

Families and well-being in democratic societies

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Introduction

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, we are seeing some big changes in family structures: in addition to families where the children belong to both members of a first-time marriage, there are an increasing number of other family situations, particularly families led by single parents or cohabiting couples, as well as, albeit in smaller numbers, families led by people who have had two or more marriages or cohabiting couples, among other possible situations.

These changes to family structures have led to a big debate based on two fundamental questions: firstly, do these different *family* structures provide, in general terms, a similar level of *well-being* for both children and adults? Or, alternatively, are some of them more likely to lead to social problems and issues? These are questions of great significance to the daily life of most of the population, which is why we are calling this discussion *the cultural debate of the twenty-first century*. In other words, *the cultural debate, par excellence*.

How can we participate in this debate in a relevant and well-founded way? How can we take part in it without projecting our own personal experience? How can we avoid ideological prejudices derived from political and philosophical ideas which are not based on objective and representative information?

In order to avoid these problems and participate in the cultural debate *par excellence*, we propose following a structured system based on the following criteria:

- We will analyze and compare information from 13 democratic countries: five from Latin America (Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Chile); Canada and the United States; four European countries (Spain, Great Britain, Norway and the Netherlands); one from Asia (Japan); and one from Oceania (Australia).
- The information must be based exclusively on representative surveys (of 800 cases or more) with national or multi-regional coverage, or on census-based information from 1995 and later. We believe that the year 1995 is a good starting point, as it includes what José Ortega y Gasset called *generation*: in other words, the period during which people have shared, at a minimum, primary, secondary and upper-secondary education.
- These studies must have been published in academic journals or in documents prepared by the official information agencies of the countries indicated.

We identified 351 publications which complied with these criteria:



Table 1
Number of publications by country

<i>Country</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>%</i>
Australia	30	8.5
Brazil	5	1.4
Canada	59	16.8
Chile	5	1.4
Colombia	3	.9
Spain	16	4.6
United States	113	32.2
Great Britain*	37	10.5
The Netherlands	39	11.1
Japan	9	2.6
Mexico	6	1.7
Norway	26	7.4
Peru	3	.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>351</i>	<i>100.0</i>

*The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

We will present the information contained in these publications in two parts. Firstly, we will give some examples of important research projects relating to domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse against children, juvenile delinquency, school failure and drug abuse. In the second part, we will carry out an analysis of all the information contained in these 351 publications.

The method of analysis will be the following: in the case of children or minors, we will compare the well-being indicators of those who live with their biological parents compared with those who live in other family situations. In the case of the adult population, we will analyze married people and compare their well-being indicators with those of adults in other types of relationship: for example, cohabiting couples, and people who are either divorced, separated, or single.

It is important to indicate that we have taken into consideration all these studies independently of their conclusions in terms of well-being in favor or against any type of family arrangement, which means that the research is completely impartial.

Part 1. Examples of important research

- **Violence in couples**

One of the main concerns of many governments and private and civil society organizations is violence against women perpetrated by men. A high percentage of woman are affected by this, and it has serious consequences both for their physical as well as emotional and moral well-being. So, what is the relationship between the different types of family and violence against women? Or, more specifically, taking into account that marriage and cohabitation are the two most common family situations in democratic societies, what relationship do these situations have with violence against women carried out by men?

In Mexico, there is an important survey on this topic: the National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships of 2006 (ENDIREH-2006), which includes a national sample of 83,159 women of 15 years and over. The fieldwork was carried out by INEGI, the National Institute for Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*).

The results show that in the 12 months prior to the survey, 7.9% of women in either civil or religious marriages suffered from domestic violence; a very serious situation. However, the figures rose significantly for women in cohabiting relationships, with 14.5% of them stating that they had been physically abused by their partner in the previous year.

In all societies where this topic has been analyzed, it can be observed that women in cohabiting relationships have a higher risk of being abused by their male partner than married women.

It goes without saying that this information does not, in any way, mean that married women do not have any problems, even serious problems, in their relationships. However, the studies do show that the frequency of these problems, as well as the levels of violence and insecurity, increase significantly in cohabiting couples.

There are many other studies which demonstrate the problem of violence in couples, as well as in the lives of children and young people, in different types of family. In total, without distinguishing between the two types of groups, 99 publications (from 1995 and later) were identified, which relate to domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse against children, juvenile delinquency, and suicide and homicide, amongst others.

