Gender, Work and Structural Adjustment: A Selected Annotated Bibliography

Section I – Asian Papers
Section II – African Papers
Section III – Latin American & Caribbean Papers

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The review in the form of a working paper is also available on this site. I would welcome researchers use both these resources, give me feedback and duly cite the works whenever used.

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III. Latin American & Caribbean Papers


The author states that low-income urban women in Nicaragua are putting up with increasingly difficult circumstances created as a result of the neo-liberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s, and are constantly making adjustments in their paid work outside as well as unpaid work in the home to absorb all kinds of ups and downs resulting from these policies. Focusing on the capital city Managua, period from 1991-1993, women in formal and informal work in small industries and commerce. Women’s paid and unpaid work are highly interconnected, and conditions in either the home or work sector affect women’s ability to participate in and meet the demands of the other.

- The market-oriented neo-liberal model of development is critiqued especially because of how its policies to cut public expenditure and privatize industry are an additional burden to women who have to stretch household budgets, care for the ill, and pull through under conditions of economic and psychological stress.
- Disaggregating the household in terms of income and work shows up patterns of resource allocation, gendered division of labor and also gender relations in the home, for example, unequal economic power is frequently accompanied by domestic conflict and violence against women.
- When the Sandinistas came to power in 1979 after struggling against the Somoza dictatorship, there followed a period of major socio-economic transformation. Within the next decade, however, the requirements of a wartime economy (due to conflict with the U.S.-backed Contras) pushed the government to focus on export-oriented production, devalue the currency, lay off workers, cut social services, etc. Though this was an internal decision and not responding to an IMF-World Bank mandate, large numbers of the 61% of employed women had to turn to the informal sector for employment, which was characterized by lower wages and unstable work arrangements.
- The United National Opposition (UNO) that came to power in the 1990 elections followed a U.S.-supported adjustment program that was more severe and in line with IMF-World Bank programs. Thousands were asked to leave their state-sector jobs. The activities of the adjustment program resulted in formal sector employment dropping by 18%, unemployment rising by 19% and underemployment by 45% in the next two years.
- In the Sandinista era many small-scale producers organized into urban cooperatives, and benefited from the distribution of low-cost materials and state assistance in marketing their products. In the UNO era, however, these co-ops were not favored and were seen as antithetical to free-market economic policies. The discussion of women working in a textile co-op, a bakers co-op, a artisans co-op and a welders co-op as well as a barrio study of informal-sector activity shows that women were making great adjustments at home and at work in order to absorb the shock of the
economic crises they were faced with.

- Between 1982 and 1991 the membership of the textile co-op had dwindled from 68 to 29. Those remaining had slowed down production to adapt to slower sales, many sought other sources of income, and finally they shut shop. A few, however, were trying to revive the co-op and were working out of their homes or in the streets in the meanwhile. The women tried selling to clients from their homes and market stalls. Some added other merchandise to their offerings, some concentrated on seasonal demand for clothes, several of them spent much time and energy looking for cheap primary materials like fabric and thread. These women extended their hours of work, diversified their production and their market, and traveled great distances to purchase materials and make sales; they were not only withstanding the force of structural adjustment, but also indirectly supporting its processes through their adjustment activities.

- The largest co-op of bakeries established in 1979 provided basic materials like flour at low costs to bakers. With changing times and the opening of new bakeries many started to cater to popular tastes like pizza and sweet pastries, one had their college-educated daughter managing the enterprise, another expanded and had a mother-daughter duo with their two shops monopolizing the market in a particular area – and here the daughter had a café attached to the bakery to attract more customers. In 1992 the co-op ceased to function when the suppliers started selling flour directly to bakers, but the bakeries continued to function independently. Many were critical of CONAPI – which was a chamber of small-scale industries that almost all small producers were part of – and its lack of support for the co-ops, a complaint echoed by the textile co-ops as well. Bakers were clearly demoralized by the market-driven economic situation in which their production was falling due to dwindling sales.

- The market for the artisans’ co-op set up in 1987 comprised of foreigners and a small number of well-to-do locals. The artisans comprised jewelry makers and artisans carving ornamental stuff out of the bark of trees. Dwindling sales made them slow down production, they tried out new techniques and designs to attract buyers, they considered whether the bark workers should be apprenticed as jewelers because of slightly higher jewelry sales, and they were also driven to spending time looking for markets for their products. Many left the co-op due to reduced incomes, and the last two bark workers left not least because they must have perceived themselves as a liability to the co-op. Household responsibilities were also cited as reasons for leaving. In order to combat competition from imported ornamental items and to showcase their high quality products, the co-op sought and got financial and infrastructure support from CONAPI and a foreign NGO and despite the risks involved started out afresh. They added new apprentices in jewelry making, and hoped to expand production.

- Ten women welders who had undergone training and consciousness raising workshops set up the welders’ co-op in 1991. Soon the co-op started to suffer from interpersonal problems, lack of work and heavy family responsibilities. Efforts at reviving the failing co-op didn’t yield good results and in spite of training new women, trying new marketing
strategies and also thinking of refashioning it into a micro-enterprise, the co-op was disbanded in 1993. The former coordinator who was the only single woman expressed disappointment at the co-op being disbanded because of the women’s family obligations. The author stresses that increased family responsibilities are not unlinked to the tough conditions created by structural adjustment in the workplace.

• The urban informal sector comprises of women who sell food, fruit, vegetables, ice and drinks, barbershops and carpenters’, tailors’, and mechanics’ workshops often in the front parts of their homes. Children added to family incomes by selling in the streets or asking for tips for guarding parked cars. Despair had driven some towards faith, others to suicide, and many to change their eating and living habits. Food and health care was minimal, and women had the added burden of stretching low incomes to manage family needs. One particular woman coped with the economic hardships better, which was to no mean extent due to her and her husband’s long-time political commitment to the Sandinistas and her present network of friends and acquaintances. Her standing as a community leader also stood her in good stead in times of great pressure and distress. This suggests the importance of women having a safety net of support.

• Many women agreed that the Sandinistas government was a better time as the hardships were not so devastating. All noted the ways in which they coped, cut costs, changed habits – diets changed from large meals of rice, beans, eggs and cheese, to mixed rice and beans and coffee; meat, a daily dish earlier, now appeared once a week; washing/ironing tasks that were sent out for a small fee now got done at home; more time was spent looking for cheaper items; women walked instead of taking the bus.

• Almost half the households in Nicaragua’s cities are headed by women, and women make up at least 44% of the economically active population. Women in particular have underwritten the cost of neo-liberal development through their extended workdays, and not surprisingly, they are the most vocal in pressing for substantive change and alternatives to this model of development.


This is a chapter of an edited volume, which focuses on the case of Mexico, the set of SAPs implemented since 1982, impacts on income distribution and living standards, and the dynamics at the household level to deal with the crisis.

The specific questions that were addressed were: How have the poor managed to cope with the new situation? What their 'survival strategies'? Do they really have choices? How is the crisis lived within a specific household, and how does it affect different members? Does it have differentiated impact by gender and age? How has it affected women? What are the implications to policy and action do the answers to
these questions suggest?

The pressure to reduce real wages and weaken labor organizations with economic restructuring, the author observes had affected the stable working class and middle class, whose relative position deteriorated over the decade.

Based on an empirical study of 55 households scattered in Mexico City, the paper highlights the following:

- The average household size in the sample was 5.72. Nuclear family households represented the large majority. There were 14.5% headed by women.
- All households had more than one income earner—the average being 2.3. 50.3% of those working for an income are in the informal sector.
- 80% of the poor and lower middle class and 50% of the middle class households reported experiencing 'great difficulties' and making drastic adjustments in their budget and consumption habits.
- Tension and anguish to make ends meet was found among the poor and better off households as well.
- The coping mechanisms observed are classified under three basic categories: labor market adjustments, budget changes and restructuring of daily life.
- Labor market adjustments: A common response is the increase in the number of household members participating in the labor market to contribute to the family income. Increase in participation in paid activities was more among women without children. 34% of mothers with male partners remained at home. Women preferred to undertake industrial homework or work in the surrounding community in order to integrate wage work with reproductive activities. The prevalent opposition of the husband or male companion to women's paid work is still strong.
- Budget changes: 69.4% of the households regularly bought less food, clothing, shoes, and other daily expenses such as transportation, drinks, and snacks than during the pre-1982 period. Practically all households have curtailed meat consumption. Poor households eliminated meat, canned food, fruits and milk altogether from their diets. Home upkeep, repairs of broken household items are neglected. Some households have sold their consumer durables and had recurred to indebtedness.
- The crisis had an effect on the fertility decisions among the sample households. 46.7% of the families have decide to stop or postpone having children during the 1982-88 period. Women were more open to discussing about birth control and family planning methods.
- Restructuring of Daily life: 73% of the families mentioned that they were shopping in cheaper markets and from street vendors. They buy in small quantities. Restricted budget also means intensification of domestic work. 68.8% of the households mentioned increase in domestic work. The pressure to participate in domestic work is higher for girls than for boys. Trips to visit relatives and friends have eliminated or cut down and many other social activities also have been affected.
According to the author, in the absence of a welfare state and decreasing governmental services and subsidies, the family had become the only source of support and of alternatives for survival. While this has intensified the ties within the family, it has not changed previous inequalities and distribution of resources. A parallel to Peru's soup kitchen and Bolivia and Chile's initiative of common pot, as collective efforts in the face of adversity, was not found in Mexico City.

