



Editorial

Couple and Family Relationships in Latin American Social Comparative Studies

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Abstract

Couple and family relationships have changed in different aspects in the recent history of Latin America. This paper reviewed comparative studies on couple and family relationships in Latin America published between 2001 and 2015. These studies used data from different countries. The contents analyzed in these investigations were divided in five main themes: (a) family size, structure and diversity; (b) couple and family internal dynamics, including couple and family formation and dissolution, gender and social roles, social care and protection, and couple and family violence; (c) couple, family and health; (d) couple, family and education; and, (e) couple, family and economy. Although comparative studies in Latin America are based mainly on data from national censuses and have a demographic approach, the comparative perspective is proposed as an important mean for the integration of diverse disciplines and the development of international cooperation in studies about couple and family in Latin America. Macro and micro perspectives, as well as quantitative and qualitative data, may complement each other and contribute to a more integrated knowledge about couple and family relationships in the region. Couple and family internal structure and dynamics are related to Latin American society and culture in diverse ways. Some possibilities and suggestions for future investigations are also presented.

Keywords: couple, family, comparative studies, Latin America

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Interpersonal relationships, including couple and family relationships, are fundamental for the social structure and dynamics of Latin American societies. In order to have a deeper and wider perspective of Latin American relationships, this paper reviews publications comparing data from different Latin American countries in themes related to couple and family relationships. This paper extends previous analysis made on friendship in comparative investigations in Latin America (Garcia, Bucher-Maluschke, Pérez-Angarita, & Pereira, 2016). Our assumptions are based on Hinde's (1997) contributions to relationship description and analyses. Hinde states that scientists should consider different levels of complexity, such as interactions, relationships, groups, as well as the environment and social and cultural structures. Therefore, a wide review of comparative Latin American family and couple studies may integrate data from different levels, including demographic, cultural, historical and social aspects of couple and family relationships.

However, comparative studies about Latin American couples and families, i.e. studies comparing couple and family relationships in different countries, are not frequent. For that reason, we aimed at reviewing and discussing

recent Latin American literature on couple and family relationships from a comparative perspective. Our sample of documents was searched and selected from several bases (Dialnet, DOAJ, Latindex, Psycodoc, Psycinfo, Redalyc, and Google Scholar). In order to be included in this review, the documents had to report data about couples and family in Latin America from a comparative perspective and be published between 2001 and 2015. The selected documents were subject to thematic analysis and the main themes are discussed ahead.

Latin American social comparative studies may provide important information for couple and family relationships in the continent, indicating similarities and differences among countries and suggesting new possibilities for future investigations. We assume that a wider framework may contribute not only to integrate knowledge about specific familial relationships in Latin America but may also foster new investigations, which include interdisciplinary and international cooperation. According to the literature reviewed, we divided the following analyses in five parts: (a) Family Size, Structure and Diversity; (b) Couple and Family Dynamics; (c) Couple, Family and Health; (d) Couple, Family and Education; and, (e) Couple, Family and Economy.

Family Size, Structure and Diversity

Recent changes in family size, structure and diversity in Latin America have been reported in several publications. In the beginning of the 21st century, [Arriagada \(2001\)](#) indicated several demographic changes in Latin American families, such as the reduction of the average family size, with less children, less multigenerational families, and more unipersonal households. [García and Rojas \(2004\)](#) also reported smaller households, following smaller fecundity, more nuclear families without children, unipersonal households and those that had configurations according to more advanced phases of the family life cycle. Configuration trends are different in diverse social groups and classes. For instance, family households with higher income have 2 or 3 persons less than those with lower income, as poor families usually have more children. Extended households are also more common among the poorer, and unipersonal in richer groups ([Arriagada, 2007](#)). Although contemporary Latin American families are getting smaller, significant dissimilarities are found among countries. During the second half of the decade of 2000, for instance, Uruguayan and Argentinean urban families had an average of three members, compared to an average of four or more members among Guatemalan, Honduran, and Paraguayan families ([García & De Oliveira, 2011](#)). Concerning household composition, nuclearization is taking place in many national contexts. On the other hand, single-person households may account up to 14% in countries with an older age structure, and mainly among the more privileged sectors ([García & Rojas, 2001](#)). According to [Aguirre \(2008\)](#), the average family size has decreased in the last decades. In sum, the Latin American family is becoming smaller, although changes may vary within different groups and among nations.

