	..	9.3	14.7
Chile	15-19	15.9	15.8	26.1
	20-24	12.0	10.1	20.1
Colombia	12-17	..	21.0	44.7
	18-24	..	16.6	34.8
Costa Rica	12-24	10.4	13.5	10.9
Ecuador	15-24	13.5	15.3	17.4
El Salvador	15-24	18.6	13.3	14.3
Honduras	10-24	10.7	10.2	..
Mexico	12-19	7.0	13.1	5.4
	20-24	..	9.9	4.1
Panama	15-24	..	31.9	32.6
Paraguay	15-19	18.4	10.8	..
	20-24	14.1	7.8	..
Peru	14-24	15.4	11.2	17.1
Uruguay	14-24	26.6	25.5	31.7
Venezuela	15-24	18.0	19.9	25.3

Source: UNDP, Democracy in Latin America, 2004.

As per the above table, youth unemployment keeps increasing sharply across countries. This gives rise to a very serious source of conflict.

Unemployment, underemployment, and poverty are closely related to each other. They all lead to all types of daily shortcomings. One of their most extreme expressions in the existence of alarming malnutrition cases in several countries. Malnutrition rates are high throughout the region, as shown in the following table:

TABLE 4
Child Malnutrition

A. Country	Last year	
Argentina	1995/96	12.4
Bolivia	1998	26.8
Brazil	1996	10.5
Chile	1999	1.9
Colombia	2000	13.5
Costa Rica	1996	6.1
Ecuador	1998	26.4
El Salvador	1998	23.3
Guatemala	1999	26.4
Honduras	1996	38.9
Mexico	1999	17.7
Nicaragua	1998	24.9
Panama	1997	18.2
Paraguay	1990	13.9
Peru	2000	25.4
Dominican Republic	1996	10.7
Uruguay	1992/93	9.5
Venezuela	2000	12.8
Latin America		18.9

Source: estimates based on data taken from WHO's Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, 2002, and UNDP, Democracy in Latin America, 2004.

On this issue, a report of the Pan American Health Organization and ECLAC (1998) stated:

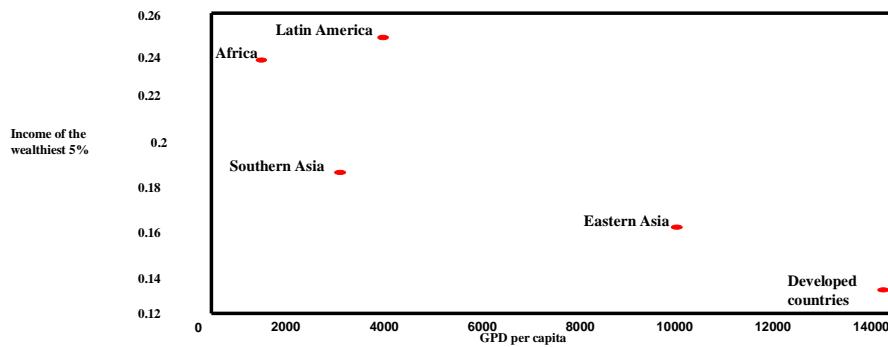
“An increase in chronic non transmissible diseases associated to food consumption and nutrition was observed in almost every country in the region.”

Malnutrition and other poverty-related aspects cause serious retard in poor children and will affect them throughout their whole life. UNICEF studies (1992) identified psychomotor retard in a sample of poor children as from their 18 months of age. At five years of age, half the children in that sample showed language development retard, 40 percent showed it in their general growth and 30 percent in their visual and motor evolution.

IV. THE MOST UNEQUAL REGION ON EARTH

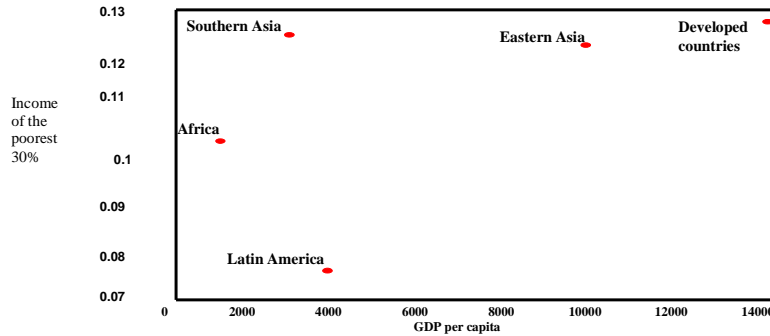
Together with poverty, the social situation in Latin America is characterized by acute inequality. As figures show, the region has become the continent with the highest social polarization rate in the world. The IDB Report on Economic and Social Progress (1998/99) provides the following figures in that connection:

