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Families, Parents and Youth Well-being

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Introduction

The family has been, and still is one of the most valued institutions in Latin American countries (World Value Survey, 2016). Despite this fact, paradoxically, governments do not invest, as one would expect, to strengthen family ties, its stability, communicational and behavioral skills in order to develop individual and relational capacities that could last overtime and could have a positive impact on other areas of well-being and social life. This could be due to many aspects; one of which is the different definitions about family and its role in society and its influence in government public policy design; another one is related to the above, it is that one of these definitions – the traditional nuclear catholic family (Esteinou, 2008) – has been the focus either of strong criticism or of unquestionable full praise. As a result, the debate has turned often implicitly or explicitly ideological, with insufficient evidence, and research and policies concerns being addressed to specific dimensions of it. In order to contribute in this debate, this paper, mainly focuses on two aspects and is hence structured on them: 1) it presents a broad review about the development of social and family policies in Latin America in order to assess how they address or not on family relationships; and 2) it also presents what we know about youth, their relationship with parents, and exhibit the prevalent tendency on youth policies, with a especial focus on whether they consider or not the parent – youth relationship. In the final section, some recommendations are made.

Social and Family policies in Latin American countries

As Kamerman and Kahn (1978) pointed out some decades ago - and recently Robila (2014), Zimmerman (2001) and Bogenschneider (2006) - family policies can be understood as government activities that are designed intentionally to support families and enhance family member´s well-being and to strengthen family relationships. These authors have pointed out some crucial aspects that are being considered when dealing with family policy design as well as with family research today: a) that the development of family policies provides recognition of the importance families have in society; b) that family policies can be explicit or implicit. The first ones include those designs to achieve specific objectives regarding the family unit and its members (such as parental leave, and domestic violence), while the second one is the policies that are not specifically intended to affect families but have indirect consequences on them (e.g. policies regarding reducing poverty); c) that an impact of family should be considered in policy development which includes guiding principles of family responsibility, family stability, family relationships, family diversity, and family engagement (Bogenschneider et al., 2012; Robila, 2014); d) that developing family policies need also to be supported by sound theoretical frameworks, a coordination of multiple actors, and monitoring and assessment, because through them the most effective use of resources as well as practices that are not performing can be identified (Robila, 2014; Mackay, 2008).

Considering these aspects, in the last three decades the knowledge about families, that have had an influence in family and social policy design in Latin American countries, has increased notably, but it has concentrated on specific areas as a result of economic, demographic, education, and health concerns and problems of the region, especially related to poverty, vulnerability and other risk factors. We have a fairly broad knowledge about changes in family structures, basic health conditions of its members, especially, those related

to infant´s mortality, mother´s mortality and care for children, nutrition, sexual reproductive health, educational deficits among young population and women, participation in labor force and the social benefits related to it.

Indeed, a recent study (Ullman, Maldonado & Rico, 2014) about the evolution of family structures in Latin American countries from 1990 to 2010, has found a diversification of family structures during that period. The most important changes are that among the types of family structures considered, the nuclear type has declined (from 68% in 1990 to 63.6% in 2010); the percentage of extended families remain the same (around 20% in that period); an increase of female headed families (either nuclear or extended; from 13% to 17.2%); and the increase of non-family arrangements, especially single or composed by one person (from 11.3 to 16%).

This study has the novelty to include three typologies developed by the Latin America Economic Commission (CEPAL) regarding the family structure, the presence or not of different generations; and the family life cycle. The evolution and differentiation of family structures is also considered as the differences by income distribution and level of economic development, and the differences in the demographic transition. Some of the main findings are: 1) the increase of non-family bond (single and those without a nucleus) households and the rapid decrease of two parent families is a characteristic phenomenon of the highest socioeconomic strata; 2) the decline of two parent nuclear families is less pronounced, and an accelerated increase of one parent households headed by women (extended and nuclear) are tendencies more common of low socioeconomic strata; 3) the outcome of these tendencies is that within countries, lower socioeconomic strata (families in poverty and/or vulnerable to poverty) present higher levels of dependency, greater presence of single-parenting families headed by women, and larger family size; families with children are also more common in families with lower socioeconomic level and hence, are more vulnerable (Ullman, Maldonado & Rico, 2014). As a result, some measures have been recommended in this field in order to tackle inequality and poverty. Some of the most important are: policies should focus on the vulnerability of families with children. To address the needs of these families, family and social policies should be aimed at reducing poverty by cash transfer programs and policies that conciliate the relationship between work and family and the redistribution of care costs. In fact, care systems in the region show great gaps in accession and quality of services, even in those countries that are more advanced in these services. This situation hinders women incorporation to labor markets, particularly those poor, where women have less human capital and other resources to count on (Ullman, Maldonado, & Rico, 2014; Rosell, 2013).