Family structure is also changing and becoming more and more diverse in Latin America. Changes include more couples without children and more elders living alone ([Arriagada, 2001](#)), more single person (predominantly female) households ([Chant, 2002](#)), a growing number of households headed by women has been reported ([Arriagada, 2001, 2002; Chant, 2002; García & Rojas, 2001](#)), and alternative family forms developed ([Aizpurúa, Jablonski, & Féres-Carneiro, 2007](#)). According to [Aguirre \(2008\)](#), family arrangements have diversified in the region in the last decades.

[Arriagada \(2007\)](#) lists the major structural changes that have affected urban Latin American families from 1990 to 2005 that led to diversification. The most important model of nuclear family (biparental with children) decreased

from 46.3% to 41.1%. Other family models found in 2005 were the extended families of three generations in the same household (21.7%), nuclear monoparental families, mainly headed by women (12.2%), unipersonal households (9.7%), and also nuclear families without children, households without marital nucleus and composed families. In most urban Latin American families, women are no longer exclusively housewives, since they take part in the labor market and contribute to family income. The more traditional model of nuclear family, with both parents, children and those that women take care of house chores on their own, represents 20.9% of Latin American urban households. Another trend is the increase in the number of families headed by women and more non-familial households, mainly unipersonal (6.7 to 9.7%).

Latin American countries were in different phases of the demographic transition, from incipient or moderate, to full and advanced stages (Yépez-Martínez, 2013), and a possible second demographic transition (Cienfuegos, 2014). Some data presented by Rico and Maldonado Valera (2011) reveal changes in family structure in Latin America. Between 1990 and 2008, most households were no longer nuclear biparental (from 51,7% to 42,2%), and there were less extended biparental households (from 14% to 12,3%). On the other hand, the number of monoparental households headed by women increased, as well as the number of divorces, time of celibacy, migration of family members, and more widowed women. There were also more nuclear households without children (7,8% to 10,8%), more unipersonal households (6,6% to 10,9%) and non-familial households in general, including unipersonal and those without marital nucleus (from 10,7% to 15,3%). Concerning the generational composition of households, the number of households without elders diminished (60,3% to 48,2%), and households with people from the same generation increased, as well as households without children.

Family diversity is an important aspect of Latin American families in comparative studies. This diversity may be related to socioeconomic dimensions or to national or regional dimensions. Arriagada (2002) refers to the diversity of families in different socioeconomic strata, and their heterogeneous structures, according to their type and the stage reached in the family life cycle. Diversity is associated with the increasing economic inequality between families, the various types of cultural changes to which families have been subjected to, including demographic changes, the increasing participation of women both in the labor market and in the social and political domains, as well as new types of familial configurations. Arriagada (2009) adds that ethnic and cultural diversity among and within countries may play an important role in such differences found.

On the other hand, family diversity occurs in different regions in the continent. García and Rojas (2001), for instance, have pointed out differences between the southern cone and other regions. Argentina, Uruguay and Chile are different regarding that people relatively have their first union later, the lower prevalence of consensual unions, smaller household size, and the relatively higher percentage of single-person units. Many Central American countries present higher prevalence of consensual unions.

Ullmann, Maldonado Valera, and Rico (2014) highlighted the diversity of family structures in Latin America according to socioeconomic situation. In all countries, there are more unipersonal households, less biparental nuclear households and more monoparental households headed by women (extended and nuclear). Changes found in the extreme ends of income realities are quite different. The increase of non-familial households (unipersonal and without a nucleus) and less biparental nuclear households is larger within higher strata. On the other hand, the less remarkable decrease in biparental nuclear households and the fast increase in monoparental households headed by women are more characteristic of lower strata. Families with children and child population are more represented in the lower strata.

