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**FAMILIES ON THE VERGE OF BREAKDOWN? VIEWS ON
CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN FAMILY LIFE IN GUANACASTE, COSTA RICA**

Sylvia Chant

ABSTRACT

As in many other countries, family life in Costa Rica has changed in recent decades. Marriage is declining, divorce and separation are on the rise, out of wedlock births are increasing, and women head a growing number and proportion of households. Nationally and internationally, statements issued by the media, government bodies and the religious establishment indicate that these trends have provoked anxiety about “family breakdown”. Yet it is less well known if similar concerns are felt at the grassroots.

The present paper explores reactions to family change among 176 low- and middle-income women and men from different age groups in Guanacaste province, northwest Costa Rica. A key finding is that although some trajectories in family life are perceived as encompassing possibilities for new, more flexible and egalitarian domestic arrangements, others are regarded as weakening family unity. Moreover, concerns about “family breakdown” are more common among adult males than their female counterparts or younger people. The reasons behind these disparate views relate to social, legal and economic processes that have destabilized “traditional” gendered divisions of labor, power and rights within Costa Rican households.

INTRODUCTION

Costa Rica has experienced a number of significant changes in family life in the last few decades. Prominent trends include a growing incidence of lone motherhood and female-headed households. These are linked, *inter alia*, with falling levels of legal marriage, rising numbers of out-of-wedlock births, greater rates of divorce and separation, and mounting involvement of women in the historically male preserve of family breadwinning. Similar processes have been noted in many other parts of Latin America, not to mention elsewhere in the world, and have been variously attributed to globalization, neoliberal economic restructuring, the changing nature of work, increased access to population control, and post-1960s feminist movements [see for example Arriagada 1998; Benería 1991; Castells 1997; Cerrutti and Zenteno 1999; Chant with Craske 2003; Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL) 2001; Datta and McIlwaine 2000; Folbre 1991; Geldstein 1997; González de la Rocha 1995; Jelin 1991; Kaztman 1992; Safa 1995; United Nations 2000].

In a number of quarters, nationally and internationally, these trajectories have been regarded as indicative of a “breakdown in the family,” and have frequently provoked anxiety, especially in relation to the potential impacts on children (see Moore 1994). While the media, official reports, and statements from the religious establishment have often documented concerns about family breakdown, it is less well known, however, how they reflect sentiment at the grassroots. Do people themselves perceive that major shifts are taking place in family and household organization? If so, to what do they attribute these changes? Are the changes identified deemed to be precipitating family breakdown, and to what extent does this hold across gender, age and socioeconomic boundaries? This paper addresses these questions on the basis of interviews and focus group discussions with 176 low- and middle-income men and women of various ages in Guanacaste province, northwest Costa Rica.¹

The first section of the paper details major changes in family patterns in Costa Rica in recent decades and considers key structural factors that have impacted household form and organization. This discussion also includes a brief account of the manner in which current trends have been viewed by public bodies (such as government and religious organizations). With reference to the survey population in Guanacaste, section two examines perceptions of family change at the grassroots and the main factors to which shifts are attributed. Section three explores reactions to change among

different groups within the sample, including the factors singled out by some as constitutive of family breakdown. The fourth and final section critically evaluates the relevance of the term “breakdown” in the wake of family transitions in Guanacaste. It also suggests ways in which the public sector might better assist families in adapting to some of the problems that are perceived as deriving from them.

CHANGES IN COSTA RICAN

FAMILY LIFE IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Although the “traditional” nuclear-family unit—comprising a male breadwinner, female housewife, and their biological children—has arguably not been as long-lived nor as numerically dominant in Costa Rica as it possibly has been in other parts of the world,² the proportion of households conforming with this model fell from around one-half to one-third of households between the 1970s and the 1990s [Centro Nacional Para el Desarrollo de la Mujer y la Familia (CMF) 1996:20]. The decline is mainly attributable to an increase in people living alone, a rise in complex or extended households, and mounting numbers of one-parent units, nearly all of which are headed by women (Fauné 1997:92; Pereira García 1998:187). Although lone-mother and female-headed households are not synonymous (Chant 1997), the proportion of female-headed households climbed from 16 percent 1973 to 22 percent in 1997 (Budowski and Guzmán 1998). According to the 2000 Census, this figure has now increased slightly to 22.2 percent [Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INEC) 2001:Table 31].

As part and parcel of the fall-off in male-headed family units, marriage rates dropped from 30.8 to 23.5 per 100 between 1980 and 1994 (Ministerio de Planificación Nacional y Política Económica 1995:5-6), and between 1980 and 1996, divorce rates rose from 9.9 to 21.2 per 100 [Proyecto Estado de la Nación (PEN) 1998:210]. Official figures also indicate that the proportion of births outside marriage in Costa Rica increased from 23 percent in 1960, to 38 percent in 1985, to 51.5 percent in 1999 [Budowski and Rosero Bixby forthcoming; Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (INAMU) 2001:8].³ In addition, the proportion of children without fathers registered on their birth certificates rose from 21.1 percent in 1990, to 30.3 percent in 1999 (*Ibid.*:9). The fact that nearly one in three children born in Costa Rica now has a “*padre desconocido*” (“unknown father”) is significant insofar as traditionally only formally acknowledged children have received their father’s surname and

entitlement to paternal support (Budowski and Rosero Bixby forthcoming). Two-thirds of births from unreported fathers occur to women under 19 years of age (INAMU 2001:8), which conceivably helps to explain why as many as 16 percent of single parents in the country are under 18 years of age (see also note 3).

Divisions of Labor in Households and Workforce Participation

In addition to shifts in the legal and demographic contours of family life, there have also been important changes in intrahousehold divisions of labor, especially in respect of the rising labor force participation of women in their childbearing years (CMF 1996:20). While there was only one female worker for every three men in the 20–39 years of age cohort in 1980, the gap had narrowed to one in two by 1990 (Dierckxsens 1992:22). Between 1980 and 1995, the share of the workforce made up by women in Costa Rica rose from 24.3 percent to 30.5 percent (Fauné 1997:58), and in 2000, this figure had reached 32.1 percent (INEC 2001:Cuadro 2). Despite the fact that women's average wages are lower than men's, and that women in general are more likely to be unemployed, increases in male unemployment have been noted in the 15–25 year and 45–70 year age cohorts, with periods of unemployment also becoming longer (Arias 2000:26, Table 1). Some of these changes have been driven by sectoral shifts in the Costa Rican economy. Agriculture, for example, a predominantly male domain, recruited only 20 percent of the national workforce in 2000, compared with 51 percent in 1960.

Moreover, mounting emphasis on agroexports over time has been associated with increased casualization, seasonal unemployment, and temporary migration of men in search of work. These trends have been juxtaposed with significant growth in the share of the labor force in services (from 30 percent to 53 percent between 1960 and 2000), which has tended to favor women. Women are currently half of the workers in this sector, which occupies as many as 84 percent of the economically active female population in the country (INEC 2001:Cuadro 13). The expansion of light manufacturing in free-trade zones, mainly around the San José Metropolitan Area, has also opened up opportunities for female workers (see Sandoval García 1997). Additional impetuses to rising female employment have emanated from declining birth rates associated with increased access to birth control, the growth in female education, and, more recently, mounting pressures on households to

expand and diversify their sources of earnings in the wake of neoliberal economic restructuring. As elsewhere in Latin America, the progressive “feminization of employment” also seems to be linked with a “feminization of household headship” (see Bradshaw 1995a,b; Chant 1997; Chant with Craske 2003: 181; Safa 1995, 1999).

Legislation, Social Policy, and Family Change

While economic and demographic trends have clearly played some part in household transitions, another important set of influences undoubtedly derives from gender-aware legislation and social programs. From the 1970s onwards, particularly during the presidency of Rodrigo Carazo (1978–1982), pressure from women’s advocacy organizations contributed to an unprecedented recruitment of women into national political life. Then, in 1986, following the conclusion of the United Nations Decade for Women, Costa Rica established its National Centre for Women and the Family [*Centro Nacional para el Desarrollo de la Mujer y de la Familia* (CMF)]. This organization, which in 1998 became the National Institute for Women [*Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres* (INAMU)] and is now headed by a Minister for Women, has played a major role in initiatives that have strengthened women’s position and rights within and beyond the family. This is especially so since the passing of the far-reaching *Law of Social Equality for Women* (Law no. 7142) in 1990, which aimed not only to promote, but to guarantee, women’s equality with men (see Chant 1997:136-137).

In addition to introducing clauses on the compulsory joint registration of property in marriage (or in non-formalized unions, registration in the woman’s name), prohibition of dismissal from jobs on grounds of pregnancy, and greater rights for victims of domestic violence to evict the perpetrators from their homes [see Badilla and Blanco 1996; Investigaciones Jurídicas S.A. (IJSA) 1990], the *Social Equality Law* paved the way for several new legislative initiatives with important implications both for women’s personal rights and entitlements, and for the material and social viability of “nonstandard” households. Prominent developments in this regard have included: the *Law Against Domestic Violence* [Law no. 7586 (1996)], the *Law for the Protection of Adolescent Mothers* (Law no. 7739 (1998)], the *Law for Women in Conditions of Poverty* [Law no. 7769 (1998)], the *Law for Responsible Paternity* [Law no. 8101 (2001)], reforms to articles 84, 85, and 89 of the *Family Code*, recognizing children born outside marriage [Law no. 7538 (1995)], the addition of articles 242–246 to

the *Family Code* acknowledging the legal validity of consensual unions, and reform of article 5 from the same eliminating the equivalence of women and minors [see CMF 1996:22; Colaboración Area Legal 1997; Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social (IMAS) 1998; INAMU 2001].

