

Research on the family in Argentina
Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina
Summary

Introduction

The family is considered by social sciences as an intermediary between each person and society, and as such it can be considered as a group and as an institution.

As a group, it is ideally expected that the family shall contribute to affirm the identity of each person and constitute an “us”; and as an institution it shall focus on the socialization and of each member to act in society. However, within the contemporary context, there are evidences of features that lead to heterogeneous and complex situations that seem to imply a “deinstitutionalization” process, which in Salustiano del Campo’s words constitutes the transformation from “public institution” to “private institution”. In the latter, the socially pre-configured rules are subject to new situations and become less homogenous and less foreseeable.

Therefore and in reference to the research on “The family as a resource for society” the aim was to get to know the following issues:

- a) The main characteristics of the family structure in urban areas of Argentina.
- b) The major features of the head of household: sex, age, education, socio-economic level, types of households and religious profile.
- c) The opinions on marriage and family: their value and the education of children.

d) The characteristics of the family relationships as regards mutual help, reliance, help to neighbours and transmission of human and ethical values.

e) The cognitive and emotional resources of families.

Methodological guidelines:

A specific section was prepared and included in the 2013 Argentine Social Debt Survey. The UCA conducts this Survey annually among urban agglomerations of more than 80,000 inhabitants. There were selected and surveyed 5,689 households according to a probabilistic sample design with a systematic selection of dwellings, households and adult population.

The sample includes three types of urban agglomerations:

- Great Buenos Aires.
- Great urban agglomerations.
- Rest of urban areas.

Main results

I) The couple:

The different types of households show diverse realities as regards couples.

- Single person, single household (14%)
- Single parent with children, one-parent household (26%)
- Couple without children (15%)
- Couple with children (45%)

The different types of households show a variety in the individuals' civil status: in single households, single persons (49%) prevail; in one-parent households there are mainly singles (37%) and separated

persons/divorcees (35%), while in households of couples without children, there is a predominance of couples married in Church or in a civil ceremony (40%) and consented domestic unions (31%); and in households of couples with children those married in Church or in a civil ceremony (40%) and consented domestic unions (35%) prevail.

- Those married in civil ceremony and in the Church prevail in households of couples with and without children, and who are middle-aged (35-59 years old) and of an older age (more than 60 years old).
- The above mentioned contrast with younger individuals (18-34 years old) who are mainly single or live in consented domestic unions.

The statements referring to couples as “*The marriage relationship seeks growth in mutual love*” and “*A man and a woman are required for there to be a marriage*” present similar percentages in the *very in agreement* answer which totals about 40%. The greatest proportions correspond to older people, those who have a partner (regardless of whether they are married or not) and those with a religious commitment. The first statement groups a larger percentage of those with a lower economic level; and the second statement gathers mostly those with a lower level of education.

As regards emotional aspects, households made up of couples with or without children present the greatest feelings of happiness.

II) Child-parent relationships:

The greatest agreement on the statements on child-parent relationships corresponds to the following statements:

- “*It is inherent in the marriage relationship to have children and educate them*” (43%)

- *“The education of children is mainly the responsibility of their parents” (58%)*

The largest number corresponds to those of an older age, with a partner and religious commitment. The first statement groups a high percentage of those with a lower level of education while the second statement gathers a larger amount of those with a lower economic level.

As regards cognitive resources, households with children are more focused on defining objectives for their personal welfare that is to say, to run personal projects.

When analyzing a third and fourth statements considering family relationships such as *“I consider myself capable of helping my children, grandchildren and/or nieces and nephews to face difficulties” (Always, 67%)* and *“My family relies on the help of grandparents (Always 41%)*, it is clearly observed that in both statements the largest percentage is made up of those with a very low economic level, those who have a partner and religious commitment.

III) Family social capital and associative networks

The analysis of two statements with a different approach in which the public aspects oppose to the private ones –*“The family is an institution with a great public value”* and *“The family is just a matter of private decisions”*– shows that the largest proportion corresponds to the former one (very in agreement 48% vs. 38%). In both cases, older people as well as those with a greater religious commitment show the highest proportions.

The relevant difference relates to the economic level, as the first statement (family and public value) concentrates a larger percentage of those in a very low economic level, while the other statement

(family and private decisions) gathers a greater percentage of people from a higher economic level.

The value of family is particularly evident when analyzing the following statements which group a significant higher number of “Always” answers:

“I generally rely on the help of my family” (67%)

“In case of urgent need I could rely on my family” (71%)

“My family has transmitted human and ethical values to me” (76%)

These statements are mainly supported by older people, people with a higher level of education, those with a lower economic level, people who have a partner and individuals with religious commitment. No differences as regards sex are observed.

With respect to the statement *“My family is concerned about helping neighbours” (41%)*, the percentage is clearly lower than the above mentioned ones, which implies that although family ties are strong, community links are of a lesser intensity.

In general, the largest percentages correspond to three big issues: reliance on the family, transmission of values and intergenerational solidarity, which are associated to older age, married couples or consented domestic unions, higher education level, religious commitment and lower economic status.

This configuration constitutes a complex and essential common cultural substratum for the development of personal, social and community capacities that may institutionally strengthen the family.