

## FAMILY REORGANIZATION AND PUBLIC POLICIES IN MEXICO

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on analyzing changes in the intra familial division of labor in Mexican families as a central aspect of their reorganization in recent decades. Although the more general expressions of this phenomenon have been studied, our aim is to carry out a more precise and up-to-date review and analysis, as well as to point out omissions in the public-policy sphere. To begin with, the research carried out has found that adult men continue to be the main financial providers, but that they are increasingly ceasing to be so exclusively. Adult women, especially as wives or heads of household, have increased their paid economic participation –or their job-seeking– in an effort to meet family financial needs, or to fulfill their individual aspirations. Sons and daughters, both adults and adolescents, continue to play a significant economic role, although it is important to note the increase in their continuance in the school system in recent decades (see García and Oliveira, 1997; Rendón, 2003; Camarena, 2004; Mier y Terán and Rabell, 2004; Giorguli, 2006; Pacheco, 2011).

The economic activity rate of adult women with the main family responsibilities has attracted the attention of many researchers and decision-makers, because it contributes to eroding deeply-rooted social norms in a society such as Mexico's, which continues to attribute the main responsibility for supporting the family to men. The resulting overburden of female work should also be borne in mind, since Mexican men have only slightly

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modified their scant involvement in the domestic sphere and child care (see Rendón, 2003; Inmujeres, 2005).

The above transformations have been studied with information drawn from various sources and have been carried out at different times over the past three decades. In Mexico there is a scarcity of longitudinal data to enable one to explore these changes in the intra familial division of labor over time in greater depth. Nevertheless, it is possible to advance in this direction by analyzing the information provided by the series of employment surveys that meet the minimum desirable comparability threshold and so far have not been exploited much from that perspective. Moreover, employment surveys are based on a broad concept of what economic activity means in countries such as Mexico. This is crucial to addressing changes in women's labor force participation (other series of data such as censuses, income-expenditure or socio-demographic surveys fail to meet these requirements) (García and Pacheco, 2011).

Based on the above considerations, our objective in this paper is to analyze the economic participation of adult women (18-64 years) over the past two decades, with an emphasis on married and cohabiting women in large urban areas (100,000 or more inhabitants), for whom the most important changes have been documented. The period of analysis is significant for a number of reasons. During these decades, an export-oriented economic development strategy closely linked to the US economy was reinforced in Mexico. At the same time, the fertility rate dropped and significant increases in female educational attainment were consolidated. For our purposes we have chosen two national employment surveys: the first National Employment Survey (ENE, 1991) and one of the most recent ones available (National Occupation and Employment Survey – ENOE, 2011). These information sources will enable us to delve more deeply into the labor participation of married and cohabiting women, and to explore the validity of different hypotheses regarding the factors associated with their insertion in the labor market. In this last respect,

individual socio-demographic aspects and those referring to household structure and socioeconomic condition receive special attention.<sup>2</sup>

The paper is structured as follows. First of all we make a brief reconstruction of the knowledge that exists in the country on the intra familial division of labor and its possible changes in comparison with other Latin American countries. We emphasize the fact that this object of study has been addressed from different viewpoints, and has sometimes been closely linked to the analysis of the survival or reproduction strategies most Mexican families have implemented when financial difficulties have been exacerbated. Secondly, we provide details of the employment surveys we use, the hypotheses explored, as well as the statistical method used, its possibilities and its limits. Following this we present and discuss the results in the context of what is already known, and we seek to clarify the contributions of this study. The last section discusses existing public policies in the country aimed at achieving a better balance between work and family responsibilities. We have found that such policies are scarce and limited and that they should receive urgent attention on the part of those responsible for public policy.

## BACKGROUND

Over the past twenty years, Mexico has undergone profound transformations at the economic, social and cultural level. In the 1980s, the government launched a restructuring of the economic model that had been implemented until then, based mainly on import substitution. The alternative strategy, which has underscored the shrinking of the State and export promotion, has failed to achieve significant and sustained economic growth. The most recent report from the National Council for Social Development Policy Evaluation (Coneval) indicates that at present, 46% of the Mexican population can be considered poor, in other words, their food, or health and education needs are not met (Coneval, 2011).

Extra domestic work constitutes the main source of income in Mexican households, although there may be other sources such as government transfers, remittances

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<sup>2</sup> We use the terms “household,” “family” and “domestic unit” interchangeably to refer to the set of individuals, whether or not they are linked by kinship bonds, who share a housing unit and a common budget.

or borrowing capacity. Nonetheless, it is a fact that the necessary formal work sources have not been created, that wages have remained low, and that partly as a result of these processes, the number of poor has not diminished, while income distribution remains highly polarized (see the papers included in De la Garza, 2012). Unemployment in Mexico remains low and short-term (except for what has occurred during the 2009-2011 crisis), but it should be remembered that at least one-third of the country's labor force is self-employed or works in small family businesses, often referred to as the informal sectors of the economy.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these sectors made up of unskilled workers, small-scale unsalaried work extends to certain professional skilled workers and technicians, driven by processes such as subcontracting or industrial flexibilization, as well as the possibility of providing education, health and other services on a small scale (see De la Garza, 2012).

In this uneven, heterogeneous context, one strategy commonly used by families has been to increase the number of members seeking to participate in the labor market, whether in the salaried or unsalaried, formal or informal sectors, as well as other aspects such as the modification of consumption patterns or emigration to the United States. These strategies undoubtedly experience many constraints (labor force demand, structure and composition of worker supply within domestic units) and both successful and failed aspects have been pointed out. However, for the purposes of our study, it is important to recall that the average number of wage earners per household increased from 1.5 in 1977 to over 2.0 in the 2000 decade (see Tuirán, 1993; González de la Rocha, 2001; Cortés, 2006).

