

Working and Living Arrangement of Single Mother Households and Social
Support in Mexico City

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1. Introduction

I conducted my field research in Mexico City for 10 weeks for my project on the single mothers and social support in Mexico, with the funding of CLASPO during the summer, 2006. Last year, I had already interviewed a sample of single mothers in Mexico City as a part of my project for my doctoral dissertation, 'Working and living Arrangement of Single Mother Households and Poverty in Mexico' during my fieldwork. In my dissertation project, 'living arrangement' is defined by a combination of the headship and household composition variables (London, 1998; Single-Rushton and McLanahan, 2002). More broadly, it also includes the time-use of household members and their contribution to available household resources. This issue has been investigated by researchers, but their interests are mainly confined to developed countries such as the U.S. and European welfare states. However, studies in Mexico have lacked the solid statistical information to explore, in depth, the gender bias in poverty and the family dynamics associated with it.

Moreover, while I was conducting my first field research in Mexico City in 2005, I found that female headship and single motherhood have different socio-demographic and economic characteristics in Mexico, and the pattern of poverty should be investigated in terms of various groups divided by demographic characteristics among Mexican women. Therefore, my summer fieldwork in 2006 was a follow up research for my dissertation. This research focused on (a) targeting a particular group of single mothers, and (b) adding a policy component to my research by working with government agencies and with NGOs.

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This report is organized as follows: I will begin by describe the background of my

field research. In this section, I will discuss about the trend of single motherhood and female headed households and relationship of these with poverty in Mexico. Also, I will present my research questions in this section. Then, the methodology and the procedure of my fieldwork will be presented. In section 4, the socio-demographic and economic context of Mexico is discussed with review of Mexican labor market and brief description of social reform in Mexico since 1970s. In section 5, I will present my preliminary findings from my fieldwork followed by policy implication for single mothers in Mexico.

2. Background of field research: female heads vs. single mothers

The increase in the proportion of female headed households is a global trend. In Mexico, female-headed households have increased from 13.6 % of the total in 1977 to 20 % in 2002 (Acosta Díaz, 1998; ENIGH data, 2002). In the context of increasing female headship, the ‘Feminization of Poverty’ theory implies that more and more women bear an unequal share of the burden of poverty (Pearce, 1978), and that families headed by female single parent are more likely to be poor than those headed by couples or men. Especially in developing countries, disadvantages in the labor market of women put them in worse position when heading their own households.

However, the association between female headship and poverty should not be regarded as universal. Using data from national household surveys, several scholars find that female-headed households are less likely to be poor in many countries of the Latin America (Marcoux, 1998; Moser, 1996). The female headed households in Mexico also show some idiosyncratic characteristics different from other countries. Mexican national

survey data indicates that the median income of female headed households in Mexico has been similar or higher than that of male headed ones, and the poverty rate of female headed households is slightly lower than that of households where a couple is present.¹

Table 1. Increase of Female Headed households and Single mothers, and Poverty Rate

	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
% Total Female-Headed Households	13.96	14.69	16.17	17.54	18.33	20.01
with Children and No Partner	11.34	12.28	14.28	15.06	15.61	17.11
Percent below Poverty						
Female-Headed Households	13.48	16.34	28.37	26.07	13.24	13.96
Male-Headed Households	17.70	17.29	30.81	27.31	17.59	14.25

ENIGH (Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de Hogares), 1992-2002

Potential explanations for this situation of female headed households in Mexico suggest important policy issue to be stressed on especially for young and poor single mothers. My preliminary research indicates that higher income of female headed households is due to the factors related to family practices and living arrangement. In 1997, 46% of Mexican single mothers lived in households headed by someone else (typically their parents), while only the half that amount of single mothers in U.S were living with their relatives. Also, female heads in Mexico are relatively older than those in U.S as well as Mexican male heads. In other words, in Mexico, single mothers with lower income

¹ It is need to be addressed here that ‘female head’ and ‘single mother’ should not be used as identical concept even though lots of studies use these to concepts interchangeably. My quantitative data analysis indicates that absolute number of female heads (about 90 percent) is single mothers, while on average only half of Mexican single mothers are heading their households. According to the CPS statistics about 80% of single mothers head their own households in 2000. It means that the relationship between single motherhood and family composition largely depend on various social factors of each country.

potentials (such as less educated, younger, and never married) move into the households headed by other people and select themselves out of headship, while single mothers with higher income potentials head their own households leading to higher income of female headed households.

