Is there a crisis in the family?

occasional paper no. 3
world summit for social development

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by henrietta moore

unrisd
united nations research institute for social development

UNRISD work for the Social Summit is being carried out in part with the support and co-operation of the United Nations Development Programme.

Editing: Jenifer Freedman
Proof-reading and layout: Rhonda Gibbes
Dissemination: Adrienne Cruz

UNRISD/OP/94/3

ISSN 1020-2285

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geneva, july 1994

preface

The agenda for the upcoming World Summit for Social Development includes three major items: the reduction of poverty, the generation of productive employment, and the enhancement of social integration. The work being undertaken by UNRISD in preparation for the Social Summit focuses on the last of these: as countries confront the seemingly intractable problems of social conflicts, institutional breakdown and mass alienation, the topic of social integration has assumed increasing importance in public debate.

The series of UNRISD Occasional Papers brought out as part of the preparatory process for the Social Summit reflects research carried out on a range of issues that affect social integration. This paper takes up the question, "Is there a crisis in the family?" There is a widespread perception at the present time that something has gone wrong with the family: the purpose of this paper is to examine how processes of social, economic and political change are affecting family forms, gender relations and family-market linkages. It identifies globalisation, increasing market integration, and the changing nature of labour markets as the macro-economic forces which produce strain on intra-household resource allocation, conjugal relations and child care and socialisation. In the context of increasingly unified and deregulated markets for capital and labour, people within vulnerable countries and those within vulnerable groups must maintain family relations and livelihoods from a diminished resource base.

This paper identifies the care of children and the reproduction of human capital as the main issues to be addressed by those interested in the family. It makes three main arguments: First, nation states in the developed world are finding the cost of welfare programmes hard to meet, and are alarmed by the speed and scale with which these costs are projected to rise. In this context, the debate about the family is one of the mechanisms through which the relationships between the family, the market and the state are being redefined.

Second, the rise in female-headed households is among the most important of the recent changes which have taken place in household and family structure, and these households have thus become a focus of policy debate. Research shows that women shoulder a disproportionate share of the costs of childcare and the reproduction of human capital, and the disadvantages of female-headed households provide graphic evidence of this fact. The difficulties faced by many female-headed households are not due to the fact that they are dysfunctional families, but are rather attributable to the discrimination women suffer in the labour market and the unequal distribution of labour and income within families. Because public transfer programmes world-wide favour families with employed male

breadwinners, they effectively divert resources away from the families most in need.

Third, the supposed indicators of family crisis — marital conflict, youth crime, disadvantaged children and single mothers — are not simply the result of dysfunctional families, but must also be seen in the context of the strain placed on certain family relations and categories of individuals by poverty and extreme economic hardship. It is the lack of control over their lives that forces many disadvantaged families into situations where personal relations break down under stress.

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July 1994

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table of contents

introduction

Is the family in crisis? There is a widespread perception at the present time that something has gone wrong with the family. High rates of divorce, increased marital conflict and the escalating costs of welfare programmes, coupled with rising crime, drug taking and anti-social behaviour among the young, are all taken as evidence that the family and the social values on which it is based are in decline. How accurate is this picture? Does it reflect a form of "moral panic" rather than a description of an empirical situation?

Historians and social scientists have documented many instances in different societies at various times of what they term "moral panic". These moments of crisis in what are perceived as deeply rooted and firmly held cultural and social values have often occurred in periods of transition and rapid social change. The extent to which such crises **accurately** reflect changing circumstances is questionable, since they often appear to be part of a response to change rather than an instigator of it. However, it is clear that many countries and communities at the present time sense their social and cultural values to be under threat from a diverse range of social, economic and political changes that appear both interconnected and global in their spread.

The purpose of this paper is to examine what these global processes might be and how they are affecting family forms, gender relations and family-market linkages. Globalization, increasing market integration and the changing nature of labour markets are identified as the macro-economic forces which act as sources of pressure, and produce strain, on intra-household resource allocation, conjugal relations and child care and socialization. In the context of increasingly unified and deregulated markets for capital and labour, people within vulnerable countries and those within vulnerable groups have to maintain family relations and livelihoods from a diminished resource base. This paper identifies the care of children and the reproduction of human capital as the main issues to be addressed by those interested in the family, and it sets out the reasons for and the benefits of such an approach.

what is the family and how has it changed historically?

No attempt can be made to analyse the family without some discussion of the existing variability in family forms and responsibilities, and the manner in which different social systems and ideologies of family life encode particular definitions of the rights, needs and responsibilities of individuals within families. Any argument about a crisis in family forms or a decline in family values necessarily involves some consideration of how families have weathered crisis in the past, and of how different kinds of families have responded to difficulties. This section of the paper considers some of the problems involved in trying to define the "family".

If we take the issue of variability seriously, it is clear that there is no such thing as **the** family, only families. Family forms not only vary historically and culturally, but they also vary within any one context. It makes little sense therefore to talk of **the** Japanese family or **the** Ghanaian family. From a historical perspective, it has been demonstrated convincingly for early modern Europe, for example, that the nature of the family, and its relationship to the household, varied extensively even within individual regions of Europe, and that no single evolutionary trajectory for the family (for example, from an extended to a nuclear form) can be demonstrated over time.[1] Family/household forms also vary with the life stages and social strategies of their members. In consequence, different types of families/households exist alongside each other in any particular context, and individual families will pass through a variety of different forms during the different stages of their development.

The relationship between the family and the household is always something that requires detailed social and historical analysis. While recruitment to households is usually through kinship and marriage, these units are not necessarily the same thing as families. This is particularly clear in the context of Africa, for example, where production, reproduction, consumption and socialization may be spread across several households, and where separate conjugal income streams mean that relations within domestic units are more likely to be characterized by bargaining and negotiation than by sharing. What is important about such households is that they do not form closed "family economies" where household members have equal access to pooled resources, and they cannot therefore be treated as autonomous units for the purposes of social development and welfare policies. In a wide variety of communities and societies, households and families are not coterminous, nor do they overlap completely. Family members may be spread across several households, and household units can contain individuals who are not part of the unit comprising the conjugal couple and their children.[2] Families and households should thus not be treated as identical entities, and the degree of congruence

between them will always require empirical specification. This issue of definition is crucial because many recent analyses of the crisis in the family and of the rising cost of dysfunctional families to the state tend to assume all too readily that the autonomous nuclear family is the model for the family worldwide, and that family members must necessarily be co-resident and co-operating. This assumption ignores the fact that domestic units, whatever their composition and form, are rooted in social networks which provide support and solidarity, as well as the exchange of goods and services. It also obscures the extent to which such units are divided by different interests, resource allocations and power differentials.

Questions of resources within families/households always have to be seen in the context of rights, needs and obligations. The management of resources, including labour and income, has a direct impact on family/household organization, the sexual division of labour, and expectations about roles and relationships. Families are not entities or agents in themselves. They are made up of individuals who pass through a number of life stages, each one of which will be closely connected to ideas about what is expected of them and what is due to them. Consequently, any analysis of the family has to take into account the very different experiences of family life that individuals have. Definitions of parent, wife, husband and child vary considerably from one context to another, and the expectations and experiences of these roles also differ. One obvious example here is the way in which notions of childhood vary. Few middle class Americans, for example, would have any intention of sending their seven-year-old out to work in a factory, let alone asking him or her to undertake child care responsibilities and domestic tasks on which the rest of the household depended.

