

TRANSITIONS TO FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC EXPANSION AND CRISIS: THE CASE OF LATIN-AMERICAN MIGRANTS IN SPAIN

Elena Vidal-Coso
elena.vidalcoso@upf.edu
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Xiana Bueno
xbueno@ced.uab.es
Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Female Latin-American flows in Spain are highly related to the labor demand for domestic workers and care-givers. The main aim of this research is to analyze the prevalence, evolution and composition of Latin-American economically female-headed households in Spain and how they are facing the current economic crisis. Preliminary results suggest that unemployment is affecting men more so than women. As a result there is an increase in female-headed households. We will use data from the Spanish Labor Force Survey (SLFS) between 2005 and 2012. Female-headed households are defined as those nuclear households where women serve as the unique working member. We will explore how these household structures are, its changes in parallel with the economic context, and its socio-demographic and labor market characteristics. Additionally, we will longitudinally explore transitions from husband-wife households to female single parent households, and transitions from households where two-parent work to households maintained exclusively by women.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

Latin-Americans migrants have a long history of migration to Spain and represent 37% of the total foreign born population in 2012 according to official Population Registers. Beside the fact that Latin American migrants are a numerically large group it is also the fact that women play an important pioneer role in Latin-American migration which makes them an interesting case for study. Compared to other immigrant groups this specific gendered feature (about 55% of the resident migrants from Latin America in 2012 are female) make that a more specific family migration strategy even more important when facing an economic crisis.

The main aim of this research is to analyze the prevalence, evolution and household structure of Latin-American economically female-headed households in Spain and how they are facing the current economic crisis. The gender composition of Latin-American migration flows and their evolution over time are highly correlated with Spanish labor market characteristics. In fact, the role of Latin-American women as pioneer migrants in Spain are highly related to the labor demand for domestic workers and care-givers, explaining the high incidence of women who are the main breadwinners of their households. Our expectation is that the increasing demand for male workers for construction and related industries during the economic boom explains the evolution towards a greater gender and occupational balance among Latin-American families. However the economic recession brought important difficulties to these families. Preliminary results suggest that unemployment is affecting men more so than women. Our hypothesis is that the current economic recession is causing an increase in female headed households in two ways. First, this increase is driven by nuclear families (couples with or without children) in which male partners become unemployed. Secondly, the increase is a result of greater number of single parent households, not only explained by single motherhood, but also as a consequence of separations, divorces, and husband's return migration.

Using data from the Spanish Labor Force Survey (SLFS) between 2005 and 2012 we will be able to cover the economic expansion period until 2007, as well as the current economic constraints from 2008 to present. Female headed households include those households where women serve as the unique working member. In the first stage of the analysis, we would like to explore how these household structures are, how they change in parallel with the economic context, and which socio-demographic and labor market characteristics the women have. Additionally, we would like to understand different potential patterns by origin, especially as compared to the Spanish population. In a second stage, using the panel version of the SLFS, we will longitudinally explore two issues in order to measure the impact of the economic crisis on living arrangements of Latin-American households: in one hand, transitions from husband-wife households to female single parent households, and in the other hand transitions from households where two-parent work to households maintained exclusively by women.

Being aware about the controversial on previous literature on defining "household" and "head of household" (Buvinić & Rao Gupta, 1997), we will identify as "female-headed household" or "female maintained household", all those households except for single-member ones, where

the unique breadwinner or breadwinners are women, that is, all employed household members are female members and they economically maintain the rest of members. Our definition of “female-headed household” covers not only single mother households, as much of the literature traditionally does, but also couples with and without children as well as extended and multinuclear households. Moreover, “single mother households” must be understood beyond a single motherhood since it can also include transnational female headships especially in a context of international migration.

Background

Based on a traditional patriarchal system, previous literature on female headship often understood “female-headed households” as households with dependent children headed by unmarried women, and were understood in contrast to “two-parent households.” Three decades ago, this female headship was even considered to be “incomplete families” because of the lack of a male breadwinner (Tienda & Ortega Salazar, 1982).

Most of the literature focused on female-headed households typically focused on the economic and labor-market disadvantage that caused a higher level of poverty and its implications for the social and economic wellbeing of women and children (Tienda & Glass, 1985; Buvinić & Rao Gupta, 1997; Lichter, Maughlin & Ribar, 1997, García & Oliveira, 2005). Other topics have been the transition of single-mother households to extended households in order to balance the lack of male members (Tienda & Ortega Salazar, 1982), the stress level of women economically in charge of a household (McLanahan, 1983) or the role of non-nuclear members in female-headed households which facilitates the mothers’ labor market participation (Tienda & Angel, 1982; Snyder, et.al., 2006).

