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socialobservatorylacaixa.org
One of the most important spheres for safeguarding the protection of children and teenagers is the family. Young people require a suitable environment to ensure their appropriate development. In this sense, the family is a basic point of reference for guaranteeing their personal welfare.

Until relatively recently, the immense majority of Spanish children lived under the same roof as their mother and father. Since the early 1990s, however, the country has undergone a series of very fast-moving changes, with the more traditional family evolving towards new models of coexistence. An increase in parental separation has led to growing numbers of children living in single-parent households.

Separation may be accompanied by situations of conflict that can have a negative impact on children’s emotional wellbeing. Moreover, the absence of one parent increases the burdens on the other, leading to the fact that living in a single-family household corresponds to lower income levels.

This Dossier aims to provide elements for reflection on the diversity of family models in Spain and on how these can condition child welfare. Children are the most vulnerable group of all and the group most likely to suffer the effects of economic crises. Therefore, the financial resources available to the family will have a decisive impact on them.

The "la Caixa" Banking Foundation is strongly committed to improving the situation of families, especially those in a situation of relative or extreme financial poverty. A good example of this is its CaixaProinfància programme, which proposes a comprehensive care model for children in situations of vulnerability and their families. Within its framework, worthy of special mention is its Positive Parenting programme, which provides parents with tools to help them perform their roles in a way that facilitates their child’s optimum development.
As an introduction to the Dossier, the Barometer starts off by presenting some context indicators, to provide a general overview. This is followed by a series of key indicators to find out the economic and social situation of Spanish families, according to different household compositions.

The two articles that follow next deal with two subjects of special interest. The first considers whether parental separation affects children’s school performance. The second analyses the division of household chores in couples where the female is the sole breadwinner.

As illustrated in the text by Diederik Boertien, Spanish families have changed very quickly in recent decades and there are now fewer children living in the same home as both of their biological parents. As teenagers, they have a slightly lower possibility than others of completing upper secondary education at the appropriate age. Also, the author concludes that growing economic inequality is more concerning for progress at school than the changes observed in family structure.

The article by Joan Garcia Román analyses the relatively recent phenomenon of couples where the female is the sole breadwinner. These types of partnerships are more egalitarian and reflect fewer gender differences when it comes to doing the household chores. However, in contrast with other countries, in Spain the gender gap in the amount of time devoted to domestic chores remains.

Turning to the Interview, the intergenerational transmission of behaviours and values, and the transformations of family structures that have occurred in a relatively short time are the main issues tackled in a conversation with the researcher Aart Liefbroer.

The Review in this issue focuses on two publications that tackle the subject of how the instability caused by socioeconomic inequality is putting couples to the test, particularly in an era of changing gender roles, and also puts at risk the wellbeing of their children.

The Dossier closes with a section on Best Practices, on this occasion covering the psychoeducational programme “Learning Together, Growing as a Family”, under the umbrella of the Caixa Proinfância framework programme.
Summary

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For more data see
www.socialobservatorylacaixa.org
This section provides a general context for the rest of the data and indicators that are presented in the Barometer. Thus, based on a series of basic indicators and synthetic indices on social, demographic and economic issues, this section offers a global and temporary view of the situation in Spain within the European or international context.

Selection made by Anna Villarroya, Associate Professor of Applied Economics, University of Barcelona

Global view

1. Level of economic development

Gross Domestic Product per inhabitant in Purchasing Power Standards

SPAIN AND EU-28 (EU-28=100)

In 2017, the GDP per inhabitant in Purchasing Power Standards remained at 92% of the European average, unchanged from the previous year

The data are expressed in Purchasing Power Standards, which enables the elimination of differences in price levels between countries and facilitates, therefore, a comparison of GDP that better reflects the economic capacity of the citizens of each country. The volume of GDP per inhabitant in Purchasing Power Standards is expressed in relation with the average of the European Union (EU-28), which takes the value 100. Thus, if the index of a country is above 100, the level of GDP per inhabitant of that country is higher than the average value of the European Union and vice versa.

Global view

The **Gini coefficient** measures inequality in income distribution. To facilitate its interpretation, the values (from 0 to 1) are multiplied by 100, thus ranging between 0 and 100. A coefficient close to 0 means that a more equal distribution exists, while a coefficient close to 100 implies a high concentration of income in a reduced number of individuals and, therefore, greater inequality.

### 2. Inequality in income distribution

The At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion or **AROPE indicator** provides a multi-dimensional view of poverty and social exclusion recording the population that is in at least one of the following three situations: 1) below the poverty risk threshold; 2) suffering severe material deprivation; 3) households with low or zero work intensity.

#### Gini Coefficient (GC)

Between the years 2007 and 2017, inequality in Spain increased, with a Gini Coefficient (not including social transfers) that has increased in value from 45 to 50

![Gini Coefficient (GC)](chart)

Source: Eurostat, 2018 / * The data refer to the EU-27 / ** The data refer to 2016

#### 3. People at risk of poverty and social exclusion

**AROPE at risk of poverty and social exclusion indicator**

Sources: Eurostat, 2018 / * The data from 2007 refer to the EU-27

In 2017, one out of every four people was at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Spain, three points higher than the European average (EU-28: 23.5%)
4. Exclusion from the labour market

Unemployment rates by nationality
ANNUAL AVERAGE, SPAIN AND EU-28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nacionales</th>
<th>Extranjeros</th>
<th>Spain ... EU-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Unemployment rates by age group and nationality, 2017
ANNUAL AVERAGE, SPAIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNDER 25 YEARS</th>
<th>25-64 YEARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extranjeros</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nacionales</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


16.4% Percentage of the Spanish population unemployed, much higher than the European average (EU-28 = 7.3%).

23.9% Percentage of foreign population unemployed, in 2017, much higher than the European average (EU-28 = 12.5%).

38.6% Nearly 40% of young Spanish people (aged under 25 years) were unemployed in 2017, much higher than the European average (EU-28 = 16.8%).

5. Demographic determinants

Population change due to natural causes (births and deaths) and to migratory movements (inflow and outflow)
SPAIN AND EU-28

In 2017, the Spanish population grew by 132,000 people. Without contemplating migratory flows, the population would have fallen by 31,000 people.

The **early leaving from education and training rate** shows the percentage of people aged from 18 to 24 years whose maximum level of education is the first phase of Secondary Education and who are not currently following any kind of education or training.

### 6. Limitations to human capital training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early leaving from education and training rate</th>
<th>SPAIN AND EU-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>EU-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2017, the early leaving from education and training percentage was 18.3%, nearly thirteen points below the figure for 2007, but still a long way from the Europe 2020 Strategy target for Spain (15%).

### Early leaving rate in Spain

#### 35.8%

Percentage of foreign nationals (18-24 years) who, in 2017, left education or training early (EU-28: 22%).

#### 15.9%

Percentage of Spanish nationals (18-24 years) who, in 2017, left education or training early (EU-28: 9.6%).