One of the major difficulties in analysing families and households is that the expectations surrounding intimate living and domestic life can often be at odds with circumstances. The ideology of family life may have relatively little to do with people's actual situation. In the United Kingdom, the ideology of the nuclear family is still very powerful, but the number of individuals resident in such units is only about a quarter of the population. Ideals about the behaviour of women, men and children are a feature of all societies, and while these ideals do change, in situations where they become impossible to fulfil, for whatever reason, conflict can be the result. Increasing levels of marital conflict, and a corresponding rise in divorce rates, are causing concern. However, it is often very difficult to separate out the empirical reality from people's perception of it. One possibility is that marital conflict may appear to have increased dramatically because it has now become a focus of concern and is being emphasized in research findings. Another possibility is that because divorce rates are rising in some contexts, partly due to changes in legislation, individuals feel more insecure within marriage. This insecurity could be of many different kinds, but one noticeable feature of recent research, for example, is the frequency with which men are reported to express dissatisfaction with their wives' behaviour. The increasing number of women working outside the household leads to complaints about insufficient attention to domestic tasks and child discipline, as well as to accusations about women's inappropriate expectations in life. These complaints are basically about women failing to fulfil ideal notions of wife and mother. This does not mean that women

fulfilled these notions in the past — women in many contexts have been working outside the home for a very long time — but it does imply that social and economic changes have created situations where the interests and needs of all individuals cannot easily be met within the domestic unit.

how different is the present from the past?

The issue of the extent to which family relations have changed feeds into the current question about whether the "crisis in the family" **is** a crisis, and whether or not it is likely to be mortal. Recent debates about the family have revealed a split between those who claim that the current diversity of family forms is nothing new and those who say that there is a breakdown in the family and the origins of this breakdown are to be located in a collapse of value systems. In the light of this division, it is necessary to try and specify what, if any, are the changes that contemporary families are facing that were not faced by families in the past.

One of the key determinants of family forms and household composition is demography. Fertility and mortality rates are crucial in this regard, and it is clear that current levels of population growth, combined with improvements in mother and infant mortality rates, are unprecedented. However, there are gross disparities between countries with regard to population growth and mortality rates, both of which are closely correlated with, but not straightforwardly determined by, economic opportunity and welfare provision. Improved life expectancy, particularly in industrialized countries, has altered household composition, as some individuals now have to care for elderly parents as well as children. In some industrialized countries, changes in age at marriage and improved participation in the labour market for women, as well as other factors, have led to a substantial rise in the number of cohabiting couples and single-person households. However, these increases, at least for the United Kingdom, are the result of comparisons with data from earlier decades in the twentieth century. Before the 1800s, significant numbers of individuals never married and either lived alone or with other single persons. Cohabiting may not have been common in the past for the middle and upper classes, but it was certainly very common for working class women and men.

It does seem evident that divorce rates are rising, but for many developing countries there are no good data on divorce rates for earlier periods. Modern statistics on divorce rates have to be correlated with changing legal and customary definitions of marriage, in order to be certain that divorce rates are not rising simply because marriage rates are. Current debates on the family in Europe and the United States stress that divorce has an adverse effect on children, and many argue that children from "broken homes" are likely to do less well at school and exhibit anti-social behaviour of a variety of sorts. However, divorce is not the sole cause of broken homes and step-families. In the past in Europe — and at the present time in some developing countries in spite of improved life expectancy — many families are broken by death. Significant numbers of those who are widowed **do** remarry — although widowers remarry much more quickly than widows — and

establish new households. In many parts of the world at the moment, parental death and orphanhood are on the increase because of armed conflict.

Significant and unprecedented changes have been brought about in family forms and household composition through migration and urbanization. Labour migration has meant, particularly in developing countries, that many households are *de facto*, if not *de jure*, headed by women who have to provide for their children and for household reproduction, often in the absence of regular or substantial remittances. Female labour migration has increased markedly in recent years, and this is tied to the opportunities for women both in the informal sector of the urban economy and in wage labour in certain enterprises, including textiles and electronics. Women who migrate to urban areas often leave one or more of their children with their own mother, thus creating households without resident wage-earners. In parts of Africa, for example, households comprising grandparents and grandchildren are on the increase not only because of labour migration, but because of the ravages of AIDS.

The size of urban centres has grown massively all over the world during this century.[3] Increasing numbers of individuals are dependent on waged employment or informal sector activities for their livelihoods. The very rapid rate of population growth in the developing nations has meant that fewer people are able to earn their living on the land, and resources of all kinds are under increasing pressure. Urban poverty is now a phenomenon on a large scale; whether it is worse than the poverty of nineteenth century London or nineteenth century Shanghai is not known. What is clear is that immiseration and deprivation are on the increase, and that in this process women and children — in part because of their relative disadvantage in labour markets — are especially vulnerable. The large numbers of children living on the streets in cities all over the world, combined with rising crime, increasing substance abuse and lack of education are symbolic for many of the crisis in the family.

The size of populations and the scale of migration and urbanization are without precedent, but, given the effect of the market and wage labour rates on family forms, a further factor needs consideration. The extent of globalization and the degree of market integration have provided a political and economic context for the current changes in family/household relations that is quite unlike anything that has preceded it. Progressive market integration has led to increasing differentiation both between and within countries. Processes of social and economic differentiation have intensified along lines of gender, race and class with potentially disastrous effects for certain groups within populations.

is there a "moral panic" about the family?

As soon as this question is posed it becomes apparent that there can be no answer to it. Whose family is being referred to, and who exactly is suffering from panic? It seems that much of the panic, but by no means all of it, is located in Europe and the United States, and in international institutions. There is a particular irony in the fact that this crisis in values, if that is what it is, is occurring at a moment when the globalization of technology and the media is ensuring that a very specific Euro-American model of gender, family and intimate relations is being marketed worldwide. The enormous popularity all over the world of Euro-American soap operas, for example, can be accounted for, in part, by the heady mix they offer of intimate relations under pressure combined with consumption and property transfer strategies designed to ensure social and familial continuity. This mix is a feature of locally produced soap operas as well as of internationally marketed ones, but is only one of many ways in which the changing aspirations of individuals are bound up with new consumption possibilities.

The ubiquity of the West's cultural productions and the enshrinement of key sets of dominant values associated with the West in the thinking and practices of global institutions are perceived as undesirable and neo-imperialistic by a variety of countries and groups in the world. Many Muslim countries, for example, do not seem to be suffering a crisis in the family. They rather see their family forms and values as providing moral guidance and coherence within a specific project of modernity. They do not believe that the West's path to modernity, social development and economic growth is the only one, or that it is a particularly desirable one. It could be argued that a similar situation exists in China, where the public discourse on the family is one that emphasizes the strengths and abilities of the Chinese family. The dominant discourse at the present time is one that focuses on the links between the family and the success of market reform.

What makes it difficult to analyse such discourses is that they are public and often produced by the state and/or élite groups, and it is not clear how well they correspond to local understandings and experiences of family life. It is clear, however, that public discourses of this kind do influence the way people think, even in situations where people are not in total agreement with them. They also have a marked effect on social policies, including welfare provisions and taxation systems.