CHART 1
Income of the wealthiest 5%
(percentage on total income)



As it can be observed, the wealthiest five percent of Latin American population earns 25 percent of the total income. This proportion exceeds the percentage earned by the wealthiest five percent in regions in the world. In turn, the poorest 30 percent of the population earns the lowest income (7.6%) as compared to other continents, as show in the following IDB chart:

CHART 2
Income of the poorest 30%
(percentage on total income)



Source of Charts 1 and 2: IDB-IPES, 1998

Likewise, and measured in terms of the Gini ratio that reflects the inequality level in a society's income distribution, Latin America shows the worst ratio worldwide, as follows:

CHART 5
COMPARED INEQUALITY
(measured by Gini ratio)

Most developed countries in equality terms (Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, other)	0.25 to 0.30
Developed countries	0.30
Universal Gini average ratio	0.40
Latin America	0.57

The lower the Gini ratio is, the better will be the income distribution of a society. In Latin Americas it exceeds by far the ratio of the most equitable countries and it is significantly higher than the worldwide average.

The following table shows compared figures at national level:

TABLE 6
Inequality indicators for some countries in Latin America, United States and Italy

	<i>Gini ratio</i>	<i>Percentage of upper 10% on total income</i>	<i>Percentage of lower 20% on total income</i>	<i>Income ratio tenth-first deciles</i>
Brazil (2001)	59.0	47.2%	2.6%	54.4
Guatemala (2000)	58.3	46.8%	2.4%	63.3
Colombia (1999)	57.6	46.5%	2.7%	57.8
Chile (2000)	57.1	47.0%	3.4%	40.6
Mexico (2000)	54.6	43.1%	3.1%	45.0
Argentina (2000)	52.2	38.9%	3.1%	39.1
Jamaica (1999)	52.0	40.1%	3.4%	36.5
Dominican Republic (1997)	49.7	38.6%	4.0%	28.4
Costa Rica (2000)	46.5	34.8%	4.2%	25.1
Uruguay (2000)	44.6	33.5%	4.8%	18.9
United States (1997)	40.8	30.5%	5.2%	16.9
Italy (1998)	36.0	27.4%	6.0%	14.4

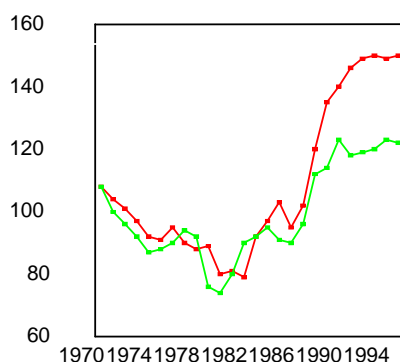
Source: World Bank (2004), *Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Break with History?* Washington DC.

The acute social disparities in the region have a regressive impact on multiple areas that include: reduction of national saving capacity, restriction of the domestic market, adverse effect on productivity, negative impact on the educational system, detriment of public health, poverty increase, privilege of social exclusion, undermining of domestic confidence, and weakening of democratic governance.

Inequality and poverty have a close interaction. The worsening of inequality has been a factor of huge weight in poverty increase in the region. The study prepared by Birdsall and Londoño (1997), among others, suggests so. Researchers have projected the poverty curve of Latin America if poverty had maintained throughout the '80s the same levels shown in the early '70s, which were already high but increased later on. Their conclusions are shown in the following chart:

CHART 3

THE IMPACT OF INEQUALITY ON POVERTY IN LATIN AMERICA 1970-1995



Source: Birdall, N. and J. L. Londoño, "Asset inequality matters: an assessment of the World Bank's approach to poverty reduction", American Economic Review, May 1997.

The continuing line in the chart shows the evolution of poverty in millions of persons between 1970 y 1995. The broken line is an econometric simulation showing such evolution if income distribution had maintained unchanged since the early '70s. In such case, estimates show that it would have been half of what it actually was. There is a significant "excess of poverty" caused by a greater inequality.

Poverty and inequality have an acute impact on the mother and child mortality indicators.

