TEXTILE WORKERS IN BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA

A Study of the Interrelationships between Work and Households

LILIANA ACERO

In collaboration with Claudia Minoliti, Alejandra Rotania, and Irma Nora Perez Vichich

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PREFACE

This volume is the result of the research study "Textile Workers in Brazil and Argentina: A study of the Interrelationships between Work and Households." Part 1 presents the Brazilian results, and Part 2 those from Argentina. The studies formed part of the UNU project on Household, Gender, and Age, co-ordinated by Dr Eleonora Masini, and they were carried out with their institutional bases at IUPERJ (Instituto Universitario de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro) in Brazil and at CIPES (Centro de Investigación y Promoción Educativa y Social) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Field research was undertaken in those countries between 1984 and 1986.

Chapter 1 presents the main theoretical perspective of both countries' research, its design, methodology, and research procedure. It principally discusses new developments on the social impact of technical change on labour and gender that inform our studies in the two developing countries. For that purpose, it draws significantly on my own findings in past research relating to textile factory work.

Chapter 2 outlines the principal features of the Brazilian textile industry with regard to production, employment, and modernization of equipment, and provides the general context of the study.

In chapter 3 the demographic and occupational characteristics of the sample population of workers' households are described, with respect to the size, composition, and level of family income, as well as its administration. The analysis of the sample population looks to establish behavioural differences associated mainly with age and gender.

Chapter 4 studies the general characteristics of the textile workers interviewed, including occupational history, salary level, the extent of their contribution to family income and their role in its management, participation in domestic activities, understanding of sexuality and contraception, forms of decision-making within households, marital status, and fertility. These data are mainly analysed in relation to the behaviour of the sample population by gender and age and, where possible, by subsector – traditional or modern – of the textile industry.

Chapter 5 analyses some aspects of the life-history of textile workers by gender and age. The variables considered are occupation, marriage, fertility, contraception, and co-residence, in relation to the changes in the life-cycle of the interviewees. These individual histories have been analysed cross-sectionally. The relations that exist between the sequencing of these individuals' events in terms of each variable have also been considered.

Chapter 6 discusses some of the workers' perceptions, relating especially to the role of women as wage-workers in general and as textile workers in particular.

Part 1's Conclusions (chapter 7) are to be seen as a qualitative attempt to draw together the main findings about textile workers' behaviour in Brazil.

A Methodological Appendix complements the Brazilian analysis presented in part 1. This has the purpose of alerting researchers and policy-makers to some of the data-gathering problems, field-work strategies, and obstacles encountered. These are usually present in research of this kind conducted in developing countries.

Part 2 presents the results of the textile worker study conducted in Argentina.

Chapter 8 shows the principal employment, production, and technological trends in the textile industry during three periods: the years immediately before 1976 (when there was a radical change of economic and social policy in the country); from 1976 to 1983, period of a military regime; and from 1983 to the present. This chapter elaborates upon the scanty secondary data available, data that were specially gathered for this research in order to give the most detailed picture possible of the research context. In this sense, the chapter itself is innovative from a national standpoint, as the information in it has not been compiled before; most secondary data that could have been used were destroyed during the period of the military regime.

Chapter 9 describes the main demographic and occupational characteristics of the textile workers. The analysis includes a description of size, main household composition, level of income, and patterns of income administration in the interviewees' households per age, gender, and sector where useful. A Methodological Appendix on the choice of the sample and the research site complements this chapter.

Chapter 10 studies the present behaviour of different variables in the sample of textile workers, by gender and age-cohort. The main aspects studied are: present type of job, skills, level of contribution and type of participation in family income and domestic work, marital status, and family-planning and fertility patterns as well as relative knowledge of sexuality and contraceptive methods. These variables are mainly analysed quantitatively and synchronically. Where possible, when the results relative to each aspect are presented, there is also a study of how the workers participate in the decisions taken regarding that aspect.