Much of this legislation has been accompanied by the introduction of significant new gender policies and programs, particularly during the National Liberation Party regime of President José María Figueres (1994–1998). Not only was this administration responsible for establishing a National Equal Opportunities Plan [*Plan Nacional para la Igualdad de Oportunidades entre Mujeres y Hombres* (PIOMH)], and a National Plan for the Attention and Prevention of Intrafamily Violence [*Plan Nacional para la Atención y Prevención de la Violencia Intrafamiliar* (PLANOVI)], but the first dedicated program for female-headed households in the country: the Comprehensive Training Program for Female Household Heads in Conditions of Poverty (*Programa de Formación Integral para Mujeres Jefas de Hogar en Condiciones de Pobreza*) (IMAS, 1999a). Launched in 1997, this latter intervention was spurred, in part, by a rise in poverty among women-headed households from the mid-1980s⁴ and the fact that following ratification of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1989, the Costa Rican state has made concerted moves to increase guarantees of children's well being [see United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 1998].⁵

The main thrust of the Female Household Heads program was to award a stipend to beneficiaries for up to six months during which they would take training courses in personal development, self esteem, and employment and income-generating skills (see Marengo et al. 1998). In the present Social Christian Unity regime of President Miguel Angel Rodríguez, this initiative has been continued in a revised form as "*Creciendo Juntas*" ("Growing Together"), which forms part of the *Plan Nacional de Solidaridad* (National Solidarity Plan). Although *Creciendo Juntas* has been extended to all women in poverty, around half the 15,000 or so beneficiaries reached between 1999 and 2001 were heads of households.⁶ Two ancillary programs, aimed at the young, also accompanied this scheme. The first of these, *Amor Jóven* (Young Love), launched in 1999, is concerned with heightening sexual awareness and preventing pregnancy among adolescents; the second, *Construyendo Oportunidades* (Building Opportunities), seeks to (re)integrate teenage mothers into education, and to equip them with personal and vocational skills to enhance their own lives and those

of their children (see Chant 1999a, 2000; IMAS 2001; Primera Dama de la República 2001). Aside from these initiatives for women and lone mothers, the National Solidarity Plan encompasses a program geared to strengthening family cohesion (*Programa de Fortalecimiento Familiar*), which assigns basic income supplements to families in extreme poverty, and another (*Programa Infancia y Juventud*) which provides assistance for children and youth from low-income families, mainly in the form of care, after-school activities and youth development (see IMAS 1999b,c).

Public Concerns about “Family Breakdown?”

While the Costa Rican state is clearly concerned about protecting and promoting the rights of vulnerable groups and, thanks largely to the efforts of CMF/INAMU, has shown itself willing to work with more flexible definitions of “family” than are often found elsewhere (see Chant 1999a, 2002b), this is far from being an open endorsement of family plurality. For example, many official (and academic) publications continue to use the term “*familia completa*” (“complete family”) to denote units comprising two parents and their children, whereas one-parent households are consigned to the category of “*familia incompleta*” (“incomplete family”) (see Sagot 1999:101). Moreover, although CEPAL (2001:V16) notes for Latin America more generally that the term “*desintegración familiar*” (“family breakdown”) is seldom defined explicitly and/or is used to describe factors as disparate as rising divorce rates, new family functions, and lack of intrafamily communication, one of the principal evocations in the Costa Rican case relates to the absence or irresponsibility of one or both parents, normally fathers, as encapsulated in another increasingly common term: “*paternidad irresponsable*” (“irresponsible fatherhood”). This again tends to reinforce the idea that “family” is synonymous with the “in-tact” male-headed unit and is the standard from which other configurations deviate.

In turn, links are sometimes drawn with between decline of “the family” and other social ills. As one author writing in the prominent Social Science journal *Ciencias Sociales* put it: “Disorganization and disintegration of the family are the cause of declining moral values, economic pressures and social problems such as prostitution, alcoholism, drug addiction and violence” (Loaíciga Guillén 1994:10) [*my translation*]. These latter issues, in turn, are of major significance to Costa Rican society more generally, with nearly one-quarter of the population ranking delinquency

(including violence) and/or drugs as Costa Rica's biggest contemporary problem.⁷ Although perceptions of rising violence could in part be due to increased denouncements of intrafamily abuse (facilitated by the new support mechanisms for women and children itemized above), it is also the case that violent muggings and murders are on an upward trend, possibly relating to mounting levels of arms ownership in the country (see PEN 1998:44). As far as the Catholic establishment and its "Movimiento Familiar Cristiano" ("Christian Family Movement")⁸ are concerned, the erosion of social values within the country also owes to increased sexual freedom (Schifter and Madrigal 1996:62).⁹ Falling rates of marriage, increased illegitimacy, prostitution, and the rising visibility of homosexuality are targeted as primary concerns here, and have provoked numerous Church appeals for adults to set good examples to their young by eschewing the evils of libertinism and modern consumerism, and conserving "family traditions." Similar messages are promulgated among Costa Rica's growing Protestant community.¹⁰

Although there are clearly assumptions embedded in these discourses about the ideal form that households should take, it is also true to say that many public discussions of "family breakdown," at least on the part of secular bodies, emphasize the importance of *intrafamily relationships*, particularly those between parents and children, and link problems in this domain not so much with factors internal to families (such as "breakdown" in their membership or "deviant" social behavior), but with wider structural processes. For example, a number of press and academic articles in recent years have expressed concern about declining parental involvement in the daily care and socialization of children. This is attributed not only to rising economic pressures and growing work burdens on parents, but to the spread of new technology and exposure to media. A study conducted on adolescent depression in 1999 by a consortium of national and international agencies, for example, concluded that one of the main reasons for rising rates of depression among the young was that "parents have abandoned their role through overwork; the television and computer have taken the place of parents" (see also CEPAL 2001 on Latin America more generally) [*my translation*].¹¹ This is endorsed by other recent research that has asserted that the hierarchy and hegemony of the family are being displaced by modern communications, especially television, thereby weakening traditional support systems for children and adolescents (see Tiffer 1998:116; Moreno 1997). Indeed, Costa Rica has one of the

highest rates of access to television and personal computers in Latin America, at 387 television sets per 1,000 people in 1998, and 39.1 personal computers (the regional averages for Latin America and the Caribbean in the same year were 225 and 33.9 respectively) (World Bank 2000:310-311, Table 19). The number of Internet hosts per 1,000 people in the year 2000 was 4.1, which placed Costa Rica in sixth place in the region after Uruguay (19.6), Mexico (9.1), Argentina (8.7), Brazil (7.2), and Chile (6.2) [United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2001:48-50, Table A2.1].

In summarizing the views of public bodies on family change a range of apparently contradictory tendencies can be identified. Although, on one hand, a decline in “traditional” patriarchal households may owe partly to the efforts of the state to secure basic human rights and welfare for vulnerable groups, the male-headed nuclear unit still seems to be something of a normative ideal in public (and especially in religious) circles. Concern also remains about the potential effects of its demise on social stability, cohesion and reproduction. By the same token, there is recognition that the quality of family life and intrafamily relationships are not governed simply by the configuration of households, but by wider structural factors over which individuals have little control. This, as I have argued elsewhere, has led to a situation in which public discourses of changing patterns of family life in Costa Rica are perhaps more strongly marked by notions of a “*crisis for*” rather than a “*crisis in*” the family (Chant 2002b: 376). In other words, if families are “breaking down,” then this is not just because of the “new” ways that people are organizing their lives, but because social structures and values have been undermined by development and globalization. To what extent to these kinds of interpretations mirror those at the grassroots?

GRASSROOTS VIEWS ON FAMILY CHANGE IN GUANACASTE

As stated earlier in the paper, in examining popular views on family change, I draw from a 1999 survey of 176 low- and middle-income men and women from three broad age bands (see Table 1).¹² The survey consisted mainly of focus group discussions, organized as “*talleres*” or “workshops,” in which participants were invited to reflect on gender and the family in Guanacaste at the end of the twentieth century, and how things had changed (or not) in their own lifetimes (see Chant 1999b for fuller details). My assistant and I gave our informants substantially free rein to talk about issues that mattered to them, and, in the interests of “respondent autonomy,” attempted to keep our own

interventions to a minimum. Aside from “setting the ball rolling” up on key topics, such as what the concept of “family” summoned up for people, and if people felt that family life was changing, we tended only to intervene a) where we felt that assertions needed substantiation and/or corroboration (for example, where there seemed to be an over-idealization of the past), and b) to ensure that people who wanted to speak got a chance to do so. In line with this methodology, the present and following sections consist mainly of basic reportage using transcripts from individual interviews and group sessions. Most of the critical analysis of this material is left until the concluding part of the paper.

