

HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE AS A RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENTS :  
EVIDENCE FROM THE 1980s URBAN MEXICO

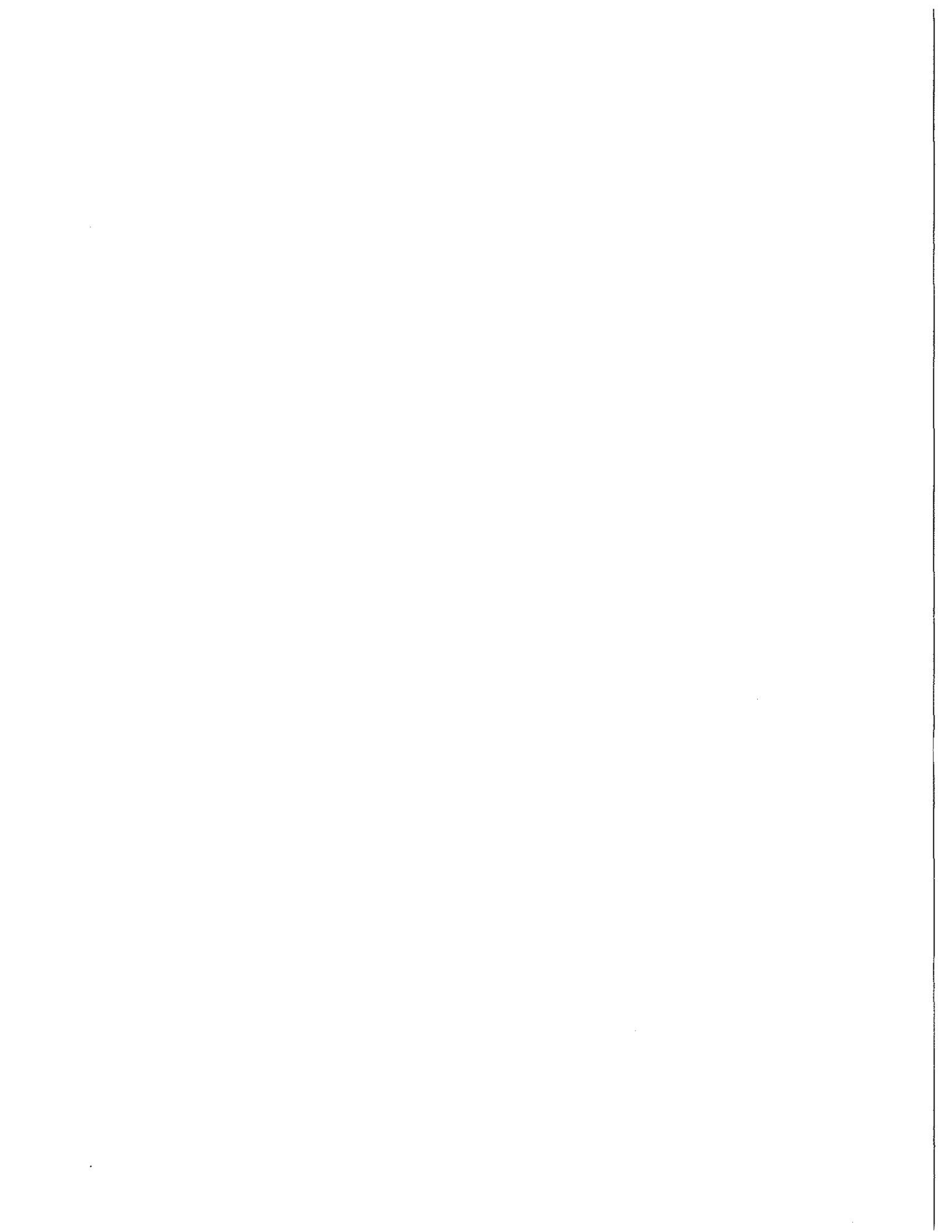
by

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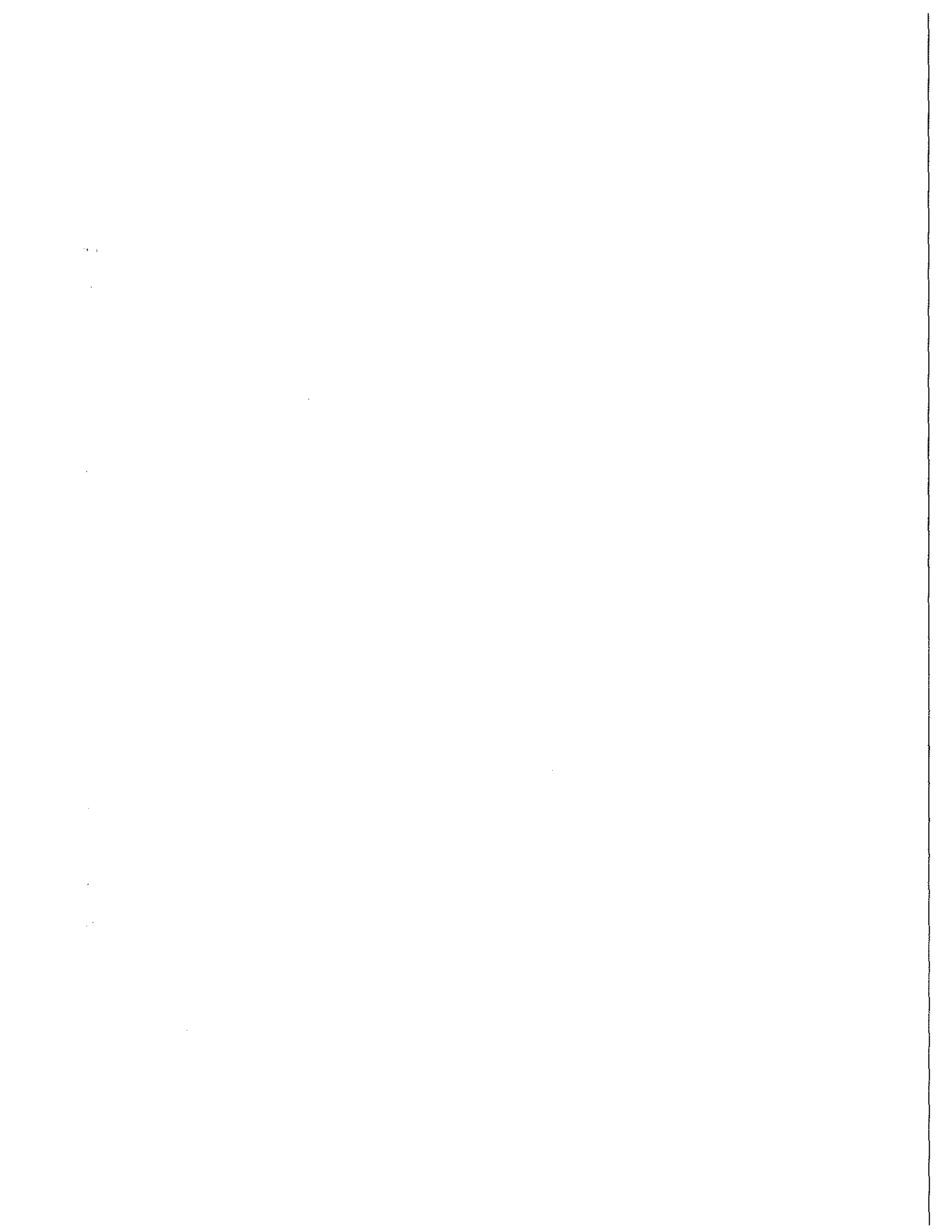


## Introduction

The type of households that individuals form is an important determinant of many economic, social, and demographic outcomes. Consumption, savings, labor force participation of women, child care, and health care are only a few examples of the factors that are influenced by the organization of households. That household structures differ from place to place, over time, and across the stage of the life cycle of individuals is well known. We have less knowledge about what determines that households take the particular forms that they do, about differences in the determinants across countries, and about the effect that public policies can have on the organization of households.

This paper attempts to add to our knowledge on household formation by beginning to examine the determinants of the structure of households in urban areas of Mexico -- in particular, those in which women with young children live. We choose this group of women because of our interest in applying our analysis to factors related to women's allocation of time, such as between market activities and child care. We focus on urban areas because of the increased labor market activities in such settings. We present analyses that constitute an exploratory effort, as part of a long-standing interest in female labor force participation. Ultimately, the goal is to increase understanding of the interrelations among female employment, fertility, and the factors that affect women's welfare, including the structure of households.