Chapter 11 considers, in relation to gender, the most relevant events in the workers' life-histories studied synchronically. It discusses patterns of entry into the labour market, occupational history, marriage, fertility and contraceptive pat-

terns, and co-residence arrangements. Whenever possible, trends in the time sequence between these types of events are noted.

Chapter 12 analyses the workers' perceptions about female work and salaries, and their actual economic situation within the textile industry.

Finally, there is a short Conclusion (chapter 13) which considers in general the qualitative and quantitative findings of the Argentine research.

Chapter 14 compares the main findings of the research in both countries.

The study raises questions on issues of central concern for planners and policy-makers, especially women's issues. Some of these, relative to Brazil and Argentina, are developed in chapter 15.

This book is not directed at demographers or family-planning experts. It is intended for a wider public of first- and third-world academics, planners, and policy-makers, and will, it is hoped, inform them of the *real* lives of those who make up the popular sector in two third-world countries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The two parts presented were reworked in their different versions by members of the different countries' research teams. The first editing and reworking of the present version was, however, carried out by three people: Irma Nora Perez Vichich, Claudia Minoliti, and myself, while the final editing, including the evaluators' comment, was done by Claudia Minoliti and myself. However, the process by which each chapter was developed deserves a fuller explanation.

In the Brazilian case, I was responsible for the analysis and writing up of chapters 1 and 2. First versions of chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 were developed by Alejandra Rotania, Mabel Arruñada, and myself. Data-gathering was mainly carried out by Irma Nora Perez Vichich and Alejandra Rotania. The latter was responsible for most of the initial analysis of information and wrote up the first version of the Methodological Appendix to part 1.

In the Argentine case, the first version of chapter 8 was the work of Silvia Severini, based on data gathered by myself and Irma Nora Perez Vichich. Chapters 9 and 10 were based on material analysed and first written up by Mabel Arruñada, and chapters 11 and 12 on material by Irma Nora Perez Vichich.

The Conclusions of both parts, the comparative chapter, and the Policy Implications are of my own construction. Jorge Fernández Bussi, as local statistician, wrote the Methodological Appendix to part 2. Claudia Minoliti, a previous interviewer who came into the research in the last phase, reviewed both volumes extensively with myself for content, data simplification, and shortening, and with a view to incorporating the evaluators' comments. She deserves very special thanks.

The development of a two-country project is quite a difficult task, especially when it entails moving part of the team from one country to the other, and permanent communication between some members of the research teams in different countries. However, the difficulty turned out to be a source of strength. The task was successfully carried out owing to the high morale, the spirit of co-operation, and the commitment of the research teams, and this again deserves special thanks.

In addition to the usual problems, it is particularly difficult to research in a society like Argentina, after a military dictatorship that most affected the social groups and organizations that were to be researched, as well as the professional infrastructure and the researchers themselves. The semi-destruction of academic life as a result of the lack of research possibilities and secondary data, and people's distrust and fear, shaped the professional milieu that is only now recovering the strength it had during the 1960s and 1970s.

I should also like to thank, for their part in the general project design, Kate Young from the Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, Sussex, Ian Miles from the Science Policy Research Unit, Brighton, Sussex, and my Women's Group in Brighton. In Brazil, at the institutional base at IUPERJ, I want to acknowledge the support given to the setting up of the project by the Sociology Group, particularly Neuma Aguiar, Carlos Hasenbalg, Luis Wernecke Vianna, Elisa Reis, and Simon Schwartzmann. Also my special thanks to Dr David Kertzner, who collaborated as UNU expert in orienting and simplifying the life-course instruments design and analysis plan.

In Argentina, I am especially grateful to the research team that kept up the work at times when, owing to personal difficulties, I could not be as heavily involved. I thank also Luis Rigal, who as Director offered the institutional base at CIPES. It is regrettable that work did not prosper at the institutional base. Not carrying out the audio-visual follow-up to the study meant the reduction of the action-research component of this project. I thank also Jorge Fernández Bussi and Lilia Chernovilsky for their assistance with statistical and computing matters.