Family diversity has also been attributed, at least partially, to socioethnic differences (Robichaux, 2007), subject to cultural practices of subaltern groups, having non-Iberian backgrounds (Robichaux, 2008). Oyarce and Del Popolo (2009) also pointed differences in indigenous households and families in Chile, Panama and Bolivia. Panama is the only country where the structure of indigenous households shows a pattern of extended families, compared to non-indigenous households, where nuclear families are predominant. The percentage of households led by indigenous women is lower in all three countries. In Bolivia, a large percentage of indigenous households are those with one person.

Finally, cohabitation and marriage have been a recurrent topic of investigation and discussion in Latin American comparative studies. Cohabitation in Latin America, especially in areas with larger indigenous and black populations, has always existed as alternatives to marriage (Esteve, Lesthaeghe, & López-Gay, 2012). Consensual unions in this region have historical roots, prevalence among all age groups, and status as a socially accepted context for childbearing, and high occurrence in Latin America and the Caribbean, ranging from 12% in Chile to 62% in the Dominican Republic (Castro-Martin, 2002). Historical cohabitation patterns among disadvantaged social and ethnic groups persist (Covre-Sussai, 2014). High levels of consensual union are found in Latin America (Ruiz-Salguero & Rodríguez-Vignoli, 2011) and cohabitation in Latin America is rising (Esteve, García-Román, & Lesthaeghe, 2012; Esteve, Lesthaeghe, & López-Gay, 2012). Consensual union increased in the 1990s in most Latin American countries, in all age groups and socioeconomic sectors (Rodríguez-Vignoli, 2004a).

Cohabitation among the lowest educated is related to low socioeconomic development, high social and gender inequality, and traditional values. In contrast, cohabitation among the highest educated is related to high socioeconomic development and low social and gender inequality (Covre-Sussai, 2014). Although it doesn't have the same social and legal status or stability as marriages, cohabitation is a typical marital pattern of Latin America and has been culturally tolerated. Consensual unions are increasing (Rodríguez-Vignoli, 2004a, 2004b). Adolescent unions tend to be consensual but they have decreased significantly over time in Central American countries even though adolescent births increased significantly among less-educated and poorer women (Remez, Singh, & Prada, 2009).

In sum, recent investigations have revealed that family size is shrinking in Latin America. Though, changes vary from country to country, and family structure is becoming more and more diverse, what is also related to different social and economic groups. The conjugal patterns of marriage and cohabitation have also suffered changes recently, revealing a complex context. As we mentioned before, these investigations are mainly related to demographic studies based on data from national censuses. Further investigations relating family structure and dynamics in comparative terms, including social and psychological studies, would contribute to a wider and interdisciplinary approach to couple and family relations in Latin America.

Couple and Family Dynamics

Some topics have received more attention regarding family dynamics, such as formation and dissolution of conjugal unions, gender and social roles, care and social protection, and couple and family violence.

The formation and dissolution of conjugal unions are at the basis of couple and family dynamics and both have been subject to historical changes in recent decades. In the 1990s and 2000s, researchers began to observe increased frequencies of never-married persons, separations, and divorces, as well as a rising age at first union

(García & De Oliveira, 2011). Arriagada (2001) also reported more divorces and recomposed families. Jelin (2005) observed smaller rates of marriage, more consensual unions, increasing age for first marriage, and more divorces. Chant (2002) also observed a mounting incidence of divorce and separation and García and Rojas (2001) recognized that marital dissolution increased in many countries. According to Cerrutti and Binstock (2009) marital instability is growing and consensual unions are more instable. Overall, the formation of conjugal unions has become less frequent or is taking place later in life, and dissolutions have increased. This context should be taken into account in investigations about romantic and conjugal relationships as important contextual factors.

It is not only the formation and dissolution of couples and families that have changed, but transformations in social and gender roles in family dynamics have also been reported. Arriagada (2002), for instance, recognizes more equal marital roles, with economic contribution of women and children to the households, and new relationship dynamics among parents and their children, with a larger acknowledgement of children rights and less hierarchy and submission. However, social and gender inequalities are still found in households: double shifts burdening women, family violence and less autonomy for women. Family dynamics also includes division of work, including the division of extra domestic and domestic work and caretaking, usually associated with traditional gender roles. In Latin America, the traditional family model with a sole male provider and a woman who is a wife and a mother devoted exclusively to housework and caretaking is changing, as well as female participation in decision-making and the control of women by male spouses (García & De Oliveira, 2011).