As many studies present, family and kinship networks have played an important role as a safety net for the poor in Mexico. Incorporation of the extended family members was survival strategy to cope with the economic difficulty by pooling income and making a collective consumption during the economic crisis (Chant 1991; González de la Rocha 1994b; McKenzie 2003). However, the decline of family size and extended families due to the decrease in fertility and increase in single parent households since 1970s would undermine household survival strategies based on kinship network (Roberts, 2005). Also, in contrast to rural setting or traditional society, family or kinship network in urban area is not stable in Mexico because urban labor market situation during the last several decades have drastically changed and seriously affected most of Mexican families. Profound transformation of Mexican economy and labor market structure causes repetitive unemployment (or underemployment) or unstable work by family members at household level, and under-utilization of labor force at social level.

Then it would be important question what if Mexican society experiences a similar increase in the proportion of female heads that are young and never married single mothers as the U.S society has witnessed in the past decades. Young single mothers are more likely to work as self-employed worker or be in informal sector excluded from the Mexican welfare system (Laurell, 2003), and are more disadvantaged in labor market. Kinship

network is the social mechanism that has its limits and unstable, and is only one of the three components of the welfare triangle; state, market, and family (Esping-Anderson, 1999). Also, neoliberal reforms by Mexican government since 1980s have changed the role of state, employment and labor market structure, and thus, situation of family life such as marriage (or union) pattern. Thus, my research questions are:

- 1) What socio-demographic, economic, and cultural factors contribute to increase of single mothers and female headed households in Mexico.
- 2) How Mexican young single mothers make living and working arrangement to cope with the economic hardship, and how kinship network work for single mothers.
- 3) How does Mexican public policy affect the life of single mothers and how the social support programs for single mothers work in Mexico?
- 4) What activities and researches by NGOs support single mothers at community level.

Thus, the main goal of my research has been to explore the relationship between female poverty and family practices in Mexico by examining the working and living arrangement within single mother households and to investigate how social policy in a changing social, economic, and demographic environment in Mexico affects the life of single mothers and their family.

3. Methodology and Research Procedure

The main method of my fieldwork was semi-structured in-depth interview with young single mothers in poor urban regions in Mexico City, policy makers in governmental agencies of Mexico City, and social workers who are working in various organizations

including NGOs. I selected Mexico City as a research area for several reasons. First, the extreme poverty has grown very fast in urban areas in Mexico (Laurell, 2003), however governmental poverty program has been concentrated in rural areas. Mexico City government launched their own poverty relief program apart from federal government since 2001 after representative of PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática) was elected as a mayor. I was questioning how different poverty programs are connected, if they are, each other based on different political interest in Mexico City. Second, Mexico City has been the home of informal economy based on commercial and service industry, while manufacture industry was moving to other border cities since 1970. Labor market structure of Mexico City shows the dynamics of family practice of single mothers and their position related to disadvantages in labor market and social security.

At the preparation stage of my fieldwork, I was designing my fieldwork as a collaborative work with governmental agencies in Secretaria Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL) of federal government which is conducting various poverty-relief programs at national level, because I conducted my previous fieldwork with the help of coordinators of 'Program of Human Development' and directors of programs in SEDESOL. My initial research plan was to conduct interviews with specific group of single mothers (young single mothers in highly marginalized delegations such as Iztapalapa, Xochimilco, and Milpa Alta in Mexico City) through these agencies. Before I started my field research in Mexico, I contacted regional directors of program oportunidades and Habitat directed by SEDESOL in advance. This was the first step to get sample single mothers for interview

among the beneficiaries of the programs, and collect the information about the procedure policy implements, effect of public policy, and the activities of social workers at regional level.

For the first two weeks of my research I was waiting for the final arrangement of internship position to work in SEDESOL. However, one difficulty I faced in the stage of setting up my field research in Mexico City was that there was a huge reorganization of SEDESOL, because there was big political event during the July, and I recognized that the collaborative work and position for work might not be stable if I could have one in given political situation of Mexico. Furthermore, I couldn't wait until when the position had been finally arranged because I had limited time for my fieldwork in Mexico. After having spent two weeks for gathering secondary data from various research institutes, I decided to re-design my field research and target institutions of my investigation with alternative plan. My alternative plan was to direct my field research to social policy of city government of D.F. I started to contact investigators in CIESAS and El Colegio de Mexico to find an initial interviewer among governmental officials which is related to poverty-relieve program, and eventually the single mother support program. Fortunately, I could get the information about the welfare program and poverty relief program of Secretaría de Desarrollo Social of Distrito Federal through sociologists and investigators in CIESAS and El Colegio de Mexico and contacted the officials in this institution.