Besides these economic and demographic differences, Latin American countries have faced important constrains and problems regarding health and education. These have been faced primarily by social policies addressed to overcome poverty and vulnerability, especially government programs focused on cash transfers. Most countries have this kind of programs being the most successful and extended among the population those of Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador. Some of these programs require some conditions to get the monetary benefits, such as children and mothers must attend to periodical health visits, and children must be enrolled in school. Without doubt, this social policy has had considerable coverage, increased the level of education and nutrition among children and youth, have reduced child and maternal mortality and poverty, and in some countries have included the elderly through some monetary and health benefits (Levy & Shady, 2013; Cecchini & Madariaga, 2011;

Gomes, 2014; Ripoll-Nuñez & Carrillo, 2014; Schvaneveldt, 2014; Sorj & Gama, 2014; Arriagada, 2007).

Although these programs are focused on the family as a unit, in general social policies have developed in most countries as part of the war against poverty and vulnerable conditions. As a result, governmental efforts are aimed to foster economic development, but they are not aimed and are not properly designed as explicit family policies, addressed to strengthen family relationships. Some studies have pointed out this fact for different countries, and the most important conclusions are that policy initiatives for families in vulnerable conditions constitute implicit rather than explicit family policies; they focus on increasing family´s income and improving their living conditions rather than on impacting and investing in family processes and dynamics. (Ripoll-Nuñez & Carrillo, 2014; Schvaneveldt, 2014; Carrillo et al., 2012; Sunkel, 2007). I will return further on this issue. On the other hand, many of these programs are based on conservative views since they place most family responsibilities on mothers and keep fathers (or male figures) alienated to the needs of adults and children in single-parent, two parent, and extended families; most social policies´ goals emphasize individual´s financial and physical well-being, reflecting a rather limited conceptualization of poverty (i.e., basically a condition of unsatisfied basic needs due to the absence of income) and its effects on families (Ripoll-Nuñez & Carrillo, 2014; Schvaneveldt, 2014; Carrillo et al., 2012; Sunkel, 2007; Rosell, 2013).

Chile and Uruguay are exceptions, and have an explicit program aimed to families. *Acción en Familia* (FOSIS, 2014) in the first one, and *Cercanías* (INAUS, 2014) in the second are addressed to strengthen the capabilities and skills of poor and extreme poor families through a process of psychosocial support and supervision, which allows mobilizing families' capitals in tune with their interests and needs.

Some explicit family policies have developed in the region, especially regarding legal changes, maternity and paternity leave and care systems. Civil Codes have advanced some important changes regarding the definition and regulation of marriage and divorce, assisted reproduction technologies, such as Colombia and Ecuador. In Mexico some states have legalized same sex marriages and in Mexico City adoption by same sex marriages has been legally acknowledged. Gender equality has been also introduced in legislation through equal rights in marriage and divorce. Legal protection against domestic violence has improved but its implementation to eradicate and punish it and attend victims through Commissaries or other police figures is modest and continues to be a serious problem (Esteinou, 2013; Gomes, 2014; Ripoll-Núñez, 2014; Schvaneveldt, 2014).

The regulation of childcare in labor laws or codes allows maternity leaves averaging three months, being Chile, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Mexico and Argentina the countries with longer leave periods. However, legislations tend to be limited to the protection of working mothers during pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and breastfeeding, but does not consider the child-rearing and care or needs of children at this stage. It also disregards men´s responsibility for their young children. Legislation, thus, shows heavy gender biases and the measures adopted do not necessarily consider the needs of care receivers. Labor regulations exclude from the respective benefits anyone who is not a formal-sector wage worker, to the detriment of informal-sector, independent, part-time and rural workers - and their children. However, this is beginning to change in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay, whose legislations acknowledge the labor rights of informal and poor workers and afford them entitlement to maternity leave (ECLAC, 2011).

Most countries have no provisions incorporating children´s life cycle needs into the work cycles of their parents, for example, in case of accidents or illness. Also the care/needs during early childhood have not been given adequate legal and practical application. Labor regulations, for example, afford less time off for working fathers than their childcare responsibilities require. Paternity leave varies from two to five days to a new birth, and only a few countries have extended that time (Ecuador, Uruguay, Venezuela and especially Cuba) (ECLAC, 2011).