Table 2 shows these publications, according to the country analyzed:

Table 2 Academic and official publications from 13 countries which deal with matters of domestic violence and a lack of physical security			
<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of publications</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of publications</i>
Australia	5	Great Britain*	8
Brazil	0	The Netherlands	8
Canada	28	Japan	0
Chile	3	Mexico	3
Colombia	2	Norway	3
Spain	2	Peru	3
United States	34	<i>Total</i>	<i>99</i>



*The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

- **Sexual abuse against children and adolescents**

Together with violence in couples, we also find in democratic societies a sector of children and adolescents who face situations of extreme violence, caused, for example, by physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

The United States of America has carried out what is probably the biggest study in the world on this topic: the Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4). This study was directed by Andrea J. Sedlak and is based on 16,875 documented cases of children who had suffered some form of abuse.

In the specific case of sexual abuse against minors, NIS-4 estimates that during the year of the study (second semester of 2005 and first semester of 2006), 135,341 cases were registered in the whole country: 36% of these perpetrated by the biological parents. These are very serious figures. But what was the distribution of the cases according to the type of family?

- In families with another type of married parents (stepfather, stepmother or adoptive parents), the proportion of sexual abuse was 8.4 times higher than in the case of children and adolescents who live in families with their biological (married) parents.
- In families with cohabiting parents, 4.6 times higher.
- In families with one biological or legal parent cohabiting with another person, 19.7 times higher. This is the most serious case of all.
- In single-parent families, 4.7 times higher. And in families where children lived with people other than their parents, 8 times higher.

It is important to highlight the fact that the majority of children and adolescents in the United States—as well as in Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru and the other countries where research was carried out—, do not suffer physical or sexual abuse: the number of cases in terms of percentage is very low (around 1%). However, we are talking about people here, and, therefore, the information clearly shows that the risk increases significantly when children and minors do not live with both biological parents.

The concept of risk is a key element in the design of most public policy in democratic societies. In effect, the concept of *risk* has led to work being carried out in order to prevent problems such as cancer and lung disease caused by smoking, for example, or automobile accidents due to alcohol consumption. Very few people actually end up suffering serious consequences from smoking or driving under the influence of alcohol; however, the risk of suffering illness or causing an accident—including death—increases significantly.

- **Juvenile delinquency**

Another manifestation of violence is the problem of juvenile delinquency. When governments deal with this issue, they generally focus on improving the quality of life of the population, as well as setting up systems for investigating and obtaining justice. With good reason, they think that poverty, the lack of paid work, the lack of educational opportunities and cultural services for young people, as well as



problems related to the inefficiency and corruption of justice systems, contribute to the increase of delinquent behavior in the juvenile population.

All the activities aimed at resolving the previously mentioned problems are very important. However, something that isn't common in many governmental authorities and interest groups is to think that juvenile delinquency is also related to what happens within families; specifically in terms of their structure and stability. Some people think that this is due to a "conservative" or "traditional" mentality; however, the socio-historical reality does not depend on ideological bias, which has no place in information based on representative surveys or census-type data.

Let's take, as an example, Norway, which is considered to be one of the countries with the highest level of well-being in the world, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In a study published in 2009: "Family Dissolution and Children's Criminal Careers", Torbjørn Skarøhamar (from the official statistics agency of Norway) analyzed the situation in his country, based on a sample of all the children born in 1982, 49,975 cases, who had at least one Norwegian parent. The objective was to find out if they had committed any criminal acts and the relationship with different socio-demographic variables in two specific age ranges: at ten years old (1992) and at twenty-two years old (2004). The study relates to criminal acts which were officially documented, i.e. not based on census-type information.

When relating acts of delinquency carried out by Norwegian children and young people to their type of family, the following results were found: in the case of children and young people who lived with their biological parents, 8.9% had carried out criminal acts, a significant number; however, when the children and young people came from broken homes, the problem increased significantly: 21.5% of the cases. In other words, there was a significant difference between the different types of family.