It is a well-known fact that it is not only the need for resources that influences greater labor participation by household members. In regard to adult women –our object of study– it is important to take into account other socio-demographic and cultural processes, such as individual aspirations associated with growing educational attainment among women, as well as the fact that women currently devote less time during their adult life to the care of small children. Over the past two decades, the educational attainment of the Mexican population has significantly increased (the average number of years of study rose from 6.5 in 1990 to 8.6 in 2010 and there are now practically no differences between men

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<sup>3</sup> As would be expected, estimates of the informal sector in Mexico vary according to the definitions of this sector. If we refer to the lack of social benefits, over half of the country's workforce worked in this manner in 2010-2011 (see De la Garza, 2012).

and women, Inegi, 2010). With regard to population trends, there has been a sharp drop in fertility (the average number of children per woman fell from almost 7 in the 1960s and 1970s to 2.2 at present, Conapo, 2011). Furthermore, separations, divorces and consequently, women-headed households are on the increase, although they have not yet reached the levels of other Latin American and developed countries (for documentation of these trends, see Landale and Oropesa, 2007; Cerrutti and Binstock, 2009; Quilodrán, 2010; Echarri, 2011).

It should be noted that among Latin American countries, Mexico does not feature in the group with the highest rate of increase in women's economic participation. In 2010, the rate of female economic activity for women 15 years old and over was 44% in Mexico, a figure lower than the Latin American average of 53%. The differences between Mexican and others in the region become more marked for the younger age groups (see Cerrutti and Binstock, 2009; Cepalstat, 2011). However, due to their significance and repercussions –as mentioned above– we consider it important to delve more deeply into the particular characteristics of this upward trend in the economic presence of Mexican women, as well as its associated factors and the challenges it poses to public policy.

The most widely studied aspects of female economic participation are those of an individual and family nature. As for individual traits, it is a well-known fact that the main increase in occupation has taken place in older age groups (after the age of 35), when women have usually had the children they want and their children begin to grow up.<sup>4</sup> If we consider the position in the kinship structure, women heads of household (who often have no partner) are those with the greatest economic presence; spouses or live-in partners are in the opposite situation, although one should also consider the rate of increase of their work activities, as we shall see further ahead. The greater the educational attainment, the greater the labor participation, as tends to occur in other contexts, although some studies indicate that this relationship varies in terms of the contraction or expansion of job opportunities. Finally, having small or many children is associated with a lower female economic presence, although the meaning and strength of this relationship in periods of economic

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<sup>4</sup> This is in comparison with young, single women whose economic participation has been consistently high and has changed less over time.

crisis, especially in low-income urban sectors, has often been discussed (see García and Oliveira, 1997; Knaul and Parker, 1997; Rendón, 2003; Inegi, 2012).

The effect of family characteristics (socioeconomic and demographic) has received special attention, especially those that make it possible to place women in the various social sectors and determine the existence of small family businesses (defined according to the income of the male or female head of household and his/her status as unemployed or a salaried or unsalaried worker). Female economic participation is usually greater in the middle sectors, because that is where women with the highest levels of educational attainment are concentrated. However, the rate of increase among low-income women has been significant (Tuirán, 1993; García and Pacheco, 2000; Pacheco and Blanco, 2011). Wives –but also adult daughters (and sons) to a certain extent– have so far had a greater opportunity to be economically active if the family has a small business or some other form of economic activity is carried out in the home that permits the simultaneous performance of domestic and extra-domestic tasks. This can happen in the lowest productivity sectors (marginal, informal), but also in sectors undertaking self-employed professional and technical activities (García and Oliveira, 1997; García and Pacheco, 2000).

In addition to factors that have a bearing on overall economic participation, various characteristics of the occupations and the income earned by adult women have also been studied. In the case of wives or spouses, on the one hand, there are those who point out the partial nature of the work performed or the low contribution they make to family income (they usually contribute less than half of this income; see Cerrutti and Zenteno, 2000; Pacheco, 2011). On the other hand, there are those who seek to show that spouses' input contributes significantly to keeping many families above the poverty line (Cerrutti and Binstock, 2009). Finally, in recent years a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the need to analyze domestic and extra-domestic work jointly, in order to evaluate spouses' contribution to the reproduction of domestic units more accurately.<sup>5</sup> As a result of the increasing availability of data from time use surveys, it has been possible to estimate these women's work overburden, which is fairly high when children are small (estimates vary,

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<sup>5</sup> Together with the economic value of domestic work and its contribution to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (see Pedrero, 2004, 2011).

but when domestic and extra-domestic work are jointly considered, wives or partners have been shown to have an overload of approximately 10 hours a week in comparison to men) (Oliveira, Ariza and Eternod, 1996; Inmujeres, 2005).

#### DATA, GENERAL TRENDS AND MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Population censuses were initially the main information source used in Mexico's case to quantify transformations in the population's participation in economic activity. Various household and fertility surveys have also been used for this purpose, but this type of sources and population censuses often underestimate female economic participation, as is usually reported in socio-demographic studies. On the other hand, in our employment surveys, particular emphasis has been placed on the need to increase the number of questions in order to record economically active women, who often do not actually consider some of the income-producing activities they undertake as *work* (see García and Pacheco, 2011). The first employment surveys were taken in some of the country's urban areas, and it was not until 1991 that the first National Employment Survey (ENE, 1991) comparable with subsequent surveys was carried out. This survey marked the beginning of a biannual (sometimes annual) series up to the year 2004. In 2005, a new series was begun, known as National Occupation and Employment Survey (ENOE), which continues to this day.