Interview with director of Secretaría de Desarrollo Social provided me insight for the direction of my investigation about social policy in Mexico City. Interviews and collaborative work with social workers in DIF-DF (Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral De

la Familia del Distrito Federal) was great opportunity for me to look into the social program for single mothers with young children and with risk of disruption of family. I could have opportunity to meet and interview with single mothers in delegation Cuauhtemoc and observe the activities of social workers. Also, I visited Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico to interview with the executive Coordinator of 'Fondo para el desarrollo Social de la Ciudad de México' and had a chance to investigate the economic resources available and to talk about the problem of labor market of Mexico City.

On the other hand, thanks to the help of the investigators in CIESAS and El Colegio de Mexico, I could visit several NGOs, such as Casa Alianza and MEXFAM which are non benefit organization for women and family. Also, Inmujeres-DF (Instituto para las mujeres en Distrito Federal) had various workshops and meetings for women. Although Inmujeres is one of government agencies of Distrito Federal, its activities are very independent and connected to various level of NGOs at community level. The focus of activities of Inmujeres vary according to the characteristics of each delegation –from domestic violence to social support for single mothers. I visited Inmujeres in two different delegations that population of very different socioeconomic characteristics resides. As a result, it became a better chance for me to study relatively new public policy programs by city government and understand its policy in the broad context of Mexican social policy.

4. National Context

Economic Crisis and Social Reform since 1980's

The Mexican debt crisis that began in 1982 marked the end of an era of state-led

development based on Import-Substitute-Industrialization and new era of opening market to world economy. Between 1950s and mid-1970s, Mexico experienced greater industrialization, rapid economic growth and significant socioeconomic improvements that were accompanied by a decline in the underutilization of the labor force and a reduction of low productivity jobs. These overall improvements in labor conditions facilitated the expansion of female labor force participation, particularly into more formal types of improvement associated with the growth of the public sector (Parrado, Emilio A., and Zenteno, 2001), and the service economy expanded due to the growth of the middle class through Import Substitute Industrialization strategies.

However, Mexico's strong economic performance ended in the mid-1970s with signs of increasing fiscal deficit. Since then, the country has experienced recurrent financial crises in 1982, 1986, and 1994, accompanied by low levels of economic growth and recession. In addition to signs of sharp decline in national economic growth, the critical condition of the country's economy reflected in investment, and increasing pressure of foreign debt-servicing and of multilateral agencies, permitted the implementation of a liberalization strategies.

A liberalization strategy began in Mexico during 1988 under the Salinas administration, and since 1994, this strategy has been continued under President Zedillo (1994-2000). Furthermore, in addition to joining the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in 1985, Mexico signed the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) meaning the integration of Mexican economy into the global market in 1994. Since the 1970s the global economy has been in an era of market deregulation and growing labor

market flexibility, in which new technologies, new labor control systems and reformed forms of work organization have transformed patterns of labor force participation throughout the world (Standing, 1998).

Mexican government introduced several important reforms in order to obtain greater flexibility in recruitment and dismissal and to decentralize union bargaining under liberalization strategies since mid-1980 (Peters, 1998). Besides these changes in labor regulations, employer's mandatory payments to social security were reduced. The process of privatization of state enterprises and public services has been one of the strategies for overcoming Mexico's financial deficit. This process was initiated in 1983 and continued into recent years, resulting in a cut in the bureaucracy by 50%, and massive firings of over 500,000 employees in the public sector during the past 15 years. This massive dismissal was not accompanied by programs to create new jobs in newly repaired enterprises, nor was any incentives or aid given to the dismissed workers (Coordinating committee of CASA Mexico, 2001). The privatization and deregulation processes have accelerated particularly after NAFTA took effect, placing the country in a vulnerable situation and subjecting Mexico's economy to the capital of transnational corporations. As a result, the Mexican labor market has been characterized as trending towards underemployment and informal employment. Also the liberalization strategy of Mexico has resulted in cuts in labor costs, precarious employment, reduction or stagnation of salaries, mobility and flexibility of work shifts and locations, and overall weakening of labor unions. The result of stagnant salary policies is contrast sharply with the period prior to 1982. Between 1934 and 1982 the purchasing power of wages increased 54%, but from 1982 to 1999 the real

purchasing power decreased by 69% (Coordinating committee of CASA Mexico, 2001).