In conclusion Beneria recommends: the setting up of open markets, collective kitchens and neighborhood stores that would provide goods at relatively lower prices. Expansion of credit programs, provision of child-care, nutrition programs, health clinics, and training programs for different groups of workers. However, the reverse of flow of resources from the creditor to the debtor countries can only succeed in redeeming the crisis.


This article discusses the individual, family and market determinants, as well as the consequences, of intermittent labor force participation among married women in two of the three largest metropolitan areas in Latin America, Buenos Aires and Mexico City. The author asserts that background characteristics, family circumstances, gender norms, and job characteristics affect the type and duration of these women’s labor force participation.

Data used:
Quantitative as well as qualitative. Quantitative analysis is based on short-term panel data constructed from consecutive employment surveys in both cities. Surveys are representative household samples, with a multistage and stratified sampling design, and contain information on the demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the population living in private households. The qualitative analysis is based on 40 in-depth interviews of women living with their husbands – 20 in each city. They were selected according to their stage of family formation (age and number of children) and the socioeconomic level of their household (low and middle class). Since the focus of the study was on intermittent employment, women from upper middle and high socioeconomic households and women who had completed college were excluded from the sample.

Findings:
• Presence of young children at home affects women’s labor force participation more in Buenos Aires than in Mexico City, probably because childcare services are less expensive in the latter. Also, families being larger in Mexico City women can rely on their support for childcare. In both cities, the presence of another woman in the household to share work and childcare increases chances of stable LFP.
• Young children are an interruption in labor force trajectories in Buenos Aires more than in Mexico City, where marriage is a significant interrupting factor.
• Women married to men who are unemployed or with unstable employment
are more likely to work, whether intermittently or regularly (more in Buenos Aires than Mexico City).

- Women with high levels of education will not only work, but also stay in the labor force more regularly. They tend to be more career-oriented, rely less on traditional stereotypes and have higher expectations. They also are more likely to live in middle or high-income households and can therefore afford domestic help and childcare.

- Women with less education and having huge domestic burdens are more likely to work in the informal sector, and this increases instability because informal sector jobs are characterized by low productivity, easy entry-exit, flexible or part-time schedules, and no labor benefits. Instability is greater in women workers in Mexico City as it has a greater incidence of informal employment as also a practice of using temporary workers in large commercial establishments.

- One finds a higher proportion of married women working intermittently in Mexico City than in Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires has lower fertility rates, smaller families, an older population, higher levels of educated labor force, more egalitarian income distribution system, and consequently a larger middle class.

- Traditional expectations regarding women’s roles also have an impact on married women working. Husbands may not approve of their work unless absolutely necessary.

What affects labor force patterns among middle class non-professional married women:

- In Buenos Aires: family circumstances (lack of childcare, husband’s employment instability), labor market conditions (kind of job and sector of activity), particular economic moment (recession or expansion), employers’ prejudice against hiring women with children. Many women are of the opinion that women should work, and that work enables a sense of self.

- In Mexico City: not to do with constraints (because informal sector jobs are easily available, as are childcare and domestic help, labor force movement occurs not because businesses are unstable, but because of the temporary nature of contracts or unsatisfactory labor conditions), but with how women value their work and how important it is for them to generate their own income (women’s relative contribution to household was lower, and because they did not feel the responsibility of being the main provider their labor force attachment was lower). Some view their work as a secondary activity when compared to taking care of the family, others see it as a project of economic and personal improvement.

What affects labor force patterns among women living in poor households:

- Buenos Aires: instability among poor women with children at home is related to the way job opportunities arise and the sorts of domestic arrangements they must make to be able to work.

- Mexico City: instability is related to the prevalence of a wide variety of activities, facilitating the employment of those with low skills and time constraints, who often enter and exit these jobs. Also influenced by gender
biases against women’s work, particularly the husband’s beliefs. Major interruption in work pattern occurs when women marry, not when they have children.

Intermittent employment, therefore, arises from the conflict of combining paid and domestic work and from the nature of the labor opportunities available to women.


The article focuses on the effects of economic restructuring on the behavior of female workers and the conditions under which they are incorporated into the labor market, asserting that the recent remarkable increase in female labor force participation (LFP) in Buenos Aires is a result neither of improvements in the conditions of labor supply nor due to the diversification of the structure of occupational opportunities available for women. It is instead a response to increasing unemployment and job instability associated with the implementation of structural adjustment policies since 1991.

- Women’s LFP rates in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires grew sharply from 38% in 1991 to 46% in 1995, the same time that extreme economic policies under the structural adjustment program were being implemented. This increase coincided with a major expansion in male and female open unemployment rates.
- In Argentina the slow but steady growth of female employment has indeed been related to diversification of occupational opportunities, improvements in education and changes in women’s roles – similar to progress indicators for women in the developed world – but post-1991 the increased trends are an indication of the ‘added worker effect’, i.e. other household members joining the labor force to counterbalance the increasing employment instability of primary earners (household heads).
- Data used is from the Encuesta Permanente de Hogares, EPH, (Household Continuous Survey) survey, which is a representative sample, gathered using a multistage and stratified design. It contains information on the demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the population living in private households.
- Aggressive economic and structural reforms ensured greater flexibility in recruitment and dismissal, and decentralized union bargaining.
- During 1993-94 the number of people seeking employment continued to grow, while the economy wasn’t able to preserve existing jobs. One reason employment generation slowed down was because of the privatization of public enterprises. Another was that the reorganization of firms to ensure high productivity and to face the competition often resulted in adjusting the size of the labor force accordingly. And lastly, because a large number of small and medium size manufacturing and commercial units found it harder to survive.
- The largest increase in female LFP rates was observed among the least educated section of women, who traditionally experience the lowest rates. Likewise, women with the highest domestic burden, excluding those with
very young children at home, displayed a sharp increase in their LFP rates during this time.

- Determinants of female LFP: level of education is positively linked to LFP, wives with children at home are less likely to show LFP, female heads show high LFP, stable/high income households do not show much female LFP. But there were certain changes: women with less education, those married with children older than 5 years, those living in middle income households were showing significantly more LFP than prior to this period.

- Those affected the most were the poorest households who had to send more members out to work to sustain their standard of living. If they did not find jobs it was these members who swelled the ranks of the unemployed.

- Using a multinomial logistic regression the author shows that women’s movement into the labor force is significantly associated with the employment instability of male heads of households. Women living in households where the head recently changed labor force status were almost twice more likely to enter the labor force than those living in households where the head was continuously employed.

- Most of female LFP therefore has been a response to decreasing job opportunities and labor conditions and as a way of diversifying households’ economic risks.


The article aims to identify the activities women have generally performed in household survival strategies with particular reference to towns and cities in Mexico and Costa Rica. It also looks at the changes arising with economic crises, and examines their possible implications for gender roles and relations in the wider social context of adjustment.

- Mexico’s economy is largely based on oil, manufacturing and tourism, whereas Costa Rica derives its wealth largely from the export of coffee, sugar, meat and bananas. The structural adjustment program of the 1980s had a very negative impact on the social and economic status of the two countries.

- Urbanization in these places has brought about certain effects on gender roles and relations: women’s economic participation is generally higher in towns and cities, rural-urban migration tends to be female dominated, increase in the number of female-headed households, higher female sex ratios, to name a few. Nevertheless, traditional ideologies die hard and legislative interventions to mitigate the biases appear ineffective.