One way to face children´s and parent´s life cycle and needs has been through governments´ supply and extension of care services, but historically this has been associated to public incentives for women´s enrollment in work. As a result, in urban and semi-urban areas, parents of Latin American countries increasingly turn to child-care services (Berlinski & Shady, 2015). Stabb & Gerhard (2010) have pointed out that in the recent years several middle-income Latin American countries (e. g., Chile, Mexico and Uruguay) have increased availability of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. This service expansion is qualitatively different from conditional cash transfer programs of the region. Feminist scholars have tended to view these programs critically, fearing that stipends combined with care conditional requirements will reinforce traditional gender roles and add to the total of workload of poor women, while doing little to improve women´s long-term economic security. Childcare services, in contrast, are explicitly aimed at, or facilitate, the commodification of female labor and the defamilialization of care. According to these authors, the fact that recent developments in this area have received little scholarly attention so far leaves the impression that Latin American social policy is unalterable stuck on a familialistic track, but national and regional trends are quite varied.

These authors have analyzed the government efforts to expand ECEC services for children up to three years in Chile and Mexico. Although concerns over labor force participation and child welfare have emerged on the political agendas of both countries, their approaches to service expansion differ significantly. Broadly, Mexico´s Federal Daycare Program for Working Mothers subsidizes community –and home-based daycare to facilitate the employment of low-income mothers without pursuing explicit educational aims. Poor women (rather than children) are the program´s target group. In contrast, while female employment has been encouraged, the *crèche* component of *Chile Crece Contigo* (Chile Grows With You) is conceived as a strategy to invest in the capabilities and equalize the opportunities of children from low-income families. Children (rather than women) are the main beneficiaries of the program and have been granted the right to a *crèche* and a place in the kindergarten (Stabb & Gerhard, 2010).

So far, it seems that although there have been some explicit family policies, such as in providing children and worker women with care service systems, not only the family relationship scope has been very limited but also reveal that there are different approaches and academic lenses that have molded them.

Policies Aimed at Parent-Youth Relationships

The Chile *Crece Contigo* and *Acción en Familia* programs, for example, show that the tendency regarding the implementation of family policies is beginning to bring change in some countries and other concerns properly related to family dynamics and the development of capabilities are being included in policy programs. Indeed, in the last years, Latin

American and Caribbean countries have progressed in improving infant conditions. Today, children have less probability that some decades ago to die in birth or in their first years of life; they have better health and nutrition and most of them go to school. While in 2000, two out of five of them lived in poverty today one out of five is in that condition. However, children still suffer delays in critical areas of development such as language and cognitive capabilities due - in a great measure - to the deficient stimulation they receive during the first years of life and the strong disadvantage that results from harsh socioeconomic conditions (Berlinski & Shady, 2015). Consequently, governments should invest in improving and developing the capabilities of individuals and families in order to foster sustainable development based on the human development.

Family is the factor that influences children´s well-being and hence is also regarded as one of the most important for the development of youth as well. Having a family environment that nurtures them, with positive and warm relationships can promote the development of their capabilities to perform in healthy ways in their personal lives and in society. Government investment in rearing and parenting programs are then crucial, as well as the promotion of research on the relationship between family environments and children´s and youth´s well-being. This is an area that unfortunately has been neglected. In fact, actually there are just a few studies, which show that these environments seem to promote or hinder the development of all the potential capabilities of many children. As we will see further, even less knowledge is available regarding family environments and youth´s development.

In recent years, Latin American governments have supported different programs to promote that families invest more in their children, or doing it differently. These interventions go from programs aimed to ease the economic restrictions through monetary transfers to families to programs intended to change parents´ behavior and practices. Berlinski & Shady (2015) have found that children of poorest households have considerable lower levels of development, especially, in cognitive and language areas, and hence, these parents invest less in their children.

The association between income and child development is not directly causal. Therefore, the improvements on children´s well-being can not be explained only on the basis of cash transfer programs to poor families. Some impact evaluations have been made to some of these programs and they have showed the progress achieved on different child development areas, such as nutrition and breastfeeding practices. However, it is less known the effect of cash transfers on other areas such as cognitive and language development, but Berlinski and Shady (2015) point out some interesting results of rigorous evaluations made to two programs: *Bono de Desarrollo Humano* (Bonus of Human Development) in Ecuador, and, *Atención a Crisis* (Crisis Service) in Nicaragua. The evaluations to these programs show that monetary transfer programs had positive impacts, though modest, on children´s cognitive, language and behavior development, especially when such transfers were addressed to the poorest homes. Therefore, as other results for developed countries, the observed improvements cannot be explained only by increased income. Rather, these programs seem to have transformed the behavior and consumption patterns, benefiting children. Cash transfer programs could be re-designed to have a greater impact on child development only when rearing and parenting practices were better understood (Berlinski & Shady, 2015).