The increase of family income inequality is also a problem as well.

Table 2. Distribution of Income in Mexico, 1984-2000 (in percent)

Family Income by Deciles,					
Lowest to Highest	1984	1989	1992	1998	2000
1	1.72	1.58	1.56	1.50	1.52
2	3.11	2.81	2.75	2.70	2.64
3	4.21	3.74	3.70	3.60	3.60
4	5.32	4.73	4.70	4.70	4.59
5	6.40	5.90	5.70	5.80	5.70
6	7.86	7.29	7.11	7.20	7.08
7	9.72	8.98	8.92	8.90	8.84
8	12.16	11.42	11.57	11.5	11.24
9	16.73	15.62	16.02	16.0	16.09
10	32.77	36.93	38.16	38.10	38.70

Source: Table cited from Al Camp, 2003. p. 251

Undoubtedly, social and economic changes are largely related to demographic aspect of family formation. With the economic crisis in 1982 and consecutive crisis until recent years, marriage pattern of relatively young women has changed. During the stabilizing development period (between mid 50s to late 60s), the fertility rate was increased and marriage of couple in their early age was prevalent. Samuel and Seville (2005) describe this period as “marriage boom.” Mexican families of this period benefited from the relative economic prosperity and expanded job opportunity based on urbanization process which was accelerated during this period. However, since 1980s Mexico has been

experienced the drastic decrease of real wage and increase of informality. The marriage pattern of young Mexican couples are inscribed in the context of long economic depression (Olivia Samuel y Pascal Seville, 2005). Young women delay their marriage until later age, consensual unions are more prevalent than before, and marriage rupture occurred more frequently than the generation of their parents. Also, women have incorporated at large extent into activities of informal economy as the consequences of economic restructure and deterioration in the real income of the households (Emilio Parrado y René Zenteno. 2005).

The challenges to social policy in Mexico lie in the unsatisfied needs that have accumulated since the early 1980s as the proportion of the population in poverty has exploded and income and wealth have become increasingly concentrated (Laurell, 2003). According to Leal and Martinez (2005) the first generation of social reform since the economic crisis of 1982 is evaluated as the combination between inappropriate employ of liberalization and absence of key politics that protect the sector that the liberalization left uncovered. The designed reform by federal government for the social security was focused on providing the pension of salary workers in formal sector (Leal and Martinez, 2005). This neoliberal social policy reform agenda in Mexico addresses pensions, workers' compensation, health services, and child care. Under the Mexican Constitution, all wage-earning and salaried workers are guaranteed access to basic welfare services provided by public institutions and guided by principles of comprehensiveness, solidarity, and redistribution (Laurell, 2003). The Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) addresses these needs in the case of private-sector workers and the Social Security Institute for State

Workers (ISSSTE) does so for public employees. Although Mexico's social welfare system is comprehensive; it includes old-age and disability pensions for insured workers; pensions for widows and dependent children; workers' compensation; medical care for insured workers and their families; child care for insured female workers; cultural, sports, and recreation centers; and low-cost housing financed with low-interest funds. However, it has lots of restrictions because of the structure of labor market of Mexico. Social security system in Mexico covers only about 55 percent of the national population, which work in formal sector. Self employed and informal sector workers are excluded, and this represents a serious inequity because those who are excluded are generally the poorest of the poor (Laurell, 2003). It also accompanied polarization of access and negative impact for the level of health, increase of costs and falling of the clinic efficiency, and absence of adequate regulation (Leal and Martinez, 2005).

Apart from the social reform federal government, city government of Distrito Federal launched new social policy since 2001 aiming at the universal coverage of social security, Programa Integrado Territorial. The principle of this policy is that housing, health and education are social right of the citizens and the ultimate goal of this policy is universalization of this social right to all of its citizens. For example, pension plan for the elderly over 70 years old covers 98 percent of total citizen of Mexico City regardless of their social class and previous job.