Our empirical analyses use two cross-sectional national surveys of Mexico. In an attempt to capture the changes in household formation patterns, we observe the



determinants of household structures in two points in time, 1982 and 1987, covering a period of economic deterioration for urban areas in Mexico.

The paper describes the variety of household structures in urban Mexico, and the association between household forms and demographic, social, and economic characteristics. First, we outline a basic conceptual framework to examine the determinants of household structures in developing countries. Second, we describe trends in household structure and other relevant variables, using data from the two surveys. Third, we use multivariate regression models to examine the correlates of household structure, comparing the covariates in both surveys. Finally, we discuss our results and the possible implications for other demographic behaviors of interest, such as employment of women and child care. We also provide brief considerations for further research.

### Conceptual Framework

We adopt the standard definition of household as a co-resident group of individuals regardless of their relationship by blood, affinity or marriage. Generally speaking, a household is formed by individuals sharing eating and sleeping quarters, and a common budget. We refer to household structure as the type of organization in which individuals live. We define a structure as extended if one or more permanent members of the household is not a member of the nuclear family of the household head.

To analyze household structure as an endogenous or choice variable, we adopt household production theory, considering the household as a unit that combines

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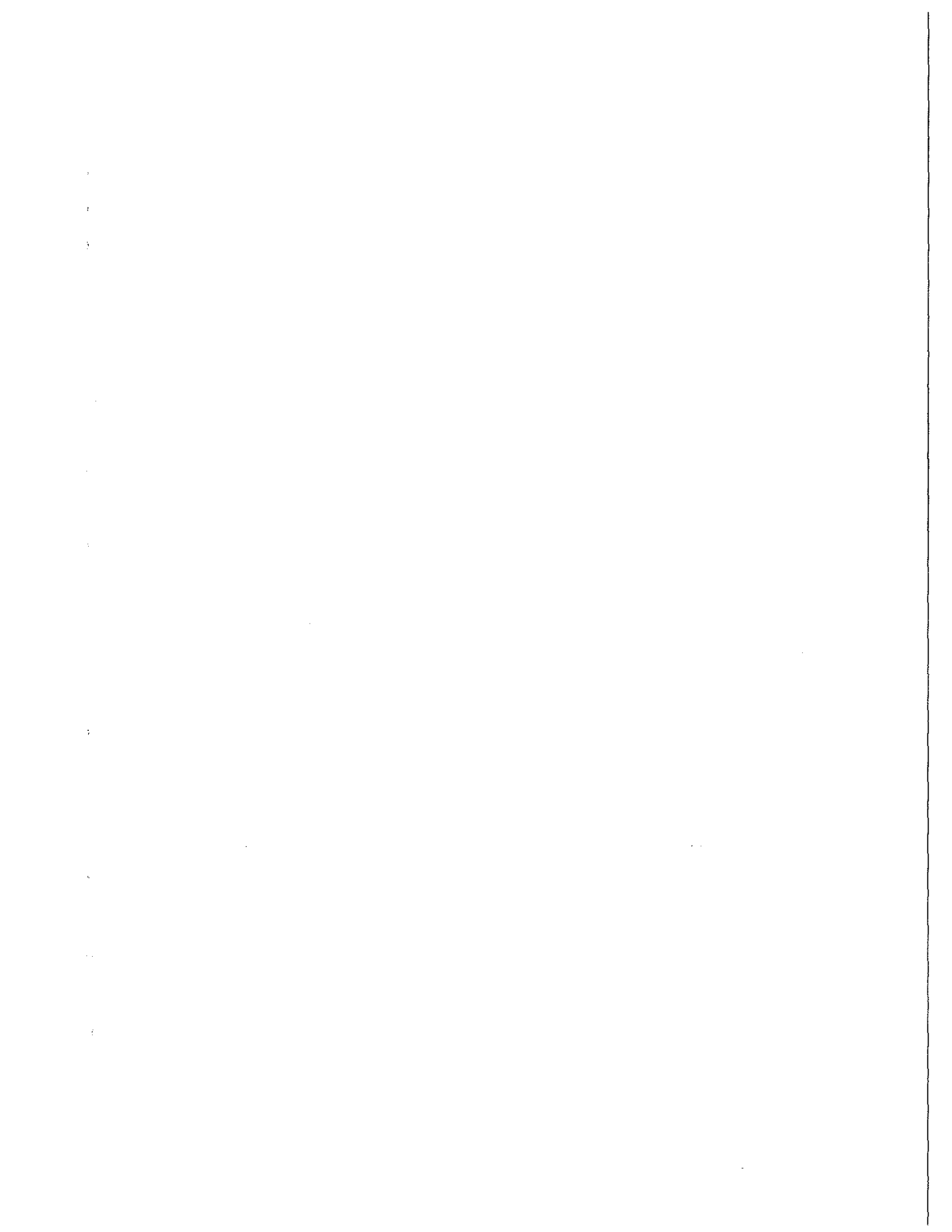
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members' time and other resources to produce various outputs. Household members share some of these outputs, such as meals and child care, and the members derive utility from the consumption of these outputs. Many authors in the economic literature have used this framework to explain time allocation of household members, for example women's allocation to domestic activities or to the labor market. Less frequently, this framework has been applied to models of household formation itself (Ermisch 1988, Wolpin 1984).

Ermisch (1988) notes that economic analyses have addressed in more detail the formation of units at the time of marriage or divorce, what he calls the first level of analysis. The second level of analysis -- the determinants of household structure independent of marriage -- has received less attention. For the second level of analysis, forming households, issues of taste for privacy and opportunity cost of the members (or potential members) ought to be considered. In addition, it is necessary to consider how individuals substitute for one another in time-intensive activities, and whether there are economies of scale with larger numbers. Wolpin (1984) notes also that "the types of household organization prevalent in any society must .. result from the economic, political, and technological environment which makes some organizational forms more efficient than others at meeting the goals of the individuals within the society,.. (pp. 235)".

We lack a well-specified behavioral model from which to draw for our analysis of the determinants of household structure. There are, however, several studies of relevance. DeVos and Palloni (1989) discuss the use of formal models to examine household structure, providing a useful summary of approaches. They also present





a framework to relate the supply of kin to the rules of household formation, demographic constraints, and the observed household structures. Without making an application to behavioral or choice models, the authors discuss a framework in which the observed household structures are a function of socioeconomic conditions, demographic factors, kinship rules, rules of household formation and dissolution, and the availability of kin.

In a recent study of individuals' household formation choices, Mutchler and Burr (1991) examine the living arrangements of the elderly population in the U.S., suggesting that economic resources affect the choice across various household arrangements, while health condition explains institutionalization. For Latin America, several descriptive studies have documented the demographic composition of households and domestic units, without, to our knowledge, providing a behavioral model for household structures. DeVos (1985) described the structure of households in several Latin American countries. Tienda and Ortega (1980) explore whether the type of headship affects the propensity to have one or more non-nuclear relatives living in the household in rural and urban Peru. The authors conclude that household extension helps compensate for the absent spouse in female-headed households. Zuniga et al. (1986) present a description for rural Mexico, where households tend to be nuclear. Compared with rural settings, non-nuclear households are more common in urban areas. The authors conclude that household extension seems to be an arrangement to compensate for higher migration or higher mortality in rural Mexico. Cuellar (1990) emphasizes the stage of economic development in the formation of extended households. In rural areas of Mexico, he concludes, although the nuclear household is predominant, the variation in the proportion of extended households is large (between 8 to 40

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percent). The author also concludes that among poor rural households, those with more members are better off than those in small units, perhaps due to a survival strategy of aggregation by individuals.

For our conceptual framework, we assume that the individuals forming a household are all potential decision makers, although certain decisions are made by a couple, others will involve a family, and still others are made by an individual (for example, the head of household). One of the choices that a couple may make is to form a household with individuals outside of the immediate family or nuclear group. The couple may choose to live on their own, with the wife's parents, or with other kin or non-related adults. From an economic perspective, this choice will be made to produce more efficiently the outputs of its choice than it would be possible in another household form.