The Context of the Survey

The setting of the survey was the province of Guanacaste in the northwest of the country. This area is distinguished from other parts of Costa Rica on a number of counts, particularly in respect of its high levels of poverty and un- and underemployment. In 1998, for example, unemployment in Guanacaste was 7.2 percent and underemployment was 19.8 percent, compared with national levels of 5.6 percent and 13.1 percent respectively [Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Comercio (MEIC) 1998; Aguilar et al. 1998]. This is mainly due to the fact that until the 1990s, when international tourism began to take off along Costa Rica’s north Pacific coast, the province was reliant on a small number of agricultural activities (primarily cattle ranching, rice and sugar production), with limited or only seasonal demand for labor. This, coupled with the fact that earnings are considerably lower in Guanacaste than in other parts of the country (male wages are on average 13 percent less in Guanacaste than in San José for example—Arias 2000:21), has given rise to high levels of permanent migration¹³ as well as short-term outmigration, particularly on the part of low-income men. Moreover, the shrinking of agriculture’s role in the provincial economy in recent years has given rise to a situation where, in contrast to the rest of the country, rates of underemployment and open unemployment among men have exceeded those of women. In 2000, for example, male and female levels of unemployment in the “Chorotega” planning region (which comprises mainly of Guanacaste) were 5.9 percent and 5.4 percent respectively, and the figure for male underemployment was as high as 18.2 percent compared with 16.5 percent for women (INEC 2001:Cuadro 9).

Male underemployment and periodic outmigration have, in turn, been associated with considerable instability in household composition and livelihoods in the province (see Chant 1992,

2000; Moreno 1997:9). Long-standing tendencies for men to desert their spouses and children, and/or to engage in heavy drinking and multiple sexual relations, are widely attributed to the economic and physical hardships of migration combined with the psychological and emotional stresses on couples engendered by frequent and/or prolonged periods of separation. Formal marriage has traditionally been less common here than in other parts of Costa Rica, with only 30.9 percent of women with coresident partners being legally married in low-income settlements in Guanacaste in the 1980s, compared with 73.3 percent at a national level (Chant 1997:170). Similarly, whereas in Costa Rica as a whole in 1996, 52.8 percent of births occurred to married women, in Guanacaste this was only 34.7 percent [Dirección General de Estadísticas y Censos (DGEC) 1997:25]. According to the 2000 census, the proportion of female-headed households in the Chorotega Region was 23.4 percent as against a national average of 22.2 percent (INEC 2001:Cuadro 31). By the same token, links with extended family members, especially among women, have often helped to compensate for the weakness of conjugal unions and/or the precarious nature of male support. The fact that patterns of conjugal informality and extended family support networks seem to be an ongoing reality in Guanacaste, especially among the poor, conceivably constitute major reasons why the erosion of the “traditional” male-headed household model now occurring at a national level did not elicit undue interest or commentary in our group discussions.

People’s Perceptions of Family Change and Its Causes

Leading on from the above, discussions of family change across the groups as a whole were dominated by two main themes: first, the decline of “family values” such as “respect,” “morality,” “integrity,” “responsibility,” and “decency;” and second, the mounting difficulties of intergenerational communication and parental control over children. While people often found it hard to pinpoint precise reasons for these trends, four main sets of processes emerged as significant in their discourses.

Development and International Tourism in Guanacaste

Among older people, and especially those whose recollections dated prior to the 1980s when the bulk of Guanacasteco livelihoods were still in farming, a common reason given for the decline in “family values” was Guanacaste’s conversion to a “modern” economy reliant on “science,” external capital and international tourism. Consumerism, together with the influx of foreign visitors, residents

and entrepreneurs, widely deemed to have “loose morals” and “antisocial” habits on account of their dress, sexual practices, and use of drink and recreational drugs, were singled out as having seriously undermined “traditional” patterns of behavior. This arose not only from social interaction (especially among the young), but also from the pernicious effects of “demonstration.” As expressed by Doña Imelda, a 52-year-old retired primary school teacher from the village of 27 de Abril:

Lo que pienso es que nos gusta imitar, y en la zona de Villareal, que es la que yo conozco bastante, que está más afectada. Ellos andan a como comenzó a venir, sin que ofenda la palabra “gringos,” pero desde que comenzó a venir, la gente se ha influenciada, que comenzó a andar en shorts, o casi desnudos, presentarse en una oficina donde se debe tener cierto respeto a una institución, se meten en sandalias. En el tiempo de “los hippis,” andan con pelo largo. Todo el mundo dice que todo el mundo andan con pelo largo y es la única excusa que hacen, pero eso de que no nos han llevado en realidad a resolver los problemas económicos, no que nos haya servido. Que sí tienen trabajo por el momento, pero esto se está perdiendo un montón de valores que nuestra gente sencilla y humilde, que es la que llega ahí a trabajar, está adquiriendo por el hecho de vivir ahí. Ese contacto que tienen, es completamente otro mundo, y si hablamos de Flamingo todavía peor, porque eschucho que hay lugares donde se bañan desnudos y todas esas cosas. Para nuestra gente, que tenía un poquito de principios—nuestra gente se asombra. Hemos estado unas veces a la playa y se ve una pareja ahí, una sola maleta de arena, y nuestros pequeños! Y uno hace aspavientos porque uno no está acostumbrado a ver esas cosas. Si hablamos de lo moderno, pues así tendrá que ser, pero quién sabe que otras cosas peores tendremos que ver?

[What I think is that we like to copy, and it’s the area around Villareal, which I know best, which has been most affected. The people there go about—and while I don’t wish to offend by using the word “gringos”—since they started coming, people have gone around in shorts, or half-naked, and wearing sandals into offices where one should have a bit of respect. And in the era of “the hippy,” they have long hair. Everyone says that it’s because everyone has long hair these days and its the only excuse they give, but that hasn’t actually done anything to solve our economic problems. It hasn’t helped us at all. People may well have work at the

moment, but at the same time, there's a massive loss of values among our simple and humble folk who go there to work, that comes about from just living there. What they come into contact with is another world entirely, and if we speak of Flamingo [a deluxe beach resort a few kilometers from Villareal], it's even worse, because I hear that there are places where they swim in the nude and all that kind of thing. We have been to the beach sometimes and there's a couple there, making out in the sand, and there are our little ones! And we make a fuss because we're not used to seeing that type of thing. If we talk about the modern age, then that's how it has to be, but who knows what else we'll have to see?]

Some younger participants attributed the loss of values and decline in intrafamily communication not only to economic modernization, but also to the fact that parents set bad examples to their children. As commented by Luis Emilio, a 16-year-old schoolboy who formed part of a mixed group of low-income adolescents in the village of Bernabela:

Yo creo que eso se debe a que los tiempos cambian, y la sociedad se va corrompiendo cada día más ... así entonces, los valores como la comunicación entre los padres se van perdiendo. También se puede mencionar la infidelidad entre los padres, y eso provoca la desunión entre la pareja y en algunos casos provoca que el hijo tome el mundo de drogas y algo así.

[I think that it [the decline of the family] owes to changing times, and that society is getting more corrupt by the day ... this explains why values such as communication between parents is declining. It can also be said that infidelity between parents provokes breakdown in their relationships and in some cases pushes the child into the world of drugs or something else like that.]

Technology and Mass Media

Echoing public concerns discussed earlier, another set of factors identified as significant not only in the erosion of family values, but in the decline in intergenerational communication, was the increased influence of television and other forms of mass media such as the Internet. These were regarded by respondents as having exposed children and youth to “undesirable influences” such as violence, individualism, materialism, consumerism, sexual licentiousness and “global culture.”¹⁴ “*Telenovelas*” (TV soap operas), for example, were held responsible for setting bad examples of

“libertine behavior” and “offensive language.” Growing access to technology and mass media was deemed to have presented children with more stimuli than in the past that detracted from a formerly narrow range of activities and fixed reference points.¹⁵ These processes were noted not only by older age groups in the survey, but by young people as well, such as Andrey, a 16-year-old schoolboy from the Bernabela group:

Bueno yo creo que las familias se han ido rompiendo, o sea se han desintegrado. O sea, la gente de antes era más culta. Pero con los cambios de la tecnología, la televisión, la prostitución, la pornografía ... todo eso fue influyendo para que muchos hombres o mujeres ... ya o sea, quisieran experimentar en otros rumbos. Y se van perdiendo las familias.... Hay mucha gente que dice para qué voy a estar en mi casa si puedo estar ... no sé ... viendo una película o algo así? O sea otras alternativas que puede tomar el jóven no precisamente de familia, porque ven la familia como aburrido.

[Well, I think that families have been breaking down, that they have disintegrated. People in the past were more cultured. But with changes in technology, television, prostitution, pornography ... all this has made a lot of men and women ... want to experiment in other areas. And families are getting lost in the process.... There are many people who say why am I going to stay home if I can be ... I don't know ... watching a film or something? In other words, young people have other alternatives that haven't got much to do with the family, because they see the family as boring.]

Similar sentiments were expressed by young middle-class adults taking university degrees in psychology in Liberia, the provincial capital, with Fiorella (21 years) observing that she had hardly sat down to a family meal in ten years. In her household everyone had either a television or computer in their room, and usually retired there to eat alone. Another student, Angie (23 years) described technology as an “*arma de doble filo*” (“double-edged sword”): it might be good for economic progress, but it also tended to alienate people and to impede the need for human contact.

Perceptions of a widening technology-related chasm between parents and children seem to be greatest among low-income groups where many parents have not had more than primary schooling. Much as though parents might be proud of, and respect, their children's greater education and

technological capabilities, they also find the situation threatening. Today's adults not only feel ill equipped to teach their children in the way their own parents did, but unable to exert authority. This compounds a more general tendency, noted particularly by older respondents such as Don Bertirio, a 66-year-old casual farm laborer from Liberia, that the youth of today "*quieren mandar a sus padres*" ("want to order their parents around"). Notwithstanding that more knowledge on the part of children could contain seeds for greater democratization in family life, from the perspective of a number of adults it seems that a widening intergenerational "digital divide" has contributed to a situation whereby instead of children fearing their parents, parents are tending to fear their children (see also Chant 2002b; Moser and McIlwaine 2000a,b on Colombia and Guatemala).