It is relevant to point out here that the author analyzed the influence of different variables which could explain the occurrence of delinquent acts in Norwegian children and young people: the education of the parents, income, the age of the mother when the child was born, aid received from the government, place of residence, criminal history of the parents, and drug possession and use by the parents. After adjusting the model, the researcher discovered that the type of family continued to be of great significance (the level of significance was $p < .001$, relatively high). Furthermore, it should be highlighted that the figures relate to percentages and not to risk; in other words, this relates to a problem caused by what happens within the family and which affects a high percentage of the population.

To conclude, one important clarification needs to be made: violent behavior is not equally distributed between young females and young males. Among females, the violent responses are mainly emotional ("emotional bullying"); whilst in males the response is mainly physical, and the number of criminal acts is much higher.

- **School failure**

Another area where the relationship between different types of family and well-being indicators can be studied is in formal education. This is a particularly relevant area, as it is one of the main resources that countries can use to counterbalance the effects of poverty and social inequality. In the same way, the

achievement of economic development in countries is closely linked to the increasingly high level of participation in primary and secondary education, and, consequently, a lower rate of school failure.

In terms of the link between types of family and education, a large number of studies have been carried out in the countries analyzed. One of them, carried out in Mexico, is the National Family Life Survey (*ENNVIIH: Encuesta Nacional sobre Niveles de Vida de los Hogares*), which is one of the first longitudinal studies carried out in the country.

The project is being coordinated by Graciela Teruel (from the Iberoamerican University) and by Luis Rubalcava Pañafiel (from the Center for Economic Research and Teaching, CIDE), among other academics. The first round was carried out in 2002 (ENNVIIH-1), with a sample of 8,440 homes, which included 35,000 individual interviews. The second round (ENNVIIH-2) was carried out from 2005 to 2006 with the same group, with a response rate of 90%. The data relating to 2009 has already been published, and a new round is being considered.

Based on the information provided by the 2002 and 2005-2006 rounds, Mathew J. Creighton, Hyunjoon Park and Graciela Teruel published, in 2009, the study, "The Role of Migration and Single Motherhood in Upper Secondary Education in Mexico", based on a sub-sample of 1,080 students in secondary education (equivalent to grades 7 to 9 in education systems similar to the United States).

One of the most important conclusions relates to school failure: in adolescents who live with both parents, the school failure rate is 9%; however, in the case of those who live in families headed by divorced or separated mothers, the failure rate is almost double: 17.4%.

There are also other studies available—carried out from 1995 and later, and based on representative information—which analyze the relationship between types of family and diverse education indicators as well as school failure: expulsion, mathematics performance, participation in school activities, etc.

In this respect, a total of 63 studies were identified in the following countries (**table 3**):

Table 3
 Academic and official publications based on
 13 countries which deal with education and types of family

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of publications</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of publications</i>
Australia	3	Great Britain	9
Brazil	2	The Netherlands	1
Canada	8	Japan	1
Chile	0	Mexico	1
Colombia	0	Norway	1
Spain	0	Peru	0

United States	37	Total	63
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- Drug abuse and depression**

Health issues are another important area in terms of studying the relationship between types of family and levels of wellbeing, and several countries have carried out research on this matter. In Australia, for example, there is a project called ‘Women’s Health Australia’ (WHA), the biggest of the kind in the country, whose aim is to support the development and evaluation of public policy aimed at helping women.

In order to carry out these studies, WHA is using longitudinal surveys every two years; in other words, they interview the same group of women on a regular basis. The first round was in 1996, and the women were divided into three groups, according to year of birth: 1973-1978 (18-23 years old); 1946-1951 (45-50 years old); and 1921-1926 (70-75 years old). The study has been repeated several times, the most recent of which was in 2010.

With the information obtained from the first and second rounds of the surveys, relating to 1996 and 2000, the researchers Cathy Turner, Anne Russell and Wendy Brown published, in 2003, a study which analyzed the relationship between drug abuse and the civil status of the women between 22 and 27 years of age. The study was based on a sample of 9,324 cases, and showed a significant difference in the use of different types of drugs (marijuana, ecstasy, methamphetamine, LSD, and cocaine, among others), according to the civil status of the young women interviewed, as there was considerably lower usage among married women.

- For example, drug use was 3.1 times higher for women in cohabiting relationships, 2.5 times higher for separated, widowed or divorced women, and 2.8 times higher for single women who had never been married.