- Efforts towards household survival include income generation, domestic labor and social reproduction; and these cause high labor burdens for women. Also, the lack of civic amenities and labor-saving household products means that women have to substitute the lack with their own
labor power. Very often undertaking income-generating work implies an added burden for women – household work as well as outside work.

- Outside work usually involves preparing and selling food and food-related things, offering domestic services, low-level catering establishments, etc. for many women home-based activity is their only option especially if they have young children.

- Three types of household structures are evident in urban contexts: nuclear, female-headed, and extended. Female labor force participation is highest in female-headed households (73.3%) and lowest in nuclear ones (47%). Female heads of households generally tend to have jobs that are more visible than their counterparts in male-headed households, the former tending to work full-time and often in formal sector jobs, with the latter remaining largely in domestic-based informal activities. There is higher percentage of women working in extended households too, when compared with nuclear households.

- The effects of cuts in social spending resulting from structural adjustment policies are felt more acutely by women due to their primary involvement in household consumption and welfare-related activities. Growing levels of female labor force participation, together with intensification of domestic work resulting from cutbacks in social services and reduced purchasing power, means huge difficulties for women.

- One major outcome of the increasing participation of women in paid labor is that the labor involved in domestic work and child care is being made much more visible. Many women also mentioned that although the crises had made it harder to survive they themselves were enjoying their newfound freedom to get a job and to have some economic independence at last. More profound changes which could conceivably rise in the wake of increased labor force involvement among women are greater sensitivities to wider economic and political events and to the realization that they have some control over their own lives even if the jobs they perform are subject to low protection, security and earnings.

- But it is critical to recognize that only some have experienced positive changes as a result of crisis. The fact remains that reproductive labor remains squarely within women’s responsibilities; if not the mother, then other women or older daughters in the household take over this task. Lacking education and work experience, these young girls in later life will probably move into the least prestigious corners of the labor market.

This article discusses how neo-liberal strategies of economic stabilization negatively affect the familial, social and labor relations of poor Nicaraguan women and looks at the consequent psychosocial disruptions in their lives.

- The issues examined are: women’s participation in the labor market, access to social services, family responsibilities, survival strategies, violence, and the physical and psychological deterioration they experience.
- Fieldwork done between 1990 and 1992 consisted of questionnaires distributed to 165 families with a total of 942 members, as well as 155 ethnographic interviews. Statistical information was obtained from institutions and research centers as well as interviews with officials between 1985 and 1992.
- Structural adjustment policies have led to: declining employment due to state reductions and layoffs, constriction of credit, closure of small and medium-sized firms, privatization of state enterprises and dismantling of cooperatives, reduction of state subsidies and services, and price increases. At the end of 1991 (the initiation of the economic program) almost 16,000 working women across all occupational categories lost their jobs. Furthermore, 69% of working women, traditionally the first affected by firings and seasonal layoffs, faced potential loss of work.
- This accelerated growth in the informal sector, mainly in small-scale commerce. Women represent 60% of the informal sector; 48% of small commerce and 37% of personal services are in female hands; women are a majority of unremunerated laborers, and 6 of every 10 people working in their own homes are women.
- The need to add income to the household explains the increase in female informal sector participation. The advantages of this sector stem from its flexibility of schedule and location, which allows them to overcome the obstacles to formal work imposed by their domestic role. But many of the most common informal sector activities are extensions of women’s domestic role (childcare, laundry, food preparation, etc.), and so do not threaten the traditional feminine image so important in Nicaraguan society.
- The contraction or elimination of social programs is another major concern. There is the extra burden of trying to maintain or supplement community social services on their own without aid from technical, economic or human resources. One outcome of this is an increase in illness and child mortality, and the care of infants and the sick falls entirely on women.
- Women in Nicaragua are responsible for administering the family economy. They must arrest the drop in family incomes and ‘manage’ to maximize meager resources. The woman – mother, breadwinner and ideological pillar – is supposed to meet the family’s needs for intimacy and security, and all women understand this; they are the first to look for alternative ways to support the family. They are always more preoccupied with health, children and school, and worked an average of 14 hours a day
(half of this in domestic chores) in the author’s study sample.

- Poverty and the deterioration in the quality of life had different impacts on female- and male-headed households. 72.5% of the former were below the poverty line as opposed to 67.5% of the latter. Reduction of food consumption was reported by 81.3% of female-headed households and 75% of male-headed ones.

- Survival strategies for the material and biological reproduction of the family group include increasing income of the household (generally from the informal sector), and the maximization of financial resources through cooperative networks and work done in the household. Increase in income is achieved by sending out more members of the family into the labor market, intensification of labor is done by lengthening the workday to earn more money, and reduction in reproductive expenses is reflected in diminished consumption of clothes and prepared foods as well as reduced spending on recreation, scholastic and medical expenses. The priority in spending is food, but many make do with less than 3 meals a day, eat less nutritious foods, and have been forced to eliminate milk, meat, cheese and eggs from their diet.

- Economic instability and social crisis have resulted in a direct upswing in all forms of violence: political, social, domestic and ordinary delinquency. Violence against women has increased – with a 70% increase in number of rapes compared to the previous year – as has drug use, prostitution, and youth gangs engaging in armed confrontations.

- Employment is the absolute priority for Nicaraguan women as food, education, health and care of their children are basic necessities. The principal identity of these women, thus, continues to be constructed around the role of mother and person responsible for the household. In such a context, poverty, open or disguised unemployment, the inability to fulfill family responsibilities that women assume are expected of them, an overload of domestic labor, and inter-family violence produce psychosocial stress and threaten women’s physical and mental health.


This article is framed within the following questions: how did the process of privatization in Argentina affect the situation of women? Which women were most affected? Were women affected differently than men? Have changing economic conditions – in which privatization plays a strategic role – elicited new strategic responses from families? The author asserts that privatization increases both the need for women to work and the constraints of the labor market on them.

- Privatization of the urban labor market has led to a decrease in employment and income among men, an increase in employment among women, though followed by increasing rates of unemployment among them too, deterioration of working conditions for both male and female workers, and diminished public social services which has forced women to
work harder at home and at work outside.

- The consequence of falling male employment and income has led to women entering the work force to support their families; it is not an option, but a survival strategy. There is not only additional burden on these women, but also domestic conflict due to the weakening of patriarchal authority and major changes in family roles and dynamics.

- Data used is statistical evidence from different sources, results from previous quantitative and qualitative research, informal interviews, and author’s hypotheses.

- Starting in 1993, privatization exercises led to new family forms, with female-headed households rising from 19% in 1980 to 25% in 1994. Single mothers with young children face grave economic hardships, as they cannot work long hours to generate sufficient incomes, and have no other support systems.

- Women’s increasing self-esteem and autonomy often cause role reversals in families, leading to dissatisfaction and resentment in both husband and wife. Aggression, adultery, violence and alcoholism could be some outcomes of such a situation.

- The public sector in Argentina has been a refuge for women workers with major domestic commitments as it has more flexible work hours, more off days and on-site childcare. But with privatization large numbers of women lost their jobs and bore the brunt of economic restructuring.

- Downsizing in newly privatized companies sees older workers being laid off and given a significant ‘voluntary’ retirement payout.

- The author examines the case of female employees in a newly privatized telephone and airline company (large female workforce), and finds that women are seldom in executive or managerial jobs. With the bargaining power of unions minimal, new recruitment criteria looked for candidates who would ensure lower labor costs and would not be difficult, but ‘manageable’. Also, new workers are hired on contract basis, are non-unionized, given lower pay and lower benefits, and are made to work harder.

- ENTEL, the telephone company, and Aerolineas Argentinas (AA), the airline company, tightened their rules and regulations post-privatization in order to extract the maximum labor from its women – reduced leave days, increased work hours, shortened break times, cut paid leave, etc. Many women chose to retire voluntarily from AA. Privatized enterprises often let go of those women who are not needed because of technological upgradation or cannot adapt to new technological changes.

- Even if new working conditions were not meant to deliberately discriminate against women, they do so by ignoring the gender asymmetry in daily family life, which forces women to divide their time and energy between work and domestic commitments. As its commitment to social welfare and gender equity, the state should intervene in this situation and guarantee safe and cheap childcare services, schedule the work time of female workers in tandem with their domestic life, and design a labor policy that respects family as well as individual needs.
The article discusses the common elements, the shared processes and responses that resulted from transformation in urban workers’ households effected by the implementation of neo-liberal-style economic policies. It suggests that there has been a restructuring of the division of labor, consumption, and organization of households that has kept household incomes from suffering the same drastic decline as salaries and individual income.