Another important theme refers to social care and protection associated with couples and families. In Latin America, the family has been considered as the basis of welfare providing support for elders, young people when leaving home and adolescent mothers (Sunkel, 2006). Reproduction during adolescence is increasing in Latin America, as well as the number of teenage mothers remaining in their family household. Further details about family support and variability according to socioeconomic groups have seldom been investigated comparatively in the region (Vignoli & Cobos, 2014). Latin American countries show a continued intergenerational support provided by the extended family. Despite the relatively high percentages of new generation adults residing for some time in extended households, the majority of them are found in a new placement (Esteve, García-Román, & Lesthaeghe, 2012). Familial protection and care are relevant considering the instable social and economic conditions in Latin America.

Family care and protection activities are also associated with gender inequality in Latin America (Ortega-Ponce, 2013). According to Aguirre (2008), in the last decades, there have been less households with women devoted exclusively to house chores, affecting possibilities of satisfying care needs in families. Del Valle (2014) informs that both those who are caregivers as well as those who receive care, such as children, elders, and disabled people, are more vulnerable in Latin America. In the case of elders, family, state and community provide care, though family is the traditional means, especially women. However, women insertion into the labor market is diminishing the capability of families to provide care (Huenchuan, 2009). Cecchini and Martínez (2011) include the labor market as providing social protection along with families and social and community organizations. Espejo, Figueira, and Rico (2010) report a crisis in caretaking due to economic and domestic activity and sexual division of work in households, since women need to conciliate both family and work, and provide care for children and elders. A smaller family structure also affects support for elders (Glaser, Agree, Costenbader, Camargo, Trench, Natividad, & Chuang, 2006).

The care and family protection of elders are also subject of investigation. [De Vos \(2014\)](#) showed that many childless elderly women in Latin America lived in extended family households, ranging from 36.6% in Argentina to 77.0% in Ecuador. In another study, [Colombo et al. \(2014\)](#) investigated the social support network of widows in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Equator, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. These authors found that 62.6% lost their husbands because of a terminal illness and 65.5% took care of them. It was also found that 86.4% of subjects received more emotional support from their family of origin and that 77.4% did not engage in new romantic relationships. Colombo et al. observed that after their spouse's death and due to feelings of loneliness women took refuge within the family. At the end of such process, women usually lost contact with their husbands family as well as increased their social participation.

Finally, couple and family violence forms another theme investigated in Latin American comparative studies. Based on data from six countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Peru), the prevalence of intimate partner physical violence varied from 13% to 39% ([Bard, 2012](#)). In these countries, the risk factors are higher for less educated, middle class, employed, cohabitating women, who do not make joint decisions with their partner, and have three or more children. Women who experience intimate partner violence are also more likely to physically discipline their children ([Bard, 2012](#)). Concerning familial characteristics and the likelihood of experiencing domestic violence in Latin American countries, cohabitation, female-dominant decision making, and partner alcohol use were positively associated with domestic violence ([Flake & Forste, 2006](#)).

Family violence was considered a serious social problem in ten Latin American countries ([Sagot, 2005](#)), where women suffer physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence. Men of all generations and in all kinds of relationships with women are the perpetrators in everyday life. During childhood, perpetrators are fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, and other men close to the family; and, boyfriends or partners are added to the list in the course of adolescence. On many occasions, mothers also resorted to physical and psychological punishment toward these women ([Sagot, 2005](#)). According to [Rondon \(2003\)](#), violence against women is widespread and highly tolerated in Latin America, and it stems from deep cultural roots, including traditional religious culture and patriarchal violence.