The average ratio of children in the region who die before reaching five years of age is 71:1,000. It exceeds East Asia-Pacific which is 57.1. There are great differences across countries and the highest rates can be seen in Haiti with 140.6 and Bolivia with 99.1. The differences among the various social levels are also huge, as shown in the following table:

TABLE 7
Mortality rate below five years of age

	Mortality rate below five years of age (thousands)					
Country/Region	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Bolivia	146.5	114.9	104.0	47.8	32.0	99.1
Brazil	98.9	56.0	39.2	26.7	33.3	56.7
Colombia	52.1	37.1	30.7	34.9	23.6	37.4
Dominican Republic	89.9	73.0	60.1	37.3	26.6	61.0
Guatemala	89.1	102.9	82.0	60.7	37.9	79.2
Haiti	163.3	150.1	137.1	130.6	105.6	140.6
Nicaragua	68.8	66.6	52.5	48.5	29.7	56.0
Paraguay	57.2	50.0	59.0	39.4	20.1	46.6
Peru	110.0	76.2	48.0	44.1	22.1	68.4
LAC	97.3	80.8	68.1	52.2	38.8	71.7
East Asia-Pacific	84.0	62.9	53.7	41.1	27.1	57.1
Central Asia	82.5	64.5	69.8	57.5	40.2	64.9
Middle East, Northern Africa	140.6	117.8	92.2	80.1	50.4	100.3
Southern Asia	144.2	152.6	136.1	110.8	71.7	126.6
Africa South of the Sahara	191.7	190.9	174.3	156.6	112.4	168.4
Country total	148.3	140.8	126.8	110.0	77.4	124.2

Source: World Bank (2004), Op Cit

Among the wealthiest 20 percent of Bolivian population, 32 children out of 1,000 die before their five years of age. This figure multiplies by five in the poorest 20 percent, 146.5 every 1,000 children. This extremely serious reality has a very concrete ethnic bias as it is mainly focused on the indigenous population. The same happens in Peru where mortality rate below five years of age in the poorest 20 percent is five times the rate of the wealthiest 20 percent, 111 versus 22.2, while in Brazil it is the triple, 98.9 versus 33.3.

Chronic child malnutrition also reflects significant disparities according to ethnicity, rural or urban residence and income level. See the next table corresponding to the Andean region:

TABLE 8
Occurrence of retarded youth growth in four Andean countries (%) by country, place of residence, ethnicity, region and socioeconomic status

	Country			
	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru	Bolivia
Place of residence (1)				
Large cities	12.7	20.7	13.2	18.5
Small towns	10.9	22.4	20.1	20.3
Villages	14.0	28.2	27.2	22.4
Rural area	19.3	35.2	40.8	37.2
Ethnicity				
Non indigenous population	... (2)	24.2	22.5	23.7
Indigenous population	...	58.2	47.0	50.5
Region				
High plains	...	33.3	38.5	31.2
Other regions	...	22.2	18.2	23.9
SES deciles (3)				
1 (lowest)	26.8	38.5	49.6	42.2
2	24.1	51.8	46.8	39.9
3	17.1	30.6	39.6	38.7
4	14.9	27.6	32.5	32.8
5	16.3	17.9	23.4	31.8
6	15.2	24.4	19.9	25.0
7	11.0	19.0	18.3	22.7
8	11.7	19.1	12.8	18.2
9	6.3	15.8	12.6	13.5
10 (highest)	5.4	11.9	5.2	9.7
Concentration index (4)	-0.221	-0.223	-0.311	-0.223
Country total	14.9	26.5	26.1	26.9

(1) As per DHS surveys (Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia) large cities include national capital cities and cities with more than one million people; small towns have a population ranging from 500,000 to one million people. As per LSMS surveys (Ecuador) small towns have a population ranking from 5,000 to one million people.

(2) The symbol (...) indicates that information is not available.

(3) The SES deciles apply to children and do not match the population deciles due to the impact of socioeconomic differences on fertility rates.

(4) The concentration index measures the social inequality in growth retard. It implies a general approach of the Gini ration and fluctuates between -1 and 0. Values close to -1 reflect a greater social inequality.

Source: Larrea, Carlos and Wilme Freire (2002), *Social inequality and child malnutrition in four Andean countries*, Pan American Journal of Public Health, May-June.

Andean child malnutrition rates are high and exceed 21 percent in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, but also include clear economic gradients. In general, Andean countries have chronic malnutrition rates that are three times higher in the poorest than in the wealthiest deciles. Thus, for example, in Ecuador only 11 percent of children in the wealthiest 10 percent show malnutrition problems, while that figure multiples by four in the poorest 10 percent. In the indigenous population that rate raises to 58 percent.