There are also many other studies on physical and mental health issues and their relationship with different types of family, both in adults and in children. In total, we found 34 publications on physical health and 88 on mental health. The distribution among countries is shown in **table 4**.

Table 4
Academic and official publications
from 13 countries, dealing with physical and mental
health issues

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of publications</i>	
	<i>Physical health</i>	<i>Mental health</i>
Australia	1	5
Brazil	0	0
Canada	4	13
Chile	0	0
Colombia	1	0
Spain	2	3
United States	15	32
Great Britain	2	10
The Netherlands	2	11
Japan	3	6
Mexico	0	2
Norway	4	6
Peru	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>88</i>

Part 2. Evaluation of all the information

- Well-being topics and indicators**

The 351 publications cover one or several topics related to well-being, and they look at how these appear in different types of family structure. In order to carry out a general analysis of all the sources of information, the topics have been classified in the following way:

- Education
- Physical safety
- Relationship between parents and children



- Relationship between couples
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Income and work
- Housing
- Addictions
- Life satisfaction (subjective well-being)

- **Development of a common database**

Each publication presents the findings of one or more well-being indicators, and compares what happens in different types of families, either as the main focus of the study or complementarily. In order to be able to analyze all the publications as a whole, each indicator was included in a common database.

The final result was a database with 3,318 entries of indicators from the 351 publications; an average of 9.5 entries per publication. The number of entries per publication ranged from 1 to 108.

The distribution of the 3,318 registers, based on the 11 topics covered, was as follows (**table 5**):

Table 5
Distribution of entries
in the common database
according to the different well-being indicators

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Entries</i>	<i>%</i>
Education	582	17.5
Physical safety	641	19.3
Parent-child relationships	218	6.6
Couple relationships	166	5.0
Sexual and reproductive health	33	1.0
Mental health	576	17.4
Physical health	265	8.0
Income and work	328	9.9
Housing	86	2.6
Addictions	221	6.7
Life satisfaction	202	6.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>3.318</i>	<i>100.0</i>



- **Main results**

If we take a weighted average of all the entries in the database (meaning that all publications have an equal weighting), without distinguishing between the number of different well-being indicators (11) or countries (13), the first significant result is that *the levels of well-being are significantly higher in families where children live with both biological parents who are married*. In contrast, in all the other types of family, the trend of the entries is only better in a very few cases. This is clearly demonstrated in **graph 1**:

- 84,9% of the entries indicate that *people who are married and children who live with both biological parents*, have a “significantly greater well-being” in all indicators, when considered as a whole, and without distinguishing between some countries and others.
- In contrast, only 1.2% of the entries show an inverse trend: *married people and children who live with both biological parents* have a level of well-being that is worse than other types of family when considered as a whole (see the “significantly lower level of well-being” category).
- The remaining 13.9% of the entries were as follows: 9.8% indicated a “not significantly greater level of well-being”; 1.2%, “no association”; and 2.9%, a “not significantly lower level of well-being”.

(INSERTAR AQUÍ GRÁFICA 1, QUE ES EN EL ORIGINAL LA GRÁFICA 6)

The figures are conclusive. When summarizing the information, we observed that the entries for well-being significantly favor families where the *children live with their biological married parents*: 71 times higher (84.9/1.2), compared with other types of family. This is a very significant difference! *In the democracies analyzed—when considered as a whole—there is no information which shows that the well-being trends are similar in a systematic way among other types of family*. Neither is there any data to justify that other types of family (i.e. not made up of married parents and their biological children) offer better options for well-being or better protection for basic human rights.

If we break down the information for well-being issues, in all the cases the same trend is repeated: married people and minors who live with their biological parents have higher levels of well-being in all 11 topics analyzed when compared to other types of family situation. This trend is demonstrated in **graph 2**, in which we only highlight the extreme values of “significantly high well-being” and “significantly low well-being”.

(INSERTAR AQUÍ GRÁFICA 2, QUE ES EN EL ORIGINAL LA GRÁFICA 7)

As can be clearly seen from the data, the advantages are more significant and frequent in stable marriages and in families where the children live with both their biological parents. In this type of family, compared with other types of family structure, we see fewer cases of violence against women and children; health indicators are better; there is a lower rate of mental health; income is higher and employment more frequent; living conditions are improved; there is more cooperation in relationships between couples; the relationships between parents and children are stronger; there is a lower rate of



drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse; children tend to be more cooperative and there are lower levels of delinquency; and school performance is higher.