Essentially, family dynamics refers to processes affecting family formation, functioning and dissolution. Family dynamics has also changed along the years, not only related to formation and dissolution patterns, but also concerning gender and social roles, care and social protection, and couple and family violence, as we noted throughout the literature reviewed. New gender and social roles as well as the role of family in social care and protection have also been associated with changes in society and economy. Regarding care and social protection, families have a central participation, and women are the main care suppliers while children and elders are the main care receptors. However, new social and economic structures have affected the potential of family to provide care, especially by women. Finally, violence also affects couples and families, and the main victims are women and children. Comparisons have contributed to map different kinds of violence, as well as demographic and social contexts that seem to promote interpersonal violence. Although couple and family are still important in Latin American context, changes have affected their structure and dynamics and more comparative investigations are necessary to have a more detailed description of the Latin American variations in structure and internal dynamics due to recent changes, based on quantitative and qualitative investigations, merging different disciplines and methodologies.

Couple, Family and Health

A wide number of publications reports the importance of interpersonal relationships for health (e.g. [Garcia, Macedo, & Nunes, 2013](#)). On the other hand, health status may also affect relationships. Although a series of questions could be investigated comparatively concerning family and health, two themes investigated show how health in couple and family life is related to family planning and domestic violence.

Family planning is connected with couple and family health usually due to abortion. A few comparative Latin American studies deal with family planning and abortion. Family planning has been considered of limited access in some Latin American countries, such as Paraguay and Peru ([Sharma, Gribble, & Menotti, 2005](#)). Abortion has been investigated in comparative Latin American studies and about 4.2 million abortions were conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2008, mainly in South America ([Kulczycki, 2011](#)), causing more than 1,000 deaths and 500,000 hospitalizations per year. Despite the existence of legal restrictions, most people in Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia) support abortion under a greater number of circumstances than are permitted ([Yam, Dries-Daffner, & Garcia, 2006](#)).

On the other hand, domestic violence and gender roles in family and couples are another threat for couple and family health, affecting also children's health. In Latin American countries, violence is the best interaction predictor of poor nutrition and lack of female autonomy is the best predictor of higher mortality. Joint discussion of family planning and joint decision-making about household issues are also predictive of child health ([Heaton & Forste, 2008](#)). The quality of couple and family relationships affect their children's health.

Couple, Family and Education

Couple, family and education are related in Latin American comparative studies and affect each other. The first widely recognized effect of education on family is to postpone marriage and children. Education affects nuptiality and fertility, contributing to the delay in marriage and fertility, expected in a context of educational expansion ([Esteve & Flores-Paredes, 2014](#)). Education substantially delays first marriage and first birth and Latin American women with secondary levels of schooling are significantly less likely to experience early marriage or parenthood relative to those with no schooling ([Heaton, Forste, & Otterstrom, 2002](#)). Further access to education by women may result in more women postponing age of first union, and age at first child birth, and a smaller number of children ([Schkolnik, 2004](#)).

Another influence of education is on couple formation. Educative homogamy affects consensual unions and marriages in Latin America ([López-Ruiz, Esteve, & Cabré, 2009](#)). Among married couples, educational homogamy continues to be higher than for those who cohabit, but in recent decades, the difference has narrowed substantially in Latin America ([Esteve, McCaa, & López, 2013](#)). The tendency to form educational homogamy unions is higher at the extremes of the educational hierarchy ([López-Ruiz, Esteve-i-Palós, & Cabré-i-Plá, 2008](#)). In this case, the level of formal education affects directly couple formation.

On the other hand, some studies have shown that family structure affects educational outcomes of children and adolescents besides other characteristics as self-efficacy and achievement orientation which may affect educational outcomes. In Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Panama, adolescents who live in single-mother families (about 20%) have significantly lower school attendance and attainment than adolescents who live with both parents

(Arends-Kuening & Duryea, 2006). In another investigation, family structure affected sixth-grade achievement in mathematics and reading in some Latin American countries. Students living in two-parent families obtain higher achievement levels than other students, even after controlling the student's socioeconomic level and academic background (Cervini, Dari, & Quiroz, 2014). In general, parenting behaviors affect differently Latin American adolescents in different countries. A perception of greater parental punitiveness by Chilean youth negatively predicted self-efficacy and achievement orientation. Parental punitiveness and permissiveness negatively predicted self-efficacy among Ecuadorian youth. Many culture differences were found within and between Chilean and Ecuadorian families (Ingoldsby, Schvaneveldt, Supple, & Bush, 2004).