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I most specially want to thank UNU's Kuniko Ishikawa and, above all, Dr Eleonora Masini, for their trust and support during the research. However, the research team alone is responsible for the contents of the report.

CONTENTS

Part 3

1

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF TECHNICAL CHANGE ON LABOUR

This chapter deals first with the main theoretical concerns that led to the development of the present studies on the work and households of textile workers in Brazil and Argentina. It detects flaws in recent research on wage-workers and domestic life in Latin America, and lays emphasis on women's work. Second, it introduces a summary of the main debates on the social impact of new technologies, especially those of an electromechanical type, but also ones involving microelectronic devices, in developing countries. This section draws largely on the findings of my previous studies of Brazilian textile workers at the factory level. This is complemented with a brief discussion on gender and segregation at the workplace. Next, the chapter deals with the main theoretical questions in the present studies and the research design. Finally, it discusses the methodology used and the advantages and disadvantages of this choice, given the main aims of the research. This last section is to be read together with the Methodological Appendices at the end of each part.

Introduction

The theoretical concerns that led to this research arose from central questions that were left unresolved in the literature dealing with women's subordination in Latin America (Acero, 1985a), especially literature on women's subordination in the working classes. During the early period of research in Latin America – mainly in the 1960s and 1970s – the participation of women in the labour force was considered to decline with the advance of industrialization (Saffiotti, 1978; Sautu, 1979), and as a product of the marginalization of women from industry and their concentration in service occupations.

Recent studies in Brazil questioned this conclusion, showing the increasing participation of females in industry overall even in the modern sectors, such as the metallurgical industry (Githany et al., 1982; Humphrey, 1984a, 1987). For ex-

ample, in Brazil, Brisolla (1982) notes that, while in 1950 and 1970 female participation in the EAP within manufacturing grew at 2.3 per cent annually, in the 1980s its growth rate was 10.7 per cent per year. However, the changes such growth brought about within the employment structure of selected branches have been virtually unexplored. How far there has been a recomposition of jobs because of technical change or the economic crisis affecting the region has not been studied. (Exceptions are found in Acero, 1983, 1985b; Schmitz, 1983, 1985; and Humphrey, 1987; these will be discussed at length later on.)

Many more studies have, however, through detailed case-study work, looked at the specific conditions in which women participate in Latin American industry, either in factories or as outworkers (Beneria, 1982; Abreu, 1980; Prattes, 1983; Guzmán, 1982). Low wages, unskilled work, long working hours, sexual harassment, and monotonous or repetitive work are some of the aspects which the Latin American literature agrees are commonplace for women industrial workers.

Studies have also been concerned to show how women's roles in the household can explain forms of discrimination in the labour market (Jelín, 1978; Madeira and Bruschini, 1981). Other studies have shown how, in spite of the extension of industrialization and urbanization, women still bear the main responsibility for household work, involving the social and sexual reproduction of the family (Madeira and Singer, 1975).

Household work has begun to be studied as a form of work of a specific nature subject to particular rules, especially in recent studies that apply a time-budget approach (Ceboratev, 1984; Figueiredo, 1982). Sartri (1983) has shown that its difference lies not solely in the nature of the services provided or the characteristics of the persons that usually carry them out – mainly women – but in the particular form of work relationship that links women to the household and their "boss" (father, husband). This special form of work has also been studied as a subordinate form owing to its wider application in the social environment (Bruschini, 1984).

Empirical research in Latin America has gone as far as demystifying Engels' vision that women's emancipation would take place with the development of capitalism and with women's increasing participation in factory production. It is increasingly being accepted worldwide, among academics interested in women's studies, that the conventional tools of political economy are insufficient to explore women's relationships with the labour market (Kergoat, 1984; Hartmann, 1979), let alone women's subordination in the household, or the relationship between both phenomena.[1] This has led to new theoretical developments.