It has been argued by some that the current perception of crisis in the family has been largely brought about by those governments and international agencies who are seeking to redefine the boundaries between the state, the family and the market because of the increasing cost of welfare provision. Both Europe and America have a long history of "crises" in the family which tend to occur at moments of transition and change. These "crises" are typified by an anxiety about women working outside the home, coupled with a worry about child provision and socialization. We know that family forms and the social values associated with them do change over time and that these changes produce anxieties in all societies, anxieties which under certain circumstances become articulated as "crisis". But the

perception of crisis, and the moral panic which sometimes accompanies it, cannot simply be dismissed as false or epiphenomenal, for such a perception may well bring real changes in its wake. We do, therefore, need to address seriously the question of whether there is a crisis in the family, and we need to do so for a number of reasons. First, there is the undoubted fact that a **perception** of crisis is affecting people's experience of and response to present changes, at least in certain countries. Second, the consensus in thinking that is emerging in some quarters is having a clear effect on policy formation in international institutions. This is also evident in some national policies. Third, there are important social and economic changes taking place which are having a significant impact on family/household forms and on people's survival strategies and livelihood options. Fourth, any new set of policies emanating from international institutions and affecting family life is likely to prove very divisive because different nation states and interest groups will not find it easy to establish common agendas appropriate to their needs, and some will fear that their interests will be subsumed by those of others.

In the following sections, some of the major socio-economic changes affecting family/household forms and people's livelihood options are discussed, and consequences for policy are outlined.

the feminization of poverty

One major recent change in family/household structure which has attracted much comment has been the reported rise in the proportion of households headed by women. The reasons for this increase, like its rate and magnitude, are diverse, but it is a trend which has been noted for many different countries in the world at varying stages of economic development. The debate on the origins and causes of female-headed households has been clouded by a number of assumptions, one of which is that it is a new phenomenon.

Historically, a rise in female-headed households has been associated with rapid economic development, very often under the impact of slavery and colonial rule. By the mid-eighteenth century in the Caribbean, for example, a distinctive marriage pattern had emerged where strict rules of marriage applied in the propertied classes, but common-law marriage or implicit contracts were typical among the black and *mestizo* populations. Many children were born outside marriage and a large percentage of households were headed by women (Folbre, 1991:24). This situation had much to do with the impact of slavery on family forms and reproduction strategies, because of the desire of slave owners to promote high female fertility rates outside the context of marriage. Historically, such conditions for the reproduction of labour can be contrasted with those where

individual men work for wages, for example, where stronger conjugal contracts and lower fertility rates are more likely.

The large proportion of children born outside marriage and the increased percentage of female-headed households were commented on in eighteenth century Brazil and well documented in the nineteenth century. In São Paulo in 1802, 45 per cent of all urban households were headed by women, and in 1836 the percentage was 39. In the interior of Brazil in the early nineteenth century, 25 per cent of households were estimated to be headed by women (Folbre, 1994). These figures are to be contrasted with levels of female headship of around 14.5 per cent for Brazil as a whole in the 1980s. Low occupational status and a non-European racial or ethnic background increased the likelihood of a woman maintaining a family on her own. However, the intersections of gender, race and class did not always produce the same outcome. In Mexico City in the eighteenth century, Spanish women were more likely than Indian or caste women to head households. This may have been due to a higher average age at marriage and greater incidence of widowhood, or to the high cost of housing in the city. But, upper class parents concerned about intergenerational property transfers and status sometimes discouraged marriage in difficult economic times (Folbre, 1991:25).

It is evident that the number of female-headed households is related to marriage strategies, property and inheritance transfers, and the intersection between production systems and the reproduction of labour. This means that it is unwise to treat female headship as a unitary phenomenon. The very definition of headship complicates the picture because of the variable relationship between economic provision, decision-making and power/authority structures. Women, for example, are rarely classified as heads even when they are the major economic providers if there is a male over 15 in the household, while men are frequently designated as the head even when they are not the major provider. The idea that the definition of female headship is unproblematic has been another assumption that has impeded analysis.

One significant cause of the rise in female-headed households in developing countries is labour migration. Out-migration is on the increase as disparities between rural and urban locations, and between countries, become more marked. While significant and growing numbers of women migrate, the general growth in migration figures will be reflected in the number of women left to care for children and maintain household reproduction without the help of a spouse. However, it is important to distinguish between those households where male labour migration has resulted in female headship, and those where women are involved in polygynous marriage or have been abandoned or have become divorced, separated or widowed. It is equally crucial to note that many households will pass through a phase of female headship during their developmental cycle, either because of migration or because of divorce and subsequent remarriage or because of a subsequent marriage

Box 1
Female headship and poverty[4]

Household composition in Ghana reflects a situation where lineage ties are strong and conjugal bonds relatively weak, and where a significant number of production and consumption activities take place outside the household. In this context, the household has been characterized as "a loosely knit set of overlapping economies" in which conflict between the head and other household members over the division of labour and the intra-household distribution of resources is a frequent occurrence (Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993:117).[5] *In such a situation, women's best interests lie in maximizing their access to and control over resources for the support of themselves and their children.*

However, larger households with adults of both sexes have improved access to cash income as well as lower dependency ratios.[6] *It is also evident that women's overall access to income and labour is improved through co-residence with men, particularly spouses, because women suffer discrimination with regard to their access to land, capital, education and credit. Some women may have no choice except to become a household head — particularly those who are widowed, divorced or who became lone mothers when very young — but it should not be assumed that membership of a female-headed household is always a disadvantage for women or necessarily deleterious for child welfare (Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993:118).*

Table 1
Expenditure levels for different categories of female- and male-headed households in Ghana

	Male-headed		Female-headed	
	15-59	60+	15-59	60+
Expenditure (cedis/year)	51,542	40,941	53,477	43,774
Equivalence scale-adjusted expenditure (cedis/year)*	87,346	65,932	98,065	72,519
Percentage of households in lowest expenditure quartile	23.7	38.0	19.4	32.1
Percentage of budget spent on food	69.6	73.2	71.4	74.0
Percentage of households that receive remittances	17.9	30.9	53.1	66.3
Percentage of households that send remittances	52.2	35.8	46.2	27.5
Net remittances as a percentage of total household expenditure	-0.8	0.8	6.2	8.2

Source: Adapted from Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993.
Note: *Equivalence scales used by the World Bank for analysis of the Ghana GLSS data are 0.2 for age 0.6, 0.3 for ages 7-12, and 0.5 for ages 13-17.

The above table shows that on average female-headed households in Ghana are no worse off, and indeed that t hey are slightly less likely to be found in the lowest quartile of the income distribution. The percentage of total budget allocated to food is often given as an indicator of relative poverty. Lloyd and Gage-Brandon (1993:122; fn28) argue that because female-headed households spend more on food than male-headed ones, even at the higher income levels, something other than income may be determining the level of food expenditure. One possibility is that women allocate a larger proportion of their resources to feeding their children. If female-headed households do spend more on food at any particular income level than male-headed ones, the use of the proportion of income spent on food as an indicator of poverty may lead to an overestimation of the percentage of female-headed households among the poor.

by the husband. The analysis of female headship thus needs to be closely tied to an examination of life cycles, marital strategies and labour deployment.

A third assumption which has complicated the analysis of female-headed households is the association of such households with poverty, and the long-term consequences this might have for the welfare of women and children. It seems clear that overall processes of economic decline and changes in the structure of labour markets have made certain categories of households particularly vulnerable. However, there have been relatively few attempts to investigate the consequences for family welfare of different types of female-headed household, or to analyse the effects of headship on particular socio-economic categories of households.