This section presents a series of key indicators for ascertaining the economic and social situation of Spanish families taking into account different household compositions.

These indicators originate from European surveys (such as the European Survey on Income and Living Conditions, EU-SILC, and the Community Labour Force Survey, LFS) or international ones (such as the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA).

Selection made by Anna Villarroya, Associate Professor of Applied Economics, University of Barcelona.

### Composition of households

1. How are our households made up?

Percentage of households according to type, 2017

In 2017, the most frequent type of household in Spain was that of one adult person alone without children (25.6%), below the European average (EU-28: 33.6%) and countries such as Germany or Finland, where the percentage exceeded 40% of households.

![Composition of households chart]

## 2. Households at risk of poverty and social exclusion

### Percentage of single-parent households at risk of poverty and social exclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>EU-28**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007*</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017**</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Percentage of households at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Household</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>EU-28**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households formed by two adults with one child</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households formed by two adults with two children</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households formed by two adults with three or more children</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2017, nearly half of single-parent households were at risk of poverty and social exclusion, twenty-one points higher than the total of Spanish households (26.6%).

Source: Eurostat, 2018 / * The data refer to the EU-27 / ** The data for the EU-28 refer to 2016.
Type of household and childcare

3. Can families afford access to childcare services*?

By household composition
SPAIN, 2016

In 2016, some 32.5% of single-parent families said they faced great difficulties in affording childcare services, much higher than the difficulty levels expressed by other types of households.

4. What are the main reasons that make access to services provided by nurseries difficult?

By household composition
SPAIN, 2016

*Note: Childcare services include both attendance at nurseries and the hiring of childcare services (nannies, babysitters, etc.)

The Economic, Social and Cultural Status Index (ESCS) reflects the professional occupation and education level of parents, as well as the resources (number of books) or digital devices (computers, laptops or tablets) available in the home. It is considered that students in the lower quartile of the ESCS index are socioeconomically disadvantaged and that students situated in the upper quartile are socioeconomically advantaged.

5. Situation of households and performance of students

Average score in mathematics and in reading of students aged 15 years by socioeconomic and cultural level of their families, 2015

In 2015, the difference between the average scores in reading and mathematics between more and less socioeconomically advantaged students reached 80 and 82 points respectively (which is equivalent to around two school years). This difference is below that recorded in countries such as Germany, France, Portugal, Sweden, or the OECD average.

Educational inequalities by socioeconomic and cultural level of households, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Reading: Average score in reading for students aged 15 years in socioeconomically disadvantaged households (OECD: 452)</th>
<th>Mathematics: Average score in mathematics for students aged 15 years in socioeconomically disadvantaged households (OECD: 451)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PISA 2015, OECD
6. **What type of housing do Spanish families live in?**

Percentage of households by housing ownership type, 2017

- **ONE PERSON**
  - Ownership: 71.7%
  - Rental at market price: 10.1%
  - Rental below market price: 6.6%
  - Free allocation: 12.6%

- **SINGLE-PARENT**
  - Ownership: 75.8%
  - Rental at market price: 6.6%
  - Rental below market price: 4.5%
  - Free allocation: 7.1%

- **2 ADULTS WITHOUT CHILDREN**
  - Ownership: 80.1%
  - Rental at market price: 9.1%
  - Rental below market price: 4.5%
  - Free allocation: 6.0%

- **2 ADULTS WITH 1 OR MORE DEPENDENT CHILDREN***
  - Ownership: 76.7%
  - Rental at market price: 5.8%
  - Rental below market price: 3.3%
  - Free allocation: 10.0%

*Some 65% of single-parent households live in self-owned homes, nearly twelve points below the total of Spanish households*

*Note: Dependent children are individuals aged from 0 to 17 years and from 18 to 24 years if they are inactive and live with at least one parent.*


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7. **Difficulties of families related with housing**

Percentage of households by type of material deprivation, 2017

- **CANNOT AFFORD TO MAINTAIN THE HOME AT AN ADEQUATE TEMPERATURE**
  - Single-parent: 13.1%
  - One person: 10.1%
  - 2 adults without children: 7.6%
  - 2 adults with 1 or more dependent children: 6.6%

- **HAS BEEN LATE WITH PAYMENT OF HOUSEHOLD-RELATED EXPENSES IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS**
  - Single-parent: 17.3%
  - One person: 5.8%
  - 2 adults without children: 4.5%
  - 2 adults with 1 or more dependent children: 9.1%

- **NO CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH UNEXPECTED EXPENSES**
  - Single-parent: 54.5%
  - One person: 42.5%
  - 2 adults without children: 34.0%
  - 2 adults with 1 or more dependent children: 33.3%

Source: Survey on Living Conditions, 2017, INE
8. Concentration of low-intensity employment in single-parent households

Percentage of people (from 0 to 59 years) who live in households with very low employment intensity by household type*, 2017

![Chart showing concentration of low-intensity employment by household type.]

**24.6%**

*The highest percentage of households with very low employment intensity corresponds to single-parent households*

*Note: Households with a low employment intensity refers to households in which those members of working age did so less than 20% of their potential. Source: Eurostat, 2018.*

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Type of household and happiness

9. Are families with children in the household happier?

Percentage of people who felt happy in the last month, by frequency and type of household

**SPAIN, 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households without dependent children</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with dependent children</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of household and cultural participation

10. Participation in cultural activities
Percentage of individuals who took part in cultural activities at least once in the last year, by type of household, in 2015

- **Germany**
  - Families without dependent children: 70.1%
  - Families with dependent children: 80.2%

- **Spain**
  - Families without dependent children: 53.7%
  - Families with dependent children: 65.6%

- **France**
  - Families without dependent children: 73.2%
  - Families with dependent children: 84.4%

- **Portugal**
  - Families without dependent children: 80.0%
  - Families with dependent children: 90.7%

- **Sweden**
  - Families without dependent children: 82.1%
  - Families with dependent children: 89.6%

- **EU-28**
  - Families without dependent children: 60.0%
  - Families with dependent children: 69.8%

In 2015, some 66% of the Spanish population in households with dependent children attended cultural activities (cinema, live shows and places of cultural interest) at least once per year, nearly twelve points higher than the population living in households without dependent children.

11. Barriers to cultural participation according to household type
Spain, 2015

- **Total**
  - Cannot afford it: 14.4%
  - Not interested: 13.0%

- **Single parent**
  - Cannot afford it: 20.3%
  - Not interested: 4.8%

- **Two or more adults with dependent children**
  - Cannot afford it: 16.5%
  - Not interested: 8.2%

Source: Survey on Living Conditions, 2015, INE
Summary

18 Which family factors affect children’s development at school?
Diederik Boertien, Centre for Demographic Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

28 How are household chores divided in female breadwinner couples?
Joan Garcia Román, Centre for Demographic Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Which family factors affect children’s development at school?