Lack of Time and New Work Patterns

Leading on from this, a third major factor held responsible for problems of communication between parents and children was lack of time. This was not only a result of orientation to an ever-widening range of extra-domestic activities, but the increasingly hectic pace of life, economic pressure and the need for both parents to generate income. Don Efraín, a 59-year-old farm worker who formed part of a small male-only focus group in Santa Cruz commented that "*desarrollo*" ("development") in the province had brought a "*presión bárbara*" ("fierce pressure") into people's lives that had robbed them of the time they once devoted to their families. Moreover, older people often attributed the increased rarity of family members eating together to the fact that mothers were no longer a "constant presence" in the home. As stated by Sonia, a 46-year-old chemistry lecturer from Liberia:

Claro que sí ha variado! En el sentido de que ya cuesta un poco más esa unión de familia. Cuesta un poco más el sentarse a comer juntos, por diferencia de horas, porque ahora la mujer trabaja también, al igual que hombre.... Normalmente, en mi época, mi mamá siempre estaba metida en la casa. Era ama de casa. Había una persona fija, que llevaba como ese rol ... de hogar, casi constante.

[Of course it (family life) has changed! In the sense that it now takes a little more effort to maintain family unity. It takes a little more effort to sit down and eat together, because of differences in hours, because women work the same as men.... Normally, in my era, my

mother was always in the house. She was a housewife. There was a fixed person who took on this role ... in the home, almost always.]

As echoed by a fellow Liberiana, Doña María Cecilia, a 51-year-old landlady:

Hoy en día, exigen que la mujer tiene que trabajar, entonces el TV se convierte en la niñera de los hijos.

[Nowadays, it's necessary for women to work, so the television becomes the nanny of the children.]

Interestingly, women tended to emphasize that even if they did make an effort to organize family meals, it was harder to entice children to eat at home given their growing tastes for foreign and/or junk food (“*comida chatarra*”) such as chips and hamburgers. By the same token, many women felt guilty at the thought they might be neglecting children (see Dobles Oropeza 1998). Low-income mothers in particular consoled themselves with the fact that at least they only worked part-time or from home, or left their children in the hands of relatives. Middle-class children, on the other hand, were perceived as spending most of their time with domestic servants and nannies. Notwithstanding that better-off people have always had assistance with child care, from the perspective of the poor, middle-class lives had become so dominated by money that parents were substituting cash for time with children. While low-income respondents felt that this was a means by which parents assuaged their guilt, the process exacerbated the evils of modern consumerism, as well as contributing to a new generation of undisciplined youth. As observed by Don Carlos Luis, a 62-year-old farmer from the village of 27 de Abril:

Hay varios ejemplos que tenemos que los hijos de los educadores o las parejas que trabajan como profesionales, son los hijos más desordenados. Por qué? Porque en la unión de familia no están nunca los padres para saber que están haciendo. Se les puede dar lo económico y todo pero no es lo suficiente.

[There are many cases where the sons and daughters of teachers or professional couples are the most unruly. Why? Because the parents are never in the family home to see what they are doing. They can give them financial support and everything, but this isn't enough.]

While middle-class parents themselves tended to rationalize having to work harder in order to oblige their children's financial *needs* (rather than demands), whether for education, computer equipment, clothes and so on, they also recognized that this impinged on the amount of time they had available for children, and they were worried about it.

State Intervention in Family Relationships

The increased influence of the state in child protection (such as the abolition of corporal punishment and the extension of children's rights) was the fourth, and final factor, widely identified as having diminished parental control over children. The role played by organizations such as the National Child Protection Agency [*Patronato Nacional de la Infancia* (PANI)] in enforcing bans on the use of physical discipline at home and at school received particular attention. For many parents, especially fathers, curtailment of their freedoms to use physical force were perceived as having diluted their power to exert authority. Although this situation could potentially favor more egalitarian family relationships based on mutual respect and friendship rather than fear, men tended to emphasize the negative aspects, claiming instead an association with a loss of values and disturbing new social phenomena. Somewhat contradictorily perhaps, increased checks on male violence were often linked in respondent discourses with a rise in female prostitution. As noted by Don Benito, a 56-year-old casual farm laborer:

[S]e ha venido desarrollando la prostitución porque el padre de familia no tiene la autoridad que debería tener como antes. Por qué digo yo esto? Porque si un padre de familia castiga a un hijo y el vecino o cualquier otra persona lo ve, lo denuncia inmediatamente, y va a preso.

[(P)rostitution has been on the increase because the head of the family does not have the authority that he ought to, like before. Why do I say this? Because if a family head punishes a child, and a neighbor or other person sees it, they denounce him immediately and he ends up in prison.]

Hostilities to state intervention were also found in a national study on lifestyles and public opinion of nearly 1,300 urban households carried out in 1996 by a team of Costa Rican psychologists and the then Centre for Women and the Family. A total of 46 percent of the sample declared that the

state ought not to intervene in family problems, and another 42.6 percent stressed that it was men's role to exert authority within the family (Dobles Oropeza 1998:36).

It should also be noted that men fear PANI not only because it limits the scope for corporal correction, but also because it can force them to provide child support (through docking wages, blocking applications for exit visas, and so on). Coupled with more recent initiatives such as the *Law for Responsible Fatherhood*, it is unlikely that men's antipathy towards state "interference" will go away. Indeed, for some men in the Guanacaste survey, attempts by the state to step up protection for women in the home were regarded as decidedly overzealous, as revealed in the following section.

GRASSROOTS REACTIONS TO FAMILY CHANGE IN GUANACASTE

It is clear that many people in Guanacaste are uneasy about some of the changes they perceive to be occurring in family life in their own locality, and in the country at large. Even if a tendency to berate the present and romanticize the past may well repeat itself across time, and the problem of a "generation gap" is not unique to these cohorts, this does not diminish the fact that concerns about the loss of control over children and youth, the lack of time for parent-child communication, and declining family values, are deeply felt. While changes in these aspects of family life were almost universally viewed in a negative light, however, views on other aspects of change were more divided, particularly those relating to gender. Among older age groups in particular, changing gender divisions of labor, and the growing power of women within and beyond the family, were the subject of divergent opinion. For the most part, divided views on gender corresponded with the gender of the informants themselves.

Changing Patterns of Gender: The Views of Male Adults

Many men in our survey, particularly those who were middle aged or older, expressed disquiet about changing patterns of gender, and identified mounting rates of conflict between husbands and wives (whether legal or common-law) as having played a major role in weakening family cohesion. One of the main reasons given by male respondents for this state of affairs was that new legislation and social programs had increased women's rights in their homes and in wider society. Many felt that these interventions had gone "too far" and that women were "abusing" their

new privileges.¹⁶ As Edgar, a 46-year-old instructor in educational orientation from 27 de Abril, expressed it:

[E]l problema con la liberación femenina es que la mujer no se ha podido liberar y mal interpreta su papel de liberación. Piensa que la liberación es parársele al hombre y pegarle o qué sé yo.

[The problem with female liberation is that women have not been able to liberate themselves and misinterpret their freedom. They think that liberation is about challenging men, and hitting them, or whatever.]

Another middle-aged male respondent in the same (mixed) group declared that:

La igualdad de las leyes, la igualdad del hombre y la mujer han venido a tener un montón de problemas en la familia. Por qué? Porque cuando hay muchas parejas ahí en pleito, hasta que la mujer mata a su marido. Antes quién veía que una mujer le pegaba a su marido? Quién oía decir que un esposo mataba a su señora? Antes no sucedía eso.... Le pegaba el esposo a la señora. Sí, le pegaba, pero no, no ... no digamos ... a un extremo de que hubiera tanta agresión.... Diós guarda! Si un esposo toca a una señora hasta a la carcel puede ir a dar!

[Equality in the law, equality between men and women, has brought with it a whole host of problems for the family. Why? Because where you have couples in conflict, the woman can even kill her husband. Whoever used to see a woman hitting her husband in the past? Whoever heard of a husband killing his wife? This didn't happen before.... Husbands beat their wives. Sure, they beat them, but not ... shall we say ... to the point of such aggression.... God forbid! If a man (now) so much as touches his wife he can go to prison for it!]

The other major factor held responsible by men for women's declining submission was their growing labor-force participation. In line with national trends, women's employment opportunities have increased as services have become a more important part of the regional economy. Although women's share of the labor force in the Chorotega region, at 27.7 percent, is less than the countrywide average (see previous discussion), 63 percent of women workers have full-time regular employment, compared with only 53.3 percent of men. This represents a bigger differential than for Costa Rica as a

whole, where the figures are 70.9 percent versus 66.1 percent respectively (INEC 2001:Cuadro 9). The fact that open unemployment in the region is presently higher among men than women (see previous discussion) is also significant, especially given that as recently as 1994, the situation was the reverse, with 8.5 percent of women being unemployed compared with 7.2 percent of men (Chant 2000:210). On top of this, the gap between male and female average earnings is now negligible: women in the Chorotega region (excluding nonremunerated workers) earn 97.6 percent of the male average, compared with 82.5 percent nationally (INEC 2001:Cuadro 16). For many men these labor market trends have eroded their own sense of self-worth, given women too much power, and acted to undermine the “normal” order of family life (see also Salas 1998:66).¹⁷ As noted by Don Solón, the 47-year-old director of a village primary school:

Uno no sabe ni siquiera quién es él que manda.... Bueno, pero, sí, sí, sí, el jefe de la familia, el eje de la familia es el varón, ese es el jefe, pero lo que pasa es que hay varones que no juegan ese rol, que el jefe de la familia es la mujer verdad?