A case study from Ghana (see box 1) shows that an increase in the proportion of female-headed households does not necessarily indicate a growing concentration of poverty among women, but it does suggest their increasing primary economic responsibility and their growing vulnerability. Moreover, the straightforward assumption that poverty is always associated with female-headed households is dangerous both because it leaves the causes and nature of poverty unexamined and because it rests on a prior assumption that children will be consistently worse off in such households because they represent incomplete families. There are a number of points to be made here. First, there is overwhelming evidence that resources under the control of women are more likely to be devoted to children than are resources in the hands of men (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988; Haaga and Mason, 1987; Kennedy, 1992; Buvinic et al., 1992). Thomas (1990) found that income in the hands of Brazilian women increased the health and survival chances of their children, and that it had an effect on child health almost 20 times greater than income controlled by the father. Nutrition data from the Northern Province of Zambia show that children under five in female-headed households are less likely to be malnourished than children in slightly better-off households where both parents are resident. The reasons for this have to do with women's improved access to child care and to networks of sharing within female-headed households (Moore and Vaughan, 1994). The available data suggest that the income which poorer women earn can lead to higher health and social benefits than the income men earn (World Bank, 1993).

To argue that the position of female-headed households is complex and internally differentiated (see box 2) is not to deny the validity of data from around the world which show them to be disadvantaged with respect to property, capital, income and credit. Many such households exist in the context of nation states which are rolling back their boundaries and pushing more "social care" into the arena of the family. This phenomenon provides a particularly graphic demonstration of the way in which women are expected to carry a disproportionate share of the costs of child care and social reproduction, and to do so often from a diminished resource base. Furthermore, the distribution of the costs of social reproduction — caring for children, the elderly and the sick — is inequitable within family/household units.

Box 2
Internal differentiation of female-headed households

Lloyd and Gage-Brandon's work reveals that there are significant differences between categories of female-headed households.

Table 2
Consumption and remittance levels for different categories of female- and male-headed households

	Male-headed		Female-headed	
	15-59	60+	15-59	60+
Equivalence scale-adjusted consumption (cedis/year)				
- Married	87,314	64,966	106,823	61,112
- Divorced/separated	86,095[(a)]	72,671[(a)]	100,839	78,473
- Widowed			76,268	76,739
Percentage receiving remittances				
- Married	17.6	31.3	62.5	74.9
- Divorced/separated	35.7[(a)]	67.4[(a)]	23.3	25.0
- Widowed			40.5	62.9
Net remittances as a percentage of total expenditure				
- Married	-0.8	0.8	8.8	11.0
- Divorced/separated	2.3[(a)]	4.5[(a)]	-1.6	0.7
- Widowed			1.3	8.4

Source: Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993.
Note: (a) for male-headed households, divorced/separated and widowed are combined due to small sample sizes.

Households headed by married women are best off, and those headed by widows worst off, with the households of divorced women in an intermediate position. The percentage of households receiving remittances shows that non co-resident spouses have more economic commitments than ex-spouses. However, the figures in table 1 reveal that over 40 per cent of female-headed households in the age range 15-59 actually send remittances elsewhere, and the data from table 2 indicate that remittances only make up a small percentage of total expenditure for female-headed households. This does not mean that remittances are not crucial. Indeed, for some households they may make the difference between being able to survive and not being able to do so.

The figures show that widows are at a particular disadvantage, presumably because of the discrimination they suffer in inheritance systems where they do not acquire rights to the land and property of their spouses. It is noticeable that, as women get older, married heads no longer have a relative advantage. This may be because spouses are no longer contributing to their support. In Ghana, women often "retire" from marriage as they get older, and their spouses may be supporting younger wives with dependent children (Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993:124-125).

As Nancy Folbre argues, the distribution of income and labour time within families is an important determinant of economic growth and welfare, and yet it has remained largely unmeasured and unexamined because of the persistent tendency to analyse families as undifferentiated and altruistic units (Folbre, 1983; 1986; 1991). In all societies, the family contributes a very large share of the time and money devoted to social reproduction, that is, the production and maintenance of "human capital" (Folbre, 1991:3-4). The unequal distribution of income and labour within the family means that women carry a disproportionate burden of the costs of the reproduction of that capital.

Women's particular responsibility for the reproduction of human capital is often reflected in the way they are held to be primarily responsible for child welfare and for any intergenerational transfer of disadvantage. Much of the recent research on single mothers shows that their lack of resources — including poor education — contributes to increased levels of child mortality and delinquency, and decreasing levels of educational attainment and life opportunities for their children. The easy elision between female heads of households, teenage pregnancies and dysfunctional families works to make these linkages seem obvious and pre-determined. Aggregate figures and generalized categories, such as "teenage mother" and "lone parent", exacerbate this tendency. Premature parenthood, for example, does appear to be increasing in many developing countries (PRB, 1992), and when it is associated with low educational attainment, low rates of marriage, low wages and low levels of property inheritance and transfer, it will also be associated with poverty. But, to speak of women in such circumstances as being responsible for the intergenerational transfer of poverty and/or disadvantage to their children is more than disingenuous. For one thing, it implies that the individual is to be held accountable and that she is somehow at fault for not bringing her children up in a "proper" family. This places the responsibility firmly on the individual for her failure to achieve economic and social security, and effectively prevents a thorough analysis of the causes and consequences of poverty. Teenage pregnancy does not cause poverty, however strongly it may be correlated with it under certain circumstances.

Focusing on women in the case of premature mothers and lone parents reveals the extent to which women are held to be responsible for child welfare in a way which men are not. In fact, the reported rise in teenage pregnancies in Africa, for example, may indicate that it is the **young men** who are refusing to marry. The reasons for this are diverse, but perhaps the most significant factor is that under conditions of economic decline, and where family labour cannot contribute directly to production, the cost of children has become too great. This is particularly the case where male employment opportunities and wage levels are also in decline. Increasing numbers of men are finding that they cannot support families and that marriage acts as a net drain on their own meagre resources. Even among middle class families, it has become evident that some men are using their greater bargaining power within the household to renegotiate the distribution of responsibilities so that women shoulder a greater proportion of the costs of child rearing and welfare. This means that where women are able to earn an income, they may find that they are forced to take on the cost of the running of the

household, while the husband retains his own income for other purposes (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988).

welfare dependency and the dysfunctional family

This section of the paper examines the current debate about the rising cost to the state of dysfunctional families, and it argues that this debate ignores the structural reasons for the increasing impoverishment of some families, preferring instead an approach which favours individual responsibility. One consequence of this is that the problem is being formulated as one about families and the failure of individuals within them, rather than directing attention to employment.

Historically, poverty has been viewed as a problem about work. Those who are poor either do not work enough, choose not to work or are unable to do so. Recent debates about the rising cost of welfare provision to disadvantaged households, particularly in Europe and the United States, have effectively treated the family unit as an individual and linked its poor performance in the areas of economic provisioning, socialization and child welfare to a failure to carry out its functions properly. This permits an easy slippage in thinking that links costs to the state with poor performance on the part of the family unit, and establishes that poor performance as an instance of individual failure, failure to be a complete nuclear unit based on a co-resident conjugal couple.

It is this individualized rather than structural approach to the complex interrelations between the state, the market and the family that has given rise to particular arguments about welfare dependency. The very term "dependency" implies that what families, like individuals, should be is autonomous and self-reliant. It is clearly desirable that parents should be able to earn enough to support themselves and their children. However, it is thoroughly misleading to imply that the goal of better off families is to be completely autonomous and self-reliant. This immediately becomes apparent if we consider the question of the care of the elderly. Middle class families in the United Kingdom, for example, are often unwilling to bear the full cost of the care of elderly parents and insist on the state doing so in spite of the fact that the cost of caring for elderly people who are sick or infirm greatly exceeds any contribution they may have made to the state through taxes and other means during their working lives. What distinguishes debates about the elderly from those about single mothers and unemployed youth is that the former are held to have worked to make a contribution, while the latter have not. For all their sophistication, the arguments are little more than those about the

relationship between the deserving and the undeserving poor. This is again evident in the discourse on single mothers. In the boom decades after the Second World War, women — and especially mothers — were thought to be exempt from working outside the home. The fact that during this period many married women were engaged in waged employment altered neither the perception nor the policies which that perception informed and reinforced. Part of the present problem is that the numbers of the poor have been increased dramatically by individuals — women and children — who were previously thought to be exempt from work. The result in Europe and the United States has been an increasingly vituperative debate concerning single mothers and welfare dependency which has relied for its emotional force, if not its efficacy, on an older contention about poverty and its relationship to a failure of work effort (Harris, 1993).