Diederik Boertien, Centre for Demographic Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Families in Spain have undergone major changes over the last couple of decades. It has become less common for children to live with both biological parents in the same household. Children in this situation were slightly less likely to have completed compulsory education (ESO) on time. However, and as shown by this article, it seems that socioeconomic differences are the most decisive for explaining disparities in the academic progress of children.

Keywords: family structure, single parents, school progress, family change, children
Spain is changing fast, and so are the country's families. Until relatively recently, the vast majority of Spanish children still lived with both their biological parents in the same home from birth until they moved out to form their own households. In many other parts of Europe, families had already undergone a dramatic transformation, but Spain still seemed rather traditional when it came to family issues. However, since the early 1990s, Spain's rapid changes have been so striking that Spanish families now look much more like their Northern and Western European counterparts than their Mediterranean neighbours.

For instance, the number of divorces in Spain is now as high as in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany and significantly higher than in countries such as Italy and Greece, which in the past were similar to Spain. Spain caught up with these other countries particularly after the introduction of its 'express divorce' bill in 2005, which made divorcing much faster and easier. Recent statistics on the stability of unmarried couples are much less widely available but, given that cohabitation did not increase until more recently in the country (Dominguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martin, 2013), trends in instability over time within Spain are likely to be even more pronounced if unmarried couples are taken into account.

Due to this increase in parental divorce and separation, increasing numbers of children no longer share their day-to-day home with their biological father or mother. Some of them live with a single parent and others also live with their mother’s or father’s new partner. Many children also switch homes on a regular basis to share their time between both parents.

Even though separation and divorce often free children from direct exposure to conflict between their parents, not living with a mother or father in the same home does pose its challenges. Single-parent families are more likely to be poor, and children often have less contact with the parent who does not live in the same household (Amato, 2010). Single parents might also be less effective in supervising and mentoring their children simply because they have less time on their hands to closely accompany their children throughout their school career and life. Due to these challenges, there are concerns that family change might have affected children's wellbeing and outcomes in life.
This article will analyse to what extent this is the case in Spain. Firstly, it will describe the situation of families in Spain today and document how many children grow up in different types of family structures. Secondly, it will look at the school progress of children living in various family arrangements using data from the Spanish Census of 2011, the most recent census recorded in Spain. Its aim is to answer the question to what extent family structure influences children's progress at school and how important this factor is in comparison to other characteristics such as maternal education and economic resources.

**Families in Spain 2011**

The Census of 1991 still indicated that almost 90% of children aged 16 lived with two parents in the same household. Today, this family structure is no longer as common as it used to be.

Most children still lived with their two biological parents (73%) and a few of them also lived with one or more grandparents in the same home (4% of all children). Some 23% of children did not live with their biological mother or father in the household. Some of them lived with two parents, but one of the co-resident parents was the child's stepmother...
or stepfather. Meanwhile, 6% of children lived with their mother and her partner, whereas 2% shared the home with their father and his partner in 2011. The largest group of children living with one or fewer parents consisted of children living with a single mother (12%), followed by children living with no parents (e.g., those who live only with grandparents or other relatives, 4%) and children living with a single father (3%).

**Growing up with or without two parents at home**

How well do children living in various family types perform at school and how important is this family structure as compared to other characteristics such as economic resources and parental education? Why would differences be expected in school progress depending on how many parents children live with?

Children living with a single parent have home environments that differ from those of children who live with their two biological parents. Some of these differences are important for children’s school progress (Härkönen et al., 2017). Firstly, parents who supervise their children doing homework and who engage them in developmental activities have children who do better at school. Such ‘intensive parenting’ can be more complicated for parents who do not live with their children in the same household. For single parents who do live with their children, such intensive parenting might also be complicated because running a household on their own might leave little extra time to supervise and teach their children.

A second factor that can have an impact on children’s school progress is economic resources. Single-parent families are more likely to be poor
because they often rely on the income of one adult instead of two. Poverty can lead to considerable stress within a family and this can have effects on children’s behaviour and school performance (Conger et al., 2010). Money buys families homes in rich neighbourhoods, allows parents to hire private teachers and makes it possible to enrol children in activities outside of school hours. All these factors increase the chances of children doing well at school.

Finally, most children who do not live with their biological mother or father have experienced the separation of their parents. Children often need some time to adjust to this new situation, which might temporarily disrupt their performance at school.

Children who live with a single parent are less likely to complete compulsory education on time

Many of the challenges that single-parent families face can be overcome, and many children living with single parents in fact do as well as their peers. At the same time, most empirical studies do show that children living with single parents, on average, perform slightly worse at school in comparison with other children (Amato, 2010). Earlier research has shown that a high degree of involvement of non-resident parents (in terms of both contact and finances) and joint custody are factors that minimize the impact of parental separation on children (Härkönen et al., 2017). Obstacles posed by single parenthood can also be overcome through maintenance payments, public childcare and other support for single parents. New partners could to some extent relieve pressures on single parents’ tasks and can bring economic resources to the household, but the presence of step-parents in the household might also require new emotional adjustments to be made by children.

In summary, there are reasons to expect the number of parents children live with to influence their progress at school. In the next section, it will be seen to what extent this is the case in Spain.

Completing compulsory education (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria) on time in Spain

To look at children’s school progress, data from the Spanish Census from 2011 is used. One of the questions asked in the Census is whether people had completed compulsory education (ESO), or not. Children normally finish compulsory education at age 16. This means that at the time of the Census (November 2011), children born in 1995 should have completed compulsory education. Children born in 1995 who had not completed
compulsory education either repeated a year at school or dropped out of school. Repeating a year and dropping out of school are related to important outcomes in later life, including income, health, and family life. Figure 3 indicates – for several groups of children born in 1995 – the share of children that did not complete compulsory education.

A first comparison is made between children living with two biological parents and children who live with a single parent (i.e., a mother or father who does not live with a partner). Among children living with two parents, 23% did not complete compulsory education, compared to 28% of children living with a single parent. From these numbers, it indeed appears to be the case that the number of parents that children live with influences their school outcomes. How important are these differences and how should they be interpreted?

To get a good idea of how important these differences are, they can be compared to differences according to other widely studied characteristics which are known to be related to children’s school performance. Figure 3 shows how the likelihood of completing compulsory education differs between children who live in a home that is rented by their family as compared to children who live in a home that is owned by the family. It can be seen that 20% of children living in a home owned by the family did not complete school on time, as compared to 37% of children who live in a rented home. This gap of 17% is somewhat larger than the gap of 5% observed between children living with two parents and children living with one parent.

Figure 3. Probability of non-completion of ESO on time among individuals aged 16

% Behind at school

- Living with both biological parents: 23.06%
- Living with a single parent: 27.7%
- Living in an owned home: 19.5%
- Living in a rented home: 36.6%
- Mother has university education: 11.2%
- Mother has less than primary education: 40.5%

Figure 3 also shows differences according to the mother’s education. The two extreme possibilities in the mother’s education were chosen, as information on the father’s education was not available for many single-parent families. Here, differences are even more dramatic, with a gap of 29 percentage points between children who have a university-educated mother and children who have a mother without educational qualifications. From this perspective, it becomes clear that other characteristics, such as their mother’s education, are much more important for the school outcomes of children than the number of parents that they live with.