Maternal mortality causes numerous victims in the region. As recently reported by PAHO (2004), 23,000 women die in Latin America and the Caribbean during pregnancy or at birth by “avoidable causes that in most cases are prevented on a routine basis in developed countries.” The risk of dying at the time of giving birth in Latin America is 1/160 as compared to 1/4000 in Western Europe, that is, 25 times greater. While in the United States 17 mothers die per every 100,000 live births, 600 die in Haiti and 100 in Colombia.

Basic causes are related to the absence of institutional medical assistance. 24 percent of mothers lack medical assistance during pregnancy and one third of them receive no medical care at the time of giving birth. As per the following table, figures show a high degree of bias according to the respective economic gradients:

TABLE 9
Prenatal basic care and assisted birth rates

<i>B. Country/ Region</i>	Prenatal basic care rate (by people trained in medical care)							Assisted birth rate (by people trained in medical care)						
	1	2	3	4	5	Av.	CI	1	2	3	4	5	Average	CI
Bolivia	38.8	57.8	70.4	88.6	95.3	65.1	0.17	19.8	44.8	67.7	87.9	97.9	56.7	0.28
Brazil	67.5	87.7	93.4	96.9	98.1	85.6	0.08	71.6	88.7	95.7	97.7	98.6	87.7	0.07
Colombia	62.3	81.1	89.8	95.4	95.9	82.5	0.09	60.6	85.2	92.8	98.9	98.1	84.5	0.09
Dominican Republic	96.1	98.2	99.0	99.2	99.9	98.3	0.01	88.6	96.9	97.3	98.4	97.8	95.3	0.02
Guatemala	34.6	41.1	49.3	72.2	90.0	52.5	0.19	9.3	16.1	31.1	62.8	91.5	34.8	0.42
Haiti	44.3	60.0	72.3	83.7	91.0	67.7	0.14	24.0	37.3	47.4	60.7	78.2	46.3	0.21
Nicaragua	67.0	80.9	86.9	89.0	96.0	81.5	0.07	32.9	58.8	79.8	86.0	92.3	64.6	0.19
Paraguay	69.5	79.5	85.6	94.8	98.5	83.9	0.07	41.2	49.9	69.0	87.9	98.1	66.0	0.18
Peru	37.3	64.8	79.1	87.7	96.0	67.3	0.17	13.7	48.0	75.1	90.3	96.6	56.4	0.31
Latin America and the Caribbean	57.5	72.3	80.6	89.7	95.6	76.0	0.11	40.2	58.4	72.9	85.6	94.3	65.8	0.20
East Asia-Pacific	64.9	80.7	86.9	91.4	96.2	81.9	0.08	30.5	53.0	68.4	80.6	93.4	60.8	0.22
Central Asia	78.2	84.7	86.8	93.3	96.3	86.9	0.05	82.7	92.3	95.1	98.6	99.7	92.8	0.04
Middle East, Northern Africa	13.7	21.1	33.4	49.3	73.0	35.2	0.32	12.8	21.7	37.7	58.6	82.2	38.5	0.36
Southern Asia	16.8	23.2	28.8	43.0	70.9	34.6	0.30	5.3	8.1	11.7	21.9	49.3	17.7	0.46
Africa South of the Sahara	61.1	69.5	74.9	84.2	93.6	75.7	0.10	24.6	32.9	41.2	59.2	82.1	46.2	0.26
ALL COUNTRIES	55.0	64.8	71.1	80.6	91.0	70.8	0.13	31.2	42.1	51.6	66.2	84.0	52.5	0.25

Source: World Bank (2004), Op. Cit., Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2002.

In the wealthiest 20 percent of the population, institutional assistance exceeds 90 percent, both during pregnancy and at birth. In the poorest 20 percent the deficit is extremely acute. In Bolivia 60 percent of women lack prenatal care and 80 percent have no medical assistance at the time of giving birth. In Brazil almost one third of the poorest quintile lacks institutional assistance in both cases. In Peru, 60 percent of the poorest 20 percent has no care available during pregnancy and 86 percent lacks it at birth.

Inequality is also significantly reflected in two child key areas such as full vaccination coverage and diarrhea prevalence. As shown in the next table, the poorest 20 percent in the region has severe problems in both areas as compared to the wealthiest 20 percent. As far as full vaccination coverage is concerned, while it is available to 56 percent of the wealthiest quintile, it is 17 percent lower in the poorest quintile, that is, 39 percent. Child diarrhea prevalence is more than double in the poorest 20 percent as compared to the wealthiest 20 percent in such countries as Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru.