Because the structure chosen is a result of production and consumption decisions, it is difficult to separate effects on the structure of households due to technological economies of scale (the unit as a producer), from those due to tastes (the unit as consumer). Using this basic theory, however, we can formulate the explanatory factors to include in a model of household structures. We can also speculate on expected effects of certain socio-economic variables on household structures. For example, higher income would tend to produce household structures that facilitate the consumption of normal goods. If it is the social norm for a couple to live in a nuclear family, then households would move towards this structure with higher incomes. If, on the other hand, it is the social norm to live with one partner's family when the marriage starts, then higher incomes will be associated with these types of households. If "privacy" is seen as a

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normal good, then with all else equal, the likelihood of forming a separate nuclear household will increase with income. The effect of changes in prices will be opposite to the effect of income. An increase in housing cost (producing a decrease in real income) would tend to decrease the likelihood of forming separate nuclear households (Ermisch, 1988).

The choice of an extended over a nuclear household will depend on the relative gains from having additional, non-nuclear members, compared to the losses of having them, given the constraints faced by the individuals. The observed household structure then depends on: tastes of the members, especially their relative desire for privacy with respect to consumption of goods (measured for example by age, culture, etc.); relative skills in home tasks (measured by sex ratios, number of children, etc.); earning capacities in real terms (measured by education of the members, wages, region of residence), and the non-earned income available to the unit (type of dwelling, capital assets, etc.).

Given the small amount of literature presenting empirical evidence on determinants of household structure, and the setting-specific nature of these determinants, we have difficulty predicting the direction of associations between household structure and its main covariates. In our model of the correlates of household structure (measured as nuclear or extended), we expect that, everything else held constant:

- higher per capita household income will be associated with a nuclear structure. Assuming that structures with more privacy will be preferred in urban Mexico, higher income will be associated with



nuclear structures. Similarly, better dwelling conditions will be associated with nuclear households. However, higher income and better dwellings can be associated with ability to support a higher number of members, providing economies of scale with extended households. Hence, the effect of type of dwelling (a measure for non-earned income) and income can be ambiguous.

- higher earning capacities for women (measured by education) will be associated with nuclear structures when everything else is held constant. On the other hand, better educated women will tend to have a higher opportunity cost of time, depending on the opportunities open to them in the labor market. Women with higher opportunity cost of time will move towards extended households that allow them to participate in the labor force, especially if children are present. Hence the effect of education can be ambiguous in the absence of a control for labor force participation.

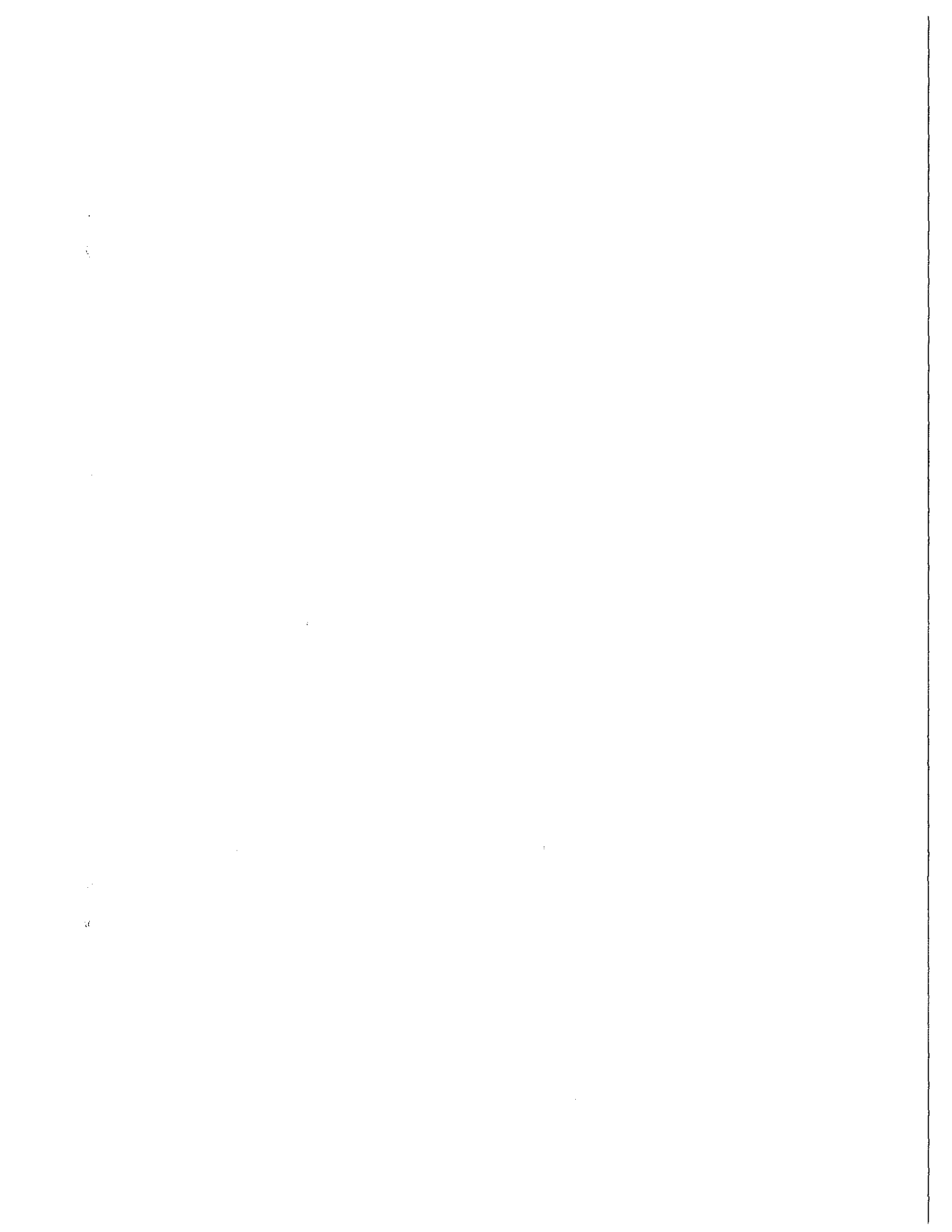
- The type of household chosen will be based upon preferences that change with the life cycle. We expect that younger ages will be associated with nuclear structures, since privacy is assumed desirable, especially among young couples. On the other hand, another aspect that changes with the life cycle is the ability to form separate households. Younger women may find that joining other (non-nuclear) members will provide economies of scale, especially when savings have not been accumulated, which is more common at younger ages. Hence, younger women may be more likely to be in





extended households than older ones. This implies that the effect of age can be ambiguous.

- Being married or in consensual union will be associated with nuclear structures. Since our sample includes all women with small children, non-married women may find it more desirable to live in extended households, both for economies of scale and for cultural attitudes which may disapprove of women rearing children alone.
- The number of young children, or having a younger child, will be positively associated with extended structures, since this type of structure may facilitate low-cost child care.
- women with rural backgrounds will tend to live in extended structures, since they will be more likely to have kin available from rural areas to form extended households temporarily, as a transition to urban settlement.
- women living in metropolitan areas will be more likely to live in extended households, since housing cost is higher than in other smaller urban areas. Metropolitan areas may also offer better and more opportunities for women to participate in paid employment. This in turn, may make extended households more attractive for women living in metropolitan areas.



## DATA AND METHODS

We use two sources of cross-sectional data for Mexico: the 1982 National Demographic Survey (Encuesta Nacional Demografica), and the 1987 National Demographic and Health Survey (Encuesta Nacional de Fecundidad y Salud). Both surveys include marriage and reproductive histories for women 15 to 49 years old, their educational attainment, current employment status, and general information on every member of the household (age, gender, education, employment, relationship to head of household). Of the total national samples, the sub-samples for our analyses include women living in urban areas (defined as communities with 20,000 people or more), and who had at least one child born in the five years prior to the survey.

Appendix A presents the definition of the variables for both surveys. To the extent possible, we define variables of interest identically. Tables 1 and 2 present descriptive summaries of the main variables for both sub-samples, with 2,939 women for 1982, and 1,914 for 1987. All our analyses include weighted statistics, to adjust for the difference in sample designs in the two surveys.

