

“The Family, a Resource for Society”
Technical Datasheet: Results from Research in Spain
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GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The certainty that the family is the principal resource and source of security, well-being and happiness for individuals, and hence for society, has guided the development of this project. As indicated in the introduction, “This is the case to the degree that the family itself consists in a relationship of full and stable reciprocity between the sexes and between generations. Indeed, it is this type of relationship which promotes and facilitates the transmission of the patrimony of civilization acquired in past generations, including the diverse forms of human, social and spiritual capital which are made concrete and manifest themselves in the different personal and social virtues. This transmission makes civil and political coexistence possible”.

With the express objective of analyzing the social value of the family in the concrete case of Spain, we have performed the survey upon which this report is based, in order to be able to quantify certain aspects relating to this question.

The family environment and the social capital of the family

The degree of participation in associative activities, in contrast with what occurs in the English-speaking world, is reduced. This low level of participation is corroborated by the low value that extra-familial solidarity receives, understanding this as aid given to persons who do not live in the same home. Nevertheless, this low extra-familial solidarity enters, apparently, into contradiction with the relatively high values given to collaboration with non-family members concerning concrete issues (listening, helping with problems among couples or family problems, taking care of their children and of elderly persons). In reality, what it expresses is a high degree of sacrifice and solidarity, although this is not manifested through associations, as is made evident by the studies concerning, for instance, the collaboration of grandparents in the care of children, or the family circle itself in these moments of economic crisis.

Important contrasts and divergences were detected at the frontiers of what should be considered ‘family’, and concerning the frontiers between the public and private spheres. 59% of those interviewed consider that the family, in addition to being a private choice, is an institution with public value, against 41% who consider that it is a reality which belongs only to the private sphere of the individuals. These percentages may be the result of an unclear phrasing of this question, or that the issue itself is lived as confusing by survey participants, or it could be the case that, in reality, society is as divided as the response to the question shows. Digging deeper in the socio-demographic profiles, we find that married persons with children consider that the family is a public good to a clearly higher degree than unmarried

persons without children. Young persons are most abundant in this second group, for whom the family is a private reality. On the other hand, 9 out of 10 persons interviewed consider that parents are the principal educators of their children. It appears that the public recognition and protection of the family should not collide with parents' right to educate their own children.

An elevated percentage of the interviewed population (68%) consider that a family can also be formed by a homosexual couple. In part, it could be assumed that the great importance that the family has for the subjects makes it such that all kinds of affective-sexual relationships can be included in this category, but another type of interpretation is also possible. While it is clear that social acceptance of homosexuality has risen, along with the "formal" disposition to admit that a couple of the same sex can marry, only a small percentage of our society is prepared to accept the consequences of what they claim to admit. The majority of those who accept homosexual marriage do not share, or have not interiorized, or are not conscious of, the consequences which come along with placing homosexual marriage on the same level as that of heterosexual marriage. It cannot be ignored that many of the affirmations in favor of homosexual marriage have not been completely interiorized and are instead a product of the environment, of current fashion, and of the perception of what is politically correct – a phenomenon which is, on the other hand, known to Sociology.

The attitudes of society regarding the family are not static, but have rather undergone change. To a large degree, many of the changes are influenced by the experiences people have had of life, as well as by the persons surrounding them, but also by the messages that are transmitted by the communications media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines, movies, advertising, the Internet, etc.), the ideas which are transmitted in schools, as well as public actions, whether via regulations and laws, or via public awareness campaigns. Legislation can be based on a social reality which already exists, but their implementation can also foster changes in these realities.

Couple relationships

Spaniards show a high degree of satisfaction with their partners, although there are important differences according to the sex and age of the participants. The couple relationship appears to be seen as the redoubt of personal intimacy and free affective and sexual communication for the couple, while only 4.4% believe it to be important to protect this relationship via the rigorous formality and secure public character of marriage.

In the survey, participants are asked about the importance given to certain purposes of the couple relationship –commitment to the stability of the union, the personal satisfaction of the members of the couple, and giving birth to and educating their children- and in all cases the value given is very high. This is of an outstanding importance, since in all cases the values are above 9. The purpose most highly valued is commitment to the stability of the union, which reaches an average value of 9.4. Except in one case, the generation from 35 to 39 years of age, those surveyed indicated a greater concern in their parents' generation than in their own regarding this issue. The purpose of seeking the personal satisfaction of the couple has an average value which is very close to the search for stability, at 9.3. In this case, and contrary to what occurred with the perception concerning stability, those surveyed –in all generations– have the perception that their parents gave less importance than they do to seeking the satisfaction of the members of the couple. The difference is especially notable in

the generations which have 35-39 years of age and 40-44 years of age. The purpose of having and educating children has an average value of 9.2. And in the case of the parents, in all generations the value is above that of those interviewed, i.e. they consider that their parents gave more importance to having and educating children.