The increase in the proportion of female-headed households over the past few decades can be explained by an increase on women’s labor force participation, a normalizing of separation and divorce, changing perceptions about single motherhood and non-marital cohabitation as well as a longer life expectancy for women. It has even been explained at local level by differences in welfare system and social benefits (Lichter, Maughlin & Ribar, 1997).

Focusing in migrant women as head of households, Oso (2008) presents a state of the art on this specific literature. Oso describes how literature on this topic has recently found a place on the interests of academics beyond the role of men as pioneer migrants and migrant women as regrouped partners. She concludes that even when we consider women as breadwinners, most of the literature has focused on their role in the reproductive sphere and shaping family dynamics. Some of these common topics include: their family situation, transnational maternity, child wellbeing, family reunification and the reproduction of gender roles in the labor market (Oso, 1998; Pedone, 2003; Santos Pérez, 2011).

The female feature characteristic of Latin-American migration into Spain has also been widely studied. From a gender perspective, studies have shown how Latin-American female-oriented inflows have been related to a specific labor and family strategy that has become more prevalent in complex households and without nucleus (Domingo & Esteve, 2010). This prevalence of female migration into Spain has been linked to a labor-market demand on specific occupational sectors such as domestic work and care-givers in a context of

complementarity where Spanish couples were becoming more bi-active in the labor-market (Vidal, et.al. 2009).

Despite a breadth of literature on migrant living arrangements and economic headship transitions, the role of economic recession and how it influences these two facts has been understudied. Research has suggested that in the US context, recession leads to a decline in new households (Painter, 2010) as well as tendency for household types to become more complex among migrant groups (Taylor et al 2010).

Data and Methods

Data come from the Spanish Labor Force Survey (SLFS) collected by the Spanish Statistical National Institute. The LFS contains detailed information on about 65,000 households and around 200,000 individuals living in Spain and is collected every trimester. It is a survey focused on the labor market but it is also currently the most unique source for studying household composition in Spain in the inter-census years (Garrido, Requena and Toharia, 2000) with the added value of covering a series of consecutive years of observation. The LFS collects rich data on socio-demographic characteristics of household members including information in order to disentangle migrants, like country of birth, citizenship and years of residence in Spain.

Since the SLFS sample is renewed every six trimesters it allows for carrying out both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. First part of our analyses is based on the cross-sectional data and to avoid overlap in participants in the survey we selected one survey every six trimesters, starting from the first trimester of 2005 until the last available in 2011. Second, we expand the analyses to a longitudinal perspective and follow members of the same households during 18 consecutive months (six trimesters) in order to observe changes and dynamics over the time with regard to the increasing presence of female-headed households, especially among Latin-American migrants.