[One doesn't even know who's running the home.... Well, but, yes, yes, yes ... the head of the family, the axis of the family is the man, he is the head, but what is happening is that there are men who are not playing this role, and the head of the household is the woman, right?]

Rafael, a 45-year-old assistant prosecutor interviewed in Liberia, expressed similar sentiments:

Cuando el padre deja el rol de proveedor, o no puede proveer para satisfacer las necesidades de sus hijos, le cuesta que le respetan los hijos como figura de autoridad.

[When a father abandons his role of breadwinner, or when he cannot provide enough to fulfill his children's needs, it becomes difficult for him to be respected by his children as a figure of authority.]

Women's growing economic autonomy was also deemed to be associated with two other processes which fed into what men perceived to be a general trend towards “family breakdown.” More women were having children on their own was one process. As articulated by Albert, a 33-year-old statistics lecturer from Liberia:

Yo creo que la familia, como la concebimos ahora, va a desaparecer, porque ahora cerca de la mitad de los niños que nacen son de madres solteras. Entonces, como concibo la familia del futuro va a ser el matriarcado—las madres, los hijos, y el hombre, no sé haciendo que. En Costa Rica, la cantidad de madres solteras está aumentando, no disminuyendo. Ahora tengo varias primas que son madres solteras, y muchos chiquillos que conozco.... Y si seguimos así, la familia va a desaparecer.

[I think that the family, as we conceive of it at the moment, is going to disappear, because now around half of the children who are born are to single mothers. So, as I see it, the family of the future will be a matriarchy—women, children, and the man doing what, I do not know. In Costa Rica, the number of single mothers is increasing, not decreasing. At the moment I have several cousins who are single mothers, and many children I know.... If we go on like this, the family will disappear.]

A second reason why women's economic autonomy was felt to be undermining the "traditional" family, was that it had made women who were already in relationships more likely to break up with their spouses, especially where men found it difficult to get regular employment. As stated by Don José, a 60-year-old farmer from Santa Cruz:

Estoy de acuerdo en una parte, pero hay una división, tal como ahora, si la mujer no halla trabajo entonces se va de ama de casa. En cambio, si el hombre no encuentra trabajo tendría que irse de la casa porque no está aportando nada ... y ese es el problema grande porque hay mujeres que quieren sentirse bien, casarse bien, disfrutar su vida y el hombre se quedó ahí!

[I agree to some extent (with women working), but there is a division now, such that if the woman doesn't find work she can be a housewife. In contrast, if the man doesn't find work, he has to leave home because he's not contributing anything ... and this is the big problem, because there are women who like to have a good time, to marry well, to enjoy their lives, but men have been left behind!]

The perception that men were losing ground in the labor market as women's share rose was regarded as particularly threatening by low-income adult male respondents and bears out the findings from a more dedicated study I had carried out with eighty low-income men in 1997.¹⁸ Several

participants in this survey had talked about feeling less needed and appreciated by their wives and children, and having less say and authority in the home. Martín, a 30-year-old bricklayer, for example, had declared that: “La mujer que tiene su propia plata pierde el cariño para el esposo. Muchos matrimonios han fracasado por eso” [“A woman who has her own money loses affection for her husband. Many marriages have been ruined because of this.”] In turn, Luis, a 33-year-old waiter, stressed that when a man cannot provide for his wife and children, his self-image and his image in the eyes of others “ya no vale nada” [“isn’t worth anything”] (see Chant 2000:211).

While many men thus attributed “family breakdown” to changes in women’s situations and behavior, and lamented this trend as negative, in light of men’s historically tenuous attachments to spouses and children in the province, I would suggest that “family breakdown” *per se* was not their principal problem. Instead, as I have argued elsewhere, a more important factor as far as men are concerned is probably that decisions within and about their families are perceived to be increasingly out of their own hands as a result of growth in women’s employment, rights and legal protection. In short, the key issue at stake is men’s perceived loss of power in domestic units, not the dissolution of domestic units *per se* (see Chant 2000, 2002b; Dobles Oropeza 1998; McCallum 1999 on Brazil; Safa 1999 on the Dominican Republic).¹⁹

Changing Patterns of Gender: The Views of Female Adults

This reading of the situation would seem to be borne out by the views of adult women in the survey. While they themselves reflected on their increased civil and economic rights with pride and enthusiasm, they were only too aware that men were finding it difficult to adjust to the new scenario. As Marta, a 34-year-old social worker from 27 de Abril, stated:

Las leyes que protegen a la mujer hoy en día ... se le ha permitido a la mujer quererse superar y salir de ese círculo en que ella ha estado. Entonces, el hombre no le gusta que ellas se superen. Ha habido un gran choque, digamos, del hombre y la mujer como una lucha de poder, pienso yo, o sea, “yo mando aquí” y ya la mujer al quererse superar entonces él piensa que va a estar por debajo. Es como una lucha de poder dentro de la familia verdad? Que eso ha perdido los valores que la familia antes tenía entonces. Yo pienso no es que las mujeres estemos peor ahora que antes sino que la mujer ya tiene otra visión diferente. Se ha valorado

más. Ella ha medido realmente la capacidad que ella tiene hoy en día de llegar a ser hasta Presidente. Ustedes ven que a las mujeres antes no se les daba la oportunidad de llegar a un puesto político, a ser Diputada. Hoy en día a la mujer se le ha reconocido esa capacidad que ella tiene. Entonces, yo pienso que por ahí ha dado ese cambio.

[The laws that protect women in this day and age ... have permitted women to want to get ahead and escape from the trap they've been in. But men have not taken kindly to the fact that women get ahead. There's been a big clash, shall we say, between men and women, like a power struggle I think. Like "I'm in charge here," and because the woman wants to get ahead, the man thinks that he'll go under. It's like a power struggle within the family isn't it? It has caused a loss of family values that we had previously. But I think that it's not that we women are worse now than we were before, but that we have a different vision. Women value themselves more. It's dawned on them that they have the capacity nowadays to become President if they want. We know that women in the past were never given the chance to occupy a political position, to be a Deputy. But nowadays women have recognized their capacity. For this reason, the change has come about.]

As echoed by Ana Isabel, a 43-year-old primary school teacher, from the same group:

Las mujeres de antes eran sometidas por el hombre. Era lo que el hombre decía y se acabó, porque yo me acuerdo este. Mi abuelita nos decía este a mi mamá: "Mirá ... la mujer está en la casa, por qué tiene que andar bailando, por qué tiene que andar aquí, por qué tiene que andar allá?"... Suerteramente, o desgraciadamente, llegó la liberación de las mujeres y entonces cogimos alas, cogimos fuerzas, y ahora Usted ve muy poco que la mujer se deje pegar del hombre.

[Men in the past subordinated women. What men said went, and that was that. I remember this. My grandmother would say to my mother: "Look ... women should be in the home, so why go out dancing, or be going here and there?" Fortunately, or unfortunately, women's liberation came along, and we grew wings, we gained strength, and now it's very rare that you see a woman letting a man hit her.]

For many women, work is also viewed as a necessity, as evident in another interjection by Ana Isabel:

Vea, ahora las mujeres nos hemos dado el rol de que ... pucha! Si nosotras las mujeres nos quedamos ahí en la casa, vamos a seguir siendo cucarachas, y yo creo ... bueno al menos yo personal, yo digo yo no nací para ser cucaracha. Yo nací para volar. Porque vea, mi marido, dos años tenía yo de trabajar cuando él me dice, no, “Deja de trabajar porque tenés que estar en la casa.” Yo le digo: “Un momento papacito. Yo estuve cinco años en el colegio quemándome las pestañas para yo irme a quemarme los ojos en la cocina. Estás muy equivocado.” Y vean que si yo lo hubiera hecho me estuviera llevando San Quintín²⁰ ahorita, porque él se fue con otra y yo me hice cargo de mis hijos sola. Y si yo no hubiera tenido mi trabajo, hubiera tenido que irme para Los Laureles²¹ a la prostitución. Eso es lo que toca a las mujeres: irse a la prostitución para sacar adelante a sus hijos.

[Look, nowadays, women have been given the role of ... for heaven’s sake! If we women stay at home, we’re going to continue being underdogs, and I think—well personally at least—that I wasn’t born to be an underdog (literally, “cockroach”). I was born to fly. Look, I had two years of work behind me when my husband said: “Stop working, because you’ve got to be at home.” I said to him: “Just a minute little papa. I wasn’t five years in high school burning my eyelashes just so I could burn my eyes in the kitchen. You’re mistaken.” And, look, if I’d done what he said, it would have been a disaster now, because my husband left me for another woman and I was left with the children. And if I hadn’t had my work, I’d have had to go to The Laurels and become a prostitute. This is how it is for women—to go into prostitution in order to give their children a life.]

Unlike men, women did not feel that their widening vista of personal, civil and professional possibilities was a cause of “family breakdown.” While recognizing that there were more practical problems to address now that so many women were working outside the home, for example, they did not feel this had undermined the family in any fundamental way, since most women rationalized paid work as a means of providing a decent home for their children and helping them get ahead (see also García and de Oliveira 1997 on Mexico). Indeed, if anything, women saw the family as strengthened

by their increased opportunities in this domain, as well as through their enhanced entitlement to property following conjugal dissolution. The fact that women in the region have rarely been able to count on men as stable figures in their lives is extremely significant here. Women have often had to fend for their children without substantial male help. Accordingly, having greater scope to leave men who do not put much into family life is regarded positively rather than negatively. Moreover, despite men's claims that women nowadays are much more likely to leave them if they cannot bring money into the household, in fifteen years of my own research experience in this region, I have rarely witnessed women abandoning their relationships unless forced to do so on account of extreme behavior, such as their spouses giving up searching for work altogether, or being violent towards them, or engaging in repeated infidelities (see Chant 1997).