The importance given to the purpose of having and raising children, to the commitment to the stability of the union, and to the fact of being married:

a.) is greater among those participants who have children than among those who don't; furthermore, the more children they have, the greater the importance that they give to these items.

b.) At lower levels of education, greater importance is given to the purpose of having and educating children.

c.) The more religious the survey participant, the more importance is given to the fact of being married.

d.) The averages according to the political positions of those surveyed indicate very significant differences in the importance given to these three items, being especially notable that of the fact of being married for the couple relationship.

In marriage, either with recourse to the different types of unions or societies of coexistence, a harmonious space is sought in which the protagonists can show their affection, express their joy and encounter happiness.

Parent – child relationships

The results encountered with regard to what parent-child relations are like in the Spanish population -attending to the typology of families according to their structure, family atmosphere, and parental identity and skill- confirm the tendency observed in other studies performed in Spain.

The persons surveyed value very positively (scores do not go lower than 8.1 out of 10) the actions that foster a positive and satisfactory family atmosphere, such as: coming to an agreement in order to manage the care, assistance and education of the children, sharing the same childrearing values, living in an optimistic and serene environment, avoiding confrontation in order to maintain satisfaction for the couple, valuing positively the time dedicated to the care of the children, and having time free of work in order to dedicate it to family life. It can also be deduced that in parallel to this valuation of the ideal situation, the case is that in fact it has not been possible to overcome the stress that families can suffer due to a lack of division of labor in domestic life and not having working conditions which permit a greater attention to the family.

The younger generations reflect a better parent-child communication than they had with their own parents, and which is manifested in being able to freely talk between both. In addition, the survey showed good communication between the members of the couple. Those surveyed consider that the primary meaning of the family relation is to offer help to family members in any situation, leaving in second place the requirements placed upon them by others. It is also clear that at times they are not able to offer the help that they would wish, and that a large percentage of parents cannot count on the collaboration of the grandparents. These responses permit us to conclude that, in general, there is an aspiration to achieve an

atmosphere of confidence within the family, and that in fact this is achieved. This is confirmed by the high value given to stability, similar to that given to satisfaction between the partners of the couple, aspirations which indicate a high motivation for taking care of the family, creating a very favorable context for the education of the children, at least within the realm of the desirable.

We encountered a generalized consciousness of the importance of parenthood and the priority of the education of the children among the functions of the parents. They see themselves as able to educate their children, although at the same time they believe that it is more difficult to educate than it was for the generation of their parents. Priority is given to an educational style in which parents explain the reasons why something should be done, and parents are conscious of the importance of being good examples for their children. Dialogue is strengthened as a means of education. There is a clear variation noted with regard to the prior generation due to a context and style in which it was more clear what had to be done and what values and norms had to be lived. It is notable that there is a greater rejection of permissive education among the current generation in comparison with the preceding one.

On the basis of the responses concerning social capital we can detect certain ideas concerning what current education in social virtues really is. In general, it can be observed that a family context predominates which favors sociability, but within its internal sphere. In the realm of the desirable, certain crucial values which favor social relations are esteemed very highly, such as honesty, respect for the law, sacrifice for others, solidarity and generosity, but the perception is that the previous generation was better able to educate in these values.

Work – family relations

The ideal relationship between family and work, expressed in the survey as the participation to a greater or lesser degree of both members of the couple in the labor market, presents response profiles differing principally by sex. Women opt for options that imply the presence of one of the two persons in the home, while the men show a greater dispersion in their ideals, which ultimately reflects a greater importance of the working world in their plans for life. Academic qualifications, having children, and that one of the children is very young are factors that affect the feminine ideal, but which nonetheless do not alter the masculine ideal in a substantial way.

The coincidence between the ideal and the reality of the family in the distribution of the working activity of the two members of the couple is generally elevated, and even more so among those women who have, at least, one small child.

When the Spanish population is asked about the weight that work and family have had in their choices, confronting these realities, the first conclusion is that the results are coherent. The family is the most valued institution, such that it is logical that the respondents answer that they have given precedence to the family over work. However, when we look more closely at the issue, we can identify a profile characterized by having prioritized the family still more in their decisions. These are the women, especially if they have children and consider themselves religious.

The analysis of the distribution of family-related tasks reflects, on the one hand, the existence of an ideal plane based on the equality between the two sexes, and on the other hand, a real

plane based on the division of tasks which, nevertheless, only the women highlight. Given how the question is phrased, we cannot conclude that it is precisely the women who take on a greater protagonism in household tasks, although we know this from other surveys. What we can conclude is that there is a differential perception by sex: for the men, the casual division of tasks is dominant, even when there are children in the home.

The agreement in considering that work-family balance has a great relevance in the lives of family members is very high. Nonetheless, seeing this balance as a path in order to achieve personal aspirations is more notable among those persons who position themselves to the right on the political spectrum, and among those men who consider themselves religious. Believing that this balance is important for raising children has a clearly feminine profile, and the men who ascribe to this point of view are those who consider themselves religious.

