

POVERTY AMONG WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA: FEMINIZATION OR OVER-REPRESENTATION?

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Abstract

Resumo

Neste trabalho discutimos quatro definições de feminização de pobreza, e analisamos microdados domiciliares para oito países da América Latina com o intuito de verificar se está ocorrendo um processo de feminização da pobreza com base nas definições adotadas. Ainda verificamos se os resultados encontrados são sensíveis a variações na linha de pobreza e a diferentes cenários de desigual distribuição intra-domiciliar. Concluimos que pode haver uma sobre-representação das mulheres entre os pobres, mas não há uma evidência clara de uma recente feminização da pobreza nos países analisados. Esta conclusão implica que questões como a autonomia econômica das mulheres são mais importantes para a agenda igualitária do que a feminização da pobreza.

We discuss four different concepts of feminization of poverty and analyze household survey data to verify if there is an undergoing feminization of poverty in eight Latin American countries, according to each of these concepts. We also verify if our results are sensible to changes in values of poverty lines and to different scenarios of intra-household inequalities. We conclude that women may be over-represented among the poor but there is no clear evidence of a recent and widespread feminization of poverty in the Latin American countries studied. The implication of this conclusion for policymaking in the region is that issues such as achieving the economic autonomy of women are perhaps more important to the egalitarian agenda than the feminization of poverty.

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INTRODUCTION

From the equity point of view, the feminization of poverty should be fought against because it is related two negative phenomena, poverty and gender inequality. Until recently, the idea that there is an undergoing feminization of poverty in the world was widely accepted among women's advocates. For instance, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) postulated that the number of women living in poverty was increasing disproportionately to the number of men, particularly in the developing countries. The same idea was restated at least in two United Nations (UN) resolutions, in 1996 and 2000, and again in a report by the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2003 (United Nations, 1996, 2000, 2003).

There is little doubt about the importance of precise information for policy design and implementation. The occurrence of a feminization of poverty has several implications for this process. One of them is that an increase in the levels of poverty among women or female headed households leads to the conclusion that the existing anti-poverty measures may be not only ineffective but negative for women. On the other hand, if the feminization is not occurring, research and egalitarian policies would gain from focusing in related but different issues, such as determinants of the economic autonomy of women.

The existence of poverty in any group is morally unacceptable and its increase in any group sets priorities for public policies. Thus, the occurrence of a feminization of poverty would require that actions to promote gender equality focus primarily on anti-poverty measures. However, if a feminization is not occurring, focusing on poverty would immobilize resources that could be otherwise used in other strategies of gender equality promotion.

Given that political, human and financial resources are scarce, to a certain extent anti-poverty measures can conflict with a broader pro-equity strategy. As Baden and Milward (1997:4) put it, "Collapsing gender concerns into a poverty agenda narrows the scope for a gender analysis which can fully address how and why gender inequalities are reproduced, not just among the 'poor', but in society as a whole".

Therefore, despite the limitations we face in terms of data availability and the lack of a consensus on how to define "feminization", empirical research on the issue may help the policymaking process by giving information about the existence or not of an undergoing process of feminization of poverty in Latin American countries. The objective of this paper is to examine if this feminization is occurring. In order to do that we analyze different definitions of "feminization of poverty" at the country level using recent survey data. The countries studied are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and Venezuela.

In the first session we begin by discussing conceptual issues related to the different ideas about what feminization of poverty is. The term "feminization of poverty" is used with multiple meanings. Though many advocates of gender equity use it, they do not always have the same concept in mind and often the idea of a feminization of poverty is confused with a related concept, the over-representation of women among the poor. We differentiate these two concepts by relating the latter to the profile of poverty in a given moment and the first to the changes in this profile over time. We also try to systematize the most common definitions of feminization of poverty with the intention of testing empirically its occurrence.

We opted to carry the tests for four definitions of feminization. Given limitations in data availability we adopt a conventional approach and define poverty as income deprivation using poverty lines as thresholds. To avoid the dependence of the conclusions on the value of the poverty line we conduct all the tests for different values of the poverty lines. We also repeat the tests assuming different levels of intra-household distribution of income since previous research shows that studies that relate poverty and inequality cannot neglect these inequalities.

Generally speaking, we found that women – but not female headed households – are probably over-represented among the poor and that except for small variations and minor contradictory results there is no clear evidence of a recent and widespread feminization of poverty in the Latin American countries examined. Based on those results we make some suggestions for future research and comments about the implications of the study for policy making. We also discuss some of the limitations of the study in what relates to generalization to other countries and to other dimensions of poverty.

THE CONCEPT OF FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

The term “feminization of poverty” became well known after a study by Diane Pearce, which focused in the gender patterns in the evolution of poverty rates in the United States between the beginning of the 1950’s and the mid 1970’s (Pearce, 1978). In her research she used two concepts of feminization of poverty, the first being “an increase of women among the poor” and the second “an increase of female headed households among the poor households”, the latter becoming the core definition in Pearce’s work.

It seems that Pearce was trying to examine the role that women or female households had in the composition of the poor population and how this composition was changing over time. In almost all societies in the world, women are a majority in the population and female headed households are a minority among the types of family. As a consequence, it is frequently found a higher number of women and a lower number of female headed households among the poor. However, this is not enough to conclude that women are over-represented and female headed households are under-represented among the poor. Over-representation in poverty is a notion that relates the size of a subgroup of the poor – say women or female headed households – to the size of this subgroup in general population. In practical terms, it is the same as comparing the incidence of poverty in different groups.

Nevertheless, in both definitions Pearce chose to look at a group among the poor and not at poverty inside a group, which, from the methodological point of view, makes a good difference. For instance, a measurement based on her approach would be indifferent if the impoverishment of female headed households was neutralized by a reduction of the numbers of female headed households in the population. For that reason the subsequent studies adopted the “poverty inside a group” approach, as does most of the research in the field nowadays. This approach is a better way to analyze issues such as over-representation in poverty and can be also extended to analyze differences in intensity and severity of poverty.

Part of the following research used a modified version of Pearce’s main definition and related “feminization” to “increases of poverty in female headed households” (Peterson, 1987, Pressman, 1988, and Northrop, 1990). Other studies adopted a different approach and defined “feminization” as “increases of poverty among women” (Fuchs, 1986, Wright, 1992). Given the existence of multiple concepts, recent studies are assuming more than one definition. For instance, Dooley (1994) and Davies & Joshi (1998) test the hypothesis of feminization of poverty simultaneously for the rise in poverty among “women”, “adult women only” and “female headed households”.