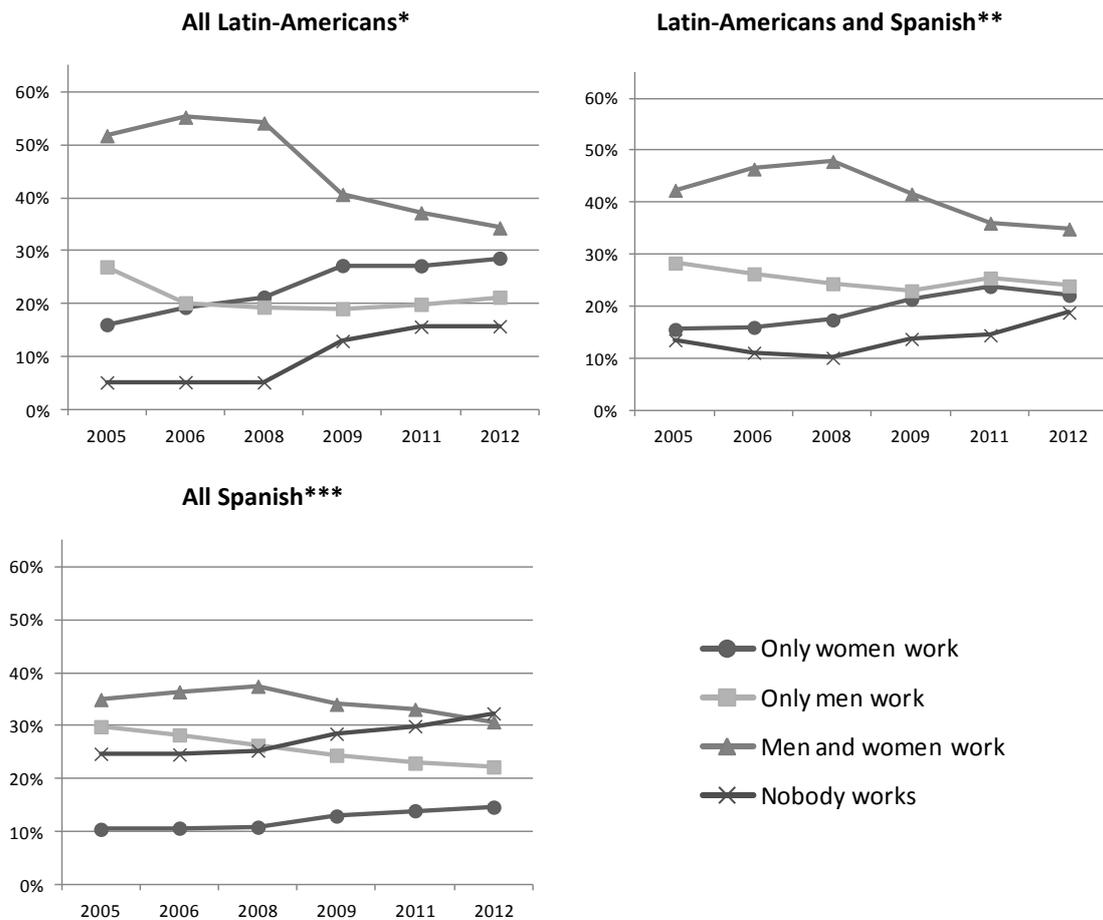
We distinguish between households in which only Latin-American adult migrants are living as well as households that are mixed in origin (Latin-American living with household members older than 16 and born in Spain). Those households where Latin-Americans are cohabiting with immigrants from a third country will be excluded from the analysis because of its small representation. For comparative purposes we furthermore include those households with only native born Spanish. Migrant status is defined based on the country of birth of the person and not citizenship, thus including first generation migrants only.

In the first stage of the analysis, we would like to explore female-headed households at individual and household level. We will analyze how these household structures are, how they change in parallel with the economic context, and which socio-demographic and labor market characteristics the women have. Additionally, we would like to understand different potential patterns by origin, especially as compared to the Spanish population. In a second stage, using the panel version of the SLFS, we will longitudinally explore transitions from husband-wife households to female single parent households to measure the impact of the economic crisis on living arrangements of Latin-American households.

Preliminary descriptive findings

Our final sample for the period 2005-2012 covers a total of 299,401 households with 999,323 individuals (excluding those where a single person lives). For 12,898 of these households lives at least one adult born in a Latin-American country. Among these households, 47.9% have all adult members born in Latin-America, 49% are comprised of adults from Latin-America and Spain, and only 3.1% of households are made up of families in which Latin-American adults live with immigrants from other origins.

Figure 1: Evolution of households by country of birth of all its adult members according to who is employed in the households.