The ENE and ENOE series differ in some respects, but for the purposes of this analysis we have made them basically comparable, although it should be noted that the procedure turned out to be more laborious than anticipated (see Inegi, online).<sup>6</sup> They are continuous labor market surveys with national coverage and representativeness for the less urbanized areas (fewer than 100,000 inhabitants) and more urbanized areas (100,000 and more inhabitants). They include different types of questions to record economic activity, hours worked, occupation, industry, income, as well as a wide variety of socio-demographic variables. The subsample we used includes all individuals living in households in the most

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<sup>6</sup> The syntax and specific sequences whereby we compare both surveys are available upon request.

urbanized localities (100,000 and more inhabitants), and the information corresponds to the second quarter of 1991 and 2011.<sup>7</sup>

### *General trends and associated factors*

According to the above-mentioned information sources, the economic activity rate for *adult women (18-64 years old) in urban areas* rose from 39% to 55% in the two decades under study. This is a considerable increase and, as expected, the level these rates attain for areas of 100,000 and more inhabitants at present is considerably higher than for the country as a whole, as mentioned above (see Figure 1). Furthermore, it should be emphasized that married or cohabiting women almost doubled their economic presence in the period considered (from 25 to 47%), and that they therefore constitute the group of adult women with the highest increase in these activity rates among the ones considered here. It is this significant increase that has motivated this research paper.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1 also shows the activity rates corresponding to women heads of households, and the behavior of these rates is also striking, since they rise from 57% to 69% from 1991 to 2011.<sup>9</sup> In this case, we are not only dealing with single mothers with small children, a situation that has inspired many analyses and concerns in countries such as the United States (Ellwood and Jencks, 2004; Molly, 2006). In Mexico, this is a heterogeneous universe of women in nuclear and extended households, made up of families from poor and middle-income sectors. The neediest heads of households are often considered the poorest of the poor, but in our context this is not always true, due to the monetary transfers or goods they receive from relatives. Moreover, it is argued that the opposite can happen, in other words, that only heads who can afford to live independently are able to set up separate homes (Gómez de León and Parker, 2000; García and Pacheco, 2000; Echarri, 2011). These elements are important in explaining the increase in their economic activity rates, which

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<sup>7</sup> The population residing in major urban areas accounts for 48% of the country's total population, according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census ([www.inegi.gob.mx](http://www.inegi.gob.mx), online consultation).

<sup>8</sup> According to data from employment surveys, wives constituted 53% of urban adult women in 1991 and 46% in 2011 (data from ENE, 1991 and ENOE, 2011 not included in Figure 1).

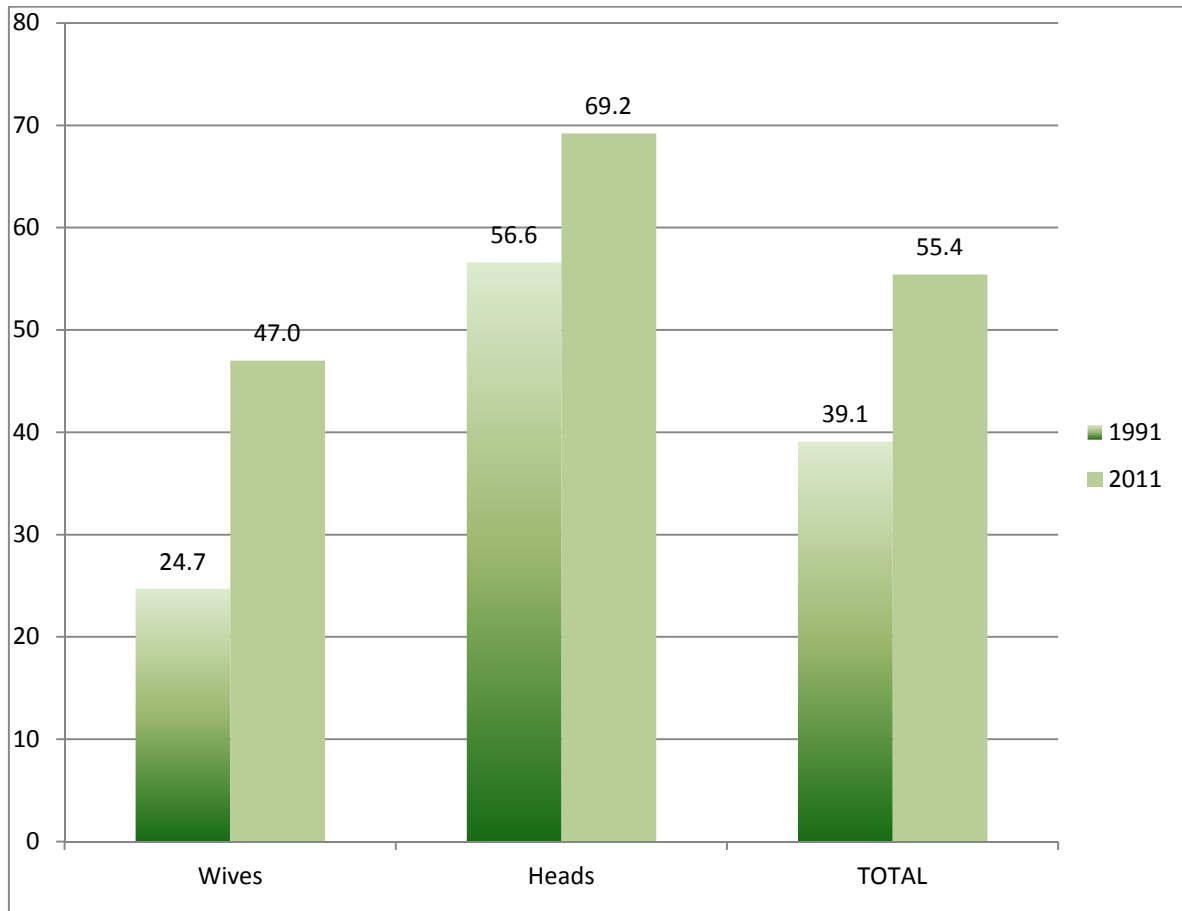
<sup>9</sup> Heads of household represented 11% of urban adult women in 1991 and 18% in 2011 (data from ENE, 1991 and ENOE, 2011 not included in Figure 1).



warrants a special study, since their associated factors are in principle different from those of married or cohabiting women, who by definition live with a male head of household.