The idea behind the concept of feminization of poverty is that there is a gender bias in the evolution of poverty over time. Hence, from a gender perspective it makes sense to relate either the growth in poverty among women, among all persons in female headed households and some variations of these groups (e.g. among adult women) to the feminization of poverty.

In spite of its multiple meanings, the feminization of poverty should not be confused with over-representation of women or female headed households among the poor. The term “feminization” relates to the way poverty changes over time, whereas “over-representation” focuses on a static view of poverty in a given moment. Feminization is a process, over-representation is a state. Being time dependent, the first refers to a trend observed in the behavior of poverty measures while the second is related to the levels of those measures in a single point in time.

There are several different indicators of poverty. The most know ones are measures of incidence, intensity and severity of poverty¹. Strictly speaking, *over-representation* refers to a higher incidence of poverty, but sometimes it is also used in a less specific way to indicate higher levels of poverty among a certain group, no matter the poverty indicator used to measure those levels.

A sustained feminization of poverty may lead to higher levels of poverty among women (or female headed households) but that does not make the two concepts synonyms. It follows that, during a certain period, feminization can occur without over-representation, and vice-versa. Just to refer to

¹ The incidence of poverty is usually measured by the proportion of the poor in a population, the intensity of poverty, for income poverty, by the aggregated difference between the observed income of the poor and the poverty line and the severity of poverty by some combination of the incidence and intensity of poverty and the inequality among the poor.

common situations in some societies, it is possible to find a feminization of poverty even when the incidence of poverty is lower among women and female headed households.

Moreover, feminization does not imply necessarily an absolute worsening in poverty among women. The feminization can occur either by absolute or relative increases in poverty. An absolute feminization of poverty is a comparison women-women over time, that is, a comparison of the levels of poverty among women in a moment with the respective levels in a previous moment. A relative feminization of poverty is a comparison women-men, where what matters is the differences (or ratios, depending on the way it is measured) between women and man in each moment. Consequently, if poverty in a society is sharply reduced among men and is only slightly reduced among women, there would be a relative feminization of poverty, but not an absolute one.

The definitions of “feminization of poverty” presented above can be divided into broad clusters according to the intersection of two dimensions, the nature of the change in poverty over time and the groups it refers to. Bearing in mind the most common approaches, the feminization of poverty can be understood as either a relative or an absolute increase in poverty among women or among women and men living in female headed households.

Considering the division above, four definitions of feminization of poverty arise. The feminization of poverty may be defined as: a. focus on women and men: a1. an increase in the absolute levels of poverty among women; a2. an increase in the difference in the levels of poverty among women and among men; b. focus on female and male headed households: b1. an increase in the absolute levels of poverty among female headed households; b2. an increase in the difference in the levels of poverty among female headed households and among male and couple headed households.

The definitions of feminization of poverty discussed so far are not exhaustive. One could go further and define it as an increase of the role that gender discrimination has as a determinant of poverty. This characterizes a feminization of the causes of poverty. For example, a growth of wage discrimination that also intensifies poverty among women and men of all types of families can be understood as a feminization of poverty because it denotes the relation between the biases against women and a rise in poverty. In many cases² such changes in the causes of poverty will result in one of the types of feminization of poverty discussed above, that is, in absolute or relative changes in the poverty levels of women and female headed households.

The content of the term feminization of poverty depends not only on what we understand by feminization but also on the definition of *poverty*. The latter is a concept that may have multiple meanings as well. Spicker (1998), for example, lists eleven different clusters of meaning for poverty, each of these clusters having its internal variations. When it comes to measure poverty the issue becomes even more complex, as often different measurement approaches apply to a single definition.

In empirical work poverty is usually assessed by household consumption or availability of resources. The most common approach is to define poverty as income deprivation in the household, but efforts have been made to implement multidimensional indicators of poverty. The basic needs strategy and, more recently, the capability approach, are probably the best known approaches to multidimensional poverty. There is little doubt that it is harder for many women to transform their resources into capabilities, thus it seems logical to try to measure capabilities, not resources, in a study about the feminization of poverty. However, there is limited – if any – information on surveys that could allow the use of the capability approach in studies that have to compare distinct moments in time, as it is the case here.

Cross country studies usually face limitations in comparability and the availability of data; hence the lack of income is the prevalent indicator of poverty used in these studies. Given the existing restrictions, income is a reasonable alternative if the results are interpreted with appropriate attention. Indeed, the lack of income is in the core of almost all definitions of poverty and it is this dimension what many policy makers have in mind when talking about the feminization of poverty.

² If wage discrimination grows but other determinants of poverty (such as low education) decrease, then it is possible that the measures of poverty do not change over time, although there is a feminization of the causes of poverty.

Perhaps even more important than the indicator is the unit of analysis utilized. Although poverty is frequently related to the individual well being, its measurement often occurs at the family (household)³ level. This happens as a consequence of the reasonable idea that people share their resources with their nuclear family members. When it comes to measure poverty, this idea is often translated in the assumption that family resources are equally distributed among all members. When income is the indicator of well being and the household is the unit of analysis, it is common to use per capita income as a measure of resources available to an individual, that is, to assume a perfect distribution of income in the household.

Under a gender perspective, the assumption of perfect distribution can be disputed. There is no reason to believe that the factors that determine gender inequalities in the public sphere will not act within the families. On the contrary, despite the scarcity of data to support such research there is some evidence that intra-household inequalities occur at relevant levels (Sen, 1997a, 1997b, Haddad & Kanbur, 1990, Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2000).

The profile of the distribution of income can influence the way intra-household inequalities affect the results of a study about the feminization of poverty. Taking into consideration these inequalities may significantly alter the outputs in the cases where the density of the distribution of incomes around the poverty line is high or becomes high after inequalities are taken into account. As this effect is usually related to the choice for a specific poverty line, a simple poverty dominance analysis that tests the robustness of the results for different lines helps to set clear how dependent the impact of intra-household inequalities is on the values of the poverty lines.

But how should intra-household inequalities be taken into account in a multi country study about the feminization of poverty? Bearing in mind the data availability problem, the use of simulations could be an alternative. Given some parameters of how the intra-household distribution should be, one could create scenarios of different levels of inequality to test the hypothesis of feminization of poverty. The disadvantage of these simulations is that they do not tell us what happened but only what could happen under certain assumptions. Yet, they are useful because they contribute to establish the extent to which intra-household inequalities affect the process of feminization of poverty.