To further describe the household units that are extended, we construct a measure of the type of extension. We define a vertical extension as one where the additional (that is, non-nuclear) members are related to the head and belong to a different generation (for example, grand-daughter, mother, mother in law). We define an extended household with lateral extension if the non-nuclear members of the household belong to the same generation as the head (for example sister or cousin, or sister-in law). And as both vertical and lateral if the non-

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nuclear members are both from the same and other generations than the head of the household. As shown in Table 1, approximately 37 percent of women live in extended households in both years. The distribution by type of extended households differs slightly. In both 1982 and 1987, among women living in extended households, about 57 percent were in a vertical structure. The distribution by the other two types of extended households differed from 1982 to 1987. In 1982, 27 percent of women in extended households were in lateral, and 16 percent in both lateral and vertical structures. In 1987, 33 percent were in lateral, and 10 percent in structures with both vertical and lateral extension.

Table 1 also reveals that our sample of mothers of young children were better educated in 1987 (46 percent had more than six years of education, compared to 38 percent in 1982). They had slightly older last-borns in 1987, and were of about the same age as the 1982 sample. A higher proportion of the mothers were employed for pay in 1987 (29 percent compared to 19 percent in 1982). About 90 percent of the mothers in 1982 and 1987 were married or in consensual union, with a slightly higher percentage in 1987. A higher proportion had a rural background than in the 1982 sample (38 compared to 34 percent). Approximately 40 percent of the mothers wanted another child in both years. The conditions of their dwellings were similar with respect to utilities in the two samples: about 60 percent of mothers had three facilities in their dwellings (electricity, water, and sewage). In both years, about 20 percent of the mothers had partners or heads of household who were self-employed. The geographic distribution in the three metropolitan areas of Mexico were very similar in both years, except for a slightly higher proportion in Mexico City in 1987.

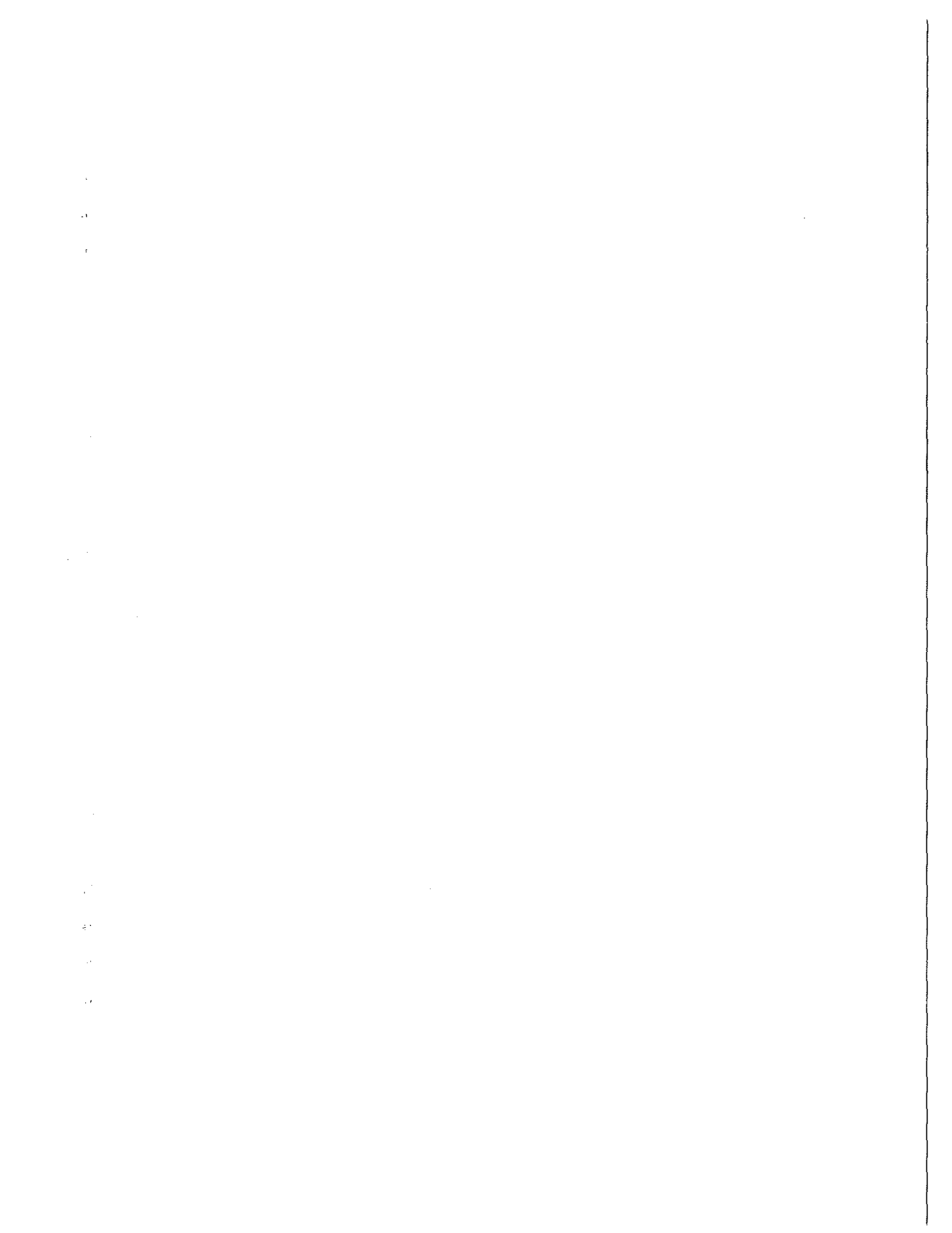


Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of the main variables of interest, by type of household structure (nuclear or extended). The statistics show that extended households are associated with better educated, younger, employed, non-married mothers in 1982 and 1987. Living in an extended household is also associated with having self-employed partners for both years. Having a younger infant is associated with extended households only in 1987, and living in better dwellings in 1982 only.

To examine the covariates of household structure with a multivariate approach, we estimate logistic regression equations, with household structure (extended or not) as the dependent variable and a series of explanatory variables that represent the factors hypothesized as determinants in our conceptual framework. The multivariate models exclude employment of women as explanatory variable, because of the possible endogeneity of employment to household structure. Here we estimate a reduced-form of the model, leaving the estimation of a structural-form for our future research on this topic.

Table 3 presents the results of the regression models for 1982 and 1987. The multivariate models confirm many of the associations found in the descriptive analyses. Holding all else constant in both years, extended households are associated with women with more years of education, younger, not-in-union, with partners who are self-employed, and living in better dwellings. We find noticeable differences between 1982 and 1987: the age of the last child and the woman's background are not significant explanatory factors of extended household in 1982, but they are in 1987. For the latter, living in extended households is associated with a rural background and having a younger last-born. For both

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years, the region of residence is not a significant explanatory variable of living in an extended household.

The results of the multivariate analysis correspond, to a large extent, to our expected effects as outlined in the conceptual framework. We had hypothesized that the effect of better dwellings and the woman's age would be ambiguous. Instead, we obtain a negative effect of age and a positive effect of better dwelling on the likelihood of living in extended households. Another unexpected result is the positive effect of education on extended households. We speculate, that the effect of education on the likelihood of forming extended households is covering the effect of the mother's employment. We explore this issue by examining further the relationship among employment of women, education, and household structure.

Table 4 presents the percentage of women with more than six years of education according to employment status and household structure, by year of survey. Panel A of Table 4 shows that, for both years, women in extended households are better educated than those living in nuclear ones. We also find that employed women have more years of education than those non-employed. All women are better educated in the 1987 sample than in 1982. This result holds across women living in nuclear and extended households. The relationship, however, does not hold when we divide women by employment status. Among those employed, women had more education in 1982. This panel also shows that the educational difference between employed and non-employed women is larger in 1982 than in 1987. Panel B of Table 4 shows that among employed women, education is higher among those in nuclear than in extended households. The reverse holds for non-employed women: those in

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extended households have more education. This general result does not hold for the employed sample in 1987, where we find no difference in education across nuclear and extended structures. Panel B also shows that, as indicated by the results in Panel A, the educational gap between employed and non-employed women closed between 1982 and 1987, but especially for those living in extended households, where 50 percent compared to 52 percent of women have more than six years of education (see Diagram 1). This set of results confirms the hypothesis that the relationship between education and household structure was covering the effect of employment. We confirm also that, to separate these effects, employment of women should be modeled as endogenous to household structure.

#### Discussion and Conclusions

We have presented the results of exploratory analyses, leading to a model of the determinants of household structure in urban Mexico. We perform our analyses using samples of women with young children from cross-sectional surveys from 1982 and 1987, covering a period of economic deterioration in urban Mexico. We find that the distribution of mothers by nuclear or extended households remained relatively stable between 1982 and 1987.