The most important conclusion, then, is that monetary transfer programs have limited reach in other crucial areas of child development. Rearing and parenting programs have shown, instead promising results and are valuable tools to improve parents´ socialization practices –

as Berlinsky and Shady (2015) have pointed out - but they are much more difficult to implement and to achieve the expected outcomes. Three main models have been used: home visits, group sessions, and medical appointments. Unfortunately, programs of this kind in the region usually focus on early cognitive stimulation and there are few evaluations about their impact. Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru have developed and extended these programs. Programs that follow a home visit model may have a significant impact on children´s development if they have high quality standards and follow a specific curriculum. A recent qualitative study about the quality of six home visit programs in Latin America and the Caribbean has concluded that the home visitors usually are successful in establishing a warm and positive relationship with the families and children, but they are not as successful implementing the curriculum, which was carrying out the activities and to achieving the behaviors expected by the program. There is also concluding evidence about the impact of different programs for parents. Rearing and parenting programs that have been evaluated as successful share some characteristics: home visitors or group facilitators that establish a trustful relationship with mothers´ (and in some cases fathers´) children; there is a clear philosophy which rules what is expected of the intervention, and it is fully understood by the personnel; in those programs focused on improving early stimulation, during the sessions home visitors and facilitators work with the parents on a structured set of activities, and they are encouraged to continue with them; and the personnel is highly skilled and is strictly supervised (Berlinski & Shady, 2015).

This is especially true for the few programs addressed to rearing practices, first in Jamaica, and then in Colombia, Brazil and Chile. The results are very promising since they reported positive effects on children´s cognitive development; and, even after the intervention, a follow up to the adolescent and early adult years conducted yielded that those youth kept having a higher intellectual coefficient, and better results in school, better mental health (less depression and social inhibition), less violent behavior and 25% higher income than those children of the controlled group (Gertler et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2011, both cited in Berlinski & Shady, 2015). Additional positive results were found in the Attanasio et al. (2014, 2015, cited in Berlinsky & Shady, 2015) in other development areas (e. g. language and memory). And an important finding was that the program was more successful among children who had better basic development levels, and among children´s whose mothers had greater capacities. Rearing programs based on focal groups also yielded good results.

According to Berlinski & Shady (2015) programs aimed to improve parent practices and behaviors are more promising but they imply important challenges since it is difficult to work on and change behaviors tied to and embedded in personal and intimate dimensions. The few successful programs have been those of small scale and carefully supervised.

Rearing and parenting programs targeted not only to children but youth are practically non-existent, though some cash transfer programs are trying to include some family issues. According to the ECOSOC of the United Nations (IDEA, 2014), in 2011 youth between 15 and 24 years of age represented about 18% of the total world´s population and they presented important concerns: 13% were unemployed in 2009, one out of five in 2008 didn´t go to school, 40% had contracted HIV in 2008, high rates of adolescent pregnancy and complications related with pregnancy and birth were the first cause of mortality among girls. In 2012, the United Nations included as a crucial goal the development of youth.

Latin American governments have invested in youth programs but, as we will see, most of them are aimed to get progress on their economic, social and political rights. In fact, a review

of many of them as well as some of the impact evaluations made confirm that, regardless their important contributions their design and goals do not reach family relationships. The importance that family relationships have on many dimensions of youth life and their rights is still not regarded and fully understood, and, therefore, are not included in the design of youth programs. Different evaluations and studies have been done for Latin American youth programs (IDEA, 2014; Severo, 2011; Krauskopf, 2011; Mariani, Urzúa & Bombarolo, 2012). Most of the programs - as I noted - are addressed to improve educational (such as *Construye T* in Mexico), economic (Brewer, 2005), to promote civil and political participation (such as Youth Public Policy in Cauca Valley in Colombia), and community development to reduce violence and criminal activities (such as *Fica Vivo* in Brazil, and *Habitat* and Rescue of Public Spaces Program in Mexico). The programs do not work with families and parents or it is very limited their scope. Some of them give supervision and support in some family topics, such as communication. Instead they work with school teachers, non-government organizations related to school, and other areas.