Increase of Informality of labor market of Mexico City

The proportion of family labor and self employment in Mexico had been declined

from 1940s to 1980s during the continuous economic growth. This phenomenon was mainly due to change of industrial structure from the basic good industry to that of capital and consumer durable goods, which was less likely to create opportunity for family labor or self employment. However, substantial proportion of labor force continued to be informally employed by the late 1970s (Roberts, 1991). State intervention in protecting organized labor introduced both resource dislocations and the informalizing of capitalist production processes.

In this context, the capacity of Mexico’s urban economy to absorb the rapidly increasing labor force can be seen as “success of the unregulated market in solving employment problems” (Roberts, 1991). Migration from rural to urban areas has made more obvious the lack of absorption of the labor force into formal sector, a phenomenon that is reflected in the importance of the informal sector (Beneria, 1989). During the economic crisis, Mexico government undertook vigorous free market policies. In this process, Mexico government devaluated the value of peso, cut the government spending, privatized the state owned enterprise, and liberalized great deal of imports (Beneria, 1989). The exposure to global competition of Mexico contributed to the drastic falling of real wage of workers, and expansion of informal employment.

Table 3. Workers in the establishment with less than 5 employees (Mexico City)

Informal Worker	1994	1997	1999	2000
Employer	8.62	7.39	8.05	8.22
Self-employed	37.16	38.19	37.26	38.47
Employee	42.62	43.73	44.58	44.16

Unpaid Family Worker	11.6	10.7	10.1	9.15
Total % of Informal Worker	44.48	47.19	47.41	47.33

Source: ENEU (Encuesta Nacional de Empleo Urbano, each year)

Each type of worker shows relatively stable feature in its change. However, substantial proportion of workers is in informal economy in Mexico City even in 1994.

Another noticeable point from table 3 is that there is significant change of rate of informal economy from 1994 to 1997, which reflects the impact of economic crisis in 1995. Informal worker increased from 44.5% in 1994, before peso crisis occurred, to 47.2% in 1997. The increasing of informal economy in Mexico City during this period is a result of workers being shed from formal to informal sector, as well as a tendency for an increase in the participation rates of those members of a household in work and declining real wage level. Self-employment or employment in the informal sector may maximize the household's earning power, because during period of wage restraint, informal sector activities are not subject to the same restrictions as formal employment (Ward, 1998).

Informal economy in Mexico City is linked to changes brought by restructuring in the location and employment dynamics of different sectors of Mexican industry. Mexico City was not the case that new high-technology industry was introduced as its main industry in restructuring process. In Guadalajara, the new high technology industries, particularly in electronics are growing fastest, taking on new workers. And, export oriented sector of the industry, such as automobiles and auto parts is mainly located in the border region (Roberts, 1991).

In Mexico City, the proportion of total industrial production registered had been

declined since 1960s. It reflects the rising importance of alternative industrial centers elsewhere in the country, which had the regional advantages (Ward, 1998), and also recently, has attracted foreign investment.

5. Single motherhood in Mexico City

The likelihood of a woman becoming a single mother is undoubtedly affected by social, cultural and religious factors. However, it is also undeniable that there are economic variables with a potential to influence fertility and partnership decision, as economic theory has long emphasized (Lichter, McLaughlin, and Ribar, 1997; Gonzalez, 2005). Based on the studies of single motherhood in the United States, there are several hypotheses about socio-demographic factors that are related to single motherhood and female headship.

Many studies have attempted to estimate the effect of welfare benefits on fertility and marriage, with mixed results. These studies usually model the probability of being a female head as a function of individual and state characteristics, including welfare benefits (Rosenzweig, 1999). However, this theory does not explain the prevalence and increase of single mothers and female headed households in Mexico. Far from the western welfare states, Mexican welfare policies are not well developed enough to induce women to choose single motherhood or female headship for welfare benefits. Probably, most debatable hypothesis is 'economic independence of women', as measured by female wage levels and other indicators of female attachment to the labor force and employment opportunities (Gonzalez, 2005). Some have suggested that access to higher income possibilities would enable women to support children on their own. Others, however, point out that lack of

economic opportunities may lower the perceived cost of out-of-wedlock childbearing, especially for very young women. In terms of the effect of labor market conditions, several researches suggested that in area where few opportunities for achieving legitimate adult status exists, early, nonmarital sexual activity may serve as a marker of having achieved this status (Rich and Kim, 2002).