- The mechanisms that have been adopted within households to confront the changes imposed are at once instrumental to the survival of the domestic group and mechanisms for the inter-generational reproduction of poverty.
- Individuals are organized in domestic groups and this organization serves as the basis for survival and reproduction in urban contexts. Implicit in individual, family and household responses is the capacity to manage the resources that, although limited, make it possible for the urban poor to survive persistent poverty. This is the concept of the ‘privatization’ of the crisis and the measures adopted to confront it.
- Arising from this is conflict and negotiation in the confrontation between and among individual and collective interests. These interests are based on a domestic hierarchy in which gender and generation constitute the most important axes.
- In situations of recession and scarcity, households are forced to intensify the salaried work of working-age and other members, extend the workday, and partially withdraw from the market place through reduced consumption and intensification of domestic work by women and children.
- The change from a model based on economies that were to a certain extent self-contained (promoting import-substitution industrialization) to an ‘open’ model oriented to the international market caused a deterioration of real wages, unemployment, stagnation of formal employment and reduced government social spending. Employment diminished in manufacturing and in the public sector and increased in services, especially personal services. Formal employment stagnated or declined, part-time workers without benefits or legal protection increased, and workers earned significantly lower wages.
- Strategies within households in order to cushion and mediate the effects of the crisis:
  o Urban households were characterized by an increase in the number of workers per household (mainly women and children; often in informal, poorly remunerated jobs or self-employment), intensification of non-remunerated domestic work, and the growing importance of extended-family households as a strategy for saving on costs.
  o With deterioration in real income a larger proportion was allocated to food, at the cost of other areas of consumption like education, health, clothing, recreation, etc. Women had to intensify their domestic work in order to save for basic consumption, which also underwent change: reduction in quantities consumed as also in products that became expensive (meat, milk products, etc.). However, extended households

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and those headed by women showed more balanced patterns of consumption, because women had greater control over resources and the material bases of survival.

- One mechanism for saving on housing costs and conserving/adding able-bodied members for salaried and domestic work is evidenced in the increase in extended households. Household composition underwent changes that enabled combating increasing costs and crises.

- Apart from the ‘private’ strategies within the household, there are important networks of mutual assistance maintained by relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc., that have formed part of the sources of income and resources of the urban poor, e.g., collective kitchens in Peru.

- Although the absence of a male head of household increases the chance of permanent poverty, female-headed households have more balanced pattern of consumption, with less income devoted to alcohol and cigarettes and more to food, clothing, health, and education, as well as a tendency towards a more equitable allocation of household work. Even though female-headed households are very vulnerable, women and children in male-headed households may be equally vulnerable because of relationships of domination and subordination permeated by gender and generation (unequal distribution of shares of food, differential access to education and health, etc.)

- The survival and reproduction of households in the context of urban poverty requires a combination of diverse sources of income and participation by more than one member in the labor market. The greater vulnerability of certain types of households is related to their limited possibilities of sending a larger contingent of individuals into the labor market and to the precariousness of the types of employment in which their members participate.

- Domestic violence and conflict between individual and collective interests have increased as a consequence of the increased tensions generated by the changed use and control of income. Young males leaving school to supplement the household income has negative consequences of their incorporation into the labor market, both at entry and later, and medium and long-range levels of remuneration.

- Since women’s control of income, when it exists, translates into substantial improvement in the well being of children in terms of nutrition, health, education, increasing their salaries would have a direct and immediate repercussion on diet, access to health and better living conditions. There is, therefore, a need to rethink the criteria for granting subsidies and credit in the light of the primordial role of women in the generation and management of well-being.
This article examines the vulnerability of low-income urban women in Jamaica in the context of their most valuable asset, their labor. It argues that the labor integration process neither addresses at a strategic level women’s position in the labor market nor provides at a practical level for the sustained elimination of poverty through reduction of vulnerability.

- On the basis of research and interviews with various interest groups in a low-income residential area of Kingston, the author tries to assess whether the nature of women’s labor force integration provides the basis for sustained poverty reduction.
- Since the post-war period Jamaica has been on a path of economic activity that paved the way for an export-oriented growth model. The 1970s and 1980s saw major IMF and World Bank-led economic and political reforms altering relative prices particularly wage rates, building up a huge external debt burden, and devaluing the exchange rate. The 1990s saw an aggravation of these policies: reduced public spending and social services, drop in public sector employment, increasing divestment and privatization, etc.
- Expansion of light manufacturing industry contributed to an upsurge in such low-paying labor-intensive activity as garment manufacture. Apparel employs a fifth of female manufacturing workers, and 80% of all apparel workers are women. Increase in unregulated and unprotected workshops and homeworking activity saw a decrease in the female unemployment rate from 36% to 26%, at the same time as male formal sector employment fell from 62% to 47%. Labor market restructuring changed modes of livelihood as many men moved to informal sector work.
- In an urban economy where the majority of the population have few economic assets or claims labor is the only asset, and the reduction of poverty and vulnerability depends on the structure of opportunity for skill enhancement. Differences in the level and nature of access to assets (like sewing machines or labor-saving devices like washing machines) play a key role in individual security. If macroeconomic trends require the sustained depletion of assets merely for consumption, or reduce accessibility and quality of public goods and services, this further increases vulnerability.
- The tradition of female economic activity in informal commercial work, along with women’s relative lack of militancy has made Caribbean urban locations attractive for transnational corporations to locate low-skill, labor-intensive operations. The restructuring of labor markets represents a ‘leveling down’ of gender inequality in the labor market. (don’t understand this. Also, what is ‘structure of opportunity’?)
- The growth of employment in manufacturing tradeables is characterized by its limited prospects and increasing insecurity. Informal sector expansion through sub-contracting leads to depression of wages and further prevents expansion of the economy.
In these ways the reorganization of the labor market has increased its segmentation and the unstable and precarious nature of employment opportunities, under a contraction and casualization of formal-sector employment; the production process has been ‘decomposed’ to isolate tasks that require little or no skill training. Although women in the workforce increased significantly, their entry into the labor market is in ‘precarious employment’, in marginal sales and in service-sector ‘non-tradeable’ activity – i.e., in spurious tertiarization.

In Jamaica the role of the informal sector is recognized, and informal entrepreneurial activity encouraged, particularly after a government commitment to pay particular attention to the small-business sector. But the informal sector survives because the majority of the population operate at low levels of capital intensity and enterprise. The author conceptualizes the informal sector as involutionary rather than evolutionary, whose growth cannot be achieved simply by removing institutional and legislative bias. The author states that if, as critics of Jamaican political economic management during the 1980s argue, the Jamaican economy is only now entering a true phase of stabilization, then the rise of ‘spurious tertiary’ activity could be a recessionary trend which will retreat once economic growth is achieved.

Vulnerability in household structures is evident from how the erosion of collective welfare services has increased the domestic reproductive burden on those women unable to purchase labor-saving appliances or services. This additionally reduces their ability to be productive in the labor market. Those low-income households dependent on a single income are extremely vulnerable to the effects of ill health on that income earner.

In a society where 45% of households are headed by women, there is a degree of domestic autonomy amongst them that has led to a recognition among analysts that industrialization entails the cumulative separation of social production from domestic reproduction. But there is also a sense of invisible gendered dependency displayed by women, which raises questions about the true extent of political independence of urban working-class women. Most clearly it reflects the dual pressures placed on female household heads to take on an increased domestic reproductive burden whilst also being presented to transnational corporations as the cornerstone of a low-wage industrial growth policy.

Female integration into the workforce has the potential to address gender inequality, but the traditional gendered division of labor works against this and there has not been a substitution of women for what were men’s jobs. If the ‘structure of opportunity’ that permits a level of specialization does not exist, then the process of adding value to labor through training is one that will reduce its attractiveness to foreign investors. Attention has to be paid not just to human capacity building but also to the structure of opportunity within which this occurs.

The main focus of the article is on the differential impact of recession in the early 1980s, and recovery and restructuring in the mid-1980s on the labor force participation of men and women in Greater Sao Paulo, as also the type of work they undertook and income from work.