As feminization is a concept related to the dynamics of the poverty population profile, an increase over time of intra-household inequalities should lead to a feminization of poverty if these inequalities imply disadvantages for women. Making inferences from the existing research that points out improvements on education, labor earnings and economic autonomy of women, it is most likely that these inequalities are either stable or decreasing in many countries of the world, but that is not enough to make any detailed assumption about the way those inequalities behave over time. Thus, in the absence of further information, there is no way to estimate the real impact intra-household inequalities have on an eventual feminization of poverty.

The results of using multidimensional indicators of poverty tend to follow a similar pattern. For example, they could differ from the conventional ones obtained by the use of family per capita income measures if their intra-household distribution is changing significantly over time. Therefore, the claim that, in the case of gender studies, multiple dimensions of poverty should be considered is legitimate, but if the assumption of equal distribution of resources in the household is maintained, not much should change.

The use of equivalence scales can also influence our conclusions about a feminization of poverty. Obviously, its effects depend entirely on the type of scale used and its stability over time. In practice, the use of an equivalence scale is comparable to assuming intra-household inequalities; therefore, the use of such scales will have the same effects of the latter. Apart from effects related to the density of the poor around a certain value of income, the process of feminization of poverty tends not to be affected if these scales do not change over time. For instance, gender blind adult-equivalent scales will probably produce no change on the differences between men and women and may reduce the levels of poverty among all households with children, but will probably not promote or reduce a feminization of poverty. Neither will

³ We use *family* and *household* interchangeably since the large majority of households in Latin America is occupied by a single group of relatives (family).

equivalence scales that, by assuming that women have to consume less (lower food requirements), tend to reduce poverty among women and female headed households, but have a negligible effect on the process of feminization of poverty.

Given the limitations of data and the complexity of doing research taking into account both multidimensional indicators, intra-household inequalities and equivalence, a first step should be to test the hypothesis of feminization of poverty departing from a more conventional approach and then move to a more complex one if the results and methods seem to be promising.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

The previous studies relating gender and poverty can be grouped in two broad categories. The first one is composed by studies about the over-representation of women among the poor in a given moment; the second, by the studies about the process of feminization of poverty. The studies about the over-representation compose a large majority and have been done in many regions of the world. The studies about feminization of poverty – in the sense we use here – are less common and almost all are limited to developed countries. As far as we know, there is no study about the feminization of poverty in Latin America similar to ours.

Despite the fact they do not follow poverty rates over time, the studies of the first group frequently name by feminization of poverty the higher incidence of poverty among women or female headed household, which causes some terminological confusion. As discussed before, this is not compatible with the original definitions of feminization of poverty, neither is part of the other definitions we proposed. Therefore, we will classify those studies as studies on over-representation, even if their authors call them studies on feminization of poverty.

There is no evidence of a systematic over-representation of the women among the poor around the world. Several studies found a higher incidence of poverty among women or female headed households in some countries, but in many others this does not occur. Surprisingly, the studies usually find a higher probability of being poor among women in developed countries, but a higher incidence of poverty among female headed households in developing countries is not a common finding. In addition, the relationship between poverty and female headship of households seems not to be direct and univocal, as poverty appears to have a stronger correlation with the presence of children in the family and other characteristics of family members than with the type of head of household (Chant, 2003b, Baden & Milward, 1997, Lipton & Ravallion, 1995).

In studies in developed countries and transition economies in the 1980's and 1990's that focus on the gender of the poor, Pressman (2002, 2003), Bradshaw, Kemp, Mayhew & Williams (2003), Lockhead and Scott (2000) and Casper, McLanahan & Garfinkel (1994) identified a significantly higher vulnerability and/or incidence of poverty among women in the USA, Canada, Australia, Russia, Germany and the UK. An exception to that in more than one study was Spain, as Pressman (2002) and Fernando-Morales & Haro-García (1998) demonstrate. Focusing on the headship of the households Pressman (2002) concluded that from 24 developed countries in the Luxembourg Income Study, 8 show very small or insignificant gender poverty gaps and 11 have only slightly higher poverty rates and that those results were not affected by different poverty lines or the assumption of economies of scale in the households.

The research in non-developed countries tends to focus more on the headship of the households. Fuwa (2000), Marcoux (1998) and Quisumbing, Haddad & Peña (1995) found weak evidence, if any, of higher incidence of poverty among female headed households in Subsaharian Africa (Botswana, Cote D'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar and Rwanda), Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia and Nepal) and 13 countries of Latin America. Indeed, in some countries there are better off than male headed households. On the other hand, in Brazil and in the urban areas of India, the probability of being poor is higher among these households (Barros, Fox & Mendonça, 1994, Gangopadhyay and Wadhwa, 2003).

Comparative analyses of several studies concluded that over-representation of women or female headed households varies from country to country and that there is no clear pattern of relationship between poverty and the headship of the households. Buvinic & Gupta (1997) compared the results of 61 studies and pointed that 38 of them concluded that there was an over-representation of female headed

households among the poor, 15 found some kind of relationship between certain types of female headship and poverty and 8 did not find any relation. Lampietti & Stalker (2000) analyzed more than a hundred reports and studies and identified that only in certain countries the female headed households consistently present worse indicators of poverty, hence the idea that poverty has a “female face” cannot be generalized for the entire world.

It is worthwhile to mention that the majority of the studies above measure poverty by consumption or income, a procedure that has raised some warnings. According to Baden & Millward (1997), a moneymetric approach to poverty has some limitations for gender studies as this approach is insensitive to the specific forms of deprivation suffered by women, such as domestic violence and lack of autonomy. Therefore, it should be noted that the results cited above make reference to only one aspect of poverty. If these other aspects were considered, the over-representation of women among the poor could increase, but the same may not be said about a feminization of poverty.

In addition, most of these studies neglect intra-household inequalities, another important issue in gender studies which aim at measuring over-representation of women among the poor. The difficulty to obtain data is a main obstacle for that, but some studies tried to incorporate those inequalities. Findlay & Wright (1996) simulated an unequal division of income among family members to illustrate how much of the incidence and intensity of poverty in Italy and the USA could be underestimated by the conventional perfect distribution assumption. Case & Deaton (2002) describe household expenditures in India and South Africa showing that in the latter country differences in household expenditures on health clearly benefit adult men. Haddad & Kanbur (1993) found significantly higher levels of poverty among women in the Southern Philippines when intra-household inequalities were taken into account. Using data from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ethiopia and South Africa, Quisumbing and Maluccio (2000) concluded that the hypothesis that family members aggregate their income to redistribute it equally does not hold: the personal attributes of the individuals (sex, age, assets, human capital and others) determine the final allocation among family members, which usually favors men.