Without failing to recognize—as we have previously—the problems and limitations that can occur in families made up of married couples and their biological children, the available empirical evidence clearly indicates that *this kind of family is more likely to have a higher level of social well-being, and—because of this—is more likely to contribute in a positive way to the protection and respect of human rights.*

In contrast, in all other types of families, the conditions of women's and children's rights, as well as men's, tend to be more difficult: there is a higher level of poverty (in families with single parents); a higher level of violence inflicted by men against women (in couples who cohabit or do not have a stable marriage); lower school performance, higher levels of drug abuse and violence against children (in families with single fathers and where the biological father lives with another partner); as well as a higher level of sickness, such as depression, anxiety and lack of life satisfaction (both among people who are not married and in families which aren't headed by both biological parents), among other problems.

If we analyze the 13 countries included in the study, in all cases, the well-being trend already mentioned is clearly repeated (**table 6**). In effect, it doesn't matter what country it is: it could be English-speaking or Latin-speaking, eastern or western; with high, medium or low levels of economic growth; or with consolidated or recent democracies. In all cases, married people and children who live with their married, biological parents have higher levels of well-being, compared with other possible types of family or couple situations.

Table 6
General well-being trend among married people and children who live with their
biological parents in 13 democratic countries
(percentage by row)

Country	Significantly higher well-being	Not significantly higher well-being	No association	Not significantly lower well-being	Significantly lower well-being
Australia	86.3	8.3	1.5	1.1	2.8
Brazil	86.0	10.0	1.3	0.0	2.7
Canada	88.3	8.0	0.4	3.0	0.4
Chile	96.7	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Colombia	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Spain	83.1	10.2	0.0	3.1	3.6
United States	82.1	11.8	1.2	4.0	0.9
Great Britain	80.5	10.9	4.4	2.8	1.4
The Netherlands	82.1	13.0	0.3	3.2	1.4
Japan	90.0	4.5	0.5	2.7	2.4
Mexico	86.9	10.7	0.0	2.4	0.0
Norway	90.8	6.0	0.5	1.9	0.8
Peru	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0



Conclusions

Why do married people have—on average and in general terms—a higher level of well-being than adults with a different civil status (cohabiting, divorced, separated, widowed or single people)? Why do children who live with both their biological parents also have a level of well-being which is significantly higher than that of children in other types of family situation?

Many factors could be mentioned here, but we will highlight one in particular: *solidarity*. When people who are responsible for a family focus their life as a couple on relationships of solidarity, it is much easier to achieve well-being for themselves and for the children they are responsible for. The information available clearly shows that this situation occurs most frequently in marriages and when children live with both biological parents.

This is a special kind of solidarity, which we call *life solidarity*, and which comes about when each member of the couple commits their own resources, which they consider to be important to their daily life, to fomenting the well-being of their spouse, and, as a result of this, the couple is able to offer more resources to the children they share. Here, we are talking about emotional, moral, functional and material resources which improve the human condition, and which bring about a deep feeling of appreciation and the feeling of sharing a common identity and destiny. Life solidarity is, in this way, different to other types of solidarity, of a circumstantial nature, where people don't commit fundamental resources from their own life, or where aid and cooperation processes are motivated by political or economic interest.

What was demonstrated by the large majority of the studies which we had access to was that life solidarity is shown more easily and more frequently when a man and woman live together as a married couple, compared to what happens in other types of family arrangements. We also found higher levels when both biological parents look after the children they share. As a result of the links of solidarity, time—a scarce yet vital resource—can be distributed more positively among married couples and work in favor of their joint children. In the same way, the general tasks and activities of daily life can be organized in a more efficient and effective way. Material resources are multiplied, and emotional and moral support is more stable and more constant. When faced with the problems and needs which arise in the family, there are more possibilities of successfully overcoming them.

Of course, we do also frequently observe significant conflict in many marriages, and we all know serious situations of violence or relationship break-downs. In the same way, in stable marriages, and in the relationship between parents and their joint children, there are recurring cycles where the quality and intensity of this solidarity increases and decreases. However, on average, we can see a significantly higher level of relationships with life solidarity in stable marriages than in other types of relationship, particularly compared with those who cohabit, have been divorced or separated, or have had two or more marriages. Furthermore, the benefits are such that the well-being indicators for married people are almost always higher than those registered for single adults.