The author discusses the following hypotheses about labor market and household behavior during recession:

- In recession, the number of jobs in the formal sector declines, but the informal sector expands to absorb not only labor displaced from the formal sector but also new entrants to the labor market.
- Because of the absorptive capacity of the informal sector, open unemployment rates rise little, if at all, and open unemployment remains largely confined to so-called ‘secondary’ workers (those who can afford to remain unemployed without suffering extreme deprivation).
- During recession the labor of secondary household members is mobilized in order to offset the loss of income of the main wage earner.
- Women and young persons are less able to obtain good, secure jobs than men; the former two categories are forced into low-paid informal work and the gap between male and female wages will rise.
- The economic recovery reduces any overall rise in the level of unemployment and lowers the participation rate.

The data informing these hypotheses is from the National Household Sample Survey (NHSS) for the years 1979 (latest year prior to the recession), 1983 (deepest recession), 1987 (recovery period). The labor market is divided into: the protected employed, the protected self-employed, the unprotected, domestic servants, employers, unpaid family workers. Age groups are adult females (20-59 years), adult males (20-59 years) and young people (10-19 years).

The results corresponding to the above hypotheses are:

- The informal sector did not expand to create more work. The drop in the various sectors totaled unemployment of 4.5%, but the increase in unprotected employment was only 1.7% during that time. The remainder of the drop was absorbed into open unemployment.
- Open unemployment seems to have risen significantly among adult males than adult females. The latter increased their share of protected sector jobs and saw their incomes increase relative to the other two groups.
- The added worker effect (secondary members mobilizing for work) does not hold true for young people as they were squeezed out of jobs in all sectors by the other two groups. Adult female activity rates rose between 1979 and 1983, however putting these in the context of long term trends shows that between 1970 and 1980 female employment rose at a rate of 7.3% a year, and so it wasn’t surprising that it rose during the recession too. Moreover, while this rate rose 2.4% between 1979 and 1983 it increased by 4.3% between 1983 and 1987 when the economy was
• Women, men and young people have very unequal access to the different parts of the informal sector. Virtually no young people are among the protected self-employed, and for every adult woman in protected self-employment there were 10 others in unprotected employment and domestic service. Men were the same numbers in the protected and unprotected informal sectors; they had higher incomes and greater continuity of income, specialized tools and work premises. However, mean income from the principal employment for adult females and for young adults relative to that of adult men remained virtually constant between 1979 and 1983.

• In the recovery period it is mostly adult males who fail to win back the losses suffered in the recession. In so far as a recession and recovery may herald a longer-term restructuring involving increased informalization, this has a bigger impact on adult males than on other groups.


This study focuses on women’s solidarities as survival strategies in Guyana’s capital and most populous city, Georgetown. Participatory discussions and workshops helped understand the goals, manner of fulfilling them, problems and successes of 75 participants in 3 women’s solidarities operating in 3 neighborhoods of the capital.

• The Caribbean Community and Common Market referred to as CARICOM was established in 1973. The 13 participating countries share in common their heritage of African slavery, East Indian indentureship and British colonial administration. Guyana is a multi-ethnic country, has a one-crop economy, and about 20% of people born there live outside the country, especially the United States. The economy depends on the international pricing of its main export products – sugar, bauxite and rice.

• The late 1980s saw the introduction of an IMF-World Bank structural adjustment program that focused on repaying the country’s debts incurred earlier in the decade and on promoting private investment. This resulted in cuts in public services, jobs, subsidies, devaluation of currency and flight of skilled professionals.

• In the deteriorating economic structure and cuts in social services, women’s productive capacities are being stretched to capacity. Nuclear family structures in urban areas means support from extended families is no longer there. Migration, marital abandonment and women’s decisions to stay unmarried have led to an increase in female headed households – from 22.4% in 1970 to 35% in 1987. These are poorer than other households because of less secondary earning members and more dependents. Even though women’s workforce participation has increased it is still restricted to service occupations or home-base related (making selling food items). Children, especially girls, suffer the loss of education as they are seen to be more useful in housekeeping or pursuing some form
of income.

- The community development approach has been part of the culture of Guyanese society, and enables impoverished people to cope with severe hardships collectively. In partnership with government and non-government organizations such support groups set up facilities and services like roads, schools, homes, health and community centers, day care centers, etc., and foster a sense of self-reliance.

- The Albouystown Women’s Support Group, Lamaha park group and Sideline Dam were made up of 45, 350 and 1000 members respectively. All 3 neighborhoods were poor, with people living in sub-standard and insanitary environments. Rural migrants with little education and at times poor health, they found it almost impossible to get good jobs and improve their standard of living. Only 34.6% of the 75 participants were in the formal sector – in the poorest paid jobs. In all communities additional income was made from the informal sector by selling home-cooked food, petty commodities and small services like dressmaking.

- The women participants felt that poverty impacted on men and women differently. They complained that men were unsupportive and non-cooperative regarding the new crises affecting the households and left women to make ends meet with minimal resources. The extra stress faced by women led them to develop their own support groups.

- The support groups linked women and men with resources outside their group, (international NGOs, business organizations, and development agencies within the government), provided opportunities for members to become conscious of their roles as producers and community organizers, and introduced skills and trainings that helped ‘stretch the dollar further’. The groups set up day-care services, legal groups to mediate conflicts, recreational and informal education classes for children, in addition to cooperating in members’ informal economic activities with skill training components, training in principles of management, budgeting, marketing, etc. They also identify common social problems affecting their children, youth and adults and work out programs to attend to them.

Much more than basic economic survival needs to be done, but the emphasis on cooperative planning and working to alleviate individual and family problems gives the work of the women support groups community-wide dimensions.


The author argues that a gendered political economy must go beyond discussions of gender divisions of labor within the household to challenge the separation of social reproduction as well as daily and generational reproduction from the notion of what is economic. Interviews were conducted with a variety of Cuban men and women in the mid-1990s.

- Social reproduction is a concept that speaks of the process by which all the main production relations in a society are constantly recreated and perpetuated. In the state of developed capitalism, social reproduction involves not only the production and maintenance of the wage labor force,
but also the reproduction of capital itself, through the processes of production and investment under the control of a restricted class within society. This aspect – of reproducing not just the labor force, but the social relations of all the productive relations in the economy – is used to analyzed the Cuba crisis of the 1990s.

- Applied to the Cuban revolution of 1959, the extended understanding of social reproduction in Cuba entails not only the reproduction of the key institutions and relationships of the revolution, but also of the activities involved in maintaining the revolution on a day-to-day basis at the community or neighborhood level. It is important to conceptualize women’s ‘community management role’ – where they organize and manage services and infrastructure for their families and neighborhoods by negotiating with local/national authorities for resources – not as part of ‘domestic labor’ but as part of generational and social reproduction which takes place in the public sphere.

- An unexamined assumption of a positive relationship between women’s economic participation and their social and economic status seems a mere reduction of gender analysis to who does what where. Instead there should be attempts at applying gender to transcend traditional boundaries between the economic and non-economic. A recognition of different kinds of labor (paid, unpaid, domestic, community) is important to construct systems of economic participation that are based on gender equity.

- Ungendered political economy treats this crisis as one in production and concentrates on implications for the long-term sustainability of the system. For the Cuban population this transition is experienced as a crisis in consumption. This led to growth of the small-scale informal sector, as also of the role of the black market in the provisioning of households.

- Women have had to absorb the shocks of cuts in publicly supplied social and welfare services – in terms of increasing and intensifying domestic labor and of gender-inequitable access to remaining scarce services such as higher education or vocational training. The processes of market-based restructuring has disadvantaged women as they do not always have access to the new opportunities requiring physical and financial capital, market connections and contacts, and prioritization of household resources like space and transport. Though there are changes, women’s responsibility for domestic work and the gendered nature of the allocation of household priorities and strategies is ever present; the domestic response to the crisis in Cuba has reinforced rather than dissolved traditional sexual division of labor in these activities.

- Post-crisis Cuba has seen the redomestication of elements of reproductive activity that was previously provided by or organized within the public sphere – health services, child care, access to commodity inputs for cooking or cleaning. Before the crisis, the socially organized provision of services was built into ways in which economic life was organized.

- Cuba’s need to prioritize foreign-exchange or saving activities has led to incentives being directed to increasing productivity in national priority sectors to the detriment of publicly supported social sectors, like education (affecting teaching staff and students).

- The need to compensate for what was previously guaranteed in terms of
collective consumption means that time and energy which could otherwise be spent on participatory activities are now dedicated to activities designed to ensure the survival of family and household. Also, values and expectations of people about universal entitlements and relative equity are being replaced by values more akin to those in capitalist societies where there is no expectation of collective responsibility and entitlements are directly linked to ownership of economic factors of production.