TABLE 10
Full vaccination coverage and diarrhea occurrence

<i>C.Country/ Region</i>	Vaccination coverage							Diarrhea occurrence (%)						
	1	2	3	4	5	Average	CI	1	2	3	4	5	Average	CI
Bolivia	21.8	24.9	21.0	33.4	30.6	25.5	0.08	21.8	19.8	20.5	17.9	11.7	19.2	-0.07
Brazil	56.6	74.0	84.9	83.1	73.8	72.5	0.07	18.3	12.9	12.7	9.3	7.4	13.1	-0.16
Colombia	53.8	66.9	68.2	70.6	74.1	65.5	0.06	18.4	19.8	16.8	14.9	10.0	16.7	-0.09
Dominican Republic	28.0	30.2	46.9	42.6	51.7	38.7	0.12	17.9	16.4	17.8	14.1	10.1	15.7	-0.08
Guatemala	41.2	43.0	47.2	38.3	42.5	42.6	0.00	22.8	21.5	23.3	17.7	16.0	20.9	-0.06
Haiti	18.8	20.1	35.3	37.9	44.1	30.2	0.17	30.9	27.1	24.4	31.6	20.4	27.4	-0.04
Nicaragua	61.0	74.6	75.3	85.7	73.1	72.6	0.05	16.1	14.0	14.2	14.4	8.7	14.0	-0.07
Paraguay	20.2	30.8	36.4	40.7	53.0	34.2	0.18	9.8	8.5	9.2	7.4	4.6	8.1	-0.11
Peru	55.3	63.8	63.5	71.7	66.0	63.0	0.04	21.4	20.3	18.6	14.1	9.3	17.9	-0.11
Latin America and the Caribbean	39.6	47.6	53.2	56.0	56.5	49.4	0.09	19.7	17.8	17.5	15.7	10.9	17.0	-0.09
East Asia-Pacific	48.3	56.8	60.3	64.6	72.9	59.3	0.08	10.5	9.9	9.9	8.6	6.3	9.3	-0.08
Central Asia	64.2	67.9	71.8	75.7	77.4	70.9	0.04	19.0	15.6	15.0	14.6	13.7	15.8	-0.02
Middle East, Northern Africa	42.2	53.3	62.5	73.2	81.1	61.0	0.17	21.0	20.3	19.1	17.2	14.7	18.7	-0.06
Southern Asia	29.8	31.4	41.6	49.8	64.4	42.0	0.17	17.0	14.4	14.3	15.3	12.4	14.9	-0.04
Africa South of the Sahara	33.6	42.0	44.4	53.1	66.9	47.3	0.17	24.5	23.3	22.5	22.6	18.2	22.3	-0.05
ALL COUNTRIES	38.3	45.8	50.3	57.2	66.6	50.7	0.14	21.2	19.6	19.1	18.5	14.8	18.9	-0.05

Source: World Bank (2004), Op. Cit., Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2002. What is the impact of poverty and inequality on a fundamental institution of the social fabric, the family?

V. SOME CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL SITUATION ON THE LATIN AMERICAN FAMILIES

The family is the environment that determines the levels of growth, development, balance, health and fulfillment to be reached by individuals. Society and its members play key roles for the progress and well being of family life.

The deterioration of basic socioeconomic parameters of daily life in large population sectors in the region is silently affecting the reorganization process of numerous families. This leads to the emergence of a family that is disorganized on basic issues, unstable and significantly weaker.

This type of family can hardly comply with the potential functions of a family unit as described in a previous section. Thus, the weakness of this last redoubt of society to face social crisis makes it unable to perform its role.

The major effects of processes underway on the families are briefly described next.

A. *Homes led by single women*

An increasing number of family units are led by only one parent, mostly by the mother. This situation is closely related to poverty. A high percentage of home-leading women come from the poor strata of the population. An IDB-ECLAC-UNDP study (1995) describes this situation as follows:

“The percentage of women-led homes in almost all countries in Latin America exceeds 20 percent, which strongly contributes to the phenomenon known as “poverty feminization.” The ECLAC surveys evidence the greater relative poverty –often the extreme poverty– of women-led homes.”