Figure 1

Urban Mexico: Adult Women (18-64 years old) Economic Activity Rate, 1991 and 2011



Source: ENE, 1991; ENOE, 2011, Inegi.

Below we offer more information on what has happened with the economic presence of women who are wives or partners, who constitute a numerically significant subgroup that has experienced far-reaching changes in their labor force participation. To this end, we first use multivariate statistical models to explore the influence of individual and family variables on the propensity to work of married or cohabiting women. The statistical models chosen were binary logistic regressions. This is a widely used tool for specifying the factors

associated with labor force participation and the most appropriate one in this case because the dependent variable taken into account (economically active-economically inactive) is dichotomous.

On the basis of the experience accumulated in previous analyses, we initially chose a series of independent variables of an individual and familial nature whose importance has been proven or suggested in earlier studies. These included: *age, educational attainment, marital status (married or cohabiting), hours devoted to domestic work and to child care, type of household (nuclear or extended), presence of inactive women (excluding the wife), presence of children of different ages, labor insertion of the head (whether unemployed or employed, and salaried or unsalaried), and per capita family income (excluding the wife's income)*.<sup>10</sup>

*Age* and *educational attainment* have proved to be crucial in explaining the economic participation of men and women. In the first case, the groups we used (18-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-64 years) attempt to specify the ages with a higher level of economic activity at each of the years considered, since various studies indicate the growing importance of the labor force participation of older women. With regard to *educational attainment*, the groups chosen (no educational attainment, incomplete elementary school, elementary school, incomplete junior high school, junior high school, high school, university and more) are backed by cumulative knowledge on the operation of urban labor markets, in which having school credentials can be an essential factor for joining the work force. This breakdown seeks to pinpoint the specific role of having different types of educational credentials to perform economically at different moments.

At the individual level we also take *marital status* into account (married or cohabiting). Cohabitation has a long tradition among the country's underprivileged sectors, and this has traditionally been a situation with less social recognition. However, the situation may be changing with the spread of cohabitation to other social sectors. Finally, in regard to *the hours of domestic work and childcare*, we wished to take advantage of the information provided for this topic by employment surveys, although we encountered

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<sup>10</sup> Distribution of these variables for adult wives living in areas of 100,000 inhabitants and over can be found in Tables 1A and 2A. One omission from this list is the migratory condition of heads of household. Nevertheless, we do not have sufficient questions in the surveys to adequately record this important variable.

problems of comparability between the 1991 and 2011 data, and we also observed that this variable was closely related to the one referring to the presence of children. In light of this last problem, in the final models we did not consider this aspect, and in the individual sphere we restricted ourselves to *age, educational attainment and marital status*.

In regard to the variables of the family context, we made a distinction between aspects linked more to the socio-demographic sphere (*type of household, presence of children of different ages and presence of inactive women*), and those referring to the prevailing socioeconomic condition in domestic units (*labor insertion of the head and household per capita income, without taking the wife into account*).

The variable related to the *type of household* (nuclear and extended) helped us to ascertain the influence exerted on female economic activity of having relatives in extended units to help with domestic work and childcare. However, in the trials prior to selection of the final model, we saw that this type of concern was more directly recorded by the variable on *presence of “inactive” women* in the home, and that it was redundant to include both aspects.<sup>11</sup> As for the presence of children in the home, this is one of the most frequently studied variables in relation to female labor force activity, although it may not always be possible to establish the direction of the relationship.<sup>12</sup> In our case the variables selected are the presence of children under 7 years old (prior to entry into elementary school), and that of children of elementary school age (7-11 years old). The aim was to determine whether there are any restrictions on female economic activity in the presence of children of different ages at the two moments analyzed. In short, we include *the presence of inactive*

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<sup>11</sup> As background information it is useful to recall that in the Mexican context, the hypothesis of the substitute woman who facilitates mothers' participation in the labor market has been confirmed by some research projects (Wong and Levine, 1992; Knaul and Parker, 1997), but not by others (Rubin-Kurtzman, 1991). This set of results may be indicating that survival strategies sometimes go beyond the family environment, in other words, that substitutes for domestic work and childcare, as well as the necessary financial support, can sometimes be provided by people outside the household. Also, the inconsistent results may be attributed to the fact that these variables are not always measured in the same way in different investigations. In some studies substitute women may be regarded as being either economically active or inactive.

<sup>12</sup> Possible endogeneity and other methodological issues involved in dealing with this relationship with cross sectional information have been extensively analyzed. In our case we do not have alternative information in the employment surveys regarding women's work experience or their fertility histories. When similar situations have been encountered in the case of Mexico -a country where motherhood is highly valued- several authors have concluded that it is more appropriate to assume that it is fertility (or the presence of children in our case) which conditions labor force participation choices (see Garcia and Oliveira, 2006, and the discussion in Wong and Levine, 1988; Myung-Hye, K., 1987, and Mier y Terán, 1996).

women and the presence of children of different ages as socio-demographic aspects that can facilitate or inhibit wives' economic presence.

With regard to the variables referring to the socioeconomic context prevailing in domestic units, we selected various aspects concerning the *labor insertion of the head of household*.<sup>13</sup> First of all we considered the fact of whether or not he was unemployed, as an important aspect that would make wives maintain or seek insertion in the labor market, since this is a factor that has become increasingly important in Mexico in view of the current effects of the global economic crisis. Then we considered it unavoidable to refer to his condition as *a salaried or unsalaried worker* in view of the result of previous studies indicating that the existence of small family businesses makes it easier for wives to participate in these tasks. Finally, we included *per capita family income (without taking into account wives' income in the event that it existed)*. In the latter case, we suggest that there may be factors that facilitate the insertion into the labor market of women of families of better standing (existence of networks, paid domestic help). However, financial need may also be a factor in driving less privileged women to seek or engage in some kind of income-generating activity.<sup>14</sup> In short, then, in the family socioeconomic sphere, we take *per capita income* into account (without considering the wife), and in addition to this general approximation of living standards, we include two additional variables regarding the *head's labor insertion* which we believe may encourage greater economic participation by wives.