The mutual influence of education and couple and family relationships could be further explored in comparative investigations in Latin America, revealing different possibilities. Another point is that couple and family relationships should be considered as evolving systems as educational national levels change. Complementarily, understanding how couple and family relationships may affect educational outcomes of children and adolescents is also central for promoting changes in educational projects in Latin America.

Couple, Family and Economy

Couple and family relationships are also deeply affected by economic factors and may also interfere in the economic outcomes of their members. Socio-demographic and socio-economic aspects are interwoven in the studies about family transformations in Latin American countries across time. However, some examples of comparative social-economic works indicate how family structure and dynamics have been affected by economic changes (economic development or poverty advancement). These papers usually integrate macro and micro economic perspectives, or how macro-economic changes affect family structure and dynamics as well as how family could deal with diverse economic situations.

Family plays an important role in national economic life and planning. Family and public agents interact in the economic dimension. Uthoff Botka (2010), for instance, observed the prevalence of family transferences for the young and public transferences for the older in five Latin American countries. The relations between family and economy are complex inasmuch as diverse demographic and economic scenarios affect differently family life in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Mexico, Honduras and Nicaragua according to social and ethnic groups, countries and regions (Ariza & de Oliveira, 2008).

The effects of economy on couple and family life are quite important. Economic development is associated with higher educational achievement, participation in extra-domestic economic activities, age for marriage, family planning, new gender relations, sexual division of housework, power and authority within family. Poverty reinforces gender inequalities in family life. Authors also point out the need of comparative data about family organization and dynamics from countries in the region to analyze the consequences of sociodemographic and economic changes in family life, as labor division, power relations between genders and generations. In this case, economic factors may be associated with family transformations in Latin America. National differences have also been observed in terms of gender distribution of total time dedicated to work, both paid and unpaid, by families in Mexico, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, for example (Campaña, Gimenez-Nadal, & Molina, 2015).

Latin American comparative studies on family and economy have indicated that economic aspects affect family life differently in diverse groups. These investigations usually focus on poverty and ways to overcome it. Some

processes have been described, such as the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Aldaz-Carroll & Morán, 2001), indicating that poverty tends to be inherited by children from their parents in Latin American countries. Besides, this kind of association of economic conditions and family organization, mutual influence of education and family deserves further investigation.

In these investigations, economic and educational factors are also considered together. For instance, Aldaz-Carroll and Morán (2001) consider that family factors are important in the educational achievement of poor children and on their expected income. This study also shows that poor children with fewer siblings, whose parents are more educated, with higher household income, and living in urban areas are more likely to complete secondary education and escape the poverty cycle. On the other hand, children of single adolescent mothers, or who did not attend a preschool program are less likely to complete secondary education. Additional family factors affecting educational performance are domestic violence and ethnicity. In another investigation, national differences have been observed in intergenerational inequality transmission, also involving relations between work, family and years of schooling in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico (Ríos, 2007).

Family structure and dynamics are related to education and economy. Besides general transformations in family associated with economic changes, like new work organizations and power relations, some comparative studies have investigated how family affects intergenerational poverty, for instance. Kliksberg (2005) demonstrated a strong positive correlation between the family, violence, education, and health in Latin America.

In the last sections, it was possible to observe a complex system of relations involving couple and family and economy and education, along with internal family dynamics, including social roles, work division and domestic violence. Comparative studies may contribute to investigate these factors in different groups and countries, generating a wider and more diversified range of data, what may help to develop also methodologic and theoretical advances. Comparative investigations in Latin America may contribute to a new level of knowledge about couple and family relationships, mainly in their social, economic, and cultural aspects.