In the case of children, we find the same situation: living in a family led by the biological father and mother multiplies the benefits received due to the solidarity of both parents, which, in turn, stabilizes the relationships and increases the resources available to take care of daily needs, which may be emotional, educational, economic, or related to physical or mental health, and the other indicators analyzed. This can be observed in democratic societies with very different traditions in terms of public policy; for example, Scandinavia or the Low Countries (e.g. Norway and the Netherlands) compared with others, such as Canada, Australia, the United States of America, Great Britain and Japan; or in economically advanced countries compared with countries with a medium or low level of economic development, such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Colombia and Peru. Of course, it is not infrequent to find families where the relationship of the biological parents is significantly damaged; however, this type of situation occurs at a much lower rate than in other families where the parents are divorced or separate, or with single parents, or where one of the parents has had two or more marriages.

Can children who belong to families different to those which are led by both biological parents overcome the disadvantages demonstrated by so many varied studies? The possibility of doing so is much more difficult, the obstacles are greater; however, a profound life solidarity on behalf of one of the biological parents, who is looking after the children without the support of the other parent, or the new partner who helps look after them, can have a significant impact on overcoming these disadvantages. There are plenty of examples to demonstrate this, which is fortunate for both the children themselves and society as a whole. In a large number of situations, families can overcome their problems or learn to manage them. However, the empirical evidence is clear: this happens in a much lower number of situations than in families where the biological parents are married and look after their children together.

But what is the magnitude of this difference? That depends on the problem analyzed. In some, the differences are significant in terms of percentages (for example, in matters of poverty, domestic violence, drug abuse and juvenile delinquency); in others, we see a higher level of particularly serious problems (such as homicide and sexual abuse against children). In any case, the risk of the problems presented in this study is related to family structure, and is almost always significant in statistical terms.

And why do these differences exist? Because in families where children don't live with both biological parents, as is the case in couples who have divorced or separated, what we find, many times, is the opposite of life solidarity: the experience of *social injustice*, referring to the term used by John Rawls. In effect, either due to both members of the married or cohabiting couple—or, more frequently, because of one of them—, what we often find is an *inequality and lack of solidarity among the members of the couple*; in other words, the non-compliance with the main requirements of social justice in democracies. Specifically, this social injustice frequently manifests itself in the failure to live up to the promises upon which the relationship was founded, as a result of a lack of attention to the emotional, intimate and/or functional responsibilities which were agreed at the beginning of the relationship, or the responsibilities which come about as an innate part of being a parent. This can occur for many diverse reasons, which have one common consequence: fracturing the original solidarity and *turning it into an experience of human suffering* which directly affects the well-being indicators. These experiences of suffering have a negative impact both on the members of the couple, and, particularly, on their children.

Another explanation, which is less common in current democratic societies, is the death of one or both members of the parents. In this case, there is also total disruption to the family dynamics and the resources available to attend to the wide-ranging needs of daily life, which, in turn, leads to a notably negative impact on well-being.

All the research we have carried out supports John Rawls' claims that the family is one of the great institutions in democratic societies and, for this reason, the situation of the family plays a determining role in the well-being of the population. As a result of this, the social injustice experienced in the relationship between a man and a woman, and between parents and their children, has a negative impact on a large number of well-being indicators.

However, it is necessary to recognize that the well-being of both children and adults is also due to factors and processes which take place outside the family environment. It is related, in a significant way, to broader economic, social and political factors. It is related to the existence of competitive labor markets which offer stable, well-paid jobs. It is related to the quality of the public and political institutions of the country; with the state of the law, the protection of individual rights, and the efficiency and effectiveness of governmental activities; the level of education of the population; and the processes of community and civic participation of the population, among many other factors.

Trying to reduce the well-being of the population solely to what happens within families would be ridiculous. It is necessary to consider what happens in at least three areas of society previously mentioned: government and politicians; companies and labor markets; and organized civil society. However, the relevance of these areas of society should not lead us to exclude the role of the family, which, as we have seen, plays an essential role.

The bibliography can be requested from the author at the following email address: pliegoc@unam.mx.