Our conceptual framework provided an outline for a model of the determinants of household structure, and we found that our empirical analyses confirmed most of the hypothesized effects of economic and demographic variables on the likelihood of forming extended households. In our samples of mothers with young children, we find that living in extended households is more likely among younger and unmarried mothers. Controlling for age and marital status, it is also more

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likely among women with households involved in self-employment, and in better economic conditions. A major finding was also that extended households were more common among better educated women. The effect of education was largely an effect of employment, since better educated women were more likely to be employed for pay. Further examination of this issue in a bivariate analysis, led us to conclude that household extension is associated with employment, closing the educational gap between employed and non-employed women.

Our results support the idea that extended households have been formed in urban Mexico to cope with time demands of the household members. We fail to find support for the idea that households structures were formed as a result of preference for privacy: the hypothesized effects that would support preference for privacy did not hold with these analysis samples. The conditions in the modernization transition, where higher income and higher education are associated with living in nuclear households, does not hold in urban Mexico, at least for this group of women with young children.

We examined two data sets to study the covariates of household structures across time. We find that the effects of the woman's education, age, partner self-employment, and quality of dwelling become larger in 1987 than in 1982. The effect of having a younger child and rural background become statistically significant in 1987. These results suggest that under deteriorating conditions of urban areas in Mexico (as were prevalent between 1982 and 1987), forming extended households was increasingly a strategy to support women's participation in paid employment, to provide care for young infants, to enable younger women to care for their child(ren), and as a strategy to support self-employment in the

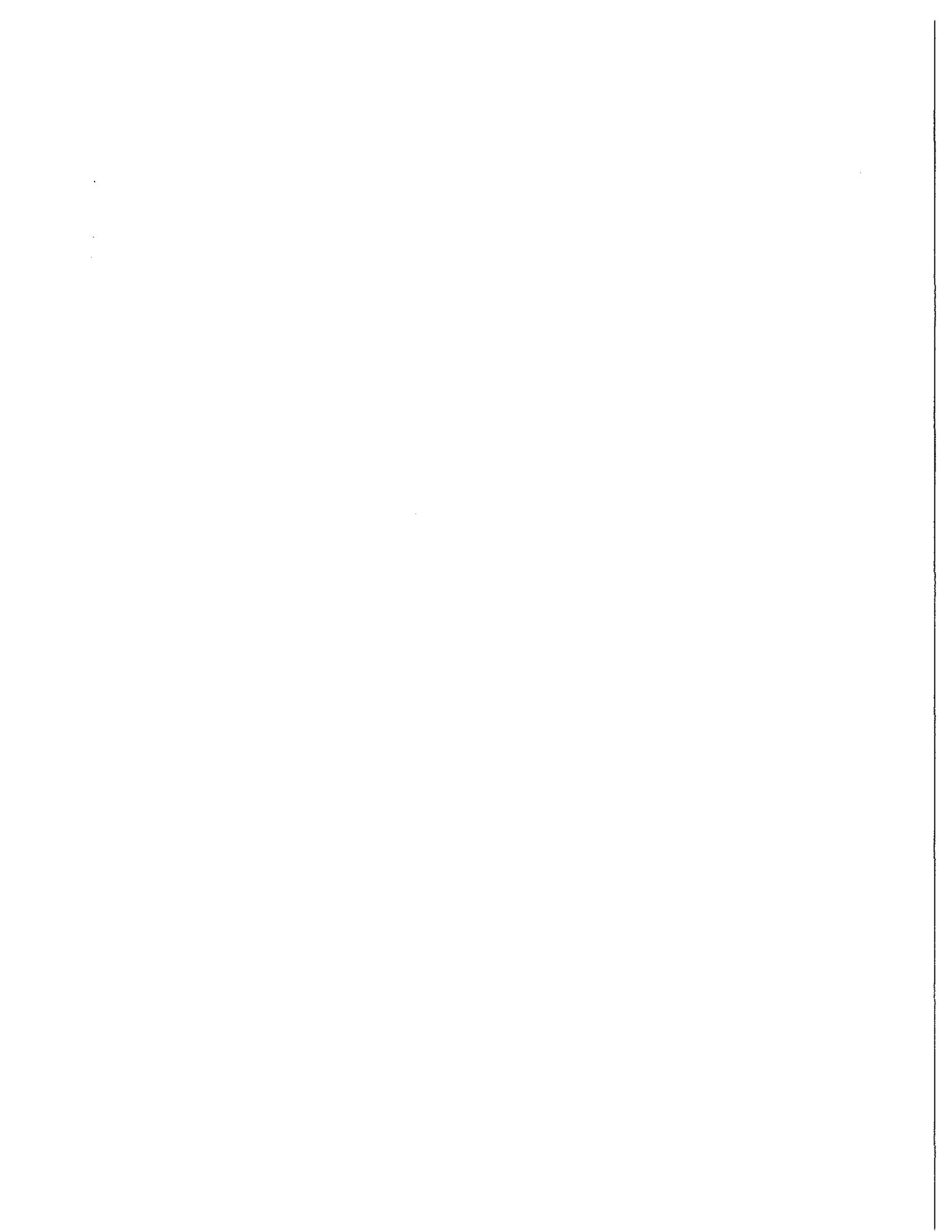


household. We also find that having better dwellings became more likely to be associated with household extension by 1987. This result, combined with the higher likelihood of extended households among women with rural background, support the notion that as economic conditions worsened in urban Mexico, households with better economic conditions were more likely to form extensions to provide support for other members, perhaps from rural areas.