B. *Effects of incomplete families on children*

The consequences of belonging to a family where the father is absent are quite significant. Besides their emotional meaning, fathers provide their children fundamental assets for their future life. In a pioneering research on this issue Katzman (1997) designed the resulting picture. On the father’s role he noted:

“The father’s presence is a key factor to provide for or reinforce some child assets:(i) as a model of identity, especially for boys; (ii) as an agent of containment, generation of discipline

habits and conveyor of life experience; (iii) as a material provider, as the absence of his contribution considerable reduces family income, particularly because women earn 20 to 25 percent less than men, and (iv) as social capital, to the extent that the father's absence implies losing contact with male networks, both in labor and politics worlds; besides, when the bond with relatives which the father could provide is broken, potential family relations decrease significantly.”

The father's absence implies the lack of all these assets. Consequences may be quite concrete. It will affect the educational performance due to the impoverishment of the socio-educational home climate; it will be a strong burden on the development of emotional intelligence; it will affect health; it creates conditions favoring feelings of inferiority, isolation, resentment, and aggressiveness, and it eliminates a fundamental source of guidance on moral aspects. During his research on children interned at the National Child Institute in Uruguay, Katzman found that only one out of three belonged to a normal family when the events resulting in such condition took place. That figure is significantly similar to the results of a study on juvenile detention centers in the United States. 63.8 percent of interned children in Uruguay lived with their mothers, 30.8 percent with a stepfather or stepmother, and 5.4 percent with none of their parents.

As stated by the researcher, the major disadvantages of children raised in this type of homes become more acute in the modern labor conditions. Such conditions require an increasingly higher education level which implies increasingly intensive educational processes. To count on an integrated family providing emotional and practical support to carry on such prolonged effort is a strategic factor in order to complete it. Children and youth belonging to dissolved families lack such key social capital.

C. *Reluctance to create and maintain a family*

There are an increasing number of young men from poor sectors who are reluctant to create stable homes. This will raise the rate of irregular or unstable families (cohabitation). This trend seems to be under the strong influence of increasing poverty, unemployment and informality in the region. In most cases, the young man sees no possibility of finding a stable job that enables him to perform his role of main provider of family income, as expected. On the other hand, a significant portion of the population, although employed, earns minimum wages that are lower to the income required to afford the basic family expenditure, even if counting on the female contribution. The general situation, as shown by surveys, also detects a great fear for the instability of the labor market. All this adds up to such objective difficulties as the severe limitations in housing access. Under such circumstances, the young man does not perceive

himself performing the role of a husband and father of a stable family. He rather perceives that he will be unable to face the obligations involved.

There is one similar conflict that appears to be the trigger for leaving home of youth in poor urban areas. Katzman (1992) suggests that such apparent “irresponsibility” would be influenced by the feeling of losing legitimacy as husbands and fathers, as they are no longer able to comply with their obligation of providing the largest contribution to family income. They feel their self-esteem damaged, in the external ambit due to their difficulties in attaining a stable labor insertion, and in the family ambit because they are unable to act as expected. This adds up to the increasing level of consumption expectations by children in poor homes under the influence of messages conveyed by the media. Thus, the young spouse feels under pressure and impotent to face such demands, and consequently discredited. Social psychology suggests that such highly oppressive situations lead individuals either to face them to the very last consequence or to show the so-called “runaway” behavior.

D. Birth out of wedlock

One clear sign of deterioration of the family unit consists of the increase in the number of children born out of wedlock. The reluctance to create a family promotes the raise of birth rate in this category. Katzman’s studies on Uruguay show the following trend:

TABLE 11
Uruguay: births out of wedlock
Montevideo: 1975, 1984 and 1993

Years	Out-of-wedlock birth rate (%)
1975	20.9
1984	23.8
1993	34.5

Source: Ruben Katzman, “*Marginalidad e integración social en Uruguay*”, Revista de la CEPAL, N. 62, August 1997.

As observed, the number of children born out of wedlock in Montevideo increased 65 percent in only 18 years. This situation has a greater incidence on younger mothers but is anyway high at all ages.

E. Early maternity

The number of adolescent mothers has significantly increased in the region.

In most cases, adolescent maternity does not lead to the creation of integrated families. The mother remains alone with her children. It is also a significant cause for the above mentioned increase of births out of wedlock. It is in itself a source of extremely weak families.