*All adult members in the households were born in a Latin-American country

** Adult members in the households were born either in a Latin-American country or in Spain

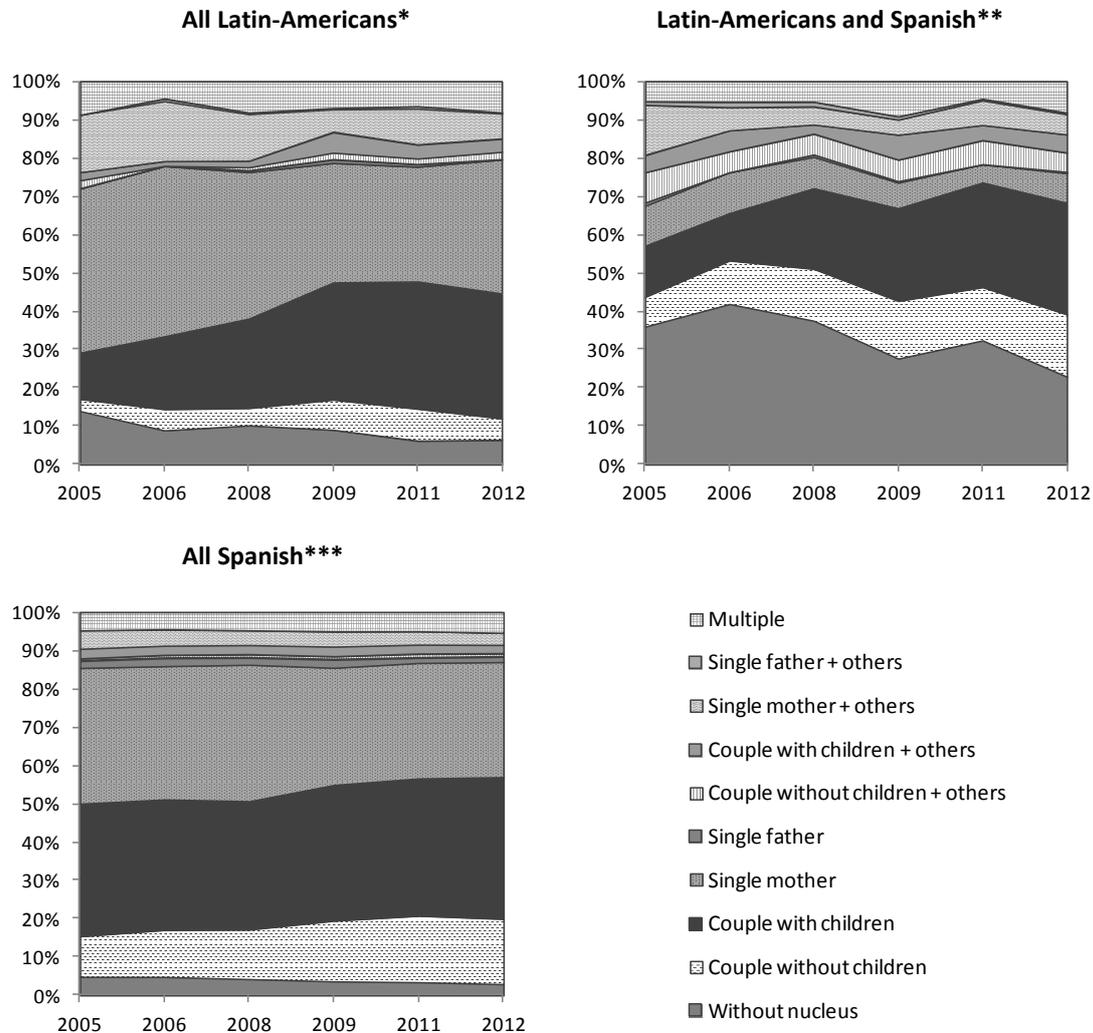
*** All adult members in the households were born in Spain

Source: Spanish LFS 2005-2011

For households in which all adult members were born in Latin-America, approximately 24% were economically female-headed. This proportion represents 20% in mixed-nationality households and only 12% in Spanish households. If we attend to its evolution during the observed period (Figure 1) we note how a larger increase in proportion of female-headed households occurs in Latin-American families, from 16% to 29%. This rise in households economically maintained by women is generally parallel to a decrease in the proportion of

households where only men work but especially with families where both men and women work as a consequence of the economic recession. It is remarkable as well the significant increase of the percentage of households with all its members unemployed or inactive.

Figure 2: Evolution of female headed households by country of birth of all adult members and type of living arrangements.



*All adult members (+16) in the households were born in a Latin-American country

** Adult members (+16) in the households were born either in a Latin-American country or in Spain

*** All adult members (+16) in the households were born in Spain

Source: Spanish LFS 2005-2011

A second preliminary finding we show in Figure 2 is the distribution of female-headed households over time, by type of living arrangements and origin of its adult members. The data show different pictures by origin. In female-headed households with at least one Latin-American member, extended and multiple household structures are more common than for Spanish ones. Heterogeneity is higher in mixed-origin households especially for extended living arrangements. There has been a significant decrease in the proportion of single-mothers living with or without other people and an increase in households of couples with children among

Latin-American households. This can primarily be explained by an increase in the number of households where the man is unemployed due to the economic recession and the household is currently economically maintained by the woman. The impact of family reunification and new unions can also help to explain this. These proportions represented 6 out of 10 cases at the beginning of the period and represent 4 out of 10 in 2012.

It is worth mentioning that the great majority of economically female-headed households are maintained by one woman and only a minority by two or more women. This fact varies from a 78% of Latin-American households to 87% and 89% for Spanish and mixed households respectively. This means that the proportion of households maintained by two or more women is doubled for Latin-American households (22%) in comparison with mixed (11%) and Spanish (13%) households.

However, when interpreting our findings one should realize that we cannot compare and assess the changes over time as these analyses refer to cross sectional data. We will add analyses on the longitudinal data to draw conclusions on how households become headed by women in times of economic crisis.

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