These two different arguments, however, are not totally exclusive but complement each other in Mexican context because there are different pattern of family composition and structure that Mexican single mothers are placed in from the United States, as I mentioned. The average year of education of Mexico remains low; for example, less than 2 percent of young adults register at universities and colleges in 2000 compared with 3 percent in Costa Rica and 5.3 percent in the United States (Al Camp, 2003). The assumption of economic independence of women explains only small fraction of Mexican women.

“I divorced six years ago...Usually, he didn't want to work and had temporal jobs...when he had a stable job, he always managed it badly. Very bad..He had debt before we got married, and afterward we were always suffering from debts by him. Only thing that he did with money he earned was to pay credit card. He was always like that.... It was a marriage with economic shortage.” (Claudia, 34, administrator of school district)

Claudia has high educational attainment (master in education) and professional job. Different from many young single mothers I interviewed, she is heading her own family without any other family members in her households based on the economic potentials. As

Garcia pointed out, increased schooling attainment together with women participation in the labor market may encourage more women than before to end an unsatisfactory or violent relationship with their partner and set up home elsewhere (García, 2001). Different from many young single mothers that I interviewed, she is heading her own family without any other family members in her household.

However, significant proportion of single mothers in Mexico is through child birth out-of-wedlock in their early age or break of consensual union. According to Garcia, in developing world, increase of female headed households is related to demographic and social factors that are closed linked to disadvantaged living conditions: early pregnancy among women who remain single, in consensual unions or in sporadic unions, desertion by unemployed or poorly paid men who are unable to fulfill their roles as economic providers (Garcia, 2001).

Table 4. Poverty rate by age group

Age of Head	Male-Headed	Female-Headed
<24	43.2	46.2
25-34	45.8	46.6
35-44	44.7	40.6
45-54	39.9	37.1
55-64	41.5	41.5
65<	46.6	45.8

Source: ENADID, 1997

Above table shows the poverty rate of male and female headed households by age group. Overall poverty rate (in table 1) indicates that female headed households are less poor than male headed households. However, break down of age category shows the

different aspect of the relationship between headship and poverty. As shown in the table, households headed by relatively young women present higher poverty rate than their male counterparts. Only the households headed by aged women are relatively better-off than male headed households. If female-headed households are portrayed as relatively young single mothers with young children, it is clear that women-headed households have fewer resources to call on than their male-headed counterparts. Firstly, there is the absence of a male wage and significant economic contributions from children, which both reduces the household income, and provides an economic imperative for the woman to enter the labor force. Secondly, the need to juggle both waged work and domestic responsibilities limits the jobs women for which can apply. Discrimination in the labor force regarding appropriate jobs for women and women's generally lower-levels of education will also limit the range of jobs and the wages available. Finally, time pressures and the absence of the support of a male partner's family leaves the woman isolated in terms of the development and maintenance of social networks (González de la Rocha, 1994c; Willis, 2000).

From this point of view, living in the house of their parents or relatives can be the option for young single mothers to complement their lack of income potential.

“My son goes to school and my sister or brother picks him up from school when school is over. When I don't work, I do it myself...My mom and my sister work too.... Sometimes I work during the weekend, and then my sister and mom take care of him. They buy my son toys and snacks...The greatest gift from my sister for him was superman garment (Ortega, 25, Housekeeper/camarera).”

“...I had to leave school when I was pregnant... I’ve never thought about living separated from my parents because I don’t have money for rent and food..My mom always helps me and my son... Mom and I cook, laundry, clean the house, and take care of my son together (Catalina, 18, Housekeeper/sales).”

Extended family continued to be important in the 1990s in many developing countries (especially in Latin American countries) in that this type of household is more characteristic of the most disadvantaged sectors and suggest that their permanence is one of the indicators of the numerous socio-economic drawbacks faced by Latin American countries that have been exacerbated by recurrent economic crises (Garcia, 2001). As many researchers have studied, extended family or kinship network plays a role of safety net for single mothers that state fails to offer to its citizens.

However, family or kinship network is not always functioning as safety net in some precarious economic situation.