As in the case of over-representation, there is no clear evidence in the literature about the occurrence of a feminization of poverty in the world. The pioneer study conducted by Pearce (1978) found an increase of both women and female headed household members among the American poor between the 1950s and the mid 1970s. The subsequent research (Northrop, 1990, Pressman, 1988, Peterson, 1987 and Fuchs, 1986) reached the same conclusions for the decade of 1960s in the USA, but Fuchs (1986) reject the hypothesis for the years after 1970 and Northrop (1990) and Pressman (1988) also reject it for the decade of the 1980s. Only Peterson (1987) sustains that there was a feminization in the USA after the 1970's.

Wright (1992) and Davies & Joshi (1998) examined data from the United Kingdom from the late 1960's to the mid 1980's and did not find any feminization of poverty. In Canada Dooley (1994) found a feminization of poverty between 1973 and 1990 when “feminization” was understood as “increase among female headed households”, but not when the “increase among women” definition was used. To the best of our knowledge, no analogous research was conducted in other parts of the world, therefore determining the existence or not of a feminization of poverty in Latin America is a matter of empirical analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using unit record data (microdata) available from household surveys of Argentina (Encuesta Permanente de Hogares, 1992 and 2001), Bolivia (Encuesta de Hogares-Programa MECOVI, 1999 and 2002), Brazil (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios, 1983 and 2003), Chile (Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional, 1990 and 2000), Colombia (Encuesta Nacional de Hogares – Fuerza de Trabajo- Programa MECOVI, 1995 and 1999), Costa-Rica (Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1990 and 2001), Mexico (Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de los Hogares, 1992 and 2002) and Venezuela (Encuesta de Hogares por Muestreo- Programa MECOVI, 1995 and 2000). All of these surveys present national coverage except for the Argentine one, which is representative only of urban areas.

Altogether these countries represent the majority of the population of Latin America. The criterion to choose them was availability of a survey after the year 2000 and comparability of data with previous surveys to allow the tests of hypothesis. We believe that to certain extent what happened in terms of feminization of poverty in the countries studied is representative of others countries in the region, although this would be less valid for Central America, which is under-represented in the study. In spite of that, one must bear in mind that more detailed results, such as poverty levels or growth rates, are country specific and therefore cannot be generalized.

If seen as a structural problem related to stable gender inequalities, the feminization of poverty would be best analyzed by looking at trends of poverty in long periods. For some countries in our study, such as Bolivia, we are looking at relatively short periods. In such cases the results should be taken carefully, despite the trends observed in longer periods for other countries are reproduced in short period analysis. We believe our study indicates fairly well the changes in the levels and composition of poverty in the 1990s-2000s.

We made efforts in order to apply the same methodology in each country. In this sense, to have similar variables for all countries we decided to use only the monetary income. However, we couldn't avoid using some specific characteristics in the surveys. For instance, some surveys had imputed values for the missing ones or corrected income values vis-à-vis the National Accounts. In the cases where the original variables were not available in the surveys, our only option was to use these adjusted data. It is also important to note that there are differences in the ways the surveys capture the income data, but this discussion is beyond the scope of this work. Nonetheless, as there are no cross-country analyses in the study, the lack of total comparability among countries should not be seen as a major problem.

Even though many of the official studies on poverty in the countries analyzed consider as total income not only the monetary but also the non-monetary inputs (such as in-kind payments, self-production or imputed rent), the poverty trends found here were very similar to the official ones.

To examine the feminization or not of poverty, four tests can be done, one for each type of definition of feminization of poverty. Feminization of poverty may be defined as:

a. Focus on women and men

a1. An increase in the levels of poverty among women,

$$[a1] \quad P_{ca}^{(fp)} < P_{ca'}^{(fp)}$$

a2. an increase in the differential poverty between women and men.

$$[a2] \quad P_{ca}^{(fp)} - P_{ca}^{(mp)} < P_{ca'}^{(fp)} - P_{ca'}^{(mp)}$$

b. Focus on female and male headed households

b1. an increase in the levels of poverty among female headed households.

$$[b1] \quad P_{ca'}^{(fh)} < P_{ca}^{(fh)}$$

b2. an increase in the differential poverty between female and male headed households.

$$[b2] \quad P_{ca}^{(fh)} - P_{ca}^{(mh)} < P_{ca'}^{(fh)} - P_{ca'}^{(mh)}$$

Where P_{ca} stands for the Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (1984) measures of poverty (FGT), t and t' for the initial and final points in time (that is, $t < t'$), (f) for female subgroup, (m) for male, (p) for persons and (h) for headed households. Therefore, $P_{ca}^{(fp)}$ represents the poverty among female persons at the initial moment, and so on.

Poverty is usually measured using per capita income, that is, under the assumption that the income in the household is equally distributed. Such assumption may not be adequate to any study concerned with gender inequalities, as they also exist within the household. However, measuring that inequality requires data that is not currently available in any of the countries of our study. We opted to analyze the effect of intra-household inequalities have on poverty using simulations of income retention where we simulate what would happen to the poverty measures if individuals retained different proportions of their personal earnings in the labor market or other sources.

To make the simulations we assume that each individual distributes within the family a fraction (from 0% to 100%) of the income he or she receives. The simulation varies the fraction distributed and recalculates poverty measures for each level of individual income distribution. Then, the hypothesis of feminization of poverty can be tested for different simulated levels of income distribution within the household.

We begin with five levels of distribution of individual incomes within the family: i. 0%, when individual retains all the income he or she receives to him or herself; ii. 25%, retention of 75% of the received income with distribution of the remaining 25%; iii. 50%, retention of half of the received income, distribution of the other half; iv. 75%, distribution of 75% of received income; v. 100%, distribution of all received income, corresponding to what is usually done in poverty studies to calculate per capita income.

The simulation for each individual can be expressed as:

$$[s1] \quad \hat{y}_i = (1 - \lambda)y_i + \frac{\lambda}{n} \sum_1^i y_i$$

for $\lambda = (0, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75, 1)$

Where \hat{y}_i is the simulated income entitled to an individual i , y_i is the observed personal income of this individual, λ is the parameter for the proportion of personal income of this individual distributed within the family (varying from 0 to 1) and n is the size of the family.

The simulations modify the distribution of income within the households but do not alter the distribution among households. It does not have any effect on the composition of poverty according to types of household, thus it was applied only to verify the feminization of poverty on the hypothesis a1 and a2, that is, defining feminization as increases in the level of poverty among women or in the differential poverty between women and men.