As Souza Lobo (1984) argues, in considering the sexual division of labour within social relationships one should take into account: (a) the identification of two different though interrelated social spheres: the social production of goods and the reproduction of human beings, the first based on mercantile relationships and the second on "apparent natural" relationships; and (b) the fact that the asymmetry

between production and reproduction brings about a sexual division of labour that structures relationships between genders in the different social settings. She adds that practices and relations of work become a social construct that has a coherence in the articulation of several sets of meanings, many of them symbolic.

From this approach one can elaborate the different trajectories developed by working women in relation to their access to income, or even their participation in activities where the wage form is predominant. The main point usually made in the literature in relation to women obtaining a wage is that they increase their share of household resources. Neither the management of resources nor the relation between monetary and non-monetary managing of resources, such as household services, decisions about child care, etc., is explored in depth (West, 1982). It is less frequent still to pursue studies that relate the actual use of such resources to the forms of thought or the perceptions about such use. However, working women's life trajectories should be seen as a historically and socially determined result of their modes of living, symbolic representations, and survival strategies. The main sphere in which these gender forms are built is that of the family and household.

Empirical research in Latin America has also tried to go beyond the concept of patriarchy as a theoretical construct, and is increasingly exploring the authority system within the family that generates the gender system at large (Schmukler, 1984). Recently, there has also been more interest in the different dimensions in which gender subordination is exercised in the households of women who have a wage. For example, the different forms of control and distribution of the money cycle within the household have been analysed as privileged forms of interchange (Roldan, 1980). However, it has been noted that money exchanges constitute but one of the dimensions in which gender negotiations take place; others involve sexual interchange, services interchange, etc.

It is with some of these concerns in mind that we have undertaken a study of the forms of decision-making of women workers within the household, targeting women who all participate in factory work and have different types of marital status, numbers of children, and kinship relationships with the household head. The dynamics of the labour process and employment in modernizing textile factories and textile workers' perceptions of the labour process and labour market were first studied elsewhere (Acero, 1983, 1984, 1985b, 1991) and will be commented on briefly in the next section.

The labour-process approach to the study of work and social relations is quite a recent contribution to the social sciences, especially in terms of the existence of empirical studies and further theoretical development beyond Marx (1867, vol. I). This approach helps us to understand the political implications of technical change and labour use. The workers engaged in the labour process are not only active agents in the generation of a product, but the product itself is generated in a *specific way* under certain social relations of production. The simple elements of the labour process (work itself, the object on which that work is performed, and

the instruments of work) have different characteristics in each of the historical modes and phases of production, as well as differences of degree, i.e. in the relationships between them at the point of production in each factory. From an empirical characterization of the dynamics of the predominant labour process in a given society, industrial sector, or specific firm, one can draw possible implications for other aspects of the workers' lives and the relations between them.

Social Impacts of Technical Change on Blue-collar Labour

From Marx on, and especially very recently, new developments in the relations between technical change, the labour process, and labour use have given rise to a new wave of theoretical and empirical case-study literature.[2] Interest in these issues has arisen mainly in the light of what has been termed by many "the micro-electronics revolution," i.e. the incorporation of microchips in machinery, both in the production process and in offices.[3]

In the developed world since the middle of the 1970s micro-electronic technology has been rapidly spreading to an increasing number of industries and service sectors, producing an important realignment of production, design, distribution, retail, and control processes. This in turn has generated a change in the nature of the work, skills, and training of different occupations, a change for which writers, policy-makers, and planners have given parallel explanations. More recently, this technological wave has also been felt in the developing countries, especially in the NICs, some of which are increasingly developing their own micro-electronic hardware and software. Owing to the need to compete successfully in an increasingly integrated world economy, the developing countries are generally (though unevenly) beginning to introduce such technology, and some of its social impacts are already being felt.

However, to evaluate the current and potential impacts of these technologies on labour use there is a need (a) to establish just how far these changes produce effects of a different order of magnitude or of a different quality from those generated by the technical change of an electrical or mechanical base, and (b) to take into account the specificities of the context in which they are being applied, especially in relation to patterns of labour use. This in turn leads us to examine the issue in the light of previous technical changes in industry.