- The inability of the system and the institutions of the Cuban revolution to deliver its goals is slowly destroying younger people’s faith/interest in these. The strategies for the future of the economic system are not mere survival strategies; they represent a long-term readjustment of the terms of the relationship between household and state in respect of the responsibility for meeting the commodity and service needs of household members in the new Cuban economy. The challenge or a gendered political economy in Cuba is to rethink how social reproduction can be reconnected to economic processes in order to facilitate a transition which is sustainable in political and economic terms.


This article discusses characteristics of women’s efforts at survival via intensification of domestic work, participation in economic work and community support strategies.

- Structural adjustment policies were introduced in Ecuador to cope with the economic crisis of the late 1970s, but these in turn brought on reduction in public expenditures, increasing unemployment, and growing inflation.
- Solanda in Quito started in 1982 as a pilot housing project for low-income families, but was addressed to the needs of medium and low-economic groups who could afford to pay the recovery costs of the houses. In 1989 53 households were researched to assess how women coped with the economic crisis at the productive, reproductive and community levels.
- 71.1% of households were nuclear, 19.2% extended and 7.6% women-headed; 9.6% of women had completed secondary school in contrast to 14.6% of men. None of the women had any tertiary education; 6% of men had attended university.
- Cuts in public expenditure and services meant that households had to curtail services in relation to water, electricity, markets, civic amenities and childcare.
- The burden of domestic work was aggravated, as women had to spend more time and effort in sourcing out cheaper items and in scrounging to make ends meet. Taking care of and maintaining young and sick family members was an additional burden.
- Extended households provided support in terms of other women members sharing domestic work and childcare. Very often domestic responsibilities shifted to older daughters, thus reinforcing women’s ‘natural’
responsibility to do domestic activities. Regardless of whether women worked outside or not, they had to do housework; they reorganized, stretched their time and reduced leisure options so as to maintain equilibrium between being mothers and workers.

- Conflict usually arose over expenditure for the family budget and household maintenance, as women received weekly or monthly contributions from all towards this. Decisions about large sums of money were made jointly by men and women or sometimes by men alone.
- Cuts in subsidies resulted in reduced consumption, where families gave up milk, bread, eggs and meat, and had instead bananas, tea or aromatic herbs and grains. The women were aware of the nutritional value of the foods they substituted.
- The urban poor had strong solidarity networks that provided a minimum level of economic security to its members. Households received different types of aid resources from different networks: food, small loans, childcare, clothing, advice and information, support in family difficulties, etc.
- 63.3% of Solanda households received income from 2 or more wage earners in order to subsist. Many worked longer hours to earn more incomes. The hours were related to type of work and women tended to work longer hours than men because they combined productive and income generating activities.
- Almost 78% of Solanda’s women were employed; type of work depended on their educational and marital status. Commercial activities included vending items within the house, the neighborhood or streets, and those in steady jobs were semi-skilled workers in textile and food-processing factories, or service industries like teachers, receptionists.
- Nearly 65% of women constituted unpaid labor in family enterprises, and this hidden exploitation was not recognized as work even by the women themselves.
- The economic crisis has seen many women enter the workforce, but did not change their economic and social well-being. Neither does participation in productive work necessarily alter gender relations within the household. Husbands continue to resist working wives, and in many cases women chose to work in areas that allowed them to stay at home, reconciling their new roles with the culturally accepted ones.
- To combat these adverse conditions the urban poor form collective organizations to give each other support. This has traditionally been part of Latin America’s community culture, like the communal kitchens of Peru, consumer collectives of Chile and the struggle for day-care movement of Brazil.
- In Solanda the women’s collective at the barrio level has worked at developing such community networks through their activities:
  - Communal Network for Children’s Development – they set up a crèche under this national child-support and development program,
  - Communal shops – with the help of an NGO called CEPAM they identified the problems of high prices and transport costs for purchases in Solando, and subsequently set up their own communal shops and managed all the marketing and technical aspects themselves,
Active participation in the housing mobilization campaign – in 1989 women participated in a resistance against increasing interest rates on housing loans and learnt to press for their demands and strategize around power issues and sometimes fought with their men even to gain representation on the campaign committees.

- A new gender approach to policy making is necessary, which views women as socially and economically productive agents. Women are utilizing all their capacities and reserves to survive, and they need to be protected from these severe restraints. Women’s time and efforts are not to be continually seen as ‘free elastic resources’.


Using a legalistic definition of ‘informal’ employment, the authors assert that reforms undertaken in Peru in the early 1990s might have resulted in a slight reduction of the informal sector, as the costs associated with becoming and staying informal and the benefits of becoming formal have increased.

- Until the end of the 1980s, a vast array of labor regulations and policies that distorted wage determination were in practice: rigid labor markets, binding minimum wage regulations, specific mandated benefits, forced savings schemes, extremely high hiring costs, job stability rules and an array of other administrative and tax-related regulations. The uncertainty and increased transaction costs arising from such a situation were a clear burden for firms.
- Structural reforms of the 1990s brought about legislative changes that greatly increased the relative benefits of staying in the formal sector and also increased the relative costs and benefits of entering or staying in the informal sector. Creation of a single unified registry in order to legally set up a firm; reorganizing the tax collection system to reach a larger tax base and detect evaders; new labor laws that eliminated job stability laws, cumbersome dismissal procedures, restrictions on temporary and part-time employment; introduction of flexible contracting mechanisms aimed at reduction in the costs of firing, were some of these.
- The traditional definition of the informal sector focuses heavily on the size of the firm, the occupation of the worker, and the type of technology employed. Consequently, size distribution is all that matters: if there is an increase in the share of small businesses in total employment that is interpreted as an increase in the informal sector.
- Stating that this definition obscures the probability of small firms finding it profitable to enter or stay in the formal sector, the authors propose a *legalistic* definition. The criteria used to define the informal sector here is based on the compliance of the firm or individual with the established judicial, regulatory and institutional framework, i.e., the rule of law.
- Using a legalistic definition enables a clear view of the relative costs and benefits of becoming or staying informal or formal – for wage earners as well as independent workers. This then translates into the following criteria for identifying workers in the formal or informal sector: for wage earners the
criteria for formality are (i) have a signed contract; (ii) belong to a union, (iii) be entitled to health insurance or pension, (iv) be entitled to vacations, or (v) be a public sector worker. The criteria for formality for independent workers are (i) having made any tax payment, or (ii) being registered with the tax authority.

- Using the traditional definition the data used (the Ministry of labor Surveys for Metropolitan Lima) suggests an upward trend in informality between 1990 and 1995, whereas the legalistic definition suggests the opposite pattern.
- This suggests that legislative and labor reforms might have increased the opportunity costs of staying in the informal sector, and that the liberalization process of the labor market may have increased formal temporary and fixed term contracting and subcontracting mechanisms as opposed to informal ones.
- The data shows that after structural reforms were implemented, and for all groups, regions and genders, workers in the formal sector earn more than those in the informal sector, the income gap being larger for wage earners than for independent workers. In general, independent workers earn more than wage earners.

Also, the earnings generating process is relatively similar for formal and informal independent workers, but differences are found when comparing wage earners from the two sectors. Differences are linked to characteristics of workers and also to job characteristics in the two sectors.


The article examines the impact of paid labor on women’s status in 3 countries of the Hispanic Caribbean, asking whether wage labor merely exploits women as a source of cheap labor or it gives women greater autonomy and a consciousness of gender subordination.

- SAP policies in Latin America, as elsewhere included devaluation of the currency, accelerating the rate of inflation and cost of living; elimination of government subsidies for basic foods and subsidized credits to farmers; cuts in government social expenditures; and a freeze on real wages. These policies shifted all responsibility for survival from the state to the individual and family.
- Data is from interviews and surveys with women industrial workers in Puerto Rico (157 garment factory workers), the Dominican Republic (231 workers in the export-processing zones) and Cuba (168 textile factory workers), between 1980 and 1986.
- The increased importance of women’s contribution to the household economy in all 3 countries eroded male authority and enabled women to challenge the myth of the male breadwinner. Women have gained more negotiating power in the household than in the public spaces of the workplace and the state; this suggests that there exist various levels of gender subordination, which need to be recognized as analytically separate.
4 factors by which the study assesses the impact of wage labor on women’s status are outlined

- **State policy**, which affects demand for female and male labor, and also affects supply through the provision of educational resources and other state services.
  - In Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic the state’s principal role is to create a favorable environment for foreign investment through the control of wages and labor, which can be achieved through outright repression or prohibition of unions in free-trade zones, or through the co-optation of labor. This forced women to compensate for the declining employment and wages of men, making them major economic contributors to the household. It is likely that this adds to their burdens in the household.
  - In Cuba, however, the state is committed to promoting gender equality, and has initiated several measures to enable women to work, e.g., educational and support services and affirmative action plans. There is also the Family Code, which encourages couples to share household and child-rearing responsibilities.