International Cooperation and the Participation of International Organizations

Fifty-nine references were included in this review. Twenty-seven references had only one author and 32 had two or more authors. In 26 references, the authors were from the same country and only in six cases authors were from different countries. Some partnerships did not include a Latin American country, as in Aldaz-Carroll and Morán (2001) which was between UK and USA. Other four references had cooperation between a Latin American country and one or more countries from other continents, as Brazil and Australia (Aizpurúa, Jablonski, & Féres-Carneiro, 2007), Spain, USA and Costa Rica (Esteve, McCaa, & López, 2013), USA and Colombia (Remez, Singh, & Prada, 2009), and UK, USA, Brazil, Philippines, and Taiwan (Glaser et al., 2006). In only one paper, the cooperation was exclusively among Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Colombo et al., 2014). It could be highlighted here that, although the subject is one of interest for several Latin American countries, international cooperation as in international co-authorship, is still incipient since only five papers out of 59 presented international cooperation with the participation of Latin American countries. Moreover, intraregional cooperation was restricted to one publication.

Thirty-nine works were published as papers in scientific journals from different knowledge fields. Twenty references were published or made available by other institutions. For instance, CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America, United Nations) was responsible for 15 publications, sometimes in cooperation with other international agencies, such as the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), the *Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development* (BMZ) of Germany, and the German Society for International Cooperation. One reference was published by the *Latin American Council of Social Sciences* (CLACSO), another one by the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) and other by the Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), Germany. Finally, two were doctoral dissertations.

We would suggest that more efforts are needed in order to have knowledge production from Latin American universities about couples and families from a comparative perspective. We would also like to point out the prevalence of demographic studies compared to only a few works found related to Psychology or Sociology.

Discussion

Although couple and family studies are common in Latin America, studies comparing data from different Latin American countries about couple and family relationships are not frequent. Comparative studies are devoted mainly to historical changes in family size, structure and diversity; to some aspects of internal family dynamics, such as formation and dissolution of conjugal bonds, social roles in family life, care and violence; and, to couple and family and social issues such as health, education and economy.

As it was highlighted by [Garcia, Bucher-Maluschke, Pérez-Angarita, and Pereira \(2016\)](#) referring to comparative studies on friendship in Latin America, scientific cooperation is also important for the development of comparative couple and family studies in the continent. Studies integrating couple and family relationships and friendships would also contribute to an integrated science of human relationships, in light of social, economic and cultural diverse contexts.

Although comparative data may contribute to the development of our knowledge about interpersonal relationships, the conduction of comparative investigation may pose a challenge, as data collection throughout different countries may be difficult. The possibility of integrating qualitative and quantitative data should also be pursued in these comparative studies, using data from national and local samples, from different cultural and social groups. Therefore, international and regional scientific cooperation is highlighted ([Garcia, Acevedo-Triana, & López-López, 2014, 2015](#)). We as well consider that dyadic aspects of interpersonal relationships should be complemented by data about social and cultural influences on these relationships. In this sense, we agree with [Hinde \(1997\)](#) that the investigation of interpersonal relationships also includes interactions, groups and society, along with the environment and social and cultural structures.

Latin American comparative studies on couple and family structure and dynamics are still incipient. Several aspects deserve further investigation uniting diverse perspectives and methodologies. Based on demographic data, there is a wide range of investigations that could be planned and conducted in comparative perspective in Latin America. For instance, the effects on internal and external relationships of structural changes in family, including family size, structure and diversity would add to our knowledge of human relationships in different contexts. The possibility of integrating micro and macrosocial phenomena may also contribute to the development of our knowledge about Latin American couple and family relationships. The investigation of how social and historical changes affect

relationship patterns of couples and families in Latin America is also necessary. Finally, comparative studies may contribute to understand how cultural, social and economic aspects affect couple and family relationships in Latin America.

Final Remarks

Interpersonal relationships, including couple and family relationships, are fundamental for the social structure and dynamics of Latin American society and comparative studies may contribute to our knowledge of couple and family relationships in the continent, helping to understand the effects of social, economic, historical and cultural contexts, fostering interdisciplinary studies and international cooperation in the area. As comparative studies usually indicate historical changes in couple and family structure, it is expected that family dynamics, including interpersonal relationships, are also in constant change. The possibility of investigating relationships in the context of social, economic and population studies, besides diverse cultural and national contexts, is important. Likewise, interdisciplinary as well as international cooperation may contribute to the advancement of couple and family studies in Latin America.

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Competing Interests

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