There is already much available evidence regarding the impact of other technical changes on jobs, skills, training, and gender categories. Most of the literature examining the impact of electromechanical technical change concludes that it is labour-saving (Bhalla, 1975). However, rarely is the nature and type of job displacement analysed, except for very broad labour categories. Most of these studies employ the "choice of technique" approach and are concerned with documenting the optimal alternative in terms of labour-cost reductions that a given technique may bring about. Even more rarely do studies look at technologically induced changes in patterns of employment and unemployment.[4]

Over the last two decades there have been a lot of studies in the area of technology and development, but they have been mainly directed to questions of technological choice and transfer of technology (see, for example, Bhalla, 1975; Stewart, 1978; and Vaitsos, 1974). Technological change has been studied but its impact on labour use has been neglected. In turn, the literature on labour markets in developing countries has distinguished between the characteristics of different types of markets, but usually on the basis of abstract assumptions rather than on studies of the labour process.

Technical Change and the Labour Market

Since the development of the early ECLA view (ECLA, 1965; Prebisch, 1963),[5] an extensive body of literature has researched the employment situation and the formation of labour markets in Latin American countries. The rapid and uneven industrial growth in the 1950s and 1960s led researchers to describe those economies in terms of "structural heterogeneity" (Pinto, 1965). This concept, used to account for the variety of economic situations found in industry, began to be used to explain the practices of sections of the working class.

Such an approach – when applied to labour use – was influenced by Lewis's (1954) earlier dual-labour-market model. Lewis had characterized economic development, within societies that he described as presenting an "unlimited supply of labour," as divided between a capitalist and a subsistence sector. The latter, he argued, provided an unlimited pool of labour for the former. Since then, many dualist models have been applied to explain the differences within the labour market in developing countries. Some of the distinctions that have been made between labour markets are those of the upper and lower circuits (Santos, 1975), the hegemonic and marginal poles (Nun, 1969; Quijano, 1974), and the formal and informal sectors (ILO, 1972).

Technology has always been considered as a central variable that differentiates and allocates labour to these types of markets. However, the specific features of the technical base were seldom explored empirically. Technology was dealt with in broad terms. For example, Quijano (1974) referred to technical patterns in so far as they were important factors in the concentration of capital in different sectors of the economy. He distinguished between the hegemonic, the competitive, and the marginal poles of the economy. In each, the forms of access and the requirements from labour varied, as did the proportions of unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled labour. The first pole broadly corresponds to the labour market in which modern foreign-owned enterprises acted, the second to the local ones in more traditional industries, and the third to small enterprises or unstable forms of work, typical of what was identified by the ILO (1972) as the "informal sector."[6]

These dualistic approaches tend to see one economic "segment" or "pole" as providing a reserve army of labour for the other (Nun, 1969). Often, they see labour as following fixed stages in its incorporation into industry: from

agricultural wage work or subsistence into the informal sector and from the informal sector into the formal, or else from the competitive sector into the monopolistic.

The latter approach contends that there are no significant constraints on rural labour entering the industrial sector's labour market. Souza (1980) argues that their main mistake stems from their use of the concept of "relative super-population" to explain labour dynamics in developing countries. They assume too often, he says, that any worker in a developing country has an equal possibility of entering industrial jobs, provided the demand exists. However, he shows that labour scarcities in developing countries do occur for certain jobs when labour demand surpasses its normal level, as in moments of unusual expansion of rural labour demand,[7] a situation he describes as "the paradox of labour abundance with scarcity." He also argues that every low-tier occupation demands specific abilities from the workforce, thus contributing to limit overall labour supply.

