



A Look at the Reproduction Strategies of Costa Rican Households, 1990 – 2015

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Abstract: This article examines the reproduction strategies Costa Rican households, focusing on fertility, marriage, education, economy, social aspects, and symbolism, from 1990 to 2015, categorized by income quintile, and viewed from the perspective of family life trajectories. The study utilized data from the National Household Surveys and included interviews with three generations of households. The main findings reveal that reducing the number of children led to smaller household sizes and less strain on available resources. In terms of educational strategies, lower-income households primarily aimed to overcome illiteracy, while higher-income households pursued higher education. Despite an increase in the average income of female-headed households, it remained consistently below that of male-headed households. A lower percentage of low- and medium-income households paying in installments indicates their reliance on alternative forms of housing ownership such as renting or borrowing. Generational changes from the first to the third generation support the second demographic transition theory. There is a noted decrease in fertility rates, falling below the replacement level in the third generation, along with a shift towards marital arrangements other than marriage, and a disconnect between marriage and procreation.

Keywords: Costa Rica, Households, Social reproduction strategies, Family life trajectory, Second Demographic Transition.

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Una mirada a las estrategias de reproducción de los hogares costarricenses, 1990 - 2015

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es dar una mirada a los hogares costarricenses para tratar de entender y explicar sus estrategias de reproducción: fecundidad y matrimonial, educativa, económica, social y simbólica, de 1990 al 2015, según el quintil de ingreso, y desde la perspectiva de trayectorias de vida familiar. Para lograrlo se utilizaron las Encuestas Nacionales a Hogares e hicieron entrevistas a tres generaciones de hogares. Los principales resultados y conclusiones son: la disminución de los hijos como estrategia, da paso a menos miembros del hogar y menos compromiso sobre los recursos disponibles. La estrategia educativa evidencia que en los hogares de menor ingreso la estrategia fue salir del analfabetismo, en los más ricos continuar con los estudios superiores. A pesar de que el ingreso promedio de los hogares con jefatura femenina aumentó, siempre se mantuvo por debajo del ingreso promedio de los hogares con jefatura masculina. El menor porcentaje de hogares de recursos bajos y medios en la categoría pagando a plazos, ejemplifica como estos deben recurrir a otras formas de tenencia que no impliquen créditos para compra, esto significó alquilar vivienda, vivienda cedida o prestada. El cambio generacional que transcurre de la primera a la tercera generación, valida la teoría de la segunda transición demográfica. Hay una disminución de la fecundidad, por debajo del nivel de reemplazo en el caso de la tercera generación, arreglos conyugales distintos al matrimonio y la desconexión entre matrimonio y procreación.

Palabras clave: Costa Rica, hogares, estrategias de reproducción social, trayectoria de vida familiar, segunda transición demográfica.

Introduction

A household is a dynamic entity that is born, reproduces, and transforms. It evolves in response to the socioeconomic context, demographic patterns, and the decisions of its members. This transformation is not unidirectional; households also

influence the socioeconomic context and demographic patterns, showcasing their capacity for change, adaptation, and survival.

This bidirectional dynamism, which has been the subject of extensive and diverse research, is explored through the lenses of family reproduction strategies, social reproduction, and survival. This study applies these concepts to Costa Rican households, providing a comprehensive understanding of their reproduction strategies—fertility and marriage, educational, economy, social aspects, and symbolism—, from 1990 to 2015, across income quintiles and family life trajectories.

This research draws on data from the National Household Surveys (ENAHO) conducted in 1990, 1995, 2005, 2010, and 2015, along with interviews with three generations of households. By combining quantitative data from ENAHO with the qualitative insights from the family life trajectories and experiences of the interviewed households, this dual approach offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject.

Contrasting the information obtained from fieldwork (interviews) with the statistical data from ENAHO allows for a more global understanding of households, contributing to family studies in explaining the dialectical relationship between household transformations and the socioeconomic context.

Furthermore, this research is inclusive, encompassing poor and middle-class Costa Rican households from 1990 to 2015, offering a balanced and comprehensive view of the diverse range of households. This inclusive approach enriches our understanding of how different households navigate and thrive, contributing to a more holistic understanding of Costa Rican society.

The research questions that guided this study were: What strategies do households employ to reproduce and survive, and how do these strategies vary according to their income quintile? Additionally, how do Costa Rican households evolve from one generation to the next? These questions form the basis of our exploration into the dynamics of Costa Rican households.