How can differences in school completion between types of families be explained?

A 5% difference in compulsory education completion exists with children who live with one instead of two biological parents. This can be considered a relatively small difference, but how should such a percentage be interpreted? Does this mean that it does actually matter who children live with?

An important issue to take into account when interpreting these differences in school progress is the question of ‘causality’. When two characteristics are related – in this case family structure and educational performance – this does not automatically mean that one causes the other. To illustrate the point, it is clear that children who live in a rented home perform worse at school, not because renting a home is a particularly impactful experience, but rather because of other characteristics typical of people who rent their home. For instance, people who rent a home normally have less money than people who own a home and a higher proportion of them live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It might therefore be that differences in school completion between these two groups are because of money and not because of their housing status.

The same argument applies to families where children live without their biological father or mother. One of the striking elements of the changes in family life observed over the last decades is that families of less-educated people have changed much more than the families of more-educated people. In 2011, almost 40% of children whose mother did not have educational qualifications did not live with their biological father, compared to 17% of those who had a university-educated mother. It is a well-known fact that children of educated parents are

In comparison to the effects of differences in families’ economic resources, these effects of family structure are small
more likely to do well at school (a pattern similar to that already illustrated in figure 3). Better-educated parents transmit skills and attitudes to their children and can help them navigate successfully through the schooling system. If many children living with single parents have less educated parents, this could be the reason why they are more likely to not finish school on time. Therefore, ascertaining whether the number of parents that children live with really matters for their school outcomes, or whether they do worse at school due to other characteristics, is not so straightforward.

A first strategy for dealing with this issue is to statistically account for background characteristics that might possibly explain differences in school progress. In other words, the estimates of school completion can be adjusted according to the different levels of education of children’s mothers. This exercise is displayed in figure 5.

The first set of bars reproduces the unadjusted differences in compulsory education completion already shown in figure 3. The second set of bars in figure 5 shows these differences, but this time accounting for a set of background characteristics such as maternal education, region, and whether children are foreign born. Here it can be seen that the differences between the groups become slightly smaller, indicating that background characteristics are part of the reason why children living with a single parent perform worse at school in comparison with children living with two biological parents.

Nonetheless, after accounting for these characteristics, a 4% gap in school completion remains between both groups of children. Of course, there are many other possible background characteristics that could theoretically account for this gap which are not available in the census.
data. It is therefore still possible that this 4% difference between groups of children is due to third factors. However, it is also likely that part of this difference indeed reflects something that is particular to children living with one biological parent.

It was noted earlier that children living with one biological parent often receive different parenting, are more likely to live in an economically poor household, and might have needed to adjust psychologically to their parents’ separation in the past. The third set of bars in figure 5 enable evaluation of the importance of one of these three explanations: differences in economic situation. This third set of bars statistically accounts for differences in the mother’s employment and a set of durables children have in their home (in addition to the background characteristics covered by the second set of bars): heating, internet, and the number of rooms their home has. It can be seen that the differences between groups are further reduced to 3% once this small set of economic factors are accounted for. Economic factors are therefore likely to be an important reason why children living with one biological parent instead of two do slightly worse at school.

Remaining differences could possibly be explained by better measurements of economic resources, such as family income, or measurements of parenting and psychological well-being. Such information, however, is not available in the census.

Figure 5. **Unadjusted and adjusted probabilities of individuals aged 16 not having completed compulsory education**

**% Not completed lower secondary school**

1. **UNADJUSTED**
   - 23.06% (Living with both parents)
   - 27.7% (Not completed Lower Secondary School)

2. **ADJUSTED FOR SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**
   - 23.12% (Living with both parents)
   - 27.4% (Not completed Lower Secondary School)

3. **ADJUSTED FOR HOUSEHOLD DURABLES AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**
   - 23.2% (Living with both parents)
   - 26.5% (Not completed Lower Secondary School)

**Note:** individuals born in 1995 who had not completed compulsory education (ESO) in November 2011. Based on information for 30,010 children.

**Demographic characteristics:** mother’s age, education and nationality; child’s month of birth, foreign-born children, region (autonomous community), number of siblings.

**Household durables:** housing status (owned, owned with mortgage, rented); mother employed or not; internet access; whether home has heating; number of rooms in the home.

Source: compiled by the author, based on the Spanish Census 2011.
Should there be concern about whether children live with two parents or one?

Families in Spain have changed dramatically over the last decades. More and more children spend part of their childhood living without their biological mother or father in the same household. Given the challenges involved in raising children as a single parent or as a separated couple, it is not surprising that there have been some concerns as to whether family changes have had consequences for children’s outcomes. This article looked at the likelihood that children did not complete compulsory education (ESO) on time using data from the Spanish Census 2011. Children who lived with a single parent were less likely to have completed compulsory education on time as compared to children who live with two biological parents. However, once differences in school completion were compared according to other characteristics such as maternal education or housing status, it became clear that the number of parents children live with is much less important for school progress than these other socioeconomic characteristics.

Policies aimed at preventing children from falling behind at school will have greater chances of success if geared towards reducing socioeconomic differences between households

Given the importance of socioeconomic characteristics for children's school progress, the increasing economic inequality that Spain has witnessed over recent years is more concerning than the changes families have undergone. Policies aimed at preventing children from lagging behind at school are therefore likely to be most effective once directed at reducing socioeconomic differences between households. The modest differences in school progress between children who live with one instead of two biological parents could be partly explained by socioeconomic differences. Policies aimed at lowering socioeconomic inequality are therefore also likely to close gaps in the completion of compulsory education between children living with one biological parent instead of two.

References


How are household chores divided in female breadwinner couples?

Joan García Román, Centre for Demographic Studies (UAB)
“la Caixa” Social Observatory Award for the best article in the field of Social Inclusion

The number of couples where only the female partner is in paid employment has increased considerably over recent decades, reaching 12.9% of Spanish couples in 2013. This type of partnership brings with it a new and infrequent division of gender roles in the household. The woman's salary represents the sole or the main income, so this should also influence the division of household chores.

Key words: gender, time-use, family, female employment, female breadwinner couples
Introduction

In recent times, society has been witness to a transformation in family models. The massive incorporation of women into the labour market has been one of the greatest changes to occur in Western societies (Bianchi et al., 2000; Goldin, 2006). Couples in which both partners are employed have become the norm, while couples in which the male is sole earner have decreased. The number of couples in which the female partner is the sole earner has also increased, especially during the economic recession. Studying these couples, known as female-breadwinner (FBW) couples, in contrast with the traditional male-breadwinner model, is important because they represent a new allocation of gender roles in the household. This is especially true when the female partner is the sole earner (Vitali and Arpino, 2016; Bueno and Vidal-Coso, 2017).