The idea that women receiving welfare benefits do not want to work — like the image popular in the United Kingdom of girls who get pregnant in order to receive the benefits due to single parents — has been reinforced by the increase in the number of married women with young children who **are** working. In the United States, for example, nearly 60 per cent of women with children under two years of age work (Harris, 1993). To claim that single mothers with children are dependent on welfare has become just another way of saying that they are avoiding work. Sympathetic commentators have remarked that work incentives built into welfare programmes have not been successful largely because individuals have been placed in low-wage jobs that do not improve skills and provide insufficient income to support a family. Work cannot, therefore, offer an easy exit point from welfare dependency for all women.

However, a recent study of women on welfare in the United States found that they **do** work in spite of disincentives in the form of lost benefits, and that at any one time about 30 per cent of welfare mothers are working, and during any period on welfare about 50 per cent of all single mothers have some contact with the labour market (Harris, 1993). But, human capital and wage levels are crucial determinants. Those women most likely to earn their way out of welfare were those with higher educational levels and previous work histories, while those who had not invested in education and had many children remained on welfare for longer periods. According to Harris (1993), it is the number of children a woman has and not the constraints of having young children at home that is significant. She found that when a woman had three or more children her chances of getting off welfare by taking a job were reduced by 50 per cent as compared to a woman with one or two children. However, the study did show that work provided the dominant route off welfare since 66 per cent of all welfare spells ended when the woman was employed. Women with fewer educational resources did not experience rapid job exits, but if they remained in the workforce they tended to work their way off welfare once their work experience could command higher wages. This suggests that, among poor women, investments in education bring better returns than investments in work experience. In sum, what mattered most in getting women off welfare were differences in human capital and family size, suggesting that if the goal of government policies is to get single mothers off welfare, then it is investments in human capital, in the form of education and training, that will bring

the most benefits. Lack of work effort is not the cause of the problem, nor are dysfunctional families. Single mothers have frequent contact with the labour force, and they combine or substitute work and welfare as alternative sources of income in order to provide for their families. In short, they rely on welfare when they cannot find jobs that pay enough to support their children.

the costs of children[7]

The overall cost of supporting children is one thing, but from the point of view of family welfare what is important is the distribution of those costs between parents and the pattern of their overall contributions. This section of the paper examines these issues and argues that women bear a disproportionate share of the costs of child care and socialization, and therefore of the reproduction of human capital. The key question here is: "what are or should be the consequences for policy of recognizing that women shoulder a larger proportion of the costs of reproducing the human capital on which future economic prosperity may well depend, and that they do so from a diminishing resource base in many instances?"

An important determinant of the cost of children is the level of contributions they will make as they mature (Caldwell, 1982). These contributions may be in the form of labour time, waged income, remittances and support in old age. The perceived level of these potential contributions influences fertility and investment (including in school fees) decisions. However, another important determinant of the cost of children is the contributions that will be made by society as a whole, including health care, education and family allowances. When the levels and nature of both forms of contribution are considered along with the distribution of the costs of child care between parents, a clear distortion emerges.

Several studies from a variety of countries have shown that mothers work longer hours, consume less and devote more of their resources to their children (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988; Sen 1983; Folbre, 1986). The commitments that women make to motherhood reduce their earnings, labour market experience, promotional prospects and general potential for economic independence (Folbre, 1991). Women, as mentioned earlier, carry a disproportionate share of the costs of child rearing and the reproduction of human capital. But do they recoup those costs in particular ways? It has been argued that under certain conditions of production and reproduction in the developing world, with a strict division of labour and defined cultural expectations, women are partially recompensed in two ways. First, regulations governing kinship and marriage clearly set out men's responsibilities to dependants. Second, women can expect economic contributions from their children (Nugent, 1985; Cain, 1982).

But, as Folbre (1991) argues, increases in the cost of children due to processes of modernization and market integration have intensified the economic stresses on

families. The rising costs of family life have intensified conjugal conflict and negotiation, rendering women in some contexts even more vulnerable in consequence of the unequal distribution of power in conjugal unions. This augments the probability of individuals reneging on formalized contracts such as marriage, and on informal contracts such as expectations of support for kin, elderly parents and other household members. Children and the elderly are increasingly unable to participate in a wage-based economy, where education is crucial, and they become more vulnerable to poverty. In this situation, parenting becomes a commitment with many costs and potentially few rewards. Each case must be analysed in specific terms, but what is evident is that in these sorts of circumstances women are no longer receiving any recompense — or they are receiving very little — for the disproportionate costs of child nurturing and rearing that they bear.

It is not possible to make global generalizations about family structure, family law and welfare policy. But, in almost all contexts, women are assigned primary responsibility for child rearing and public transfers (pensions, family allowances) are often structured so as to provide benefits to waged employees and to reinforce a family structure based on a male breadwinner (Folbre, 1991). The result is that social security programmes discriminate against female wage earners in spite of attempts in many countries to reform the law (Brocas et al., 1990), and they do so in a situation where women are already discriminated against in the labour market. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that levels of family benefits are quite low in relation to other public transfers. Working women pay the same level of taxes as men and thus contribute equally to total public transfers, but the proportion of such transfers reallocated to family benefits is relatively small in a situation where women are still bearing a disproportionate share of the costs of child care. Benefit levels and welfare legislation vary enormously around the world, but women who are raising families on their own are not receiving sufficient support compared to families with a male breadwinner. A review of current social insurance programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean concluded that such programmes subsidize children in families headed by full-time wage earners, effectively redistributing money away from most families maintained by women alone (Folbre, 1994). Female-headed households might represent a significant proportion of the state's welfare bill in some contexts; this is not because they are dysfunctional families, but because they are bearing the full costs of child rearing and nurturing in systems where public transfers do not adequately address the fact that all women shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden of social reproduction.

fathers, husbands and conjugal expectations

Certain critics of welfare policy have argued that welfare programmes provide perverse incentives and increase marital dissolution. As Nancy Folbre (1991) points out, economic development and fertility decline have historically been accompanied by increases in the percentage of female-headed households and by institutional changes that redistribute some of the costs of social reproduction from families to society as a whole. Welfare programmes, then, are the result of these changes and not the cause of them, and there is no evidence to suggest that providing benefits to families increases marital instability. Critics sometimes argue that welfare programmes are a form of unproductive spending, but this is rarely more than a way of arguing that the cost of welfare provision is too high. It is evident, however, that women's ability to support their families, whether they are married or not, would be greatly enhanced by improving their position in the labour market and instituting education and training programmes. Such an initiative would also have benefits for child health, nutrition and education. Family programmes should really be treated as employment programmes in the widest sense.