The P_α measures, and therefore the test of the hypotheses, depend on the value of a poverty line z . According to the shape of the distribution of income of a population, changes in the value of z can affect the results of any poverty study. To avoid this 'poverty line effect' we initially performed a sensibility analysis, testing all the hypotheses for different values of poverty lines. As the results were fairly robust, we concluded that the exact value of the poverty line was of secondary importance for the study of the process of feminization of poverty and decided to adopt a poverty line based in a simple methodology.

We proceeded by determining a rather arbitrary value for z in the latest survey available for each country and deflating its nominal value to obtain the line for the initial period. We defined the poverty line z as the value of the 40th percentile of the family per capita income distribution in the latest survey available (z_t), as in many of the countries studied the poverty incidence calculated with local poverty lines is around 40% (usually a little lower). Then we used a consumer price index in each country to transform z_t and estimate the absolute value of the poverty line in the initial period (z_i). The sensibility analysis was performed using poverty lines that varied from the real values of the cutting point of the 30th to the 50th percentiles of each population in the latest surveys available. Given the stability of results after the sensibility analysis we chose to present our conclusions using for the most part the intermediate 40th percentile poverty line.

Using data from the household surveys we tested the four hypotheses with three different FGT poverty measures, P0, P1 and P2 (incidence, intensity and severity of poverty). For the hypothesis a1 and a2 we also simulated what would happen with the feminization of poverty under different scenarios of intra-household distribution. Applying the simulations to hypothesis b1 and b2 was not necessary as the simulations do not affect the distribution of income among households. To evaluate the effect of changes in the poverty lines, we also carried out all the tests for three different poverty levels, which in practice resulted in the test of 117 possibilities for each country.

The outcomes were quite robust to variations in the values of the lines (out of 936 tests only 10 had their conclusions dependent on the lines) and to the simulations of changes in intra-household distribution, so we decided to present our findings in summarized tables, showing the values of the poverty measures in the countries only for the "40th percentile in latest survey" poverty line under the conventional assumption about the intra-household distribution of income.

RESULTS

Higher levels of poverty among women of female headed households

If intra-household inequalities are not considered and poverty is measured in per capita income terms, there is no relevant difference in the incidence, intensity or severity of poverty among men and women in the Latin American countries studied. When compared, women and men consistently show approximately the same levels of poverty, in all years and countries, as the Table 1 illustrates. Thus, we may not speak of higher levels of poverty among women if we use the conventional methods of poverty measurement.

A simple sensibility analysis demonstrates that such outcomes are robust to variations in the values of the poverty lines. The similarity in the indicators for men and women seen in Table 1 is maintained when both higher and lower per capita income values are used to determine the threshold of poverty (not shown in table). Modification in poverty lines alters the levels of poverty, as expected, but not the difference between persons of each sex. Within a reasonable range of poverty lines (lines from the cutting points of the 30th to the 50th percentiles) we found no evidence of over-representation of women among the poor, neither a more intense nor severe female poverty in Latin America.

This initial finding reflects the method of measurement of poverty and the composition of households in Latin America. The conventional assumption that the income is perfectly distributed within the household in practice reduces drastically gender inequalities observed in personal income, such as those found in labor or pensions earnings. Yet, there is evidence that this assumption is not correct (Haddad & Kanbur, 1990, for example). If intra-household inequalities were considered, differences between women and men would probably be higher than those estimated under the conventional assumption that each family member has full command over the amount equivalent to the value of per capita income.

On the other hand, the dominant compositions of families in Latin America are either a couple with or without children or other composition relatively balanced in terms of sex, such as female headed families with children. The most common gender unbalanced compositions in the region, such as single women, occurs more often among older adults (widows, usually), which consistently present lower levels of poverty and thus do not influence the results.

In short, given the patterns of family composition in Latin America, the postulation that family per capita income is the available income for each individual in the household neglects part of the gender inequalities and leads to the conclusion that the levels of poverty among women and men are quite similar.

Table 1

Poverty Measures for the "40th percentile in latest survey" poverty line

	Argentina		Bolivia		Brazil		Chile		Colombia		Costa Rica		Mexico		Venezuela	
	1992	2001	1999	2002	1983	2003	1990	2000	1995	1999	1990	2001	1992	2002	1995	2000
Incidence (P0)																
Male	0.26	0.41	0.40	0.40	0.54	0.40	0.53	0.40	0.34	0.40	0.51	0.39	0.45	0.40	0.37	0.39
Female	0.25	0.39	0.41	0.40	0.54	0.40	0.55	0.40	0.34	0.40	0.52	0.41	0.45	0.40	0.39	0.41
Couple with children	0.27	0.43	0.41	0.42	0.56	0.44	0.56	0.42	0.36	0.42	0.52	0.40	0.47	0.42	0.38	0.41
Couple without children	0.18	0.19	0.48	0.35	0.33	0.17	0.34	0.21	0.27	0.33	0.41	0.33	0.33	0.29	0.21	0.24
Female with children	0.29	0.48	0.35	0.34	0.59	0.45	0.60	0.46	0.32	0.38	0.54	0.47	0.37	0.41	0.42	0.43
Female without children	0.11	0.17	0.33	0.30	0.39	0.19	0.40	0.25	0.31	0.33	0.55	0.41	0.29	0.33	0.40	0.27
Other types of family	0.23	0.31	0.28	0.32	0.37	0.25	0.41	0.29	0.28	0.33	0.40	0.29	0.35	0.26	0.29	0.32
Intensity (P1)																
Male	0.14	0.22	0.23	0.23	0.27	0.19	0.24	0.16	0.17	0.22	0.23	0.17	0.20	0.16	0.16	0.18
Female	0.13	0.21	0.24	0.22	0.27	0.19	0.25	0.17	0.17	0.22	0.24	0.18	0.20	0.17	0.17	0.18
Couple with children	0.15	0.23	0.25	0.24	0.28	0.21	0.26	0.17	0.17	0.23	0.24	0.17	0.21	0.17	0.16	0.18
Couple without children	0.09	0.11	0.29	0.21	0.13	0.06	0.12	0.08	0.16	0.22	0.20	0.15	0.15	0.12	0.11	0.13
Female with children	0.14	0.27	0.20	0.16	0.29	0.21	0.29	0.20	0.16	0.21	0.26	0.23	0.15	0.16	0.19	0.19
Female without children	0.07	0.12	0.21	0.17	0.16	0.07	0.18	0.11	0.17	0.21	0.33	0.24	0.14	0.15	0.20	0.13
Other types of family	0.13	0.17	0.18	0.21	0.15	0.12	0.17	0.12	0.15	0.20	0.20	0.16	0.14	0.11	0.12	0.16
Severity (P2)																
Male	0.11	0.15	0.18	0.17	0.17	0.12	0.14	0.09	0.12	0.17	0.15	0.11	0.12	0.09	0.09	0.11
Female	0.10	0.16	0.18	0.16	0.17	0.11	0.15	0.10	0.12	0.17	0.15	0.11	0.12	0.09	0.10	0.11
Couple with children	0.12	0.16	0.19	0.18	0.18	0.13	0.15	0.10	0.12	0.17	0.14	0.10	0.13	0.10	0.09	0.11
Couple without children	0.07	0.09	0.21	0.16	0.07	0.03	0.07	0.05	0.13	0.18	0.14	0.10	0.10	0.07	0.08	0.10
Female with children	0.10	0.19	0.15	0.11	0.18	0.13	0.18	0.12	0.11	0.16	0.17	0.15	0.08	0.09	0.12	0.12
Female without children	0.06	0.11	0.15	0.12	0.09	0.04	0.12	0.07	0.13	0.18	0.26	0.18	0.09	0.09	0.13	0.09
Other types of family	0.11	0.12	0.15	0.16	0.09	0.07	0.10	0.07	0.12	0.16	0.13	0.12	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.11