As per available data, this situation is closely related to poverty. In the poorest 25 percent of the population of urban centers, 32 percent of births correspond to adolescent mothers. In rural areas it is 40 percent. In the following 25 percent as to income level, these figures shift to 20 percent in urban centers and 32 percent in rural areas. As a whole, 80 percent of cases of urban adolescent maternity are focused on the poorest 50 percent of the population, while the wealthiest 25 percent only includes 9 percent of all cases. In rural areas 70 percent of cases occur in the poorest 50 percent and 12 percent in the wealthiest 25 percent.

Even in poor sectors, the highest poverty level is consistent with the highest rate of adolescent maternity.

The strong correspondence between poverty and adolescent maternity allows for concluding that poverty increase as recorded in the region will stimulate this type of maternity and, consequently, the emergence of weaker families.

A key variable in this process consists of one poverty component: educational deficiency. In regional urban centers, the percentage of adolescent mothers among urban young women with less than six years of education is 40 percent, thus exceeding the national average of 32 percent. Within the group with six to nine years of education, adolescent maternity lowers to 30 percent. In young women with 10 to 12 years of education it decreases to 15 percent and in those having 13 or more years of study it is lower than 10 percent.

The situation underlying the adolescent pregnancy in underprivileged sectors creates a "regressive vicious circle". Poverty and inequality have a severe impact on such sectors from the educational viewpoint. Taking into account that average school attendance throughout Latin America is only 5.2 years and considerably lower in the poorest sectors, the conditions are given to facilitate adolescent pregnancy. In turn, adolescent maternity leads these young women to drop out their studies. Data show that poor adolescent mothers have 25 or 30 percent less educational capital than poor mothers who had not an adolescent pregnancy. The lower educational level and the presence of children will reduce the access of adolescent mothers to work and income and will consolidate and deepen poverty.

F. Family violence

Family violence has extended across the region. Buvinic, Morrison and Schifter (1999) estimate that 30 to 50 percent of Latin American women –according to their country of residence– experience psychological violence and 10 to 35 percent are victims of physical violence.

Besides its basic inhumanity and multiple consequences on women, family violence is the cause of serious damage to family structure and all kind of impacts on children. A study conducted by the IDB in Nicaragua (1997) showed that children from families where violence occurs have a triple propensity to medical consultation and are interned in hospitals with greater frequency. 63 percent of them repeat school grades and drop out school at nine years of age in average. Children from non violent homes remain in school until they are 12 years of age in average.

On the other hand, family violence is also a benchmark that can be replicated by children, which will in turn lead to the creation of families with severe deficiencies. Several studies, among them Strauss (1980), suggest that the rate of this type of behavior by children who have witnessed a similar one at home, largely exceeds the attitude of children from non violent families.

Although this is a highly complex phenomenon that is subject to numerous variables, poverty clearly appears as a key risk factor. According to Buvinic (1997) in Chile, for example, the cases of physical violence are five times more frequent in low-income sectors, and severe physical violence is seven times more common in such sectors; the same ratios are present in other countries.

The above mentioned daily realities of unemployment, underemployment, and informality, as well as other processes of economic deterioration, taken family relations to the edge and create the environment for violence, which is fatal for family integrity.

G. Family inability to provide for a normal childhood

Poverty and inequality force numerous families to face serious difficulties to provide their children the type of childhood that they intend and that would be desirable. The pressure of shortcomings creates a series of situations that affect children severely, create all types of conflicts within the family unit, and impede family to perform most of its roles.

One of the major expressions of this problem is the child who works since his early age. In many cases this basically responds to economic reasons. He/she is sent way to work or find a job in order to contribute somehow to his poor home and be able to subsist as an individual. As ILO has repeatedly noted, the situation of the working child is extremely rough, it opposes the international conventions in force on child protection, and the basic objectives of any society. Children face long working hours, serious risk of working accidents, no social protection, and meager wages. In most cases this also implies a school handicap or the direct drop out from the educational system. This will place the child in inferior conditions to access the labor market in the future. According to ILO, 22 million children less than 14 years old are currently working in the region.

The relationship between poverty and child labor is very close. Estimates show that in Brazil 54 percent of working children less than 17 years old come from homes with a per capita income lower than a minimum wage.

H. *Children in/of the street*

There are in the region an increasing number of children who live in the streets of several cities. They can be seen in Rio, Sao Paulo, Bogota, Mexico, Tegucigalpa and many other cities, surviving in cruel conditions. They must look everyday for sustenance. They are exposed to all kinds of danger. Death squads attach them viciously and estimates show that not less than three children in the street are murdered everyday in Brazilian cities, as in other countries. It has not been possible to assess a precise figure but it seems to be increasing significantly. Pope John Paul II, who used to report permanently this inhuman situation, described them as “abandoned, exploited, sick children.”