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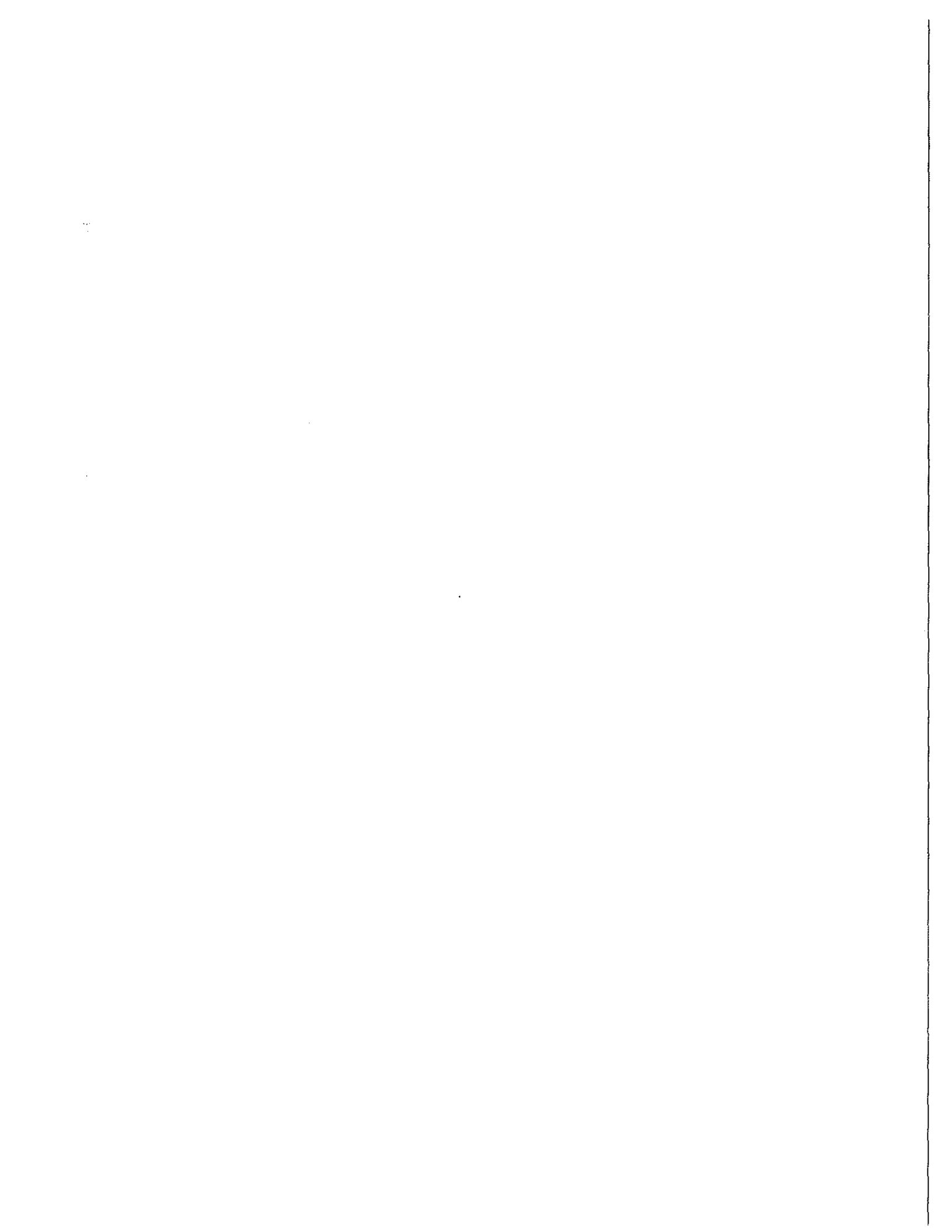
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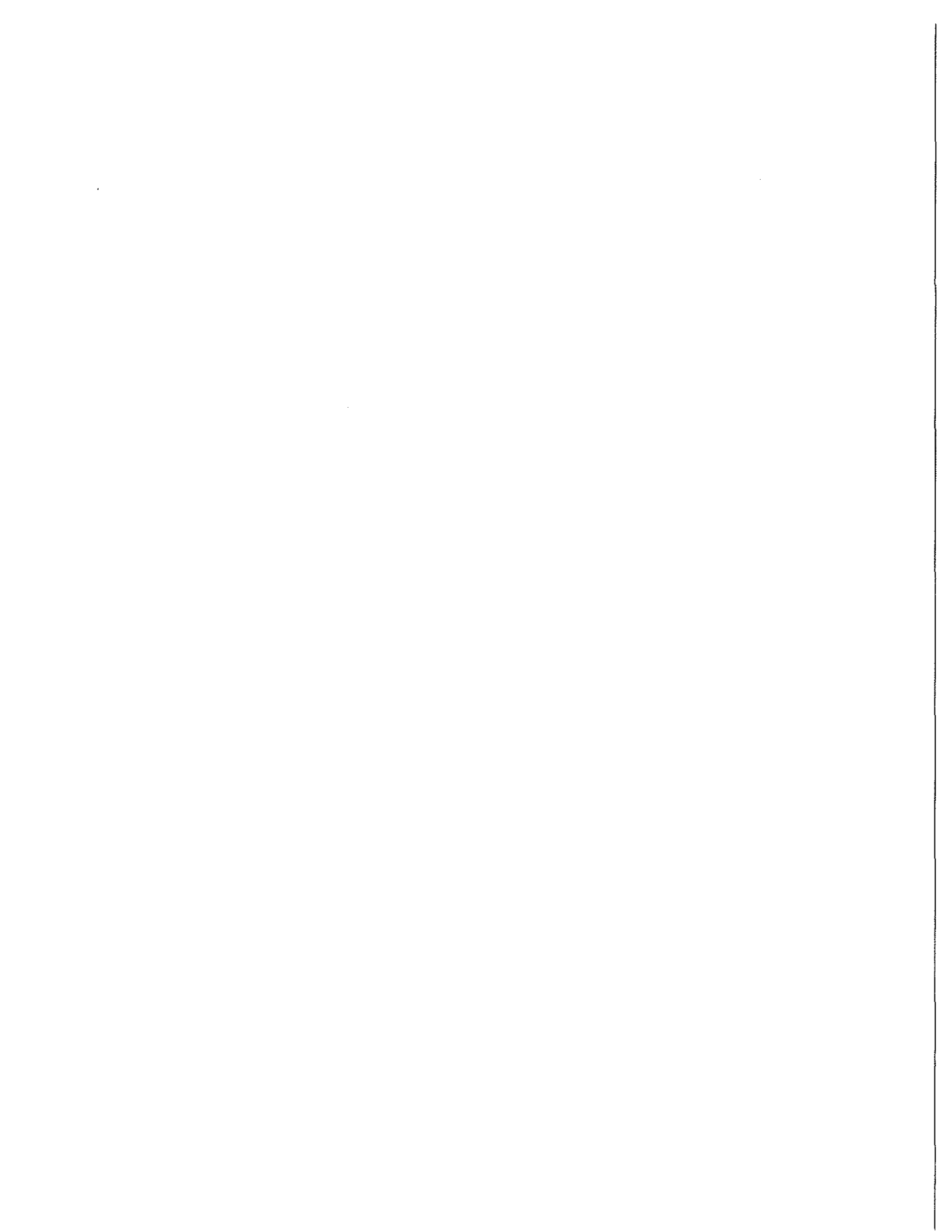


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APPENDIX A  
 Definition of Variables

Variable	Definition
Extended household (yes=1)	Whether one or more of the permanent members of the household is not a member of the nuclear family of the household head
Extended household: vertical (yes=1)	Whether the non-nuclear member(s) of the household belong to a different generation as the head of household
Extended household: lateral (yes=1)	Whether the non-nuclear member(s) of the household belong to the same generation as the head of household
Extended household: both vertical and lateral (yes=1)	Whether the non-nuclear members of the household belong to both different and the same generation as the head of household
Woman's schooling > 6 years (yes=1)	Whether the woman has more than 6 years of formal education
Woman's schooling (years)	Woman's years of formal education
Woman's age 27 years (yes=1)	Whether the woman is 27 years old or older
Woman's age (years)	Woman's age in years
Age of last born 24 months (yes=1)	Whether the woman's last-born child is 24 months old or older
Age of last born (months)	Woman's last-born age in months
Employed (yes=1)	Whether the woman is employed for pay
Married/In union (yes=1)	Whether the woman is married or in a consensual union
Mexico City (yes=1)	Whether the woman resides in the metropolitan area of Mexico City
Monterrey (yes=1)	Whether the woman resides in the metropolitan area of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon
Guadalajara (yes=1)	Whether the woman resides in the metropolitan area of Guadalajara, Jalisco
Partner self-employed (yes=1)	Whether the woman's partner or head of household is self-employed
Utilities in dwelling (yes=1)	Whether the dwelling where the woman lives has all three utilities: water, electricity, and sewage



Rural background (yes=1)