In Spain there has been an evolution of the different types of couple according to each partner's employment status. In contrast with the situation in other Western countries, where dual-earner couples were already in the majority in the 1990s, in Spain the sole male-earner model was still predominant. Even so, the female employment rate has increased in recent decades, as shown by the fact that in the early 1990s the proportion of dual-earner couples was less than 25% of total couples, whereas today they represent over 50%.

The evolution of FBW couples in which the woman is the sole earner shows a significant increase after the onset of the economic recession. The main reason behind this increase is that the financial crisis had a greater impact on jobs that are traditionally male-dominated, such as those in the industrial and construction sectors. Couples where the woman is sole earner represented about 5% of all Spanish couples until 2008; then the figure started to rise, achieving a peak of 12.9% in the first quarter of 2013. From that year on, it has gradually decreased to stabilise at around 10%.
What are the characteristics of couples where the female is the sole earner? How are gender roles distributed between the members of these couples in Spain? To answer these questions, a comparison will be made between couples at two different points in time: firstly, in 2003, when the economy was expanding, and secondly in 2010, when it was in recession. To measure the division of roles, the indicator used will be the time allocation of each member of the couple.

**How is time distributed in female-breadwinner couples?**

What differences are there between the man and the woman in FBW couples with respect to the time that they devote to each activity? Answering this question is key to understanding how gender roles are organised in the uses of time of these couples.

Figure 2 shows the difference between the time devoted by women and men to three activities: household chores, leisure and personal care. These differences reflect the average time that each devotes to these ac-
tivities daily. The upper part of the axis indicates that women devote more time than men, while the lower part indicates the opposite.

The most interesting difference is observed in the time allocated to household chores. In contrast with other countries, in Spain there is no change in the sign of the gender gap with respect to time devoted to domestic chores, so women continue devoting more time than men to these tasks, even when they are the only member of the couple in paid employment.

However, the difference is lower than in the sample for all couples, and also, it has decreased over the period studied. In other words, in FBW couples, the time devoted to household chores is distributed more evenly between the male and the female than it is across all couples. Also, in FBW couples, the gender gap has gradually been reduced over the course of the years.

In 2003, women in FBW couples in Spain spent 55 minutes more on housework than their partners, whereas in 2010, they just spent 13 minutes more. The reduction of the gender gap is similar to the amount observed for all couples together.
Another activity that shows a significant difference between types of couples is the time they devote to leisure. Women in FBW couples spend approximately 3 hours less per day than men on leisure activities, and this fell by approximately 20 minutes between 2003 and 2010. In other words, in FBW couples, during these seven years women reduced the difference in leisure time with respect to men, but this difference remains significant. In contrast, the gender gap is smaller for the overall sample of couples. In 2010, the men enjoyed 45 minutes more of leisure per day than the women, without significant changes with respect to 2003.

Finally, women in FBW couples spend less time on personal care than their partners. However, the gender gap has decreased. When all couples are considered, the gender gap is almost zero and it has remained very stable.

It seems then that the greater amount of time that women in FBW couples spend on housework and paid employment is compensated by a considerable reduction in their leisure time and by less time spent on personal care.

Spain in the European context

As seen in the previous section, the gender gap in time distribution persists in Spanish couples and also – although to a lesser degree – in couples where the division of roles in the labour market might lead one to imagine a more equitable distribution, such as, for example, in FBW couples. But what happens in the other countries in Europe?

Figure 3 shows the gender gaps in household chores in some countries: Italy (which, as seen in figure 1, has undergone a massive incorporation of women into the labour market similar to that seen in Spain), France and the United Kingdom (countries where the generalised incorporation of women into the labour market took place earlier).

The graph shows that for all couples overall, the gender gap is positive in all countries, in other words women devote more time to household chores. There are important differences between countries: in the United Kingdom and France the difference is slightly above one hour, whereas in Italy it reaches 3 hours.

As for FBW couples, two different patterns are observed. Firstly, in Spain and Italy, the woman continues to be the person who devotes
most time to household chores. The difference is especially significant in Italy (over one hour). Secondly, in France and the United Kingdom, the situation is reversed and men devote more time to household chores than their partners.

Thus, compared with other European countries, Spain is still a long way off from equality, as in some countries FBW couples have managed to reverse the gender gap in household chores. Even so, the situation is better than in Italy, where gender inequalities are still considerable and where FBW couples still present important inequalities in the division of household chores.

Main characteristics of female-breadwinner couples in Spain

The main characteristics of FBW couples have been estimated at the two observation time points (figure 4). The figures reveal that these characteristics have changed significantly in Spain over the seven-year period...
between 2003 and 2010. The proportion of FBW couples increased considerably in this period (from 5% to 10.7%), and this produced variations in their characteristics.

During the economic recession, FBW couples have become younger in Spain. Between 2003 and 2010, the mean age of each of the members of these couples decreased by almost five years. As a result, they were slightly younger than the members of the overall couples group in 2010, whereas in 2003 they were significantly older.

Another noticeable change in the characteristics of Spanish FBW couples (figure 4) is the increase in the number of cohabiting (non-married) couples and couples with children. The proportion of FBW couples that cohabit has dramatically increased from 7.2% in 2003 to 16.7% in 2010. The proportion of cohabiting couples in the overall population also grown but the increase was smaller. To a large extent this is the consequence of the rejuvenation observed, as younger couples are more likely to cohabit.

Meanwhile, a lower proportion of FBW couples have children in the household compared with couples overall, in 2003 and 2010 alike. Nevertheless, the proportion of FBW couples with children rose by over 10 points in this period, while the increase for the overall population was

In female breadwinner couples, the time devoted to household chores is distributed more evenly
only 3.6 points. In fact, the proportion of FBW couples with children exceeded 50% in 2010. It must be taken into account that the presence of children in the household has a very significant effect on the division of roles between the couple. Thus, childless couples often present a more equal behaviour in the division of household chores, whereas the arrival of children is usually the trigger for growing differences in the allocation of time (Ajenjo and García Román, 2014).

The distribution of couples by level of education also presents significant differences between the FBW couples and couples overall, as well as differences over time. In FBW couples, the proportion of female partners with a higher level of education than the male partner is greater. This difference has increased significantly in the period under
analysis (from a fifth in 2003 to almost a third in 2010). In contrast, the proportion of couples in which the male has a higher level of education has decreased, as has the proportion of couples in which both members have the same level of education. In general, the growth of the population with higher education levels has been greater among the female population, therefore it is much more probable that the female partner will have a higher level of education. In FBW couples, the male partner who is now unemployed had worked in the sectors most affected by the crisis (construction and industry), in which the education level required is lower.

A look at the distribution of the population by age group and gender helps better understand the changes in the average ages of FBW couples. In 2003, a high proportion of FBW couples were concentrated at the peak of the pyramid, since they were couples in which the male partner was retired and the female partner was not.