The different ways in which labour supply becomes limited, for example through different skill or gender requirements, has been explored further by other authors. Quijano (1974) established that the workers in monopolistic firms are able to develop special skills, training, and cultural and psychological attributes. These allow them to sell their labour-power in restricted markets within the hegemonic high-technology sectors that become immune from the competition of the mass of migrant workers in the towns. Foxley and Muñoz (1977) provide a more complete description of the differences in jobs and labour use in the modern and traditional sectors. They argue that as technical advance has concentrated in the capital-intensive industries in the modern sectors, skilled and high-quality workers are usually demanded by those industries. Management invests in training-on-the-job for workers who do not have that special skill but whose general aptitudes make it worth while for these firms to train them. Then management tends to pay higher wages (i.e. to stabilize the workforce) in the modern sector in order to keep the on-the-job trainees as well as the highly skilled workers. Once stable, these workers can form strong trade unions and, through bargaining, obtain even higher wages and privileged working conditions. The exact opposite situation is faced by workers in the traditional sectors of industry, who are described as being mainly unskilled, with low productivity and wage levels. They endure unstable working conditions and they cannot gain access to the skills required to enter the more protected labour market in the modern industries.[8]

The dual-market approaches, present in Foxley and Muñoz' (1977) study, are largely based on the theory of segmented labour markets. Doeringer and Piore (1971) first developed the concept of segmented labour markets and applied it to the study of labour markets in the US. They argue that there exists, in present society, a division of job structure into segments or clusters of jobs, each with its own characteristic wage levels, entrance requirements, and promotion patterns. Into each segment are recruited workers from certain classes, sex, and racial back-

grounds. Though the authors are interested in studying the division of the whole labour force into these labour markets, some of their findings are useful in discussing differential employment practices for blue-collar workers.

The authors divide the workforce in the labour market into two broad categories, the primary and the secondary markets. The primary labour market offers well-paid jobs, good working conditions, stability, and chances of promotion according to established work rules. The secondary market's jobs do not share any of these characteristics. Within primary markets, a particular feature is the existence of internal labour markets[9] where labour is usually recruited for new posts from within the same ranks of the firm. Those internal labour markets in turn can be closed or open. The most typical as depicted by the authors are closed – workers enter the enterprises to start a career in which they fill successive posts through promotion. In the open ones, a similar career system is established, though the firm fills the bottom of the hierarchy by recruiting workers from outside the firm using "non-market" criteria, like trade-union membership.

Two important assumptions inform these theories of labour-market segmentation. First, modern enterprises need to employ a skilled labour force; either this has to be trained by the company and to work for it on a regular, full-time basis for a long period of time, or else a permanent pool of skilled labour has to be at hand. This need can derive directly (Foxley and Muñoz, 1977) or indirectly (Doeringer and Piore, 1971) from advanced technology.[10] Second, the practices of modern enterprises, having specific patterns of labour demands, have somewhat altered the otherwise equalizing trends in the competitive nature of the laws of labour supply and demand. The studies have been undertaken basically from the demand side, considering the supply side only in so far as it can alter, in degree, some of the practices within modern firms, e.g. the setting up of on-the-job training.

A variation of the approach discussed on labour-market segmentation[11] is provided by Reich, Gordon, and Evans (1980). They relate the differentiation between segments of the labour market not exclusively to the variations in the technology and administrative apparatus of enterprises acting within them, but to practices of social control of the labour force. The division of labour in the labour market is seen as the result of consciously planned management strategies. They argue that the homogenization and proletarianization of the workforce in monopoly capitalism posed a threat to employers' control over the workers. "Employers actively and consciously fostered labour-market segmentation in order to 'divide and conquer' the labour force. Moreover, the efforts of monopolistic corporations to gain greater control of their product markets led to a dichotomization of the industrial structure which had the indirect and unintended, though not undesired, effect of reinforcing their conscious strategies. Thus labour-market segmentation arose both from conscious strategies and 'systemic' forces" (Reich, Gordon and Edwards, 1980). Authority relations in the firms were changed, especially in the big firms, towards forms of bureaucratic control, i.e. a