To all intents and purposes therefore, from women's point of view, changes in their own lives had not meant any greater likelihood of family breakdown. The continuity of family life from women's perspectives was also marked by their ongoing contact and interaction with extended networks of kin centered on their natal families (see earlier). Despite observations about people in general having less time to invest in family ties, links among blood relatives seem to be as strong, active and valued as ever. In particular, the use of kin for child minding—whether within or beyond the household—seems to be playing a vital role in facilitating the labor force participation of mothers (see Chant 1997).

Changing Patterns of Gender and Family Organization: The Views of Young People

As with adult women, some of the changes taking place in gender and family life were also welcomed by adolescents and young adults in the survey (see Table 1). While this applies more to the female members of these cohorts, an appreciable proportion of young men seemed to accept the idea that women should have their own jobs or careers, and that in an ideal world, childcare and housework would be a joint parental venture. When one male participant in a mixed group of low-income secondary school students aged between fifteen and twenty years in the village of Villareal joked that women really belonged in the home looking after children, he was cried down with retorts of "*machista, machista!*" by other male and well as female members. In turn, both male and female participants in a middle-class focus group drawn from psychology undergraduates at the University of

Costa Rica in Liberia expressed approval for a decline in familial authoritarianism. As articulated by René, a 19-year-old male member of this group:

Yo pienso que muchas de las causas que están alterando la familia podría ser el machismo porque se ha ... diversificado. O se puede decir que el concepto de lo que es una familia ... y muchas personas, no digo siempre los hombres porque hay mujeres que lo hacen, toman la posesión a esa familia. Entonces, es ahí donde viene naciendo la agresión. Empiezan a decir “bueno, yo me casé con esta mujer, es mía, entonces yo le puedo pegar y la puedo mantener debajo de la cocina.

[I think that among many of the things that are altering the family is that machismo has ... changed. Or one could say that the concept of what a family is ... and this doesn't only apply to men, because some women also do it, (namely) take charge of the family. And it's here where the aggression starts. They begin to say, “Well, I married this woman, she's mine, and so I can beat her, and I can keep her chained to the kitchen sink.”]

While young people envisaged that their own families, and those of the next generation, would probably continue to consist of a core of parents and children, there also appeared to be considerable openness about the form that household arrangements might take, even if the functions might remain more or less the same. As Cintia, a 20-year-old student from the Liberia psychology group, noted:

El concepto de la familia ha evolucionado considerablemente, y es por tal motivo que considero que, dentro de 20 años, conceptualmente hablando, la familia ya no será la misma. Se podría hablar incluso de un núcleo familiar constituido solo por hermanos, o simplemente individuos con una convivencia mutua para de esta manera, hacerle frente a una sociedad cada vez más dominada por los intereses económicos. Si bien el concepto tiende a cambiar, la funcionabilidad puede no verse afectada de manera considerable. La familia seguirá siendo el ente de socialización primario, por medio del cual los individuos obtendrán los conocimientos básicos para insertarse en un ambiente social específico.

[The concept of family has evolved substantially, and for that reason I think that, 20 years from now, conceptually speaking, the family won't be the same. One could even talk about a

family nucleus consisting only of siblings, or simply individuals who come together to cope with a society increasingly dominated by economic interests. Even if the concept is tending to change, the functions themselves are unlikely to alter dramatically. The family will continue being the primary agent of socialization, through which individuals will obtain the basic skills to insert themselves in a specific social environment.]

As noted by another member of this focus group, 20-year-old Sonia:

A mi me parece que este concepto de familia es una cuestión que cada una de las personas construye, alrededor de su propia vivencia dentro de una familia, cualquiera que sea, y que pueden existir tantas definiciones de familia como personas y características tenga, digamos.

[As far as I'm concerned, this concept of "family" is a something that each person constructs for him/herself, around their own experience within a family, whatever that might be. Let's say that there are likely to be as many definitions of family as there are persons and characteristics.]

Another dimension of this perspective was the idea that relationships born of affection rather than biology had more value for children. Some firsthand experience of being abandoned by fathers and/or growing up in stepfamilies was relevant here.²² As José, a 16-year-old member of the low-income focus group in Villareal reported:

Bueno, en el caso mío ... yo vivía con mi padastro y yo siempre me llevé muy bien con él, y desde los ocho años que mi mamá se casó con él, siempre me he llevado muy bien. Y más bien yo pienso a veces que yo le quiero más que a mi verdadero papá, porque él me dió el amor que nunca tuve de él.

[Well, in my case ... I lived with my stepfather and I always got along very well with him, and in the last eight years since my mother married him, I've always got along with him fine. In fact, at times I think I love him more than my real father, because he gave me the love that I never got from him (my father).]

Another 16-year-old male, Mauricio, in a mixed group of low-income adolescents in Bernabela, expressed the opinion that having a violent man around, even if he was the biological father, was in no one's interests:

Mejor que se vaya ... tan sólo que le pegue a mi mamá, hasta ahí ya!

[Better that he goes.... He just needs to hit my mother, and he's gone too far!]

Accompanying a general openness to diverse family forms, and recognizing the need for flexibility in a situation where conjugal relationships have been historically unstable, several young people also favored consensual unions (*uniones libres*) over marriage. Among low-income youth, many of whom had come from families where biological parents had not been formally married and/or had been involved with other partners, marriage was regarded as overly restrictive and potentially harmful to children insofar as poor relations between spouses who stayed together only because they *were* married could impact negatively on the young (Chant 1997:Chapter 8). An additional reason offered against marriage by this group was that divorce was expensive. Although in practice marriage is more common among the middle classes, and adults still tend to uphold this as a normative ideal, most youth from this sector profess that there is little difference between formal and informal partnerships, and are open to the notion of flexible, plural forms of family organization. Moreover, although these respondents agreed that some changes in family arrangements were unsettling, there was also broad agreement that the aftermath of this “transition phase” could be positive. As Adriana, a 21-year-old student from the Liberia psychology group, suggested:

Los cambios son buenos, siempre y cuando no caigamos en los extremos.... Creo que las transformaciones actuales serán para el buen funcionamiento posterior de la familia.

[Changes are good, as long as we don't fall into extremes.... I think that current transformations will actually benefit the family in the long term.]

As fellow student, 21-year-old Yadira, echoed:

Lo que yo veo es que aquí se ha tratado el concepto de crisis como muy negativo, y yo pienso que a mí me parece, que OK, hay transición, hay crisis que es necesaria para hacer cambios, pero que tal vez esa crisis no es que está empeorando la familia, no les está haciendo daño....

La familia era mejor tal vez, eso de que los hijos se rebelan y está empeorándose, pero hay otras en que mejoran la familia. Se está sacando, esa gente que fue, que ha sido por mucho tiempo agredida, y que ahora tiene la posibilidad de hablar.... Que tal vez no se va a liberar

completamente de la agresión, no vamos a tener la familia perfecta, pero que por lo menos quizás se mejore y a partir de esa crisis, que sería una crisis con una consecuencia positiva.

[As far as I see it here, the concept of crisis has been treated as something extremely negative, and as far as I can see, OK, there's a transition, there's a crisis that's necessary in order to effect change, but perhaps this crisis isn't making the family worse, or destroying it.... The family was better in the past maybe, and children rebelling nowadays are making things worse, but there are other things that are making the family better. It's coming out now, those people who were abused for a long time and who never had the possibility of speaking about it.... Perhaps we're never going to be completely liberated from aggression, or have a "perfect family," but perhaps things will get better as a result of this crisis. Maybe it will be a crisis with a positive outcome.]

In many respects therefore, there is evidence of optimism about various tendencies in family change among the younger generation (particularly on the part of women), that seems to imply not so much that "family breakdown" is on the cards, but "family breakthrough" or "betterment." The possibilities for renegotiating family life thrown up by recent transitions have offered scope for greater openness, more tolerance, more equality and democracy, and less abuse. As articulated by Karina, a 21-year-old psychology student from Liberia:

Siempre, siempre ha estado la violencia, y siempre han existido niveles de tolerancia y los niveles de desunión familiar, solamente que tal vez hay hoy una mayor apertura, porque todo el mundo habla del tema. Yo creo que una familia del siglo pasado no era más completa, ni más unida, ni mejor de lo que son ahora nuestras familias, simplemente que el contexto no dejaba apuntar ciertas cosas. Por ejemplo a una hija la casaban y la hija no tenía derecho decir con quién quería casarse, y ninguna hija podría revelarse, y la señora tampoco podría a denunciar el marido, porque le pegaba. Eso no le hacía una familia mejor. Tal vez estaban en un contexto diferente y ciertas cosas no eran valorizadas como "violencia intrafamiliar," ni "irrespeto," ni "atropello de los hijos," ni nada verdad? Tal vez ahora que haya una mayor apertura, y no digo que la situación ahora sea más crítica, a nivel de violencia, a nivel de problemas sociales también, verdad? Pero tampoco siento que la familia haya sido así como

siempre perfecta y que ahora es cuando el caos, y ahora es que ... bueno y que ahora pongámonos a discutir de familia porque la familia es culpable de todo.