Source: Authors' calculations based on the respective National household surveys.

Note: values rounded.

The information available in the surveys we used does not allow us to estimate the levels of intra-household inequalities. For this reason we performed simulations to provide a general scenario of the effects that different levels of inequality would have on the poverty estimates. As personal income inequalities in labor market earnings, pensions and others are in disadvantage of women, any simulation that reproduces them – totally or partially – tend to increase gender differences in poverty. Consequently, the expected result of the simulations is higher levels of poverty among women.

Indeed, all measures of poverty increased when inequalities were simulated, as predicted. Table 2 presents the differences between the incidence of poverty among women and men for the latest survey year available in each country according to five simulated levels of distribution of personal income. The conventional assumption is that family members distribute 100% of their income (wages, pensions, etc.), which correspond to the first column. The last column displays what would be that difference if there was no distribution of income within the families.

When intra-household inequalities are simulated, women become over-represented among the poor in Latin America. If people retained 25% of their earnings and distributed the remaining 75% to their household members, then the incidence of poverty among women would range from 4 (Argentina) to 10 (Costa Rica) percentage points higher than among men. The distribution of only 25% of the income of each person would result in differences from 11 to 22 percentage points (again Argentina and Costa Rica).

We have no means to know the real levels of intra-household distribution in Latin America, but they are probably lower than the conventional assumption in poverty studies. Therefore, if we assume more realistic hypothesis about intra-household distribution we must conclude that there is a high chance that women are over-represented among the poor, despite the fact that we are not able to measure how much. In our simulations the limits for that over-representation in the Latin American countries studied would range from 12 percentage points in Argentina to 24 percentage points in Costa Rica, that is, supposing that no distribution occurs within the households, female poverty in Argentina and Costa Rica would be, in that order, 12 and 24 points higher than the incidence of poverty among men.

Table 2

Differences in the incidence of poverty (women minus men) after simulation of five levels of distribution of personal income in the household

Countries	Fraction of Personal Income Distributed in Household				
	100%	75%	50%	25%	0%
Argentina (2001)	-0.01	0.04	0.08	0.11	0.12
Bolivia (2002)	-0.01	0.05	0.09	0.13	0.15
Brazil (2003)	0.00	0.05	0.09	0.13	0.16
Chile (2000)	0.01	0.09	0.14	0.18	0.20
Colombia (1999)	0.00	0.06	0.10	0.14	0.16
Costa Rica (2001)	0.01	0.10	0.17	0.22	0.24
Mexico (2002)	0.00	0.09	0.15	0.20	0.23
Venezuela (2000)	0.01	0.08	0.13	0.16	0.17

Source: Authors' calculations based on the respective National household surveys

Note: values rounded.

Irrespectively of intra-household inequalities, there are clear differences in the incidence, intensity and severity of poverty according to types of families, but not necessarily showing a disadvantage of female headed families (Table 1). For instance, in Brazil and Argentina, the incidence of poverty among families composed by a couple with children is more than twice as much the incidence among females without children. These differences are much more related to the existence of children in the families than to the type of family headship.

When we control the effects of the existence of children in the families on the poverty levels, there is no systematic difference in poverty due to the type of family headship. Table 1 shows that in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa-Rica and Venezuela the incidence of poverty is a little higher among female headed households with children (when compared with couples with children), but the same does not hold for the

intensity or severity of poverty. We reached similar results after varying the values of the poverty lines (not shown in table). Having children is what makes a greater difference.

Feminization

Table 3 presents a summary of the results for each country using the three measures of poverty calculated for the 40th percentile poverty line under the conventional assumption of perfect distribution of income within the households. For the four definitions of feminization of poverty we examined, most of the results were negative. However, a number of these negatives were not completely conclusive, as some measures of poverty seemed to indicate very low levels of feminization of poverty. Similar exceptions to the general trends were found in some of the countries where the results were positive.

There is no explicit evidence of a feminization of poverty in the Latin American countries studied. On one hand, an unambiguous feminization did not occur in any country, if we ignore minor exceptions and consider the entire set of definitions tested. On the other hand, all countries except one had gone through at least one type of feminization of poverty in the last years, but in each country the type of feminization was different. The lack of a clear pattern deserves a closer look at the results.

For any single definition, we may not speak of a generalized feminization of poverty in Latin America (Table 1, summarized in Table 3). An increase in the differential poverty between women and men did not occur in any of the countries studied. An increase in the differential poverty among female and male headed households occurred only in Argentina and Mexico. The levels of poverty among women became higher only in Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela and among female headed households these levels raised in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. Except for small variations in some of the poverty indicators, no feminization of poverty occurred in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica.

Table 3
Trends of the feminization of poverty - summary

Countries	Total poverty trends	Feminization of poverty, according to hypothesis			
		a1	a2	b1	b2
Argentina (92/01)	increased	yes	no (except for P2)*	yes	yes
Bolivia (99/02)	stable	no	no	no	no (except for female without children)***
Brazil (83/03)	decreased	no	no	no	no
Chile (90/00)	decreased	no	no	no	no (except for P0 of female with children)*
Colombia (95/99)	increased	yes	no	yes	no
Costa Rica (90/01)	decreased	no	no	no	no (except for female with children)**
Mexico (92/02)	decreased	no	no (except for P1)*	yes (except for P2 of female without children)	yes
Venezuela (95/00)	increased	yes	no	no	no

*The difference between their variations in $P(\alpha)$ is less than 0.01.