Family and social virtues

According to the results of the survey, Spaniards consider the family to be a basic resource of society: both in people's experience as well as in their desires, the family is the institution which transmits to its members the attitudes, behaviors and aspirations which make civil and political coexistence possible.

For the great majority of those interviewed, their family of origin has been highly capable of transmitting attitudes of honesty and respect (9.3 out of 10); confidence (8 out of 10) and the capacity for sacrifice (8.9 out of 10). This general positive evaluation is intensified even more in the younger generations and in those who consider themselves most religious. Political affiliation does not affect significantly the consideration of the family as a transmitter of social virtues.

On the other hand, those who have lived in an intact family refer to a greater degree to the family experience as a place for learning honesty and respect for the law, the capacity to sacrifice oneself for others and to help those who are in need. Those whose parents lived together without being married and those who grew up with a single parent show a somewhat lesser degree of agreement with this reality.

More than half of those interviewed think that the family today is less able to foster social virtues among its members. Only 12% think that the family is in better conditions today than in the past for transmitting these virtues. This pessimism abounds above all amongst those who consider themselves most religious and politically to the right. Perhaps they are manifesting here their concerns about the most recent social, political and legislative changes.

Family and social institutions

The majority of the surveyed population consider that the family is able to contribute to the development of the country. The degree of agreement is notable and clear: more than 78% of those interviewed valued this capacity with a 10, a 9 or an 8 on the scale from 1 to 10. The role of the family as a shock absorber for the problems arising from the current situation of crisis is, probably, influencing this highly positive evaluation.

The family as an institution receives an evaluation which is clearly superior to the rest of the social institutions considered in the survey; only educational institutions received a similar evaluation. The forces of law and order, businesses, the communications media, public administrations, judges, religion, banks and politicians receive worse evaluations from the perspective of being able to contribute to the development of the country.

No significant differences were encountered in the evaluation of the family in accordance with the socio-demographic characteristic of those surveyed; in other words, men and women, young people and the elderly, whatever their marital state might be, present very similar values. We can only note that, the greater the level of education, less value was given –in relative terms; the values given are always very high- to the family; the relationship with their political position is less clear, but in contrast, religiousness does make a difference: the lowest evaluations are found among those who consider themselves least religious, and the highest, among those who define themselves as very religious.

Finally, from the apparent contradiction between this elevated evaluation of the family as an institution able to contribute to the development of the country, on the one hand, and the relatively low percentage of persons who consider that the family is an institution important for society (50%) and not merely a private affair, on the other, we can deduce that the family is highly valued for what it implies for personal and social development, but there are those, identifying the public sphere with the sphere of control and responsibility of the State, who believe that the family is not an institution subject to the “logic of the public sphere”, without thereby negating or ignoring the importance of the family in general for life in society.

Operative implications of the results obtained

From the results obtained via the analysis of the survey responses and the discussion among the participants in the project, we can draw various implications of great importance and depth.

The results suggest the importance of continuing to study, deepening our analysis of, and explaining the social functions that the family performs in contemporary society. To define or highlight what these functions are and demonstrate their effects and influence on the correct development of social capital appears, today more than ever, to be urgently called for. In the context of the apparent consensus concerning the great value of the family, there also appears to be a general lack among the citizenry of the tools necessary for living family life with complete success, given the increase in the number of divorces, and the earliness with which they occur.

The resurrection of the prestige of marriage cannot come about other than by the rediscovery of natural or real marriage. In this context, in which we observe a certain abandonment of marriage systems, and a corresponding emptying of the notion of marriage itself, the canonical legal expression of marriage inserts itself as a spearhead, offering its structure, its properties, its ends, its peculiarities and its corresponding techniques.

It appears that the problem is more one of education in values and of morality than of sociological valuation, which suggests the necessity of remaining committed to all those

means that contribute to education in marriage and family values. In the face of the contemporary crisis of the identity of marriage, it is necessary to be more aggressively involved in the current legal, scientific and multidisciplinary panorama which studies marriage, focusing the majority of energy on the strengthening of an effective system of training and education for a correct consent to, and understanding of, what marriage is. The survey results show clearly that the Christian anthropological basis continues to be very much alive, and it is present in the inertia of behaviors relating to marriage and the family, as is seen in the judgments of those interviewed concerning the transmission of values. This means that it is possible to act with the objective of strengthening these bases in order to avoid the danger that they become diluted in the tension of the current-day relativist society.

Another aspect to emphasize is that of the differences between theoretical perception and reality, between opinions and the living circumstances of persons; it is not possible to analyze these questions separately from the context in which the survey was carried out. These differences show up in a particular way in the results related to the relationship between parents and children, education, and also in the perception of new forms of cohabitation, including the topic of homosexuality. Thus, in the case of homosexual families, it is not clear that we are in the presence of true social acceptance: it could rather be the case that people do not see any justification for discrimination or differing treatment.