Whether the woman was born in a ranch,  
village, or town

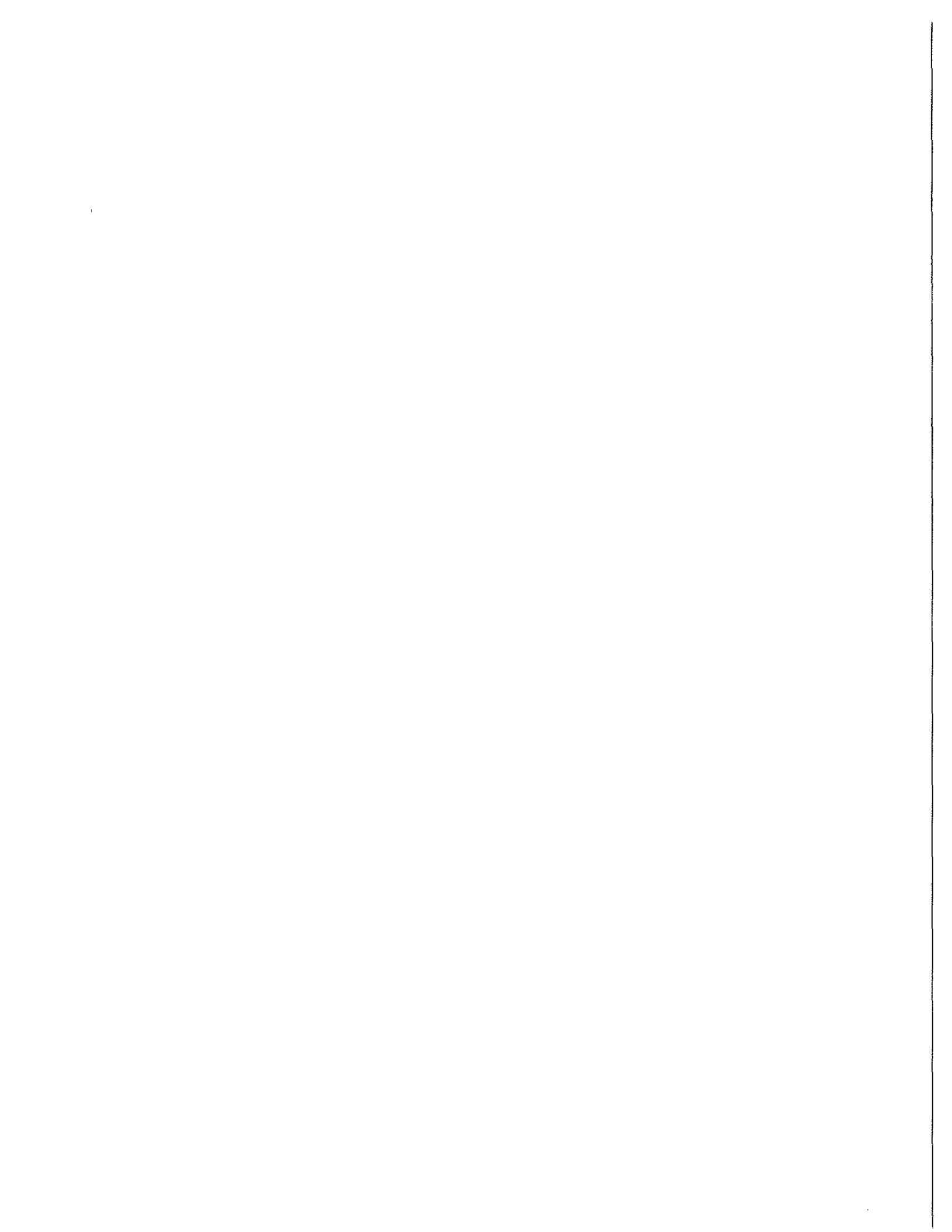


Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables

VARIABLE	Percentage	
	1982	1987
Extended household	36.7	37.1
Vertical only	56.8	56.6
Lateral only	27.5	33.0 **
Both vertical and lateral	15.8	10.3 ***
Woman's schooling > 6 years	38.0	45.7 ***
Woman's age ≥ 27 months	54.8	56.2
Age of last born ≥ 24 months	43.2	48.1 ***
Employed	19.1	28.8 ***
Married/In Union	89.8	92.1 ***
Mexico City	35.8	38.8 *
Monterrey	6.3	5.8
Guadalajara	6.7	6.2
Partner self-employed	21.9	19.7
Utilities in dwelling	58.9	61.3
Desire additional child	44.6	42.8
Rural Background	33.7	37.8 ***
N	2,939	1,914

Notes: (1) Statistics are weighted  
(2) Significant difference in percentage between 1982 and 1987 at: \* level .05  
\*\* level .02  
\*\*\* level .01





Table 2  
 Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables  
 by Type of Household Structure

Characteristic	Percentage in Nuclear or Extended Household with Characteristic			
	1982		1987	
	Nuclear	Extended	Nuclear	Extended
Woman's schooling > 6 years	35.4	42.5 ***	42.4	51.3 ***
Woman's age ≥ 27 years	58.7	48.1 ***	61.4	47.4 ***
Age of last born ≥ 24 months	43.5	42.8	50.2	44.5 **
Employed	15.3	25.8 ***	23.1	38.3 ***
Married/In Union	96.7	77.9 ***	98.6	81.1 ***
Mexico City	36.6	34.5	40.0	36.9
Monterrey	6.4	6.1	6.2	5.1
Guadalajara	6.7	6.8	6.2	6.1
Partner self-employed	19.5	26.2 ***	16.7	24.9 ***
Utilities in dwelling	57.0	62.4 ***	59.8	63.8
Rural background	34.9	31.8	36.6	39.7
N	1,860	1,079	1,203	711

Notes: (1) Statistics are weighted  
 (2) Significant difference in percentage between Nuclear and Extended at: \* level .05  
 \*\* level .02  
 \*\*\* level .01

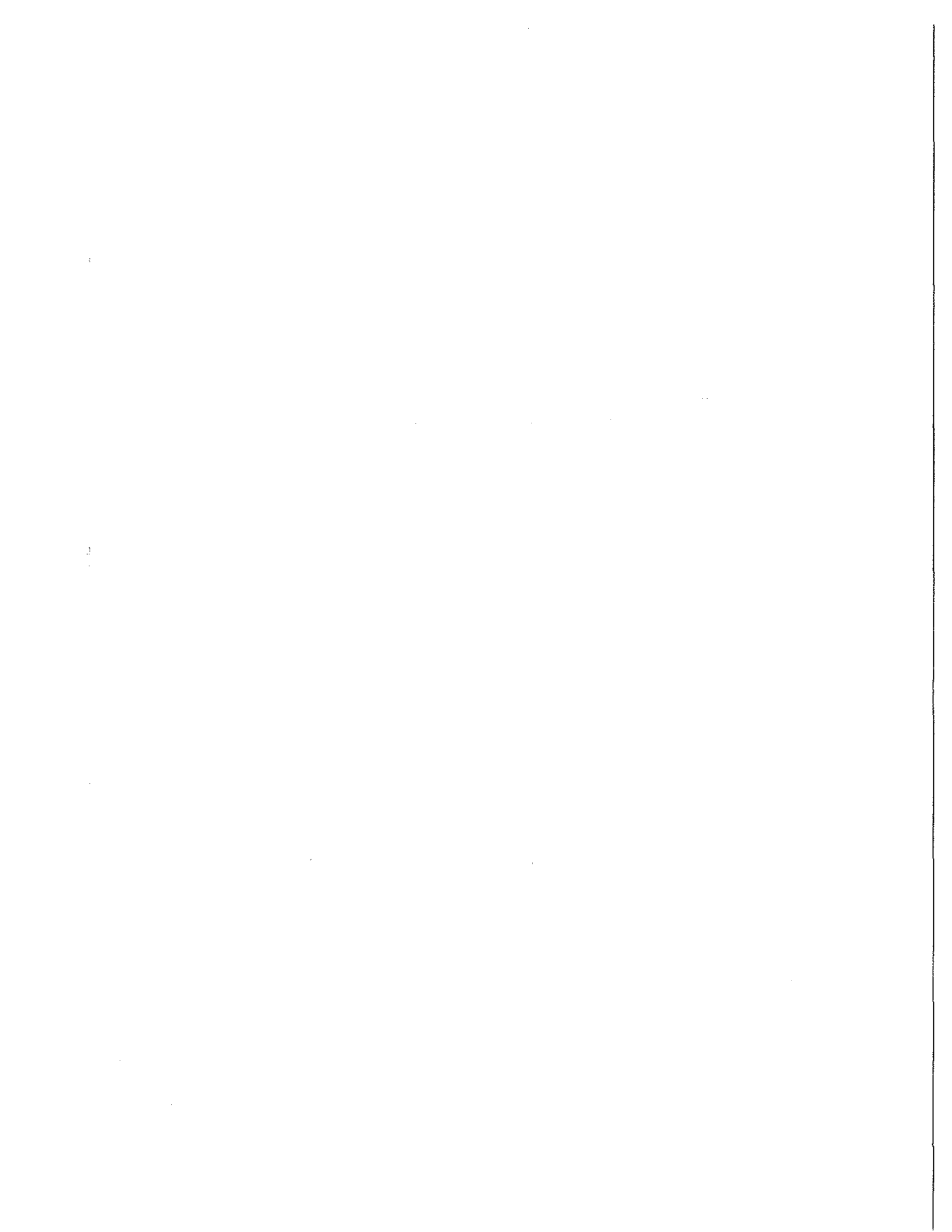


Table 3  
 Logistic Regression Coefficients  
 Dependent Variable: Extended Household (Yes=1)

VARIABLE	Regression Coefficient	
	1982	1987
Intercept	4.14 ***	7.16 ***
Woman's schooling	.025 **	.037 **
Woman's age	-.192 ***	-.340 ***
Woman's age-squared	.002 ***	.004 ***
Married/In Union	-2.09 ***	-2.853 ***
Mexico City	-.087	-.065
Monterrey	.006	-.228
Guadalajara	-.051	-.161
Partner self-employed	.444 ***	.683 ***
Utilities in dwelling	.217 **	.322 ***
Age of last born	.000	-.007 **
Rural background	.055	.272 **
N	2,939	1,914
-2 log L	3,534	2,219
% Extended	36.7%	37.1%

Notes: (1) Statistics are weighted  
 (2) Regression coefficients are significantly different than zero at: \* level .01  
 \*\* level .05  
 \*\*\* level .10



**Table 4a. Percentage of Women with given characteristics  
who have more than 6 years of education**

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	<u>1982</u>	<u>1987</u>	
All women	38.0 %	45.7 %	***
Nuclear households	35.4	42.4	***
Extended households	42.5	51.4	***
Employed	64.6	51.7	***
Non-employed	31.7	43.3	***

---

Notes: Statistics are weighted.