[There's always, always been violence, and there's always been degrees of tolerance and degrees of family disunity it's only that perhaps nowadays there's more openness, because everyone is talking about the subject. I don't think that the family of the past century was more complete, or more united, nor better than our families today, it's just that you couldn't raise certain issues then. For example, they married off their daughters, and the daughters had no right to say whom they'd marry, and no daughter could reveal anything, and she couldn't denounce her husband because he was beating her. This didn't make the family better. Perhaps they were in a different context, and certain things weren't interpreted as "family violence," or "disrespect," or "child abuse," or whatever right? Perhaps now, there's more openness, even if the situation now is no more critical, in respect of violence, of social problems and so on, right? But neither do I feel that the family was always perfect, and that only now are we in chaos ... yet we go on about how the family is to blame for everything.]

Despite the generally positive views described above, it is important to remember that on account of various of the processes described earlier (development, financial pressure, the explosion of information technology and media and so on), one big concern among young people was the idea that there was increasingly less time to invest in domestic life and family relationships. As one boy in the mixed group of low-income adolescents in Villareal commented rather poignantly, the family of the future "va a faltar más comunicación, porque ambos padres van a trabajar tal vez en trabajos diferentes, donde salen cansados y tal vez los hijos salen con la empleada" ["the family of the future will lack communication, because both parents will work, and perhaps in different jobs, where they will come out exhausted, and perhaps the children will go out with the maid."]

DISCUSSION

Having presented views on various aspects of family change among different groups in Guanacaste, it becomes clear that it is difficult to establish whether families in the province are "on the verge of breakdown" in any generalized sense. While there are obviously some worries about family change which are common to all groups in the survey population (particularly the growing

difficulties of intergenerational communication and the perceived loss of positive “family values”), there are also lines of divergence, with much contingent on the age and gender of respondents, and their different experiences and interests. For older men, for example, a strong sense of “breakdown” prevails, largely on account of changes in gender that are making men’s own roles in families less assured than in the past. Yet among women and younger age groups (especially female members), many contemporary transitions—towards greater flexibility, equality, openness, permissiveness and sharing—are seen as embodying prospects not only for enabling continuity in family life, but enriching it too. These observations highlight the profoundly subjective nature of the concept of “family breakdown,” and underscore the need to use it selectively, i.e. to make clear who is concerned about it and what their particular concerns are.

While attention to subjectivities is critical in the interpretation of family change, two other factors emerging from this and previous work I have done in Guanacaste suggest that family life is, actually, and prospectively, in a state of relative health. One is that even if couples are more likely to split up now than in the past, the extended family remains strong, and is a vital support mechanism not only for women, but also for men, who following conjugal dissolution often return to their natal families (see Chant 2000). Second, the will seems to be there to retain “the family,” broadly defined. This is evidenced in the many positive (if idealized) images of family life that were offered by respondents. Most maintained that, in principle, some form of “family” (whether grounded in kinship or friendship), was an essential part of people’s development and well being, and should ideally offer a secure, supportive and loving base for interacting with wider society.

If these positive visions of family life are to translate into lived experiences in the future, then it is important for policymakers to do what they can to assist the process, preferably by devising interventions based on in-depth surveys and consultative exercises with people at the grassroots. On the basis of the present project it would appear that salient needs include help with managing the dual responsibilities of parenting and paid work, and improving communication between adults and youth. Although amenities for child and after-school care already exist, along with various sources of family guidance such as the state-run “*Escuelas de Padres*” (“Parents’ Schools”) and the Catholic Church’s *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano*, many participants in the survey expressed a desire to receive more

publicly provided help in these domains, even if they could not necessarily elaborate on what this might entail.

Among various possibilities that might be considered here, a critical starting point is for public bodies to explore ways to maximize the use of parental resources without overloading any one group of individuals. As far as I can see, a good deal of the responsibility for spending time with children tends to devolve upon women, and not enough interest has been paid to examining how fathers, whether resident in the household or not, could be encouraged to take on a more equal share of this vital function. Although a nationwide survey on masculinity and “responsible fatherhood” was carried out by the then Centre for Women and the Family in 1996 (see CMF 1996; Gomáriz 1997), and men are nominally included in the current programs “Young Love” and “Building Opportunities” (Primera Dama de la República 2001), both the latter remain overwhelmingly oriented to women, bearing out a more general pattern in Latin America for women to be the primary constituency in both family policies and gender policies (see CEPAL 2001:V20). Moreover, the recent *Law for Responsible Paternity* in Costa Rica may get men thinking about preventing pregnancy, but not actually lead to their greater commitment to fathering, or a broadening of the role to encompass care and emotional attention alongside financial provision.²³ Strategies to do this might include those suggested by UNICEF such as promoting “culturally acceptable and positive images of men and women that can potentially demonstrate a balance of roles and responsibilities” (UNICEF 1997:33). If more could be done in this regard, then it might help increase the overall time for contact between children and parents. Additional benefits could include relaxing pressures on mothers, and reducing gender-typed socialization (*Ibid.*:27). Moving ahead with initiatives to redefine men’s roles within a renegotiated family may also help to allay men’s current fears about being marginalized from family life, and thereby diminish male alienation and hostility to current transitions in women’s positions.²⁴ Ideally, emphasis should be also be given to sensitizing young men and women about the virtues of more equitable undertaking of parental obligations such that they start out by coparenting on this basis.

Recognizing the importance of facilitating better intra-, as well as intergenerational relationships though making parenting more male inclusive does not mean that reconciling the “work-

life” balance can or should be resolved through this route alone, especially given increasing economic pressures on the majority of households in Costa Rica. While middle-class groups can solve the dilemma to some extent by hiring nannies and domestic helpers, for low-income groups, an important mechanism would be to increase publicly sponsored facilities for day care and after-school activities, and preferably in a way that these become seen as part of an extended family life, rather than separate from it. To some extent, this could be done by expanding Costa Rica’s existing “community-home” model whereby children are cared for by known individuals such as neighbors and relatives in their local environments.²⁵ Indeed, given the fact that many children already spend time with relatives or with nonbiological kin such as stepparents, and recognizing that the quality of relationships they have with others often counts more than *who* those others actually are in kinship terms, then it is possibly a small step to promoting the notion that cultivating intimacy and trust with caring “outsiders” is an important adjunct to parental contact. An expanded range of functions might also be taken on under the auspices of paid “community care,” such as shopping or preparing meals for parents who are particularly time deficient. In emphasizing that it is not just the *quantity* of time parents, or other caregivers, spend with children, but *quality* of time, more attention might also be given to training adults in new technology. This could help not only to diminish the part perceived to be played by the “digital divide” in reducing intergenerational communication, but also have the additional benefit of diversifying employment possibilities for older age groups.

Employers too could play a part in helping their employees to manage their home and working lives better by recognizing the value that workers who have families bring to the workplace. As Diane Elson (1999:612) has argued, employers tend to conceive of the unpaid caring of their employees as “costs” rather than as “benefits,” when the latter can accrue from the fact that workers bring skills to the workplace that derive from their roles as parents and as household managers. In short: “[T]he reproductive economy produces benefits for the productive economy which are externalities, not reflected in market prices or wages.” One way to reduce the “costs” to employers, of maternity or paternity leave and so on, might also be to finance these out of general taxation rather than on a firm-by-firm basis (*Ibid.*:622).

Last but not least, many of the previous suggestions for policy would arguably work better if conceptualizations of the family were to embrace a more inclusive range of options. On one hand, Costa Rica's *de facto* support to "alternative households" constitutes an important step towards working with the diversity that currently exists in the country. By the same token, this also comes across as a pragmatic response to alleviating poverty rather than a positive endorsement of family plurality, especially given that both the current and previous administrations have expressly identified that they have no wish to provide "perverse incentives" for the formation of female-headed households. As Vega (1987, cited in Moreno 1994:4) observes, although there is lip service in Costa Rica to family diversity, the daily-used term "family" conjures up an impression of a uniform institution comprising of a married, monogamous couple with distinctive gendered duties (see Güendel and González 1998:19-20) [my translation].²⁶ Yet as echoed by CEPAL (2001:V11) for Latin America more generally, a major hiatus exists between traditional discourses and new practices of family life. As long as adherence to outmoded ideas remains, then this will conceivably act to depress the legitimacy of other types of household arrangement and present barriers to more generalized strategies to help people manage the increasingly complex nature of their domestic and working lives.

More explicit acknowledgement should, therefore, be given to the arguments advanced by feminist groups in Costa Rica that patriarchal household arrangements can increase rather than diminish the vulnerability of women and children [see Grupo Agenda Política de Mujeres Costarricenses (GAPMC) 1997; Chant 1997:Chapter 8 for a more general discussion]. This should be accompanied by a fuller realization that families are not synonymous with households, and that where family ties remain strong, these can help to overcome the fragility of individual household units, as evidenced by the continuity of extended family support networks in Guanacaste. In addition, the role of *de facto* kin such as step-relations, friends and neighbors should be recognized. In short, an appreciation of, and concern for, the quality of intimate social relationships needs to override any atavistic attachment to a normative family form. If the Costa Rican state wishes to consolidate its record on securing and upholding the rights and welfare of children, then it needs to think about

finding ways to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships, which would arguably best be achieved by reducing *inequality* between families, and inequality between people more generally.