Various trials were carried out to obtain the best fit, bearing in mind at each moment the most important variables within our conceptual framework, and trying to obtain the

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<sup>13</sup> The head of household is the person defined as such by the person interviewed in employment surveys.

<sup>14</sup> In previous research on family participation in economic activity in Mexico, living standards have been quantified through variables referring to educational attainment, income of the head of household or his occupational situation, as aspects that make it possible to record adverse or favorable conditions in family contexts in different decades (see García, Muñoz and Oliveira, 1982; Tuirán, 1993; Knaul and Parker, 1997; Estrella and Zenteno, 1998). We chose both the *income* variable and the *labor insertion of the head (condition of unemployed and wage earning or nonwage earning worker)* because our aim is to explore whether, in addition to the economic conditions measured by income, the type of wage earning or nonwage earning labor insertion of the head helps or hinders wives' inclination to work.

greatest possible number of significant coefficients and achieving a good fit. For both 1991 and 2011, at first only models with individual variables were tested (models 1), and then individual and family models (models 2). The latter proved better as regards the reduction of the likelihood logarithm, although there were no significant gains in the percentage which was correctly predicted.<sup>15</sup> The results of these last models are presented and discussed below.

### *Results of logistical models and discussion*

The results obtained in the logistical regressions confirm, on one hand, the pertinence of various known relationships which were maintained in the period analyzed, but also indicate less well-known associations or ones with a different result than expected, in which there is a need to make a careful examination in order to delve more deeply into their significance and implications.

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<sup>15</sup> In the 1991 models, the change in -2 log likelihood fell from 27865.250 (model 1) to 26925.854 (model 2), and the percentage correctly predicted changed from 76.3% to 75.8%. In the 2011 models, the change in -2 log likelihood fell from 46398.273 (model 1) to 36600.707 (model 2), and the percentage correctly predicted changed from 60% to 62.2%. This is our first attempt to draw a coherent picture using these data, but we are aware of the importance of testing other methodological approaches. Comments are welcome in this regard.

Table 1  
Logistic Regression Estimates (odds ratios) of Married Women Economic Participation  
(Model 2)  
(Urban Mexico+, 1991)

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>(Exp β)</i>	<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>(Exp β)</i>
<b>Personal characteristics</b>		<b>Household characteristics</b>	
<u>Age</u>		<u>Presence of children</u>	
18 – 19	1.215	<u>Less than 7 years old</u>	
20 – 29	1.869**	Yes	0.740**
30 – 39	2.397**	No*	
40 – 49	1.930**	<u>Presence of children</u>	
50 – 59	1.125	<u>7 – 11 years old</u>	
60 – 64*		Yes	1.070**
		No*	
<u>Education</u>		<u>Presence of “not economically active women” (not the wife)</u>	
Without schooling*		Yes	1.098**
Incomplete elementary	0.971	No*	
Elementary	1.004	<u>Head unemployed</u>	
Incomplete junior high school	1.170	Yes	6.004**
Junior high school	1.284**	No*	
High school	2.548**	<u>Occupation head of the household</u>	
University and upward	4.627**	Salaried*	
		Non salaried	1.376**
		Others	0.645**
<u>Marital status</u>		<u>Per capita household income (not counting the wife)</u>	
Married	0.681**	First quartile*	
Conjugal union*		Second quartile	1.125**
		Third quartile	1.378**
		Fourth quartile	1.837**
		Constant	0.086

+100 000 or more inhabitants

\*Reference category in the model

\*\*Significance at P<0.05

-2 log likelihood 26925.854; percentage correctly predicted 75.8

Source: Encuesta Nacional de Empleo (ENE), April – June, 1991, Inegi

Table 2  
Logistic Regression Estimates (odds ratios) of Married Women Economic Participation  
(Model 2)  
(Urban Mexico+, 2011)

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>(Exp β)</i>	<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>(Exp β)</i>
<b>Personal characteristics</b>		<b>Household characteristics</b>	
<u>Age</u>		<u>Presence of children</u>	
18 – 19	1.193	<u>Less than 7 years old</u>	
20 – 29	2.426**	Yes	0.748**
30 – 39	3.207**	No*	
40 – 49	2.920**	<u>Presence of children</u>	
50 – 59	1.612**	<u>7 – 11 years old</u>	
60 – 64*		Yes	0.980
		No*	
<u>Education</u>		<u>Presence of “not economically active women” (not the wife)</u>	
Without schooling*		Yes	1.070**
Incomplete elementary	0.935	No*	
Elementary	0.930	<u>Head unemployed</u>	
Incomplete junior high school	0.965	Yes	2.874**
Junior high school	1.100	No*	
High school	1.281**	<u>Occupation head of the household</u>	
University and upward	2.976**	Salaried*	
		Non salaried	1.548**
		Others	1.917**
<u>Marital status</u>		<u>Per capita household income (not counting the wife)</u>	
Married	0.855**	First cuartile*	
Conjugal union*		Second cuartile	1.006
		Third cuartile	1.317**
		Fourth cuartile	1.877**
		Constant	0.357

+100 000 or more inhabitants

\*Reference category in the model

\*\*Significance at P<0.05

-2 log likelihood 36600.707; percentage correctly predicted 62.6

Source: Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo (ENOE), April – June, 2011, Inegi

What occurred with age was partly expected. The results (Tables 1 and 2) confirm that the ages of greatest female economic participation are those in the 30-39 age group, a situation already reported by the end of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>16</sup> This result is important in light of what is known about the age distribution of fertility in Mexico, since the highest fertility rate still corresponds to the 20-24 age group, although its level is increasingly close to that of the 25-29 group, after which it drops sharply (Conapo, 2011). Thus, for a significant proportion of Mexican wives, one can hypothesize that they attempt to join the labor force once they have had the desired number of children and they are at a relative more advanced stage in life. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that at present the ages with the highest participation extend beyond 50 years old, which may be an indication that those who entered the labor market in previous decades have remained there or plan to remain there for longer. In short, in 2011 we confirmed that the greater economic presence characterizes women from various groups of adult ages, and that it is therefore necessary to continue determining the various facets of this phenomenon and its related factors (see García and Oliveira, 1997; Estrella and Zenteno, 1998; Rendón, 2003 for an analysis of the role of age in reference to the 1980s and 1990s).