In 2010, on the other hand, there was a higher proportion in the population group aged below 45 years old. If we take into account that, according to the definition adopted in this study, FBW couples are made up of a woman who is employed and a man who is not employed, it can be concluded that the reason behind the increase in FBW couples is related with growth in male unemployment, since in its early days the crisis affected the more male-dominated sectors.

Figure 5. Structure by age and gender of people living in female-breadwinner couples

SPAIN, 2003 and 2010

Conclusions: few reasons for optimism in the redefinition of roles

The data on how couples allocate their time has enabled us to analyse FBW households in Spain, as well as to explore trends over time, by comparing survey data from 2003 and 2010. Also compared were FBW families and other types of family arrangements.

In contrast with other countries where the proportion of FBW couples has remained stable in recent decades, in Spain, this type of couple is relatively new, and a high proportion of such couples are the consequence of increased job destruction in male-oriented labour sectors during the economic recession. Traditionally, Spanish FBW couples were mainly the result of a retired male and a female still in the labour market, but more recently these couples are younger and are driven by the higher impact of unemployment on male-dominated jobs. In 2010, Spanish FBW couples were younger and more likely to cohabit and have children, and showed a greater proportion of women with higher education levels than their male partners than in 2003.

The analysis of time allocation shows that FBW couples are more egalitarian than other types of couples, as reflected in the lower gender gap in household chores (there is increased male involvement). Even so, it is interesting to observe that this tendency differs in Spain from that observed in other countries such as France or the United Kingdom, where the male spends more time on housework when he is not employed and his partner is employed. In Spain, there is no reversal in the gender gap for time spent on housework, and women still do more housework even if they are the sole earner. It seems that FBW couples have a different meaning in Spain: if you are a female and the only person in your family that works, you will continue to do a double working day, inside and outside of the home.

When explaining the allocation of household roles, Spanish FBW couples appear to be more driven by the gender socialization perspective. According to this perspective, housework is a symbolic field in which men and women perform according to what is expected based on their gender identity. Consequently, even when gender roles in the productive sphere have switched, women continue doing more housework than would be expected (West and Zimmermann, 1987). Similarly, when the traditional male-breadwinner model is violated, there is a gender-deviance neutralization effect, and husbands who are more dependent in terms of earnings attempt to reinforce their gender
expectations by doing less housework (Brines, 1994). In Spanish society, traditional gender norms seem to be more deep-rooted than in other societies and the role of women as the main performers of household chores remains strong (Sevilla Sanz, 2010).

In the future, we expect that a high proportion of men in FBW couples will ultimately also find employment. The instability and precariousness of the Spanish labour market makes it difficult to maintain a family with only one salary. Within this context, families with a sole earner (whether male or female) are not sustainable. Given the contradictory allocation of gender roles in household duties in a context where the division of paid work is unequal (when only the woman is employed), it is not possible to be overly optimistic about the future distribution of roles when these couples return to both members being in paid employment. The return to a dual-earner arrangement might suppose an increase in the gender gap in household duties when the man returns to the labour market and his time availability decreases.

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**Childless couples often present a more equal behaviour in the division of chores, whereas the arrival of children is usually the trigger for growing differences**

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**Methodological notes: Time Use Surveys as a tool for ascertaining the distribution of household chores**

The data used come from the Time Use Survey (Encuesta de Empleo del Tiempo) undertaken by Spain’s National Statistics Institute (INE). The information is obtained by means of a diary in which the respondents report all their activities during a 24-hour period. In addition to these activities, the respondents also provide sociodemographic information about themselves and their families. The survey has no defined periodicity and, to date, there have been two editions of the survey: 2002-2003 and 2009-2010 (for simplification we refer to them as 2003 and 2010). The 2003 sample was composed of 46,774 individuals living in 20,603 households. The 2010 sample was composed of 25,895 individuals living in 9,541 households.

The study has only taken into account heterosexual couples where both members are aged between 15 and 64 years old. The analysis combines sociodemographic information and the diary data obtained. The characteristics included in the analysis are in line with what previous studies considered to be determining factors in explaining partners’ differences in time allocation (Ajenjo and García Román, 2014). These characteristics are: employment status, level of education, age, type of union (marriage or cohabitation), and presence of children in the household.
The type of couple according to employment status considers which member of the couple is employed. Employed individuals can work full or part-time, while individuals who are not employed can be unemployed or out of the labour force. This variable defines an FBW couple in the study as a couple in which only the woman is employed.

From the 24-hours diary we have computed a summary measure of time spent in ten types of activities (housework, paid work, leisure, personal care, care for others, meals, purchase, study, commuting, others). The sum of all activities for each person is 1,440 minutes (24 hours). This study only shows the results for housework, leisure and personal care, which are the activities where differences between the time spent by women and men differ to the greatest extent.

References


Your recent research has analysed the influence of family experiences on the start of adult life. This is what you call the intergenerational transmission of demographic behaviour. Indeed. My interest in this area of study was sparked by the sensation I had that very little attention was being paid to family backgrounds in the analysis of demographic behaviour.

The conclusion of our research is that the intergenerational transmission of demographic behaviour takes place in different ways.

Firstly, it is frequently the case that parents try to transmit certain values to their children and, as a result, their children act in their adult life taking these values into consideration.

Something else that may happen is that children detect how their parents experience certain life events – the births of their younger siblings, marriage, divorce, etc. – and then in their adult life they modulate their behaviour on the basis of the attitudes that they observed in their parents when these events occurred.

And finally, it may turn out that the behaviour of children resembles that of their parents because their life circumstances are more or less similar. In this case we are talking about the intergenerational transmission of economic opportunities.

But other factors also exist that transcend the family sphere and determine whether or not this transmission of values and behaviours takes place...

Of course. Let’s imagine that children become more economically dependent upon their parents. This will probably strengthen the influence that their parents have on them. And the opposite is true. If people become...
more individualistic, which often occurs when independence on an economic level is achieved, it is easier for young adults to act in accordance with their own personality, instead of reproducing the behaviours of their parents.

In general, the intergenerational transmission of demographic behaviour becomes more limited as society becomes more individualistic. In contrast, it gets stronger if society’s economic situation deteriorates.

In some Western societies, there has been a major transformation of family structures in a relatively short time period. What are these changes in demographic behaviours indicating?

In my opinion, the number of children that a couple ultimately has is rarely strictly a question of obeying ideals. Frequently it is the result of a mixture of cultural reasons, economic issues and the social policies that are applied in each country (which often also have an economic undercurrent).

The economic situation is a relevant factor when analysing whether demographic patterns are repeated or not. Within a context of a lack of economic growth during a prolonged period, it is normal for the number of people who put off their decision to get married or have children to increase. But it is not the only determining factor.

In the case of the enormous reduction in the number of marriages in Spain, it is obvious that the crisis has an influence, but it also has to do with a profound change in the values of societies.

Previously, when a certain age was reached or at a certain point in a couple’s relationship, the natural step was to get married. But these days, young people ask themselves: “Should I get married?” or “What difference does it make?” This is clearly a cultural change.

