

Expert Group Meeting Family Policies and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

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**FAMILIES, PARENTS
AND YOUTH WELL-
BEING**

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Introduction



- The family is one of the most valued institutions in Latin American countries
- Yet, governments do not invest, as could be expected, in strengthening family relationships, its stability, communicational and behavioral skills that could contribute to develop individual and relational capacities
- These capacities could last and have a positive impact on other areas of well-being and social life.

Introduction



- One reason of lack of investment: different definitions of family, its role in society and influence in policy design.
- Debate focused on catholic nuclear family: criticized or full praise, and often ideological, not evidence based.
- Hence, research and policy concerns addressed to specific dimensions of it

Objectives



- 1.** Present a broad review about social and family policies in LA to see whether they address or not on family relationships
- 2.** Actual knowledge about LA youth, their relationships with parents, and prevalent tendencies on youth policies: whether they consider or not parent-youth relationships
- 3.** Some recommendations



Social and family policies in Latin American countries

1. A point of departure



- Family policies = government activities designed intentionally to support and enhance family relationships and its member's well-being
- Policy design should be guided by principles: family's stability, responsibility, relationships, diversity and engagement
- Policy design and development should be supported by sound theoretical frameworks, evidence based, coordination of actors, monitoring and assessment

2. Current tendencies in policy design



- Increased knowledge about families in the last three decades but focused on specific concerns (economic, demographic, health, education), due to high levels of poverty, vulnerability and other risk factors
- Social policies have been molded by this knowledge and strong concerns
- To face these problems, most countries have developed programs focused on cash transfers and some of them have been very successful and extended (Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador). Good results in children´s education, health, and contribute to reduce maternal and child mortality and poverty

3. Some deficits and criticism to cash transfer programs



- They are implicit family policies not explicit
- They focus on family unit but don't have a family perspective (e.g., aimed to improve income and social condition but not to family processes and dynamics). Chile (*Acción en Familia*) and Uruguay (*Cercanías*) are exceptions.
- LA countries have some explicit family policies: parental leave, legal changes, and care systems for working mothers with children
- Limitations of some of the explicit policies and cash transfer programs: still focused in formal employed women, and on mother figures, fathers being alienated; reinforcement of traditional gender roles.



Policies aimed to parent-youth relationships

1. Initial changes towards family policy and well-being: child development programs



- Chile´s *Crece Contigo* and *Acción en Familia* programs are examples of change towards explicit family policies focused on strengthening relationships and development of capabilities, especially regarding children
- Recently, governments have supported 2 types of programs to promote that parents invest more in their children: cash transfers and those aimed to change behaviors and practices, as many children still suffer delays in crucial areas of development (cognitive and language capabilities)

2. Assessment of child development programs



- Assessment of these programs have shown that monetary transfers have positive but limited reach and impact on child's cognitive, language and behavior development. Improvements seem better explained by changes in the behaviors and not by cash transfers
- Instead, rearing and parenting programs have shown promising results, they could change behaviors and practices
- In Jamaica, Colombia, Brazil and Chile rearing practices programs have shown long term positive outcomes: higher IQ, better results in school, mental health, less violent behavior, and get better income.
- They are, though, difficult to implement

3. Limitations of youth programs



- Youth report important concerns: unemployment, deficits in school enrollment, health problems (HIV, adolescent pregnancy, mortality due to pregnancy and childbirth)
- Youth-parent or family relationship policies are practically non-existent
- Youth programs basically aimed at promoting and improving their social rights (education, economic, civic and political participation). Some include support in certain family topics (e.g., communication)

3. Limitations of youth programs



- Targeted on individuals: youth are understood as adults, with no social bonds other than with work, education, political arena, but not with families. This is a misunderstanding of human rights
- Human rights perspective implies strengthening relationships of different kind: between genders, school participants, but also between family members. Hence, the scope of youth policies should be not only on improving individual development but also on relationships themselves

4. Parent-youth relationships: the importance of social competence



- Very little knowledge about those relationships in LA
- Social competence (based on Western research) = set of attributes and psychological resources that help youth become adjusted to their social circumstances, native culture, and cope successfully to every day life and ward off problem behavior (e.g., violent, substance abuse, depression)

4. The importance of social competence



It can promote :

- 1) a balance between autonomy-connectedness (with parents and adults);
- 2) achievement orientation (social initiative, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and school and work adjustment);
- 3) attaining psychological and cognitive resources (positive self-esteem, problem-solving capacities);
- 4) acquiring social skills for interpersonal relationships (conflict management)

These aspects of social competence are sources of social and psychological resilience and well-being

5. Parenting behaviors that can promote youth social competence



- In Western research, parental support behavior (warm, nurturing, positive, accepting) has been associated with the development of virtually all aspects of social competence. Supportive behavior communicates that youth are valued, confidence on youth's abilities, and fosters close ties.
- Parental reasoning can promote the development of youth social competence. It can foster moral development, internalized responsiveness to parents' expectations, positive self esteem, and can help youth to develop an autonomous system of self-affirmed values and expectations
- Parental monitoring can promote also social competence. These behaviors are embedded in a comprehensive view of human rights

6. Parental behaviors that can hinder the development of youth social competence



Some negative parental behaviors have been associated to negative outcomes in youth social competence:

- Intrusive psychological behavior: discourage or intrusion in psychological independence and emotional development (e.g., guilt induction, invalidation of feelings)
- Punitive or coercive control (physical violence)

Therefore, policies addressed to modify behaviors can promote parents and youth well-being and resilience, but we need more research on these topics.



Some recommendations



- Improving and broadening theoretical frameworks when designing family and youth policies
- Explicit family and youth policies should be developed, evidence based on parent-youth relationships and their challenges.
- Individual youth targeted policies should be re-designed considering family perspective and parent-youth relations
- Family and youth policies could focus on changing behaviors



THANK YOU;