The results concerning educational attainment are especially interesting, since the regressions show that this aspect plays a slightly different role in each of the years studied (Tables 1 and 2).<sup>17</sup> In 1991 it was sufficient to have completed junior high school to achieve the highest labor force participation; in 2011, married women with high school and over have the greatest economic presence. The most frequent interpretation of results in this respect is that the country's urban labor markets have become more demanding and require increasingly higher educational credentials. However, it could also be due to the fact that the increase in the Mexican population's average educational attainment has raised the

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<sup>16</sup> The data on age distribution (Tables 1<sup>a</sup> and 2<sup>a</sup>) show the displacement of the structure towards the upper age ranges, as a result of the aging of the country's population.

<sup>17</sup> The educational attainment distribution shown in Tables 1 and 2 indicates striking increases in the proportion of married women or partners who completed junior high school or university during the period under study (the respective percentages rise from 19.5 to 38.1 in junior high school and from 6.7 to 14.9 at university). In this context it should be recalled that in 1993, junior high school education in Mexico was made compulsory, increasing compulsory basic educational attainment to 9 years. This involved a constitutional amendment of the rights of all Mexicans and the State's responsibility to guarantee them (see Zorrilla, 2004).



requirements for the performance of diverse activities. There is no simple answer for this conjecture owing to the multiplicity of factors that come into play and must be borne in mind (see the detailed study by De Ibarrola, 2009, which covers the period under analysis).

One lesser known aspect of the labor force participation of the group of women under study is whether they are married or cohabiting with a partner.<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note that in each of the two years considered, the economic participation of cohabiting women is greater than that of married women (taking into account or statistically controlling for the other factors involved). This result could be interpreted as a sign of cohabiting women trying to seek more autonomy, but it may also suggest that these are women who need to work since they do not have the legal bond that would be more likely to ensure their financial upkeep. In the case of Mexico, we still do not have complete answers regarding the significance of the increase in cohabitation, and the extent to which this does or does not reflect an ongoing alternative to marriage sought by more independent women as a means of eliminating institutional controls (see Quilodrán, 2010; García and Oliveira, 2011).

The presence of small children of different ages is an essential aspect to bear in mind in a study such as ours.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, we are fully aware of the methodological difficulties of addressing this relationship with cross-sectional information, as we mentioned before. The link that interests us is the influence of accumulated fertility on female economic participation, with both aspects being observed at one point in time. However, despite having defined the problem in this way, it is not infrequent to reach sometimes unexpected results, or ones that depend on the social sectors being studied or the economic circumstances under consideration (see García and Oliveira, 1997).

Having established these provisos, when we examine the regression coefficients regarding the presence of children (Tables 1 and 2), the strength of the relation involving the smallest children is surprising, since they constitute an obvious constraint on female economic participation in both the years considered (the coefficient relative to slightly older

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<sup>18</sup> Cohabiting women have more than doubled their presence in our urban contexts between 1991 and 2011 (see Tables 1<sup>a</sup> and 2<sup>a</sup>).

<sup>19</sup> The drop in fertility in Mexico has visible effects in the lower proportion of children present in Mexican homes in 2011 as compared with 1991 (Tables 1<sup>a</sup> and 2<sup>a</sup>).

children does not behave consistently). This may indicate that the domestic and childcare workload or cultural barriers are still very strong in these circumstances, and that women often do not seek employment. It is also important to bear in mind that this restrictive effect of very young children is maintained even when the effect of the presence in the home of economically “inactive” women is statistically controlled for. However, if we pay attention to the significance of the coefficient of this variable referring to women whom we assume help with reproductive tasks, we find that to some extent they facilitate the labor force participation of certain married women (Tables 1 and 2). Thus we are faced a situation that should be made more visible and considered more explicitly by public policies, as we contend in the following section.

Finally, an analysis of the variables referring to heads of household enables us to outline a complementary view of what has occurred with the economic participation of married women in the country. If the head is unemployed, a much more frequent situation in 2011 than in 1991, the effect is clear and in favor of greater female labor force participation in both years. And the same is true when the head is not a salaried worker, confirming the findings of several earlier studies. In view of the above-mentioned conflicts between work and family in Mexico, it is hardly surprising that women have more economic weight when a self-employed activity is carried out in their families (generally informal), making it possible for them to deal simultaneously with domestic and extra-domestic tasks (for studies on the matter covering different decades, see García, Muñoz and Oliveira, 1982; Tuirán, 1993; García and Pacheco, 2000).<sup>20</sup>

Lastly, household per capita income (excluding the wife) brings us closer to the prevailing living standard in the family, once aspects such as the wife’s educational attainment or the existence of a self-employed activity in the home have been controlled for. Given the importance of having an equivalent measurement for both years, we decided to divide this per capita income into quartiles at both times. In 1991, as household income rises, we find greater labor force participation by the wife and all differences are

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<sup>20</sup> The category “others” does not behave in a systematic way (in 1991 it restricted wives’ labor force participation and in 2011 it incentives it, even more so than unsalaried workers). This is probably due to the fact that this is a very heterogeneous category. Here we group together inactive, unemployed heads, and those for whom there was a lack of information to classify them as salaried or unsalaried workers.

significant. In 2011, there are only positive and significant differences at the upper level of the distribution, in the highest fifty percent. These findings suggest that women with higher living standards have more possibilities for labor insertion (for example, they can make more use of the networks that allow them to advance in that direction or afford paid domestic help). These possibilities undoubtedly warrant more research and public attention.