“...I don’t know why they (four brothers-author’s comment) don’t try to find better paid job...I encourage and plead them to work for more money. They bring home 2,000 pesos per 15 days, on average, however it is not so regular....Do you believe it is enough for 9 persons in this family?.....Since my mom died 15 years ago, I have been doing all the housework by myself.....My dad doesn’t help at all because he is too old. He just takes care of my kids. However, I have three kids to take care of..” (Liliana, 27, Housekeeper/sales)

Liliana is living with four brothers, her father, and her three kids running small store from which she earn very small income. With a lack of motivation and intention to work, her brothers change their jobs very frequently. Without any female family member to share the

domestic work, she is under great burden of domestic work and childcare. Liliana is typical case that all of three welfare components which are market, state, and family fail to provide safety net for young single mother with young kids.

Another problem that many young Mexican single mothers face is that they are not protected by health insurance.

“..Insurance of my father covers my mom only. My son and I don't have any insurance....When my son is ill, I visit hospital with 'tarjeta de gratuidad'. But I have to pay for the medicine..with the card, only consulting is free (Catalina, 18, sales/housekeeper)”

In Mexico, medical benefits include up to two years of unlimited medical treatment for each illness. Treatment is provided by the public sector. These benefits are offered during the working life and continue after retirement. The medical benefits extend to the worker's spouse and children under age 16. If children are attending to school at age 16, their benefits are extended until they reach 21 (Marufo, 2002). Catalina is not working because her son is too young to be left to his grandmother. Her irregular and small income is from selling candies to her neighborhood. She and her baby are not eligible for governmental insurance system. Often the case, where the insurance is available, low labor cost is barrier for single mothers to maintain stable economic situation.

“..I was living with the father of my son for two years. When we broke up I returned to the house of my parents...No, I've never thought about living apart from my parents because I cannot pay a rent with my payment now...Of course, El Colegio de Mexico pay my social security, but I'm looking for a job better paid...there are not many

choices for me though..” (Nancy, 30, Building cleaner)

Nancy earns less than 180 dollars a month, which is slightly higher than minimum wage. The minimum wage of Mexico is 47.5 pesos a day in 2005, which is the lowest level among OECD countries as well as is almost 1/10 level of the United States. Because of the extremely low labor cost compared to prices in Mexico, Nancy is suffering from precarious life even though her job covers her social security.

6. Conclusion

From the cases introduced in this report, several facts are revealed. First, the higher income level and low poverty level of female headed households is related to the selection of single mothers with more income potentials in terms of education and jobs to head their own household and young single mothers who don't have much potential are selected out of headship and live with someone else. Second, female headship by young single mothers is related to disadvantages in economic position and the households of these heads are more likely to be in poverty than aged single mothers. Third, although extended family has provided safety net for disadvantaged single mothers, family support is fragile because of high informality of labor market and weak social safety net especially for less educated population. These findings provide some implication for social policy in Mexico.

It is undoubted that female headship by young single mothers in Mexico is related to the poverty. For this reason, social program for supporting young single mothers and their children need to be incorporated into the poverty relief program. Until now, federal governmental poverty relief program covers only rural areas. Although the region of

coverage expanded to some urban areas, most of poor urban areas were entirely excluded from this program. For example, only 3 delegations which mostly consist of rural parts of Mexico City is under the coverage of this program and beneficiaries receive very limited amount of money (about 20 to 30 dollars a month). This fact implies that poverty in Mexico means only extreme poverty Basic needs for housing, food, education and should be considered as social right of citizens. Also, targeting money transfer program for single mothers to promote the educational attainment of children should be accompanied by effective labor market policy to improve and protect the purchasing power of these families.

Social security and health insurance is another important component in social polity for single mothers. In Mexico, social security system is based on formal sector of labor market and accessibility to health care system for non-insured population is very limited. Even though poor population are given the benefit of free access to health institutions, as shown in Mexico City by city government, the quality of services is poor so that they don't meet with the need of people. Public health insurance system does not exist in Mexico yet. Furthermore, without the income stability even public health insurance system cannot work well.

Most of all, as Danziger and Danziger (2005) point out, an antipoverty initiative in any country will have a hard time in succeeding if that country does not achieve and maintain stable economic growth. In addition, the increasingly-competitive globalized economy and continuing rapid technological changes require that substantial effort be given to raising the human capital and skills of the labor force.

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