**The difference between their variations in $P(\alpha)$ reaches at most 0.05.

*** The difference between their variations in $P(\alpha)$ reaches at most 0.10.

Note: "no" stands for a rejection of the feminization of poverty hypothesis and "yes" for the opposite.

Some degree of feminization happened in all countries where poverty increased, which was an expected result of using the "increase in the levels of poverty among women" and, to a lesser extent, "increase in the levels of poverty among female headed households" definitions. In Venezuela, for

example, the feminization occurs only as an increase of poverty among women, but in Colombia it happens also as an increase among female headed households. But as these definitions are limited to the comparison of poverty levels of women or female headed households in two moments in time, one could also speak of a simultaneous “masculinization of poverty” in these countries. This points out that these definitions, in spite of the fact that they have been used in the literature, are quite problematic and can mislead the analysis.

Changes in the concepts or in the measures of poverty used would modify the conclusions about which countries have gone thru a process of feminization of poverty. For instance, if feminization is understood as an increase in the levels of poverty among women, then feminization would have occurred in Colombia, but not in Mexico. However, if we switch to the definition “increase in differential poverty between female and male headed households”, then the feminization of poverty would have occurred in Mexico, but not in Colombia. If we measure poverty levels only by the severity of poverty, Argentina would be a country where feminization happened and Chile a country where it did not happen, no matter how we define it. However, if we use a measure of incidence of poverty, a small degree of feminization would be found in Chile and the results would become ambiguous in Argentina. Because of this sensibility to the definitions of feminization and the measures of poverty used, a more conservative conclusion is that the only country where a feminization of poverty clearly happened is Argentina.

Table 4
Sensibility Analysis – Variation in poverty lines change results?

Countries	Testing the sensitivity to other poverty lines			
	a1	a2	b1	b2
Argentina (92/01)	no	no ^a	no	no
Bolivia (99/02)	no ^b	no	no	no
Brazil (83/03)	no	no	no	no
Chile (90/00)	no	no	no	no ^c
Colombia (95/99)	no	no	no	no ^d
Costa Rica (90/01)	no	no ^e	no	no
Mexico (92/02)	no	yes ^f	no	no
Venezuela (95/00)	no	no	no ^g	no

^a except of P1 and P2 for the “30th percentile in latest survey” poverty line, but the difference between male and female variations was less than 0.01.

^b except of P0 for the “50th percentile in latest survey” poverty line, but the increase was less than 0.02.

^c Note that now even P0 of female with children decreased more than P0 for couple with children.

^d except of female without children’s P2 for the for the “30th percentile in latest survey” poverty line, but the difference between female without children and couple without children variations was less than 0.01.

^e except of P1 for the “30th percentile in latest survey” poverty line, but the difference between male and female variations was less than 0.01.

^f it changes for P0 and P2 under both poverty lines, but the difference between male and female variations was less than 0.01.

^g except of female with children’s P0 for the “50th percentile in latest survey” poverty line, but the increase was less than 0.03.

Note: “no” stands for a rejection of the sensitivity hypothesis (the result become different considering other poverty line) and “yes” for the opposite.

Source: Authors’ calculations based on the respective National household surveys.

Sensibility analyses indicate that these results are not highly dependent on the values of the poverty line, as Table 4 shows. Changes in the values of the poverty line affect only a few of the results and at a residual level. Mexico is the single country where a feminization becomes more evident when lines are modified. Feminization is measured by differences in the $P(\alpha)$ measures of poverty. In the cases in which the changes in the values of the line affect the results, these differences were not higher than 3%. Thus, sensibility analysis points out that the values of the poverty the lines are of secondary importance for the study.

Table 5

Effect of simulated intra-household inequalities on feminization of poverty, according to definitions a1 and a2.

Countries	Unequal intra-household distribution changes feminization of poverty trends?	
	a1	a2
Argentina (92/01)	no	no ^a
Bolivia (99/02)	no ^b	no
Brazil (83/03)	no	no
Chile (90/00)	no	no
Colombia (95/99)	no	no
Costa Rica (90/01)	no	no
Mexico (92/02)	no	no
Venezuela (95/00)	no ^c	no

^a except of P2 at 25%, 50% and 75% (fractions of personal income distributed in household in each simulation) but the differences between male and female were less than 0.01.

^b except of P0 at 25%, 50% and 75%, and P1 at 25%, but they increased less than 0.02.

^c except for P0 at 50%, 25% and 0% but P0 decreased less than 0.07 (instead of increasing as before).

Source: Authors' calculations based on the respective National household surveys.

Note: "no" stands for a non-rejection of our previous findings on feminization of poverty considering an unequal intra-household distribution, and "yes" the opposite.

The simulation of intra-household inequalities also does not seem to affect the results in a relevant manner, as Table 5 demonstrates. The assumption that individuals would retain a fraction of their personal earnings (from 25% to 100%) would clearly affect the results only in Argentina. If all exceptions are regarded, computing intra-household inequalities would affect the findings but not necessarily this would lead to a feminization of poverty. In at least three countries, Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela, the feminization of poverty (by some definition) would cease to occur. Actually, for Argentina and Venezuela the simulations lead to ambiguous results, reversing the feminization in one case and promoting it in another.

Table 5 refers to poverty among women and men of all ages and in all positions in the family. To evaluate the extent to which the results were dependent on the age and position in the family of the persons we also did the same simulations for the heads of the families and their partners. Except for minor variations in Argentina, we found no relevant difference on the results when we restrict the analysis to a more specific group of women and men (not shown in tables). The simulation of intra-household inequalities does not seem to affect the feminization of poverty even if only heads of family and their partners are considered.

Intra-household inequalities would affect the results if they were growing over the years. Yet, it is most likely that they are not increasing since all other income inequalities (labor market earnings, pensions) and also other inequalities (education) are either stable or being reduced in Latin America. If it is right that all gender inequalities have the same basic root on gender relations, there is a fair probability that intra-household distribution has been improved during the last years. Indeed, our assumption that these inequalities were the same in the initial and final periods of analysis may even be overestimating the importance of intra-household inequalities for the feminization of poverty.

Therefore, if we do not take into account small variations and minor ambiguities resulting from the use of different concepts of feminization, measures of poverty, poverty lines or assumptions about the intra-household distribution of income, we may conclude that there is no solid evidence of a process of feminization of poverty in the Latin American region. On the contrary, it seems that Argentina is the only of the eight countries studied where we can speak of a clear feminization of poverty.