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NOTES

1. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted during the summer of 1999 under the auspices of a project entitled “Youth, Gender and Family Crisis in Costa Rica.” The research was funded by the Nuffield Foundation (Award no. SGS/LB/0223) to which thanks are duly registered. I am also indebted to Wagner Moreno, Faculty of Social Psychology at the University of Costa Rica in Guanacaste for his valuable collaboration in interviewing and analysis, and to the members of our field team—Sonia Alvarado, Emma Hernández, Juan José Morales and Lisette Ondoy—for their painstaking work on transcription. This paper also utilizes some survey work conducted for two other projects: “Institutional Perspectives on Family Change in Costa Rica,” carried out during Easter 1999, and funded by the Central Research Fund and London School of Economics, and “Men, Households and Poverty in Costa Rica” carried out in the summer of 1997, co-funded by the Nuffield Foundation (Award no: SOC/100 [1554]), and ESRC (Award no. R000222205).
2. The historian Eugenia Rodríguez (1999) claims that the nuclear household only became a powerful normative concept with the rise of liberalism in Costa Rica in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although Catholic marriage was first introduced in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Valle Central (see also Budowski 2000a:61; Rodríguez 2000, forthcoming). As it is, diversity in family forms seems to have been common throughout history not only in Costa Rica (see Gudmundson 1986), but in other parts of Central and South America as well (see Cicerchia 1997; Dore 1997; Kuznesof 1980).
3. Out-of-wedlock births are mainly concentrated among younger age groups, with 74.8 percent of the total in 1996 occurring to women who were 29 years or younger (DGEC 1997:25). This, coupled with other evidence given in the paper, supports the observation of a progressive weakening of marriage-based parenting over time.
4. While female-headed households were only 20.1 percent of poor households in 1986, they represented 27 percent by 1995 (Trejos and Montiel 1999:10). As of 2000, they were 30 percent of households in poverty (INEC 2001:Cuadro 31).

5. In some respects, the family support programs of the 1990s were a reinvention under different social and economic conditions of social democratic reforms implemented during the 1970s. The latter included the establishment of the Social Assistance Institute [*Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social* (IMAS)] in 1970 under the presidency of José Figueres Ferrer, which had the remit of combating poverty and extending health care to all (see Lara, Barry, and Simonson 1995:61). With the introduction of new taxes on sales and wages, finance was also made available for a self-sustaining Fund for Family Allowances and Social Development [*Fondo de Desarrollo Social y Asignaciones Familiares* (FODASEF)]. Related initiatives during the 1970s included the creation of the CEN-CENAI [*Centros de Nutrición-Centros de Atención Infantil* (Centers for Nutrition-Centers for Child Attention)].
6. María Leiton from the coordinating body, IMAS, kindly provided this information.
7. These figures derive from an opinion poll conducted by the firm Borge y Asociados in 1999 to ascertain levels of satisfaction with the present government, and prospective voting preferences for the 2002 election. Results published in the national newspaper *Al Día* on 2 September 1999, revealed that 25 percent of respondents rated the cost of living as Costa Rica's major contemporary problem; 19 percent, the country's economic situation; 16.4 percent delinquency; 10.2 percent corruption, 7.2 percent unemployment, 6.8 percent drugs, 6.6 percent poverty, and 2.4 percent government.
8. The Latin American *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* (MFC), which originated in Argentina in 1948, started in Costa Rica with a small group in 1958 and became a full-fledged regional movement in the 1960s (Rodríguez Chaves, 1999). The objectives of the movement are to promote "human and Christian values in the family and in the community," and to provide assistance to families (MFC 1997). These services include a range of programs designed to strengthen marriage and to help people lead "Christian family lives," such as prenuptial courses, support groups, matrimonial retreats, "family integration" weeks, and a marriage advisory service (see Napolitano 1998 for a discussion of the MFC in Mexico).
9. In the context of research on lone motherhood in Costa Rica and the rise in births unacknowledged by fathers, Budowski (2000b) observes that the Catholic Church has been

more outspoken about these trends than any other single group in the country, regarding them as the outcome of “sinful” behavior, and as highly threatening to the moral and social order. Indeed, the Church has recently withdrawn its support for “Young Love,” the government program promoting sexual awareness and the prevention of adolescent pregnancy (see earlier), because the educational materials were deemed to be too explicit (*La Nación*, 24 December 2000, p. 5A).

10. Protestant churches in the evangelical tradition have been increasing in numbers and followers in Costa Rica in recent years, with Guanacaste province alone being host to nine denominations and several individual churches, including the Emmanuel Bible Church, Assembly of God, Church of God and the World Missionary Movement. Attempts to safeguard family cohesion and welfare on the part of these sects have included income-generating activities for women, and efforts to reduce alcoholism among men (Interview with José Blas Díaz Castillo, Emmanuel Bible Church, Liberia, 14 September 1999).
11. The University of Costa Rica, the Pan American Health Organization, the Ministry of Health and the Costa Rican Social Security Institute carried out this study, “*Depresión en Jóvenes*.” It was reviewed on publication in *La Nación*, 22 September 1999, p. 8a.
12. See note 1.
13. According to the 2000 census, a total of 28.23 percent of persons born in Guanacaste were resident in other provinces of Costa Rica in this year, which is higher than any other of its seven provinces except Heredia (INEC 2001:12, Cuadro 10).
14. Klak (1999:111) notes for Middle America in general that media flows from the North have increased since the onset of neoliberal economic restructuring.
15. A similar argument is made a textbook in common use in Costa Rican primary and secondary schools: *Orientación Educativa* (Educational Orientation). In noting that family structure in the past was more stable, often linked to a particular geographical location in which all the elements existed for subsistence, the author, Pereira García (1998:45), writes that the family, the school, community and church served as a mark of reference and gave security to members. Nowadays, however, Pereira García argues that conditions of life are changing

constantly, especially in urban environments where people face a bewildering array of socioeconomic interactions, market forces, environmental pollution, personal insecurity and an accelerated pace of life which threatens physical and mental well being (*Ibid.*; see also UNICEF 1997:23) [*my translation*].

16. In the nationwide study carried out by the Psychology Institute of the University of Costa Rica cited in the penultimate section, 54.1 percent of the sample felt there was equality of opportunity between men and women in Costa Rica, with this view being held much more strongly by men than women (Dobles Oropeza 1998:36).
17. This is also noted for Peru by Fuller (2000) although she argues that: “among popular sector men, this crisis affects their self-esteem and may lead them to have doubts concerning their capacity to fulfill expectations as men, but does not lead them to question the hegemonic definition of masculinity as this is one of the few ways for them to accumulate social prestige” (*Ibid.*:109).
18. See note 1.
19. In relation to her research on Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, McCallum (1999:275) notes that: “In local talk, about sexual morés and parenting, the dominant theme is the ‘liberal’ and ‘decadent’ character of the modern age. Modernity is equated with a loss of control over female sexuality and reproduction.” McCallum further argues that discussion about “women’s loss of restraint and respectability functions as a brake upon pressure for change” (*Ibid.*).
20. The reference to San Quintín (San Quentin) symbolizes “disaster,” and probably derives from a prison with a particularly notorious reputation by this name in the United States (personal communication, Eugenia Rodríguez).
21. “Los Laureles” (“The Laurels”) is an old and well-known brothel about a mile out of the town of Santa Cruz, which is the canton to which the village of 27 de Abril belongs.
22. See CEPAL (2001) and Chant (2002a) for discussion of the growth of “blended” or “reconstituted” households in Costa Rica and elsewhere in Latin America.
23. The *Law for Responsible Paternity* passed in 2001 requires men who do not voluntarily register themselves as fathers to undergo a compulsory DNA test at the Social Security

- Institute. If the result is positive, they not only have to pay alimony and child support, but are also liable to contribute to the costs of the pregnancy and birth, and to pay their children's food bills for the first twelve months of life (see INAMU 2001).
24. As noted by Salas (1998:66) in the context of a research project on masculinity and domestic violence with 200 men, the fact that so many men have been ousted from their position as breadwinners by “criminal programs of economic and structural adjustment,” is a major factor in perpetuating male displacement and the consequences that this entails, such as domestic violence [*my translation*].
 25. The “Community Home” (“*Hogares Comunitarios*”) scheme dates back to the presidency of Rafael Calderón (1990–1994), but only took off in a major way during the regime of President José María Figueres (1994–1998). Administered by the Social Welfare Institute [*Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social* (IMAS)], and concentrated primarily in low-income settlements, women running “community homes” are given training in childcare and paid a small state subvention for looking after other people's children in the neighborhood. Individuals using this service pay what they can as a token gesture and lone mothers are technically given priority for places (see Sancho Montero 1995).
 26. This is borne out by a variety of fairly recent surveys and opinion polls. For example, a survey carried out by the Centre for Women and the Family in 1997 revealed that 73 percent of men and 75 percent of women felt that men should provide for the household, and 75.4 percent and 78.2 percent of men and women respectively stressed that women's main responsibilities should be home and family (see PEN 1998:44). This echoes a poll conducted earlier in the 1990s that indicated the marriage-based nuclear family, comprising male breadwinner and female homemaker was favored by three out of four people in the country as most desirable arrangement for raising children (Fernández 1992; Budowski 2000a; Muñoz 1997).

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Table 1.
Interview Sample by Age, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status

	Parents/adults		Adolescents/ young adults		Children/young adolescents	
	(>25 years)		(14–24 years)		(10–13 years)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Middle-income	8	20	8	38	4	7
Low-income	14	21	20	15	6	15
TOTAL	22	41	28	53	10	22