If we analyse the medium- or long-term scenario, the probability of the children of these new generations getting married will be lower than in previous generations and they could also have fewer children. If your parents are not married, for you that is the normal situation. So, why would you get married?

Another situation that is now common in Spain is that it is the grandparents who are taking care of the children, during more hours than their parents themselves, who are working...

True. It is difficult to predict how this situation may affect the children. In the Netherlands our studies on the “sandwich generation” – adults who take care of their children and also of their elderly parents – indicate that when grandparents participate in the care of a firstborn child, the possibilities of the parents having a second child are much greater.

Children whose parents stayed together have more possibilities of having a long-lasting relationship themselves

In my country, many parents send their children to nurseries for just two days per week. The grandparents take care of them during another day or two. And we have observed that this helps contribute to an increase in the birth rate.

We have not studied whether the same thing happens in countries such as Spain. But when it is difficult to access formal childcare due to financial problems, it will probably be easier to have more children if parents can resort to the help of the grandparents.

It is not an ideal situation. The best solution is for social policies to exist that help couples be able to strike a balance between family life and the professional life to which they aspire. But sometimes these policies cannot be implemented.
What are the implications for children’s development if they spend so much time with their grandparents?
I don’t know of any research that has tackled this situation, but undoubtedly it would be a fascinating subject for study.

In my opinion, it may well have positive consequences on the children’s development: firstly, they will have a richer vocabulary, because each generation has its own way of expressing itself; and secondly, their life experiences will be strengthened. In today’s society it is very difficult for relationships to be established between elderly people and young people. It happens very infrequently. The family environment is the place where these types of encounters can be developed.

At the same time, I imagine that there may also be other consequences that the parents of the children do not want, because everyone wants to educate their children in their own way…

In your work you mention separation and parenthood at an early age as two patterns that are repeated between parents and children when forming families. Does the same happen with the opposite examples? In other words, do the children of parents who stayed together all their lives – whether happily or unhappily – or children born to older parents also repeat the same behaviours as their parents?
With respect to fertility, our research indicates that when parents have had a child at a relatively early age, there is an increased possibility of their children also becoming young parents. In contrast, if parents have had children at a later age, there is greater variation. This pattern is not repeated so often.

As for separation, the children of separated parents have a much higher probability of getting separated. And vice versa: children whose parents stayed together have more possibilities of having a long-lasting relationship themselves. One possible reason for this is that in their family home they have seen how complicated situations can be overcome.

A study in the Netherlands shows that the probability of separating increases by around 25% among the children of separated parents. And the probability of a couple getting separated is 45% higher if the parents of both partners also got separated. In other words, it is not only the experiences of one partner that matter, but the accumulation of experiences within the couple.

The increase in separations among the lower classes is increasing the inequality gap in societies

According to some studies, separation has become a more common phenomenon among the lower classes, whereas previously it was more frequent among the higher classes.
In the past, separation was more common among people born of high-class marriages because they were the only people who had the financial resources to deal with it.

But these days it is more likely for lower-class couples to separate. There are various possible reasons that explain this phenomenon.

First of all, the children of high-class families have a better education and, consequently, better skills for negotiating with their partner or for dealing rationally with any conflicts that may arise. In contrast, for those people with less access to education, it is more difficult to acquire the skills needed to deal with conflicts within the relationship and reach an understanding.

Secondly, in some countries economic subsidies exist for single-parent families that may contribute towards people from lower classes choosing to get divorced.
But even so, separation makes both partners poorer. So if they increase among lower-class families, won’t inequalities in society also increase? Yes, absolutely. People originating from a lower social level usually have low incomes. If they also repeat certain demographic patterns common in these families, such as having children at an early age, then the situation may lead to a relative continuation of a lack of resources. And if all of this is combined with the couple separating, their economy worsens even further.

There are couples who, even though they no longer get on well, choose to remain together instead of separating. What effect can this have on children’s development? We know that the children of separated parents end up having more difficulties than children of parents who stay together. But if the parents are incapable of creating a healthy atmosphere in the home, it is equally damaging for the children.

It is clear that conflictive family environments that may even involve domestic violence, condition children’s development in a negative way. The important thing is for children to grow up in a healthy and safe environment where they can develop strong bonds with both parents.

How might future family structures be affected by the social and demographic changes that we are currently seeing? For example, the feminist movements that are protesting about the salary gap between men and women? With the increase in the educational level of women and their greater presence in the labour market, their role in the family is changing. They are gaining power, which is leading to more equitable relationships with their partners.

My colleague Gøsta Esping-Andersen has observed that in the past there was a dominant traditional family model: the male was the main breadwinner and the woman took care of the home. In that context, couples’ relationships were fairly stable.

We are now heading towards a model where both partners share paid employment and in household chores there is a trend towards an increase in conditions of equality. This should also give rise to stable partnerships.

But our current predicament is that we are located somewhere between the two models that I have just described. And people do not really know how to manage within this context. Esping-Andersen’s idea is that in this situation of uncertainty, when theory and practice do not coincide, relationships are much more unstable. And this may lead to higher separation rates and a decline in the birth rate.

Moreover, if both partners have equivalent power within the relationship and do not depend too deeply on each other, it is also easier for them to put an end to the relationship if it does not work out in line with their expectations. Again this may be a good thing, but it also increases the risk that some people may give up on the relationship too soon without truly trying to make it work.

Juan Manuel García Campos
Journalist

Aart Liefbroer is a sociologist and researcher at the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute. His research into fertility, family formation and social and demographic change has gained him recognition across Europe as an authority on the subject. One of his main focuses of analysis is the influence that family values have on demographic behaviour and the resulting impacts on people’s life course. This has led him to study the determinants and consequences arising from demographic events such as marriage, early parenthood or separation.
Socioeconomic inequality has been ballooning around the world, particularly among industrialized countries. Much concern has been voiced about the consequences of this trend for increases in poverty and risks to political stability, but the books reviewed here teach us that the costs to families are great as well.

Instability coming from socioeconomic inequality undermines couple unions, particularly in an era of changing gender roles, and children’s well-being is put at risk. Although these two books could not be more different, they share this theme, and adduce a wealth of evidence to support it, much of it very painful. We suffer with these suffering families.

Philip Cohen’s book, *Enduring Bonds*, is essentially a compilation of the essays he has written over the past decade for his blog. As such, the material is somewhat scatter-shot, addressing issues of the day, based primarily on the analysis of census and survey data.