#### FAMILY DIVISION OF LABOR AND PUBLIC POLICIES

The results obtained in our analysis point to a significant transformation within Mexican families, since over the past two decades the percentage of economically active married or cohabiting women has practically doubled. An analysis of the factors associated with the labor force participation of these women in 1991 and 2011 shows that those with better educational credentials and those who belong to the upper income levels continue to be better represented. This is probably a result of the prevailing social inequality in the country, but also of an element that contributes to reproducing it.

Our results also show the continuance of considerable tensions between the family and working lives of Mexican women from all social strata. We can view this from two possible angles. From the perspective of the aspects that inhibit the extra-domestic work of married women, we find that the presence of small children clearly continues to limit this work. From the point of view of factors that favor it, we find that employment begins to increase when women are over 30, when there is someone in the home who maybe helps with reproductive tasks, and/or when there is the possibility of simultaneously performing domestic and extra-domestic activities (existence of a small family business). What we are suggesting with the above is that the economic participation of married women in Mexico continues to be closely linked to the presence of family aspects that either help or hinder this, although these are not the only ones. Based on the above, in this last section we are interested in exploring the visibility of these phenomena in a society such as Mexico's, and the extent to which current social policy in the country has offered alternative means of improving the existing balance between work and family.

An interesting series of debates on the nature, effectiveness and limitations of family policies have been held in the Latin American region in recent years. However, it

should be noted that some authors continue to believe that what exists in Mexico and our region are sparse interventions, often not coordinated, regarding birth control, reproductive health, education, social security, alleviating poverty, domestic violence, work-family conciliation and other objectives (see Arriagada, 2007; Lerner and Melgar, 2010, and the analysis in García and Oliveira, 2011).

This very disparate series of problems and actions generally forms part of a central concern over the transfer to families (particularly women) of increasing responsibilities as a result of the shrinking of the State that has taken place in the Latin American region (see Pautassi, 2007; Sojo, 2007; Sunkel, 2007; Martínez Franzoni, 2008). The programs' limitations, as well as some of their successes, are very uneven, with some problems being more visible than others. Many authors refer to the loss of importance of the family model centering on a male provider and a woman devoted full-time to domestic and childcare tasks, but there is a shortage of material on specific public actions designed to balance working and family life, especially in the case of women. However, it should be noted that United Nations agencies in the region, and the World Bank, have devoted considerable space in their meetings, reports and recommendations to this problem (see Piazzese, 2009; PNUD et al., 2009; Cepal, 2009 and 2010; Chioda, 2011; World Bank 2012).

*On public policies for reconciling work and family*

Specific policies on work and family in the Latin American region are extremely restricted and in most cases limited to the protection of pregnancy and birth of children. In other words, they often fail to address other family responsibilities, such as the care of small children, the elderly and the handicapped. Furthermore, only women in formal jobs (registered in social security systems) are covered, but not domestic employees and other female workers in the informal sector (Arriagada, 2007; PNUD et al., 2009).

Within this framework of shortcomings, Mexico unfortunately does not stand out in the Latin American setting because of its existing measures, or the strength of current laws designed to reconcile family and working life. Mexican women who have a formal job are entitled to 12 weeks' maternity leave and two 30-minute breaks a day during the working day for breastfeeding. In other countries it is possible to request additional leave or else the

14 weeks recommended by the International Labor Organization (ILO) are granted.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in various countries, paternity leave is granted for a few days –a controversial issue since men make little use of it– but this is still not cause for debate in the case of Mexico. Finally, compendiums of existing laws indicate more explicit sanctions in various national contexts regarding the possibility of dismissal after maternity, or the request for a pregnancy test in order to obtain a job<sup>22</sup> (see PNUD et al., 2009; Lerner and Melgar, 2010).

The clearest measures for the reorganization of the times and places of work and childcare (such as the extension or modification of the school and workday, guaranteed maternity leave, public and private day-care centers, the extension of preschool education) are also extremely scarce in Latin American countries as a whole. Thus, in our countries the prevailing view is that families (mainly women) should care for dependents. In the case of Mexico, some studies indicate that only 2% of young children attend a public or private day-care center, although this is a service that forms part of the benefits provided by the social security institutes (Salvador, 2007) and there are special programs of this nature such as the current government's Daycare and Child Minding Centers Program. Part of the problem lies in the fact that these services are not of sufficient quality or have deteriorated. Many of the Mexican Social Security Institute's (IMSS) day-care centers have passed into private hands and the state's capacity to guarantee inspection and vigilance of these establishments is precarious (Jusidman, 2010).

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<sup>21</sup> The countries with the longest maternity leaves are Chile, Cuba, Venezuela and Brazil (PNUD et al., 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Express prohibition of pregnancy testing for women job-seekers is enshrined in the law in Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica and Uruguay (PNUD et al., 2009).

*On the long road ahead*

In light of the overview set forth above, it is necessary to begin to clarify a series of aspects that should be prioritized. The first refers to the *type and scope* of the research we have carried out. We know more about the transformations in the intra familial division of labor than about their consequences and the need for appropriate public policies. No studies have been carried out to date in Mexico that describe the costs potentially involved when there are no appropriate public policies designed to improve the balance between working and family life. There may be costs at the macroeconomic level (because the labor force is not fully employed and the country's productivity and competitiveness are affected); at the level of productive units (because the performance of men and women workers is affected); and at the level of individual and family quality of life (because there is a risk of affecting health, child well-being and forms of family organization, including gender relationships (see PNUD et al., 2009; Gornick and Meyers, 2003 and Lewis, 2009, for a comparison of developed countries in this respect). Research projects that can illustrate these possible costs should be encouraged.