In view of the fact that women **do** shoulder a disproportionate share of the costs of child care and human capital reproduction, it is ironic that debates about female-headed households inevitably focus on why women end up in this situation. The implication is that the women themselves are responsible for an increase in marital instability and that this may be connected to growing numbers of women in waged work and/or to changes in role expectations and attitudes. As mentioned above, relatively little attention is given to fathers and to the role of men in changes in family structures and gender role expectations, even though quite a lot of research has been done in this area.

In the United States, 42 per cent of households were supported by a sole male breadwinner in 1960, but by 1988 the figure was down to 15 per cent (Wilkie, 1991). The rise in female-headed households and the increase in the employment of married women are important factors in this change and they have been extensively studied. However, a third factor which has not been sufficiently investigated is equally important: the decline in the labour force participation of married men over the same period. This decline is connected to an increase in the percentage of men at the early family building stage whose income is not sufficient to support a family above the poverty level. The result has been an increase in the employment of wives and other family members, and a growth in the number of female-headed households and single parents. The decline in the male breadwinner role is greatest in men handicapped in the labour market by low education, minority status and older age (Wilkie, 1991). The greatest employment opportunities since the 1970s have been in the low-wage jobs of the service sector and as a result have favoured women.

One very significant change in the United States, and one which is evident elsewhere in the world, is that the labour market demand for better educated workers has meant that the employment rate for young men with low education has

declined markedly. Divisions along race lines have been particularly noticeable, with the gap between the labour participation rates of white as opposed to black and Hispanic men growing. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that rates of marriage among young men have declined.

Table 3
Marriage rates for males, 1960s and 1980s

	Percentage married	
Men aged 20 to 24	mid-1960s	Mid-1980s
White	48	24
Black	45	13

This decline in the rate of marriage for young men has been paralleled by a rise in the proportion of young mothers who do not marry before the birth of their first child. Among white women in the age group 15-29, the percentage with a premarital first birth rose from 8 in the mid-1960s to 20 in the mid-1980s. The figures for black women showed a comparable rise. This suggests that young mothers have little to gain financially from marrying the young fathers of their children, and it is also possible that those who do not marry may be better off in terms of higher educational attainment and lower fertility than those who do (Wilkie, 1991). The data also show that some young men do not have the resources to marry and are apparently unwilling to take on the costs of a family commitment. One in five white and one in three black married men in the United States have earnings insufficient to support a family of four above the poverty level, and 60 per cent of white families have two or more wage earners (Wilkie, 1991). A further study in the United States of teenage mothers on welfare and the fathers' involvement in child care and support demonstrated that employment played an important role in the young men's expression of fatherhood and in permitting them to be involved in the upbringing of their children (Danziger and Radin, 1990). This supports the idea that joblessness is connected to the diminished family role of the father.

The causes of changes in family/household structure and increases in premarital pregnancies lie in structural factors rather than in individual preferences and proclivities or in failures of socialization and the pathology of dysfunctional families. These structural factors include changes in the national economy, increased market integration through globalization, and the responses of corporations and government to economic and social change. While it is true that the decline in men's ability to support a family is, and has been, an important factor in the rise of women's employment, there are a number of ways in which this might affect family structures. Historically in Europe and the United States, wives and children worked and contributed wages to family support simply because a family could not be supported on a single wage. Hence, married women's employment rates increased. This can be contrasted with the family wage systems prevalent in South-East Asia, where employment opportunities for young unmarried women have encouraged their increased participation in the labour force in circumstances where families cannot survive on a single male wage. The exact

relationship between employment strategies and family/household structure varies depending on local gender ideologies, religious beliefs and kinship systems. In many cases, men prefer their young unmarried daughters to work rather than their wives, and in such situations married women's labour force participation can be relatively low. In these circumstances, women's labour force participation has no connection with increases in marital instability, and families can be strongly patriarchal and resistant to dissolution partly because of the need to maintain access to several wage incomes.

The question of whether or not women's involvement in waged work leads to an increased sense of independence, as well as improved decision-making roles in the household and changes in conjugal role expectations, is impossible to answer in comparative perspective. The empirical findings have been mixed, and it is difficult to know, for example, whether women divorce because they have the ability to be self-supporting or whether they enter the labour market when they recognize that their marriage is unsatisfactory. Recent data from Thailand, where women have a long history of employment and where the divorce rate is low but showing a modest rise, suggest that what little effect employment has is mediated by a whole set of factors relating to marital problems, wife abuse and poor relations between spouses. The picture is further complicated by the fact that 25 per cent of families in Bangkok are extended, and hence women may have help with domestic duties and child care. Some women keep a shop at home or are craftworkers and can therefore integrate domestic and productive work more readily. The study concludes, however, by pointing out that although work might allow women to leave an unsatisfactory marriage, it certainly does not cause divorce (Edwards et al., 1992).

Divorce rates are on the rise in many countries of the world, but it is worth noting that this pattern is not a uniform one and that in many countries women are unable to divorce. There are also marked differences between rural and urban areas, and between individuals of different classes, religions and ethnic groups. The available data suggest that women suffer a significant loss of income at divorce, with reductions of 30-70 per cent from pre-divorce family income, while men's income tends to increase because they are no longer supporting dependants (Weitzman, 1985; see also the discussion of Lloyd and Gage-Brandon's material, above). The result is that divorce and marital disruption have very different consequences for women and men. The reasons for increasing divorce rates have to be specified culturally and historically, and no single generalization could cover all the kinship and marital systems of the world. However, a number of critics have asserted that rising divorce rates are related to changing roles and expectations, and that, among many factors, increasing female participation in the labour force, greater mobility and modernization are to blame. These arguments are difficult to assess — especially in comparative perspective — because they are often based on assumptions about the negative effects of social change on what are thought to be key social relations and cultural values. What is evident is that critics frequently approach the problem of changing roles and expectations within marriages and families from an individual as opposed to a structural perspective.

Recent research in the South African homeland of Qwaqwa has produced evidence of high rates of premarital pregnancies, conjugal conflict and marital dissolution, accompanied by poor socialization of young males and rising levels of crime (Niehaus, 1994; Sharp, 1994; Banks, 1994). The reasons for this situation are a decline in male migrant labour and male employment generally, increasing social differentiation within the community, and the relocation of industries (clothing, glass and electronics) into the area to take advantage of cheap female labour and other incentives. The consequence of these changes is that household reproduction is more dependent on female income from beer brewing, petty trade and wage labour. Women report their husbands as saying that beer brewing is not an appropriate activity for respectably married women, and that domestic tasks and child care are being neglected as a result of women working. Conjugal conflict over income and household decision-making has been greatly exacerbated as men transfer their anxieties about the loss of their jobs and their declining contribution to household resources into the domestic domain. Women find themselves increasingly in the position of not being able to support the family on a male wage and they continue to look for ways to generate income. There have been a number of violent clashes in the homeland where men have protested against the provision of jobs for women in the new industries — at their expense, as they see it. Conjugal roles and expectations are being forced to change, as women provide more of the income while partners are unemployed. Child care, especially for women with young children, has become a crucial issue. The definitions of a "good wife" and a "good husband" are altering, and one result is that people's personal relationships are under enormous pressure.

Family/household forms and structures are responding to these changes in a number of ways. The dependency ratio of adult income earners to children is a clear determinant of household security among low-income households, and consequently extended households made up of three generations or co-resident siblings are emerging. Increasing numbers of women are refusing to marry because marriage provides little security for them and their children, while adding to their vulnerability through the demands husbands can make on wives' labour, time and income. More and more men are leaving the area and not returning because they cannot support their families. Young men are refusing to marry and/or to acknowledge paternity because they do not have the resources, and are not sure that they will ever have the resources, to enter into family commitments. As mentioned earlier, marriage in this kind of situation becomes a net drain on men's resources and this increases the numbers of absent fathers and unmarried teenage mothers.