- **Access to income-producing resources**, including level of wages, working conditions, etc., as well as alternative income-earning sources like the informal sector or transfer payments.
  - In Cuba women workers are guaranteed equal pay for equal work, paid vacations, maternity benefits and a wider array of support services than is found in capitalist societies. But occupational segregation, which made factory management give top priority to highly skilled workers, generally male, keeps women in inferior positions.
  - In the other 2 countries virtually all production workers are women and all management is male. Discontent arising from such situations is expressed in turnover or eventual withdrawing rather than labor organizing. Lack of worker solidarity is linked to the youth of and constant turnover among workers, their recent entry into industrial employment, family responsibilities, and lack of job alternatives.
  - In no country, then, do women have equal access to income-producing resources with men, who still dominate the highly skilled, better-paid jobs and enjoy greater possibilities of advancement.

- **Structure of the household**, including factors like life cycle of women employed and support from kin.
  - Women have begun to assume more authority in the household, deriving from their increased economic contribution to the family. They make decisions jointly with their husbands and also administer expenses together.
  - Households with young children are in the most critical stage economically, and this is when women are most dependent on men. Lack of health services, funds, and equipment, coupled with the pressures of economic crisis increase women’s fear of challenging male dominance.
  - Many female heads of household are younger women separated from one or more consensual unions; they are reluctant to remarry, citing the
independence their work has given them as reason. Female-headed households are generally poorer, in part because they have fewer wage earners in family. Networks of relatives and neighbors are support systems for such households, with extended households having the highest incomes because of more wage earners.

- Very often, while men accept the idea that their wives work, most of them do not share in housework or childcare. In general, however, more egalitarian relationships in all 3 countries are found among stably married couples in which both members work and are better educated.

- Gender ideology, which is governed by cultural and structural factors and affects the way in which women define their roles.
  - The private-public split in Latin America dates back to Spanish colonial distinctions – fostered by Catholicism – whereby women were relegated to the home and men to the street as a way of maintaining family honor and female virginity. Patriarchal laws championing the man as provider and protector still prevail in many Latin American countries, whereas women’s rights to divorce and equality before the law are very limited.
  - The patriarchal family is upheld by the patriarchal state; this support is partly due to the state’s recognition of the family’s importance to social reproduction and of its limited ability to perform the family’s functions. This is evident in times of crisis when the state places additional burdens on the household to meet basic needs.
  - Most women have come to consider paid employment as part of their domestic role, because they work for the household and not for their own self-esteem or personal autonomy.

- Women are thus still clearly subordinated in the workplace and the polity, and their confinement to the home has been replaced by occupational segregation. This allows women a limited representation in the workplace in selected female occupations that are often extensions of their female roles.


The argument in this article is that the male bias in the informal sector paradigm lies not so much in the underestimation of women as a particular group within the informal sector, but in the faulty characterization of the model itself, which is gender-blind.

- For the most part there is a consensus that production is polarized between large and small enterprises; employment in the former is mainly based on wage and salaried labor, workers are highly paid and skilled, protected by unions and labor legislation and have good career prospects, whereas the latter consists of self-employment, family labor and quasi-wage workers, with low pay and skills, mainly casual workers with few career prospects.
The author calls into question the assumption that there is a single axis of segmentation in the urban labor market which underlies all the variables that differentiate the two sectors.

- Work on the informal sector has showed that the presence of women in this sphere acts as a subsidy to the formal sector in many ways. It has helped to recognize women’s work and its significance for the wider functioning of the economy.

- With data from 1972-1974 in Lima, Peru, the author asserts the following:
  - There is profound segregation between men and women within both sectors and the differences between men’s and women’s work in each
  - This combination of segregation and differentiation means that the typical characterization of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ only ever applies to one sex and excludes the other
  - Also, since gender crosscuts the formal/informal sector division rather than running parallel with it, one sees that there are two axes of segmentation in the labor market.

- The data analysis shows that when looking at the characteristics of men’s and women’s employment in the informal sector – income, education, skill and occupational mobility – it is women’s employment that conformed to the typical conception of unskilled and poorly paid dead-end jobs, and this was true of their situation in both the sectors. Men tended to have skilled jobs with relatively high incomes and good career prospects and this too was evident in both sectors. Thus ‘formal’ jobs corresponded to men’s jobs and ‘informal’ jobs to women’s jobs, regardless of the size of enterprise or category of employment. The informal sector, therefore, the author states, is a female sector, not because it is dominated by women – it is not – but because it describes the characteristics of female employment.

- This does not mean that gender should replace enterprise/employment status variables as the major axis of segmentation. It is within male and female labor markets that there were differences in skill, earnings and job mobility associated with conventional formal/informal sector variables. Gender was crosscutting enterprise and employment size; just as the gender division was internally segmented by enterprise size and employment status, the formal/informal division was internally segmented by gender.

- In analyzing gender segregation within the informal sector, the first task is to document gender differences through the systematic comparison of men’s and women’s employment (rather than focusing on one sex or the other), and the second is to search for explanations that are appropriate to the specific characteristics of informal sector production. The analysis of gender segregation has to be set within the wider context of formal/informal sector relations rather than confined to the informal sector alone.

- Much of the inequality between women and men in both formal and informal sectors was occupationally based. It was women’s confinement to unskilled occupations, those restricted to the informal sector, which accounted for their low levels of income and low opportunities for mobility. Although men also worked in the informal sector, they had access to occupations that facilitated skill acquisition, accumulation of
savings, and job mobility, hence a stronger position overall.

- The reason why women were restricted to these occupations lies in the family, an institution that affects the entire organization of small-scale production; which handled resource allocation in a much wider sense and designated certain activities as appropriate for men and others for women. Within small-scale production it affected the apprenticeship system, the distribution of credit, tools and client networks; because the domestic economy as well as petty production often took place in the home, there was a transference of the domestic division of labor to that of small-scale production.

- It is, therefore, not because women are underrepresented or ignored that the informal sector can be accused of a male bias. Instead, the bias is inherent in the characterization of the sector itself.


This paper explores the spatial component of women’s work in Tarija, Bolivia. Bolivia is famous for its mineral wealth, and its economic crises in 1980s and in a sense was the crises of the mining sector. During 1985-87 the workforce was reduced by 75%. The former miners moved to other parts of the country. Tarija, the city where the present study was conducted received several miners. The study site detailed as 'barrio' known as Lourdes, houses several unemployed miners.

This is a study with 44 households. Households take complex spatial and temporal divisions of labor for survival. Women's income earning work is contingent on the household structure. Women fit their use of micro-niches of economic opportunity within the spatial demands of their day.

Women work significantly closer to home than do men, and therefore have smaller access to markets in spatial terms.

- Households respond to crisis by engaging in strategies that minimize expenditure and generate income. A household may include several people who engage in a strategy of multiple livelihoods. Households take a complex temporal and spatial divisions labor. For eg. temporary migration.

The study has also observed that women spend long hours carrying out multiple income generating activities.

- Household composition emerges as a key indicator that determines women’s engagement in income-generating activity.
- Households in which women work outside the community are larger.
- There us virtually no difference in the number of children per household.
- The number of adults per households is significant (p=0.003) and so is the number of children per adult (p=0.001).
- Women rely on other women to facilitate income-generating work away from home.
- Young daughters share mother’s responsibility. Older woman members or
young daughter’s with small children shoulder responsibilities to relieve women to work outside.

- Women who stay at home carry out several types of petty business that can be carried out from home.

Providing assistance in the form of community-based day-care facilities may substantially increase opportunities for female employment. The author highlights the need to understand the spatial reality of women's lives to understand the interconnections of housing, employment and child care.


The starting point in this article is that different versions of liberalization – alternatives consistent with the basic strategy – can have significantly different effects on poverty and inequality.