A second aspect of interest relates to *improved assessments and evaluations* of the few existing programs. In the bibliography on policies referring to families, both in Mexico and in many Latin American countries, projects and programs are mentioned and listed, but we lack the elements to allow us to arrive at conclusions on their effectiveness and capabilities (Ordaz Beltrán, 2010; García and Oliveira, 2011). Analysts do not usually detail (or have) information on coverage, budgets, performance according to proposed objectives and other aspects required for specifying the possible impacts or lack of them. In Mexico although this information may exist or be analyzed within the appropriate government offices, it only rarely comes to light. One possible exception –in the sphere of family policies– are the programs of conditional cash transfers for poverty relief, submitted to periodic assessments, as well as the social policies and programs implemented by the Federal District Government which have begun to be the object of rigorous evaluations (see Valencia Lomelí, 2008; Murayama Rendón and Rabell Romero, 2011). It is essential to

foster this culture of transparency and evaluation in order to achieve better results in family policies.

Lastly, mention should be made of the importance of *raising awareness among broad sectors* of Mexican society with regard to the changes taking place in gender roles, their associated factors, possible impact and the limited scope of the policies implemented. In this respect, it should be noted that not only is it necessary to modify cultural and social-organization aspects, but also that the country's institutional architecture itself has been built using a male-centered vision, as pointed out by authors such as Jusidman (2010). Likewise, it is necessary to involve non-state agents to a greater extent, such as organized women's groups, unions, political parties and companies. This forms part of "the political economy" in the search for gender equality (World Bank, 2012). In the case of Mexico, organized women's groups have been particularly active in the task of bringing to light and sanctioning domestic violence (as well as other types of violence). Over the years there have been a few accomplishments –although still very insufficient– in the legal field and local programs. The support of these groups and other organizations is crucial to the aim of achieving a better balance between work and family life.

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#### IMPORTANT ACRONYMS

BID: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (Inter-American Development Bank in English)

CEPAL: Comisión Económica para América Latina y El Caribe (ECLAC in English)

INMUJERES: Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (México)

OIT: Organización Internacional del Trabajo (ILO in English)

PNUD: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (UNDP in English)

APPENDIX



Table 1A

Mexican adult (18-64 years old) married women according to different individual and family characteristics  
(Urban Mexico+, 1991)

<i>Personal characteristics</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Household characteristics</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
<u>Age</u>		<u>Type of household</u>	
18 – 19	1.2	Nuclear	86.6
20 – 29	24.7	Extended	13.4
30 – 39	33.9	<u>Presence of children</u>	
40 – 49	23.1	<u>less than 7 years old</u>	
50 – 59	13.1	Yes	51.9
60 – 64*	4.0	No*	48.1
<u>Educations</u>		<u>Presence of children</u>	
Without schooling*	6.3	<u>7 – 11 years old</u>	
Incomplete elementary	19.0	Yes	41.6
Elementary	25.7	No*	58.4
Incomplete junior high school	4.0	<u>Presence of “not economically</u>	
Junior high school	19.5	<u>active women” (not the wife)</u>	
High school	18.6	Yes	36.2
University and upward	6.7	No*	63.8
<u>Marital status</u>		<u>Head unemployed</u>	
Married	90.6	Yes	0.8
Conjugal union*	9.4	No*	99.2
<u>Hours of domestic and care</u>		<u>Occupation head of the</u>	
<u>work</u>		<u>household</u>	
Less than 15	2.8	Salaried*	67.7
15 – 34	17.5	Non Salaried	27.5
35 and more	78.2	Others	4.8
Does not apply	1.6	<u>Per capita household income</u>	
		<u>(not counting the wife)</u>	
		First cuartile*	29.2
		Second cuartile	24.3
		Third cuartile	22.6
		Fourth cuartile	23.9

+100 000 or more inhabitants

\*Reference category in the models

Source: Encuesta Nacional de Empleo (ENOE), April – June, 1991, Inegi

Table 2A  
 Mexican adult (18-64 years old) married women according to different individual and family characteristics  
 (Urban Mexico+, 2011)

<i>Personal characteristics</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Household characteristics</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
<u>Age</u>		<u>Type of household</u>	
18 – 19	0.9	Nuclear	86.8
20 – 29	15.5	Extended	13.2
30 – 39	29.1	<u>Presence of children</u>	
40 – 49	28.5	<u>less than 7 years old</u>	
50 – 59	19.9	Yes	38.6
60 – 64*	6.2	No*	61.4
<u>Educations</u>		<u>Presence of children</u>	
Without schooling*	2.4	<u>7 – 11 years old</u>	
Incomplete elementary	7.1	Yes	32.8
Elementary	18.2	No*	67.2
Incomplete junior high school	3.5	<u>Presence of “not economically</u>	
Junior high school	38.1	<u>active women” (not the wife)</u>	
High school	15.9	Yes	26.3
University and upward	14.9	No*	73.7
<u>Marital status</u>		<u>Head unemployed</u>	
Married	81.2	Yes	3.0
Conjugal union*	19.8	No*	97.0
<u>Hours of domestic and care</u>		<u>Occupation head of the</u>	
<u>work</u>		<u>household</u>	
Less than 15	8.4	Salaried*	62.2
15 – 34	34.5	Non Salaried	24.0
35 and more	55.7	Others	13.8
No domestic work	1.5	<u>Per capita household income</u>	
		<u>(not counting the wife)</u>	
		First quartile*	26.9
		Second quartile	25.0
		Third quartile	25.3
		Fourth quartile	22.8

+100 000 or more inhabitants

\*Reference category in the models

Source: Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo (ENOE), April – June, 2011, Inegi