Other important limitations of youth policies are that they are targeted individually and that the range of age considered is too broad. In fact, most policies conceive youth just as individuals who do not have social bonds, especially with their families, and frequently they have in mind adult individuals. This is a result, in part, of providing different resources to guarantee their human rights in areas where they develop part of their lives; but it can also lead to a misunderstanding of human rights. Youth individuals do not live isolated, and do not perform only or mostly in adult spheres, such as in labor markets or the political arena. A comprehensive understanding of human rights must consider that its achievement implies on the strengthening of relationships of different kind, between genders, school participants, but also between family members, and therefore the scope of youth policies should be not only on the individual development but also on the relationships themselves. This is a perspective that needs to be considered in public policy design. Also, for a 12 year old boy or girl is may be more important his/her relationship with his/her parents and family than his/her relationship with labor markets. Their needs may be very different also than for a 24 years old girl or boy.

Most youth live with their families, regardless the family arrangement, and families continue to be an important dimension, which has an impact on their lives. However, little is known in Latin American countries about the associations between parent behavior and authority and what has been called adolescent and youth social competence. Social competence can be defined as a set of attributes and psychological resources that help adolescents and young individuals become adjusted to their social circumstances, their native culture, and cope successfully with everyday life sufficiently to ward off problem behavior, either externalized ones (e. g., violent or delinquent behaviors, substance abuse, conduct misbehavior in school) or internalized ones (e. g., depression, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders) (Baumrind, 1991; Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Bush, 2013). Social competence encompasses multiple attributes that provide the young with capacities to function effectively in everyday social life and are also sources of resilience for warding off negative consequences during times of crisis and extensive challenge.

Recent conceptions of social competence in Western societies identify some of its sub-dimensions: 1) establishing a balance between autonomy and connectedness (or conformity) in reference to parents (and other adults); 2) developing an effective achievement orientation, which has an impact on developing social initiative, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and school and work adjustment; 3) attaining psychological or cognitive resources (e. g., a

positive self-esteem, identity achievement, and problem-solving skills and capacities); and 4) acquiring social skills with peers and other interpersonal relationships (e. g., conflict management capacities). These aspects of social competence are sources of social-psychological resilience and well-being (Bush & Peterson, 2008; Peterson & Bush, 2013).

On the other hand, Western countries research has shown that parenting behaviors may either encourage or inhibit the development of certain features of youth´s psychological wellbeing and other skills, competencies and performance in different social settings. Supportive parental behavior has shown to be the most important ingredient to foster child and youth social competence. Indeed, warm, supportive, nurturing, or accepting behavior by mothers and fathers is associated with the development of virtually all aspects of social competence (Peterson & Bush, 2013). Supportive behavior is important because it communicates that adolescents are valued, fosters close ties within the parent-youth relationship, and communicates confidence by parents in the adolescent´s abilities. Adolescents who receive support or nurturance from parents often report lower amounts of anxiety, depression, and behavior problems (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Bush, 2013; Rohner, 2008).

Another important behavioral strategy that the Western parents use to foster youth social competence is reasoning. Parents use it for appealing the youth´s concern for others, their desire to be mature, and their abilities to understand and voluntarily accept the parent´s point of view. The use of reasoning helps them understand why rules are necessary, why their misbehavior is unacceptable, how their behavior affects others, and how their actions might become more acceptable. Parents who use reasoning do not impose arbitrary authority on them, but communicate respect for them, their confidence in the youth´s capacities to make good decisions, their capacities to voluntary comply, and their growing autonomous abilities to make their own decisions (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson & Bush, 2013). Parental reasoning often has been found to foster youth outcomes like moral development, internalized responsiveness to parents´ expectations, moderate conformity to parents, and positive self-esteem. Exposure to parental reasoning provides adolescents with confidence to think for themselves and develop an autonomous system of self-affirmed values and expectations (Peterson & Bush, 2013; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson, 2005). There are other important positive parental behaviors, such as monitoring, which are associated with positive youth outcomes. These behaviors are very important because they are strongly embedded in a comprehensive view of human rights and could promote its development in young individuals and parents.