Significant difference in percentage between 1982  
and 1987 at : (\*) level .05  
(\*\*) level .02  
(\*\*\*) level .01



**Table 4b. Percentage of Women with given characteristics  
who have more than 6 years of education**

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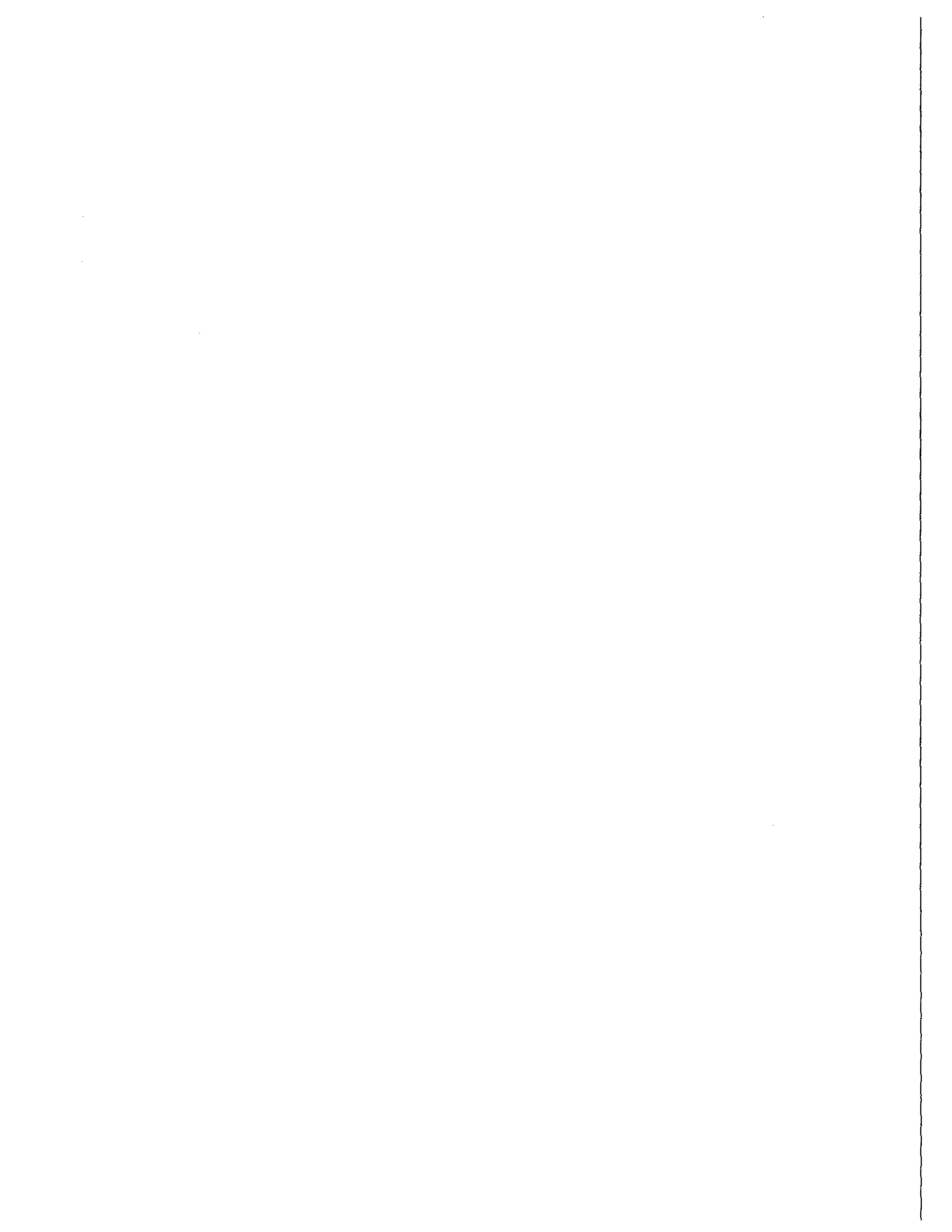
	<u>Nuclear</u>	<u>Extended</u>	
1982 - Employed	69.7 %	59.3 %	***
1987 - Employed	53.4	50.0	
1982 Non-employed	29.2	36.6	***
1987 Non-employed	39.1	52.3	***

---

Notes: Statistics are weighted.

Significant difference in percentage between  
nuclear and extended households at :

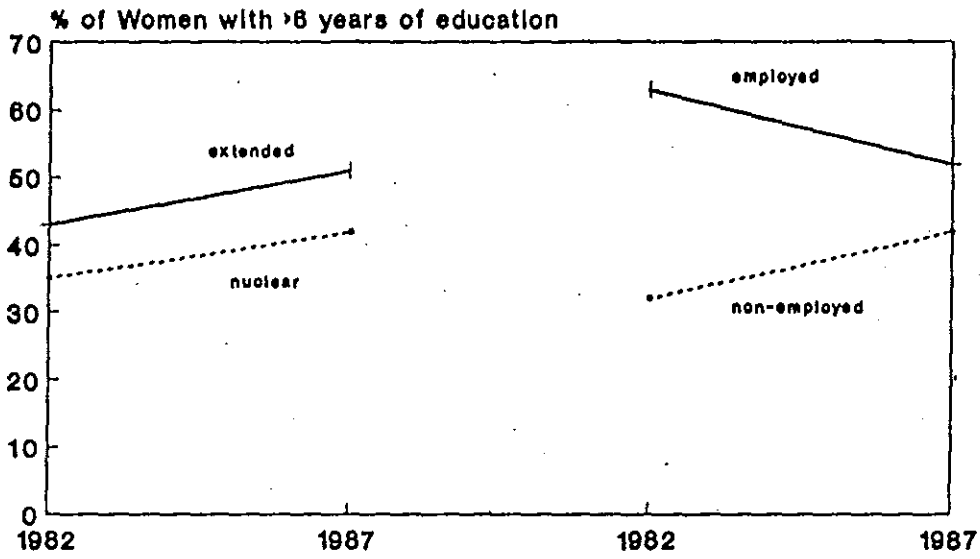
- (\*) level .05
- (\*\*) level .02
- (\*\*\*) level .01



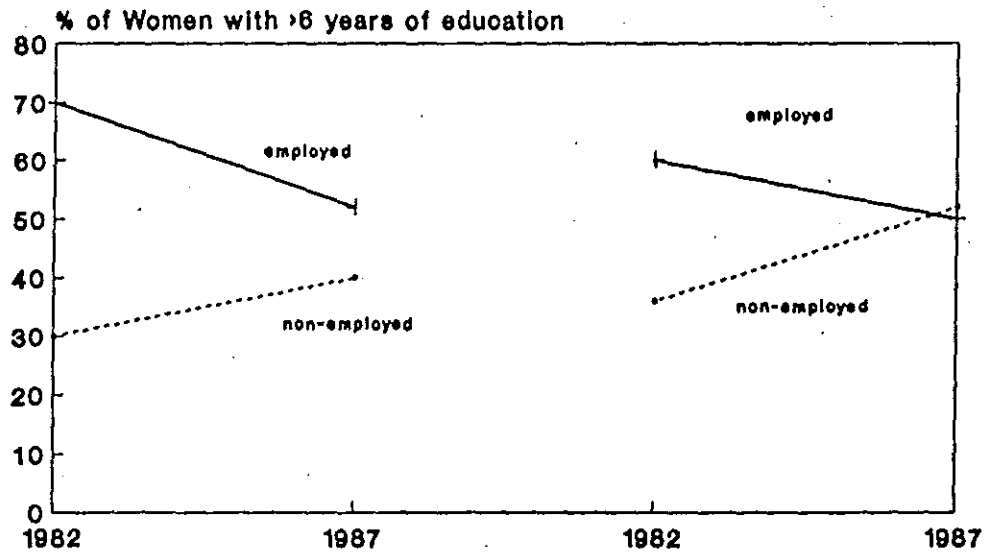


# Diagram 1

## Education of Women by Household Structure and Employment



Panel A



Panel B

Nuclear

Extended