Under conditions of extreme economic and social pressure, it becomes apparent that women's and men's interests do not converge but rather diverge. The needs, rights and obligations on which the conjugal contract depends can no longer be mutually constructed. This should not, however, be taken as straightforward evidence of the breakdown or dissolution of the family. Co-residence of adult, unmarried siblings was noted by Niehaus (1994), who reported sisters who went out to work and had their children looked after by their brothers. Family ties between generations were strong and a number of residential arrangements involving grandparents and grandchildren and multi-generational households were noted. Family ties of a broader

kind were actually essential for establishing wider networks and residential arrangements that would allow households to secure access to income and to nurture the young. In the past, many analysts have failed to recognize this point because they have been implicitly comparing such family arrangements with the conjugal, nuclear family, and have thus found them wanting.

The question of crime, especially among young males, is clearly related to high levels of unemployment and to the impossibility of establishing adult status in a situation where they can neither marry nor work. The need for an income in order to be able to consume and survive is what draws some men into co-residence with their sisters and others into illegal methods of income generation. There are no incentives, and very few opportunities, for young men to build a positive sense of self. It is not so much because fathers are absent and have no authority, thus providing defective role models, but rather because the whole structure of masculine identity is in doubt. This may in turn provide further impetus for involvement in illegal activities which bring their own form of status, recognition and identity.

The problem of unsocialized youth is but one part of a larger problem about the care and nurturing of the young. Some critics have taken rising levels of youth crime, the number of children on the street, and decreasing levels of educational attainment as evidence of the "crisis in the family". It seems obvious when we see children in difficulty to point to the family as the source of the problem, but how accurate is this perception? Is it really true that what we are seeing is the breakdown of family and social values? One way in which this issue can be addressed is to investigate what has been happening to children and to examine the determinants of their situation.

children in the labour force and on the street

Anthropologists and historians have long pointed to the culturally and historically variable nature of childhood. The different conditions of children's lives generate different definitions of childhood, and individual children's subjective experiences of childhood will vary according to the specific understandings and ideals prevalent in any one context. The roles and tasks of children around the world differ, as do views about what it is reasonable to expect from a child. This becomes particularly apparent when we look at children in the labour force, and the related problem of children on the street.

UNICEF estimates that around the world over 100 million children work, and this figure does not include farm and domestic workers. In low-income countries, 25 per cent of children between the ages of 6 and 11 years are working and not in

school, and, of those between the ages of 12 and 16, approximately 60 per cent are working. Over 100 million school-aged children receive no education and over 100 million children live on the street. UNICEF (1990) reports that 150 million children in the world are malnourished.

The whole question of child labour depends both on the definition of "the child" and on the definition of "work". In rural households in the developing world, children's productive potential is important for household survival, and even if they are attending school regularly they will be working in the fields, herding and tending livestock, fetching water and fuel, and looking after younger children. Contributing to family labour in this way is rarely considered work. Childhood is not thought of as a period of time that exempts children from making their contribution to social and household needs, and while children between the ages of 5 and 15 are not considered full adults, they are seen as individuals with responsibilities and obligations. It has been estimated that 100 million rural children in India between those ages live in conditions that make their contribution to their family's livelihood mandatory, but only 16 million are categorized by the government as "child labourers" (Nieuwenhuys, 1994).

The underestimation of children's contribution to family income and household survival is also a problem for children in urban contexts. Once again, children are not usually categorized as workers if they perform unpaid work related to their parents' occupation (collecting rags or selling vegetables), if they work in household-based industries (carpet making, cigarette rolling, carpentry) or if they are involved in piece-work undertaken by the family (embroidery, flower decorations, lace-making).

Children work both in the formal and the informal sectors of the economy. Many children work in factories and on plantations. The conditions under which some of these children work are appalling, but child workers are favoured by employers because their labour is cheap. Children are often paid very little, and sometimes nothing at all, in spite of the fact that their reasons for working are due to the need for increased family income (Lawyers Committe for Human Rights, 1991). In urban contexts, many working boys are self-employed as rag-collectors, newspaper sellers, shoe-shiners and parking boys. Some have given up on school, but others go to school for part of the day, while working in the early morning and late afternoon. Others work in small-scale industries doing piece-work, or as unpaid workers and apprentices in family workshops. In India, it has been estimated that 22 per cent of boys who work start full-time jobs at the age of 8 or younger, and another 25 per cent by the age of 10. Girls start their working lives earlier, either as maid servants in middle class households or as housekeepers and care-givers to younger children in their own households. The latter category are surrogate mothers and are not remunerated. Over 50 per cent of employed girls receive no cash payment for their work, while only 7 per cent of boys are unpaid. Where girls **do** receive payment, 96 per cent hand over their entire salary to the family, as compared to 52 per cent of working boys (Chatterjee Schlachter, 1993).

Two things keep these children working: the economic requirements of parents and the economic advantage of employers. The two are connected. Low levels of wages in the informal and formal sectors of the economy for the urban poor, and especially for adult women, make child labour a necessity in order to bring in enough income to support the family. As the need for an educated workforce grows, children who have been pulled out of school to work — particularly girls who start at a very young age to substitute for their mothers — will be at a particular disadvantage in the labour market. Employers find child labour attractive because children are paid less than adults, they are easier to control and to lay off, and they are unable to insist on their rights.

The large number of working children in urban environments is related to the problem of children on the street. The available data show that children are on the street in increasing numbers, and it is often assumed that these children are without families and involved in crime and drugs. Recent work on children in urban environments has emphasized the importance of distinguishing between children who simply work on the streets and those who may be working on the streets, but are without families or homes. In India for example, as elsewhere, the rise in the number of street and working children is related to poverty and rapid urban growth, and in particular to the spread of slums and shantytowns. It has been estimated that the total slum population in the country in 1990 was between 45 million and 56 million people. Accurate numbers for street children and working children are hard to collect, but a national survey in 1983 calculated that there were 17 million working children (a figure considered too conservative). Working in an urban environment means being on the street, often for many hours each day. However, not all children working out on the street are homeless or without families. In Delhi, for example, 75 per cent of working children live with their families. These children go out to work on the streets during the day and return home at night to hand over most of their earnings. But, while the number of homeless children may be small as a proportion of the working child population, their numbers are still enormous (between 400,000 and 800,000 according to UNICEF) (Chatterjee Schlachter, 1993; Black, 1993; Szanton Blanc, 1994).

Among homeless working children, there are different degrees of connection to the family and of marginalization. Some visit their families frequently, preferring to live closer to their place of work with other children, while others do not have the money to travel home. There are also children who have run away from home or been abandoned. A recent five-country (Brazil, India, Italy, Kenya and the Philippines) study for UNICEF found that these children had often left home to avoid cruel treatment by a parent or step-parent or because the family had suffered a tragedy such as a parent's death (Szanton Blanc, 1994). The heavy obligation of bringing in money, combined with strict parental control and beatings for the slightest misdemeanour, led many children to flee home. Sometimes such children were lured away from home by another child who could point out the advantages of being independent of parental interference and not having to work under impossible conditions to help support younger siblings. Children from female-headed households were not significantly more likely to be among the homeless, but dislike of step-parents who failed to provide support and affection in return for

the child's contribution to home life was an important factor for many children. In the case of Brazil and Kenya, households that were notionally female-headed often had resident adult males in them compounding the difficulty of correlating female headship with child homelessness. What the study did find was that poverty was the major factor forcing children into work, often as young as 6 years, and that working and being very poor provided the context in which children were forced away from their families. Most of the homeless children interviewed, albeit in the rather different contexts provided by the five countries, expressed a great deal of sadness at having moved away from their families and retained a strong sense of the family as a potentially supportive and loving unit. Many of them had left home because of a lack of support and affection, not surprising in the context of poor families where both parents are working very long hours themselves for very little money.