Negative parental behaviors have been also associated with negative youth outcomes, such as intrusive psychological and punitive or coercive control. In the first one, parents discourage or intrude upon the psychological independence and emotional development of youth by invalidating adolescent´s feelings, constraining verbal expression, withdrawing love, or attempting to induce guilt (Holmbeck et al., 2002; Parker, 1983, Peterson & Bush, 2013). This behavior has been linked primarily to depression, withdrawal, loneliness, eating disorders, negative perceptions of the self, lower self-efficacy, and less effective identity development. Punitive or coercive control often leads to a variety of problematic outcomes, such as hostile feelings, diminished internalization of parents´ expectations, growing distance, and resistance to authority by youth (Peterson & Bush, 2013).

These Western studies have shown that parental behaviors are associated with important outcomes of youth social competence development. Considering the study of Berlinski & Shady (2015) - reported above - about social policies aimed to foster child development,

which has found that policies addressed to change rearing behaviors yield promising results, it is feasible to think that explicit youth and family policies in Latin American countries aimed to this purpose could foster and strengthen the relationships between youth and parents, have an impact on other social spheres, and, therefore, contribute to the overall development and well-being of societies.

In order to make progress in family and youth policy designing, we need to make more research about them to improve family tasks such as communication, problem-solving, coping with stressors, conflict and divorce, and maintain nurturing relationships – as some researchers have noted (Ripoll-Nuñez & Carrillo, 2014; Carrillo et al., 2012). There is also a need in the region to improve and establish a systematic assessment system, and increasing the statistical information on family policies (Robila, 2014). This knowledge and evidence could contribute to sound policy design. An example on recent research being conducted in Mexico can show the importance of it. In 2010 a survey that covered different aspects on parenting behavior and authority and adolescent social competence was made among 1200 youth between 14 and 17 years of age of different social, economic, demographic, and geographical background (Esteinou, Peterson, Vázquez, Wilson & Bush, 2016).

Although this research has not concluded, the results so far point out that families and parents are important agents for adolescent´s development and well-being, and for their performance in social life. For example, more adolescents report in this research high levels of positive communication with their fathers than they do with their mothers (with a strong difference of 10 percentage points or more). Another result regarding parenting behavior is, that fathers are perceived by adolescents as more supportive and using more reasoning than mothers. Both examples were unexpected outcomes because according to the mainstream culture mothers´ emotional and communicational qualities are praised and taken for granted. Other results regarding adolescent social competence show that girls do and adjust better in school than boys, but they report higher levels of depression; also, more than half of adolescents perceive themselves as having low levels of social initiative (Esteinou, Peterson, Vázquez, Wilson & Bush, 2016). These few findings reveal the crucial need of more knowledge about family relationships in Latin American countries, and that should be used as a ground in family and youth policy design. Evidence based policy design definitely would help to go beyond common sense believes as well as certain academic biases that have molded family and youth policies. Some policies, for example, could be addressed to change some behaviors and practices (e. g., to improve the development of support and reasoning behaviors and capacities, especially among mothers, but also among youth). In the long term, they could help to achieve progress in reducing violent behavior and promote a culture of human rights.

Finally, this paper has only dealt with family and youth policies aimed to strengthen family relationships, but research is also needed regarding social cohesion and institutional contexts that promote or hinder the development of social capital, an ingredient that can have an important role for well-being and social development. As I noted at the beginning of this paper, the family is an important value among Latin American countries. But we still know little about the quality of family relationships and their relationship with institutional contexts and social cohesion. A recent study made in Mexico (Millán, 2016) showed how the quality of relationships in the closest spheres (i. e., family), doesn´t seem to matter to self reported happiness in certain contexts where integrated spaces (e. g., homogeneous, or interactions among similar individuals) are more important. If the family is really built as a space where constriction and motives for integrating are strong, that integration will appear as unconditional, regardless the quality of relationships; it is indifferent to it the character of

conflict in the family. Therefore, acknowledging that the family is an important value doesn´t mean that the quality of its relationships as well as its outcomes, are guaranteed.

Some recommendations

1. There is a need of improving and broadening the theoretical frameworks when designing family and youth policies. Knowledge about family and youth should not be restricted to economic, political, social and demographic lenses, though they are very important. A family dynamic and processes framework would improve our comprehension of family and parent-youth relationships.

2. Explicit family and youth policies should be developed, evidence based on parent-youth relationships and their challenges.

3. Individual youth targeted policies should be re-design to include family perspective on parent-youth relationships.

4. Family (explicit or implicit) and youth policies could focus on changing behaviors in order to strengthen family relationships and promote well-being. Poverty, violence, gender inequality and other important problems could be faced more effectively if support and reasoning parental behaviors are promoted, and punitive and coercive behaviors are inhibited.

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