- The liberalization programs undertaken in all three countries have intended to favor efficiency, leadership by the private sector rather than the state, and encourage relatively open and unregulated economies. Within this basic orientation, however, they have varied considerably.
- All three countries went through an initial period of contraction and then recovered to achieve impressive results in terms of lowered inflation and renewed growth. During the 1980s and 1990s all three went into crisis again, but while Chile emerged with a relatively egalitarian economic strategy, Mexico’s export growth and renewed output growth was accompanied by an increase in poverty. Peru’s recent comeback program was at a stage where it could be revised to avoid or moderate such breakdowns.

The question is: what kinds of measures might help lessen poverty and inequality without violating the constraints of an adjustment program that is fundamentally led by the private sector in an open economy?

- The main economic relationships that work either in favor of or against equality are the balance between the demand for labor and the growth of the labor force, the distribution of assets, and the distribution of access to education, skills and opportunities.
- Liberalization programs can be designed to allow capital flows to determine the external balance on current account and comparative advantage to determine the structures of production and trade. This ‘standard model’ displays the logic of eliminating state intervention; it has been the most common model in liberalization programs all over the world. Alternatively, they can be designed to promote exports in order to raise the ceiling of sustainable rates of growth, to lessen dependence on external capital, and to favor diversification toward exports of manufactures and modern services. This ‘competitive model’ aims at building up the capacity of the country’s modern sectors to compete in open international markets.
Two possible orientations of social programs – intended to moderate the impact of liberalization programs on the poor – that complement the two models of liberalization respectively are: the kind that emphasizes emergency help to sustain nutrition or health standards for the extremely poor, and a program that aims at reducing the inequality of opportunities by such means as improving the quality of education and redistributing educational expenditures for the poor, providing worker training to increase job flexibility, developing communal leadership by inviting applications for local projects. A combination of the competitive model with social programs that reduce inequality of opportunity could form a third model of liberalization.

The Chilean military government followed the standard version of liberalization programs till it collapsed in 1982, following which the democratic government attempted to make the process more egalitarian. The standard model reduced inflation and enabled economic growth, but worsened poverty and inequality. Chile’s second adjustment program was the competitive model, and the government took responsibility for stimulating production, employment and exports – and not just for restraining inflation. This proved more successful in terms of aggregate growth and reduction of poverty and inequality as well. 1990 onwards, the democratic government continued with economic orientation of the competitive model but increased and re-oriented the country’s social projects by introducing an array of programs and training programs to build up the human capital of the poor. Balance was to be sought in a form acceptable to both business and labor.

Mexico’s liberalization program ran successfully from 1987 to 1994, and its crash replicated Chile’s breakdown just as its liberalization model followed Chile’s standard model. Although the damage to the poor was serious in Mexico during the late 1980s, its employment conditions did not deteriorate like those of Chile’s. Among the factors that helped moderate adverse effects were the government’s decision not to engage in any massive discharge of public-sector workers, and the introduction of 2 extensive social programs that helped thousands of communities to implement local projects for their own development. This made it a hybrid of Chile’s first and third models. Mexico’s persistently rising external deficits, however, spelt its doom in 1994. The positive side of the forced devaluation that followed is that it gave the Mexican economy an elastic capacity to respond to the stimulus of favorable exchange rates. Arresting appreciation of the currency will allow for growth, but because Mexico is following the standard model it may not be in a position to choose its course independently, especially in the context of international finance aid during its 1994 emergency.

Peru’s active state intervention from 1965-1990 included some positive intervals but gradually turned into a deteriorating state. The standard model of liberalization was introduced in 1991, and as in Chile of the late 1970s Peru’s output per capita kept falling through 1992. The recovery of the economy started the following year with the government indicating clearly its commitment to liberalization and macroeconomic stabilization. In contrast to the beginnings of the standard model in both Chile and...
Mexico, where prior devaluations had established an initially strong competitive position, Peru’s version was implemented against the backdrop of prolonged deterioration. Once the economy started to recover, its external deficits started rising exactly as in the two other countries. Peru is at the stage where its ability to avoid the shocks experienced by the two countries depends on both the course of its economic policy and the contribution of rising investment to the supply of external exports. But the fear of a resurgence of inflation is ever present for those who would like to move to a more competitive exchange rate or to adopt any alternative means of promoting export growth.


The article discusses women workers roles in informal sector micro-enterprises in Latin America, in the context of societal, familial and patriarchal constraints.

- Women’s presence in informal sector work is linked to many factors: whether they are married, single heads of household, married to male heads of household, have children and whether they are of working age or not, whether they are part of family labor, or supplement the family income.
- Women who work independently of their husbands are disadvantaged in setting up micro-enterprises because of their lesser access to capital and buying-marketing skills, and because of limitations on their mobility associated with gender ideologies in Latin America. The author acknowledges that women working as unremunerated labor in their husbands enterprises may make all the difference between the success and failure of those enterprises.
- The author discusses 3 informal sector occupations and women’s work within them: street vending, garbage picking and brick making.

Street vendors
- Usually local governments have sought the support of street vendors, while national governments have sought to eradicate them. They do pay taxes, but go against the modernizing image of the economy. Women form the majority of micro-entrepreneurs, mainly street vendors, in most cities in Latin America.
- Street vendors are linked with capitalist enterprises in many direct as well as indirect ways. Commission sellers, dependent workers, and the independent, truly self-employed are the 3 types of vendors who differ on the basis of the goods they sell as well as their relation with capitalist enterprises.
- Commission sellers have dependent linkages with large, medium or small firms in the formal sector, multinational businesses, or purveyors of illegal goods. They sell the products of other retailers, receiving a commission on each item sold. Dependent workers are quite like commission sellers,
depending upon a supplier or on credit to obtain merchandise, but do not have a fixed commission. Independent self-employed vendors sell mainly cooked/uncooked foodstuffs, second-hand goods or assorted small items; they buy from a variety of intermediaries or make their own merchandise.

• The relation to capitalist enterprise depends on the products being sold as well; some vendors sell products made in the formal capitalist sector on commission, others buy their products from formal sector wholesalers and intermediaries who represent commercial capitalism. These informal activities must be recognized as serving the interests of monopoly capital: many sell goods illegally imported from the United States and this only helps the companies that make them.

Garbage pickers

• The general primary materials recycled are cardboard and metals. Paper companies find it cheaper to buy paper and cardboard from garbage pickers than buying paper pulp made from trees. The same is the case with metals – they are cheaper if procured from junkyards rather than newly mined and alloyed.

• Garbage pickers may sell to intermediaries, satellite warehouses, main warehouse, or sometimes directly to the paper companies. Most families employed in the dump own pick-up trucks; those who don’t, have to sell to intermediaries. Women come under this category. Women gather materials for household use and for re-sale, like old clothes, slightly damaged toys, cutlery, household implements, etc. This is a way of supplementing family incomes.

• Garbage pickers subsidize core capitalist enterprises through self-exploitation and exploitation of family labor. Their work enables paper companies to make profits without having to hire them as full-time workers and give social security benefits.

• Goods and services offered by these informal sector firms are often cheaper than those offered by formal sector enterprises; this lower cost means that these workers exert less pressure for a higher wage capable of covering cost of goods and services produced in the formal sector. This also protects companies against demands for a family wage.

Brick makers

• Brick makers’ work directly subsidizes capitalist enterprise in that they sell bricks at lower cost than profit-making brick making businesses by using unpaid family labor. Through their self-exploitation and family exploitation they provide a direct subsidy to the cost of living of urban populations and thus save formal enterprises from demands for higher wages.

• Brick making involves tedious and time-consuming work, and women and children participate in almost all stages of the work. Those women who do not take part in the main or subsidiary processes provide input into the family enterprise by making meals for the brick workers. This productive labor provides subsidies to the household, to the brick making enterprise and both directly and indirectly to capitalist enterprises located in the

formal sector of the economy.

- The extension of women’s domestic labor in brick work is exploitation based on ideologies of gender and generational hierarchy, or the internalization of these ideologies.

Those engaged in informal sector activities are not divorced from modern formal sector enterprises, nor are they self-generated with no links to modern industry. Rather, they are intimately connected to the capitalist system and facilitate the generation of greater profits within that system. Women are doubly exploited, as disguised proletarians and as a subordinated sex; the subsidies they offer are not only to the capitalist system, but also to the male-headed family enterprise.
Gender, education and development. A partially annotated and selective bibliography. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Off of Educational Research and Improvement. E cational resources information center (eric).

Inevitably there will be some oversights and significant omissions in a work of this kind. The theme is a massive one, still attracting a great deal of interest, as it should. We take full responsibility for any shortcomings, and hope that readers will notify us of important, readily available sources that have not been listed here.