CONCLUSIONS

One must recognize that there are multiple definitions of “feminization of poverty” coexisting. Indeed, both “feminization” and “poverty” can be themselves concepts with various meanings, what allows the understanding of many different phenomena as feminization of poverty. Most of these meanings – if not all of them – are relevant for policymakers and gender equality advocacy. Thus, instead of trying to argue in favor of a single definition of “feminization of poverty”, research should try to encompass as many definitions as possible and relevant.

Our study departed from the idea that the concept of feminization of poverty is related to a gender bias in the evolution of poverty over the years. We related the increase in the levels of poverty among women or female household, as well as the increase in the differences between men and women and between male and female headed households to the feminization of poverty to avoid confusion with the idea of over-representation of women or female headed households among the poor. To conduct the study we used four different definitions of feminization, according to the nature of the changes in poverty over time and the groups it refers to.

The concept of feminization of poverty also depends on the way poverty is defined and, to some extent, measured. *Poverty* is a term that has multiple meanings and each meaning usually allows more than one measurement methodology. Given the limitations we faced in data availability, we adopted a conventional approach and based the study on income poverty. Our conclusions refer mainly to that type of poverty, but one may infer that other types of poverty that depend directly on the consumption of market goods (such as deprivation in food intake) or depend on goods and services that are consumed collectively by the family (such as potable water and sanitation) will follow patterns similar to the ones we found here.

Our analysis is restricted to eight countries in Latin America. These countries, however, represent the majority of the population of the region. Obviously some results are country specific and cannot be generalized, but there is no reason to believe that these countries are not a reference to understand what happened in the entire region, especially in what refers to South America, since Mexico and Costa Rica are the only Central American countries in the study.

Previous studies have identified a higher vulnerability and or incidence of poverty among women in some developed countries and transition economies. On the other hand, research on developing countries found weak evidence of a higher incidence of poverty among female headed households. Recent comparative analyses of several studies concluded that the relationship between family headship or gender of individual and poverty varies from country to country. A similar conclusion was reached in what relates to the feminization of poverty in developed countries. Depending on the way it is defined, a feminization occurred in some countries and in some periods, but no systematic feminization of poverty was observed in Europe or North America.

Our study leads to conclusions similar to those obtained for other developing countries. We found that in the countries we examined there is no relevant difference in the incidence, intensity or severity of poverty among men and women when intra-household inequalities are not taken into account and poverty is measured in per capita family income terms, irrespectively of the value of the poverty line we use. This is partially reflects the dominant compositions of poorer families in Latin America, which are relatively balanced in terms of the sex of its members: couples with or without children and female headed families with children.

The only type of female headed family we found an over-represented among the poor were those families with children. However, similar levels of over-representation were found among couples with children, indicating that the presence of children and not the type of family headship is what differentiate families in poverty. There is no reason to suppose that these results could be affected by any type of intra-household distribution different than the ones we analyzed here.

Nonetheless, if intra-household inequalities were considered, then women would probably be over-represented among the poor. If intra-household inequalities are gender determined, the same factors that result in inequalities in, say, occupational status could be the source of disadvantages for women in family income distribution. The scarce evidence we have seems to confirm this idea, thus it is reasonable to assume that by neglecting intra-household inequalities one underestimates the real levels of poverty

among women. Nevertheless, we are not able to measure how much and we are not aware of any reference study in Latin America from which we could depart to estimate these inequalities.

In the countries studied we found no increase in the differential poverty between women and men. Only in Argentina and Mexico we observed an increase in the differential poverty among female and male headed households during the periods analyzed. The levels of poverty among women became higher in Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela and the poverty among female headed households increased in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. Excluding some small variations in a few of the poverty indicators, no feminization of poverty occurred in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica.

The initial findings about the countries in which the feminization of poverty has happened vary according to the definitions of feminization and on the measures of poverty used. In most of the countries a result obtained for a given definition of measure is not corroborated by the use of other definitions or measures. Only in Argentina it may be said without much ambiguity that a feminization of poverty occurred. In all other countries it has not occurred or the results were inconclusive.

These findings are insensitive to variations in the values of the poverty lines or in the levels of intra-household inequalities. Apparently the value of the poverty lines is of secondary importance for the conclusions: only in Mexico a feminization becomes more evident when the lines are modified. Usually the simulation of intra-household inequalities do not affect the results, but when it happens, the influence acts in both directions, reverting or promoting the feminization of poverty. These latter changes, however, are small and ambiguous.

If we ignore small variations and contradictory results of minor importance, we may conclude that there is no clear evidence of a recent and widespread feminization of poverty in the Latin American countries studied. This conclusion is in line with the existing studies carried on developed countries but we do not believe it could be straightforwardly generalized to other countries and regions.

Our results are not enough to allow us to prescribe any anti-poverty policy but some implications for public policies could be mentioned. First we must distinguish over-representation (and higher intensity and severity) of poverty from feminization of poverty as these are not just conceptual details but phenomena that are moving in different directions. Over-representation informs us about the size of the problem that has to be solved; the latter provides information about the progress of status of women over time that allows us to evaluate how changes in society are reducing or increasing gender biased poverty. Our study shows that female poverty is not increasing. Therefore, from a political perspective, feminization should be seen as an important issue, but should not overshadow the debate on gender inequality.

In general terms we found a probable over-representation of women among the poor – depending on the way resources are distributed within the households – and no relevance of the gender of the family head to determine poverty and no evidence of a feminization of poverty in the region. For anti-poverty policies these results should be interpreted with caution. They do not allow the conclusion that the composition of families can be ignored by policies as they are not saying that the determinants of poverty are the same for all family types. What they suggest is that intra-household inequalities are an important issue for the debate on gender and poverty.

If intra-household inequalities are large, then the conventional methods uses to measure poverty are not completely adequate to capture a gender bias in poverty. We are aware of the difficulties involved in the measurement of such inequalities thus we believe that for policymaking the best way to approach the subject is to focus on the determinants of the economic autonomy of women, particularly the ones related to labor market participation and earnings differentials.

The definitions of feminization of poverty we analyzed are not exhaustive, but they cover a large portion of the definitions used in the literature on the field and on the public debate about the issue. Yet, we did not examined directly one important aspect of the feminization of poverty, the increase in the direct role that gender inequalities in education or labor market may have as a determinant of poverty. We believe that future studies could pay attention to that, although our results do not give any indication that such kind of feminization of poverty is occurring in Latin America.

We are not sure if our conclusions would hold for dimensions of poverty other than income or family consumed goods and services. Poverty understood as deprivation of health, for example, does not

share the same determinants than income deprivation and therefore may have a different behavior than the one we found in our research. It would be interesting if future research could analyze other dimensions of poverty not directly related to the ones we examined.

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