The presence and increase of children in/of the street has to do with multiple factors, but it essentially and clearly reflects a deep break of the basic containment structure, the family. The family deterioration processes that lead to its dissolution, the creation of precarious families and extreme tension within the family itself, as well as poverty, silently undermine family capability to keep these children within its scope. It is a borderline situation that shows the seriousness of the silent weakening of many family units in the region.

Such issues as the increasing number of women-led homes, the reluctance of young men to create families, births out of wedlock, early maternity, family violence, family inability to provide a normal childhood, children in/of the street, are all part of this weakening scenario. All of them should be given a priority in public policies and in society, and urgent solutions should be sought for.

VI. AN OVERALL REFLECTION

Is it possible to face all the above mentioned problems?

No statement of impotence can be admitted in this connection; Latin America has huge potential resources of economic nature and a history full of values that enable it to face such problems. It also counts at present with a gigantic achievement: the democratization of the region. This challenge should be a priority for democracies that were established in the region with such hard efforts and struggle. This is what a democratic system is expected to do.

Amartya Sen (1981) noted how the great mass famines in this century occurred under dictatorships. On the contrary, in democratic conditions the pressure of public opinion, the media and the various expressions of the organized society force public powers to prevent them.

Latin American states and societies must address comprehensive social pacts in order to strengthen the family.

Public policies in the region should take due note of the significance of the family roles and act accordingly. Family is continuously referred to in the usual public discourse in Latin America but actually it has no presence in terms of public policies. There are limited efforts to set up organic policies for the protection and strengthening of the family unit, overwhelmed by the progress of poverty and inequality. There are numerous sectoral policies addressing women, children, and youth, but very few attempts to build up a vigorous policy addressing the unit that frames them all and that will have an in-depth influence on the situation of each of them: the family.

Social policies should be strongly focused on this decisive unit. A concrete support to family constitution in the underprivileged sectors is required, as well as a detailed protection of all steps of maternity, the support of families to face the excessive pressure arising from economic problems at critical times in their existence, the eradication of child labor and contribution to child school attendance, development of a supporting service network (day-care centers, assistance to the elderly and disabled, etc.), extension of cultural development opportunities and family recreation. This requires explicit policies, the availability of organic instruments for their implementation, the allocation of resources, and alliances between the public sector and civil society entities that may contribute to such goals.

The burden of poverty and inequality on the poor sectors of Latin America is creating “dead end situations” that must be necessarily faced, either through the above mentioned policies or others addressing the essential areas of employment, production and the various economic aspects. The permanence of “iron circles” as mentioned by ECLAC in a report on the family (Latin American Social Overview, 1997) cannot be admitted. It points out that “according to each country, between 72 and 96 percent of families in extreme poverty or poverty conditions have parents with less than nine years of education.” This means that poverty restricts education in the region, which in turn leads to the creation of families where children will have a limited school attendance, thus maintaining a family fate of poverty from one generation to the next.

It may be said that no resources are available to carry on renewed family policies. Right now it is necessary to do as much as possible for countries to grow, to improve their productivity and competitiveness, and increase their resources, but at the same time it is essential to keep at sight the final priorities of development and preserve them. Some societies that are poorer than others have, nevertheless, better results in family terms, because their public policies and budgetary allocations have provided mothers, children and family units a true support. Likewise, resources can be increased by a comprehensive call for the participation of the whole society in family-support policies. In this area, there are several developed societies in the world that count on significant contributions from civil society and volunteers.

To strengthen the family implies to improve the human capital of society, the driver of economic growth and social development and the basis for democratic stability; but even beyond that, the ultimate goal should not be the improvement of one means, but of the whole democratic society as the ultimate end. The family is the basic unit for multiple areas of activity but above all it is an end in itself. To strengthen it means to give an effective step towards the development of human potential, to reinforce dignity, to extend opportunities, to enhance actual freedom.

Every hour that goes by in this Latin America affected by the above mentioned social problems without counting on effective policies to deal with them, will mean more destroyed families, or families that will never be created, adolescent mothers, school drop out, and excluded youth. Ethics in the first place, as well as the notion of democracy and the ideas enshrined by history in the region, demand joint efforts and urgent actions in order to avoid them.

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