Children on the streets are vulnerable to exploitation from adults and they are easily drawn into prostitution; drug, alcohol and solvent abuse; gambling; and crime. Children are exposed to rough handling and sometimes brutal treatment by security guards and the police. In Brazil, the killing of street children has been attributed to various so-called "justice committees" said to be made up of off-duty policemen and security guards (Swift, 1993), and there have been reports from Colombia of shop-keepers and other civilians killing homeless children and child beggars (Buchanan, 1994). Children often move around in gangs which give some protection and offer a sense of belonging and commitment. A UNICEF report on Italy pointed out that children who cannot acquire prestige, recognition and a sense of self at home or in school are particularly vulnerable to the lure of petty crime, gambling, stealing handbags and motorscooters, and handling drugs. There is a strong sense of self at work in being able to manage the hostile urban environment and escape control and/or detection by adults and the authorities. The net result is that children often identify strongly with the violence they experience and subsequently engage in violence themselves (Lorenzo, 1993).

Prostitution is a common way to make money for boys and girls. In Nairobi, where strong links between the street children have been observed, girls may be selling sexual services during the day and returning to their "community" at night. These alternative communities or families may involve pairing between girls and boys who consider themselves "husbands" and "wives". Sexually transmitted diseases are a major health problem. A recent study in Brazil reported that street children engaged in sexual activity with peers and adults from inside and outside their circle. Sex was a means of acquiring money, food, clothes or shelter, but within the peer group it was used for entertainment, pleasure and comfort, as well as to exert power and establish dominance. Nearly half (42.9 per cent) of children reported having sex under the influence of drugs or alcohol, 39.4 per cent had sexually transmitted diseases, 69 per cent of girls said their friends had been pregnant and 43.4 per cent that their friends had had abortions. Sexual initiation occurred at an early age: 10.8 years for boys and 12.4 years for girls. Well over half (60 per cent) of boys reported experience of anal intercourse. Many of the sexual encounters street youth described were exploitative or coercive, and girls were particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. The findings

revealed that street youth were more vulnerable than children living at home to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and that street girls were more likely to get pregnant and/or to have an abortion (Raffaelli et al., 1993).

Once children are on the street they are vulnerable in all sorts of ways, and this applies whether they are genuinely homeless or not, although those who are homeless are even more vulnerable. Children on the street are particularly susceptible to exploitation by adults. The inculcation of some into a "culture" of violence, petty crime and substance abuse reflects the harshness and brutality of their circumstances, as well as the necessity to make ends meet. These children suffer from emotional deprivation and from a reduction in their life chances, primarily because of their lack of education. However, there is very little direct evidence to suggest that the plight of these children is the result of incomplete or dysfunctional families. Poverty and low wage levels force families into a situation where they must substitute or augment adult labour with child labour, and once that process is established the route to a street existence becomes possible.

is there a crisis in the family?

It is not possible to use data like the material presented above on working and street children to answer the question of whether or not there is a crisis in the family. Family/household structures and strategies are very diverse worldwide and their response to processes of economic and political change are equally diverse. In other words, if there is a crisis in the family, it can only be a multiple set of crises in many different families.

However, it is evident that the general perception of crisis in the family is one which has very specific Euro-American origins. This does not mean that families in other parts of the globe are not experiencing marital dissolution, problems with caring for the elderly, poor intergenerational relations and economic difficulties. But in many countries there is no public discourse of family decline. Families are seen as the bedrock of all other social institutions and their social values are seen as intimately connected to economic success and national identity. The notion of crisis is nonetheless important because it has come onto the international agenda, as well as being evident on some national agendas, in a way which will have direct consequences for policy initiatives. The following are among the most important:

(a) Nation states in the developed world are finding the cost of welfare programmes hard to meet, and are alarmed by the speed and scale with which these costs are projected to rise. In this context, the debate about the family is one of the mechanisms through which states are seeking to redefine the relationship between the family, the market and the state. This process of redefinition is crucially

dependent on portraying the family as an autonomous unit which is responsible for its own relations with the market. If a family fails to provide for its members then this failure is an individual one and may be attributed to a lack of effort or to the dysfunctional nature of the family unit.

(b) As a consequence of the redefinition of boundaries between families and the state, it is necessary to respond to the changes that have taken place in family/household structures. The rise in female-headed households is among the most important of these changes and these households have thus become a focus of policy debate. Research shows that women shoulder a disproportionate share of the costs of child care and the reproduction of human capital, and the disadvantage of female-headed households provides graphic evidence of this fact. Women receive no compensation from either the market or the state for the burden they carry. The inability of female-headed households to manage in some contexts is not a result of the fact that they are dysfunctional families, but of the discrimination women suffer in the labour market and of the unequal distribution of labour and income within families. Public transfer programmes worldwide favour families with employed male breadwinners, and they thus effectively divert resources away from families most in need.

(c) The supposed indicators of "family crisis" — marital conflict, youth crime, disadvantaged children and single mothers — are not simply the result of dysfunctional families, but must also be seen in the context of the strain placed on certain family relations and categories of individuals by poverty and extreme economic hardship. Lack of control over their lives forces many disadvantaged families into situations where personal relations break down under stress. Loss of self-esteem both for parents and children, combined with joblessness, unwanted pregnancies, substance abuse and despair, are made worse by the fact that poverty also dispossesses people of their political as well as their economic rights. Those who are not employed and have little education are very unlikely to have much say in the conditions of their citizenship and/or in political processes in their countries.

The increasing tendency to blame families, and very often women within those families, for their inability to survive the structural changes wrought by increasing market integration and globalization is one way of avoiding an analysis of the causes and consequences of poverty and immiseration. The notion of a crisis in the family is to be resisted because of the way in which such a moral discourse prevents a proper analysis of the situation many families face and justifies the denial of responsibility by the state and other institutions.

notes

1. While it is now generally thought, for example, that the English family has been nuclear in form for a very long time and that no easy relationship between increasing nuclearization and industrialization can be posited, it would be a mistake to imagine that this picture is an invariant one. Anderson's (1971) research on mid-nineteenth century Lancashire showed that kin helped each other, particularly in times of crisis, by living together for periods of time, and Wilmott and Young (1962) found much the same situation in London in the 1950s. Households in both cases were therefore extended rather than nuclear. For a review of the literature on the development of the family in Europe and a discussion of these issues see Kertzer (1991).
2. One obvious example is the practice of child fostering, common in Africa and Latin America, where families send a child to relatives, sometimes a married sibling, but often more distant kin, so that they can be fed, clothed and educated.
3. For a review of the data on urbanization in developing countries, see Kasarda and Crenshaw (1991).
4. The analysis is based on data from the Ghana Living Standard Survey from 1987/88.
5. Whitehead (1992) shows that men's authority within the household and kin group includes the allocation of household labour and the contribution of wives to the family farm/business.
6. Dependency ratios are defined as the number of resident productive adults in a household compared to the number of dependants (children, elderly, sick).
7. My argument in this section and in those that follow is indebted to the work of Nancy Folbre (1991; 1994) from whom I take my understanding and inspiration.

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