Edin and Nelson’s book, *Doing the Best I Can*, goes far to substantiate Cohen’s argument. While their methods could not be more different (Edin and Nelson carry out in-depth interviews with poor fathers obtained by the authors going to live in the poor neighborhoods being studied), their portrait of how the economic forces unleashed by inequality undermine committed relationships makes clear that just telling people to get married (even if they listened) would do little to stabilize the lives of the families that they observed. Each book, though, brings important insights to the overall challenge of stabilizing incomes (and, incidentally, reducing endemic work-family conflict).
Both books are a delight to read and study. Cohen takes on the widest range of topics. His use of evidence is often fascinating. Historians of the family and interested social scientists have noted that parenthood has recently been transformed, with children becoming valued less for their ability to be useful little workers and more for their uniqueness (cf. Viviana Zelizer’s study of children’s insurance policies, *Pricing the Priceless Child*). To indicate the continuing power of sexism, Cohen documents the proportions of females among *New York Times* bylines, showing that men have an easier time getting their stories published, while women are still too often relegated to stories on style and families.

Both books solidly address the problem of racism in the United States (which while not such a prominent problem in European countries, nevertheless appears in many guises). Edin and Nelson’s sample of poor fathers is approximately evenly balanced between white and black men, often living in nearby neighborhoods (despite the fact that the neighborhoods themselves are normally quite racially segregated). Race clearly makes a difference: young impoverished white fathers normally have access to a stronger network of stably employed relatives who can provide more opportunities for jobs, housing, and the like than otherwise comparable black fathers, whose relatives are often even more impoverished, addicted, and imprisoned than they are (if they haven’t already been killed).

As a likely result, the white fathers cling more closely to a traditional view of fatherhood (founded on male incomes) and more distant father-child relationships. In contrast, the young black fathers in the study have collectively created a new vision of fatherhood, given their repeated failures at being ‘good providers’, that essentially entails maintaining close social and emotional bonds with their children, what traditionalists might even call a ‘mother-child’ type of bond. This is apparent in their prominently displayed joy at impending fatherhood and in their far stronger efforts at maintaining visitation rights than white fathers in the same situation, when the children’s mothers have given up on them as useful partners.

Race is also a major theme of Cohen’s. He delights in showing whites’ fear of blacks, which has the unfortunate result that black men are all too often killed by police in the United States. More centrally, he reviews concerns about the black family, which has led whites in the growth of births outside marital unions and created the problem of fatherhood that Edin and Nelson’s poor black fathers confront.

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Inequality coming from socioeconomic inequality undermines couple unions

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While neither book pretends to be a policy study, it is clear that two issues are central in contributing to the pain these families, fathers, mothers, and children, experience. One is rooted in the gender changes at work. The other is the instabilities that unbridled capitalism tends to produce.

The gender challenge took root with changes in men’s and women’s productive roles that emerged with the industrial revolution and the demographic changes it impelled. Not that long ago, men and women shared a common ‘sphere’ of household production, the essence of subsistence agriculture. The emergence of new industrial and commercial jobs increasingly spurred men to leave the household to take such jobs. However, with many fewer children and longer lives, domestic women became underemployed, so that when jobs emerged that called for ‘female’ labor (requiring less strength over
shorter hours), women joined men in their public sphere, taking paid employment for much the same reasons men had, to better support their families.

This change stressed families, as women added support obligations, creating the ‘second shift’ for them. This led some countries (particularly in Scandinavia) to develop family policies that reduced women’s work-family conflict. They enacted and gradually expanded programs of family leave, and even more centrally, of subsidized, high-quality childcare.

Families need stability, not just of earnings but also of time

But even the Scandinavian countries have found that this is not enough. The additional burden of the ‘second shift’ for women disadvantages women in the workplace, as employers and supervisors assume (normally correctly) that female employees will put their family’s needs ahead of those of the workplace. They need to leave to pick up children from childcare centers or make dinner for their families, while men are freer to work longer hours, travel more for work, and generally feel that their major obligation to their families remains simply to provide. Hence, the emergence of policies providing “daddy days” of family leave.

Further, their large public sectors allow and even encourage workers to take family leave. (particularly men, who increasingly have access to wage subsidies they would lose if they did not take it) Their robust private sectors, however, are less enthusiastic, preferring workers who are willing to change their work schedules with little notice. But what families need is stability, not just of earnings but also of time.

Here is where unbridled capitalism becomes so problematic, as both books testify for the United States. It provides no state-subsidized childcare, so families must juggle constantly to provide coverage for their children, particularly those in the low-wage sectors of the economy. Too many children end up at risk, alone at home, or even unsupervised in cars or parks. Providing substantial notice before work hours are changed is rare, but it is as important as providing stable incomes. Countries wishing to obtain the benefits of the free market need to tame it, at least to the extent that the costs to families (like those to the environment) are assessed as part of the cost of doing business, or some combination of state support and protective regulations is put in place.
Learning together, growing as a family
A psychoeducational programme with the focus on positive parenting

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<th>Problems</th>
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<td>Children’s quality of life and their personal and social adaptation depend, to a large extent, on the quality of the relationships established in their families.</td>
<td>The educational process must be developed from the perspective of positive parenting: this is the principle that inspires the programme.</td>
<td>Evaluation of the six editions of the programme held to date confirms that it has been extremely effective in promoting positive changes, among parents and children alike.</td>
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According to the European Union Recommendation Rec (2006)19, positive parenting respects children’s rights, since it is based on parents’ concern for the wellbeing and healthy development of their children. At the same time, the recommendation recognises the need for programmes to support parents in the exercise of positive parenting, backed by evidence-based professional resources.

Against this background, the year 2011 saw the launch of the psychoeducational programme “Learning together, growing as a family” within the CaixaProinfància framework programme of the Obra Social “la Caixa”. The programme’s aim is to develop a harmonious family environment by promoting positive relationships between parents and children (aged 6 to 12 years).

The programme consists of eight modules that are delivered over 16 two-hour sessions. It is designed as an educational experience with three differentiated types of sessions: those aimed solely at parents, those aimed at the children, and those that bring together the whole family.

The programme objectives are as follows:
- Strengthen emotional bonds
- Encourage educational family relationships
- Develop family communication and organisation skills
- Foster relationships with the child’s school
- Promote shared leisure activities
- Provide resources to support the positive management of conflicts

Participation in the programme grew from 1,270 beneficiaries in the 2011-2012 academic year to 3,648 in the 2016-2017 academic year (via the CaixaProinfància network, other collaborating organisations and the centres of the Department of Education of the Canary Islands Government).

In particular, assessments of the 2016/2017 edition confirm its impact on family relations. The sessions have enabled work to be done on different aspects, with special emphasis on improving parenting skills and family development.

As an example of the positive changes seen, a programme facilitator recalls: “One girl took a cut-out figure of a superhero to class. On it she had written: “This is my mom”. This little girl had done the workshop with us. Here we had a child who previously would not even say “I love you” to her mother; the fact that, following the workshop, she considers her mother to be a hero indicates that the evolution has been very positive” (discussion group, Valencia 2017).
Celebrating the future by growing together

At "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, through the CaixaProinfancia programme, we strive to ensure all children can be what they want to be.

And if we achieve this, it’s thanks to all the hard work carried out by social organisations and collaborators over the past 10 years so that thousands of children and their families can break the cycle of poverty in the best possible way: through education.

Because our dream is for them to achieve theirs.