Next, the theoretical-conceptual approach of the article will be explained. A household refers to the group of people who live together in the same physical space and carry out tasks to achieve the economic and non-economic maintenance of the group (Barquero and Trejos, 2005, p. 330). This group of people may or may not be linked by kinship ties; regardless, they share housing (physical space), budget, consumption, production, services, and daily activities (Ariza and de Oliveira, 2003, p. 20), and in some cases, biological reproduction (Ariño, 2007, p. 257).

A household is composed of one or several families, determined by kinship, whether by filiation (consanguinity) or by alliance (marriage systems) (Segalen, 1992, pp. 37, 57 and 63). These institutions channel not only the relationships and kinship networks that allow identification in the community and access to it but also the

subjective and socialization elements that define how consumption and production are carried out in the household (what socio-structural and economic).

Families go through various phases or stages, “from the constitution of an initial nucleus going through different moments of change according to the growth of the initial group and the ages of its members to the dissolution of the nucleus or its dispersion into new nuclei” (Barquero and Trejos, 2005, p. 333).

These stages are defined as the family life cycle and must be understood in terms of the life cycle of its members, the composition, size, and structure of families in —relation to the conditions of their society— (Hareven, 1995, p. 111), whether cultural, social or economic. As Ariño (2007) explains, dynamic units are conditioned “by demographic dynamics, particularly marriage and fertility (...) the population by sex and age and its distribution in the territory, along with economic, social, cultural patterns” (p. 255). This is also due to the cumulative result of retrospective trends in fertility, mortality, and migration and the influence of socioeconomic and political processes (Pérez Brignoli, 2010, p. 285).

Households reproduction strategies are not uniform but depend on the social stratum to which their members belong. In this social world, they are built and reconstructed with the distribution and acquisition of economic and social capital and the mechanisms and dispositions of reproduction. The aim is to seek the material, biological, and immaterial reproduction of the family or families that make up the household (Bourdieu, 2013, pp. 31-32). This ensures biological reproduction, preserves life, and develops all the practices indispensable for optimizing the material and non-material conditions of the existence of the household and each of its members (Torrado, 2003, p. 28).

Therefore, the behavior of household social agents contributes “to the reproduction of social position, to the reproduction of their social class of belonging and, therefore, to the reproduction of the global structure of social classes” (p. 28).

Reproduction strategies are not simple, one-size-fits-all solutions. They are complex responses to economic, material, cultural, and ideological conditions determined by social and biological reproduction. Each social group practices a reproduction strategy (Chacón, 1995, p. 10) in each context and time. These strategies are not independent of the societal context. The current development style conditions them in each society, which determines the characteristics of the labor and consumption market, the actions of the State, and the living conditions of the population (Ariño, 2005, p. 258).

Bourdieu classifies eight types of reproduction strategies: biological investment (fertility and prophylactic), succession, educational, economic, social investment, marriage, symbolic investment, and sociodicy (Bourdieu, 2013, pp. 36-37). This research will study fertility and marriage strategies as well as educational, economic, social, and symbolic strategies.

Marriage strategies are understood as those that ensure “the biological reproduction of the group without threatening its social reproduction through unequal marriages, and taking care of the maintenance of social capital, through an alliance with a group that is at least equivalent” (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 37). The fertility strategy compromises the household’s assets since fewer children means a decrease in “the number of potential suitors for the material and symbolic assets: especially depending on the condition of the available resources” (p. 36).

The long-term educational strategy must be understood in socioeconomic terms, “they tend above all to produce worthy social agents capable of receiving the inheritance of the group” (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 36). “Economic investment strategies, in the broad sense of the term, tend to perpetuate or increase capital in its different forms” (p. 37).

Finally, social investment strategies “oriented towards the establishment or maintenance of social relations” (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 37), and “symbolic investment strategies (...) that aim to preserve and increase the capital of recognition” (p. 37).

For this research, households reproduction strategies are actions of social agents, oriented by the socioeconomic stratum to which they belong and the life cycle of its members. These factors guide both the basic needs of each household and the ways to address them. At the same time, these strategies depend on their condition or social position to obtain and transmit the necessary goods that guarantee or improve the economic and social capital of the household, in a feedback relationship with society, and on the limits imposed by the state in each time, space and context.

In analyzing the bidirectional relationship between the context, household, its members, and reproduction strategies, we use the theory of the Second Demographic Transition (STD). This theory, proposed by Ron Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa in 1987, suggests that the main changes are sustained fertility below the replacement level, a multiplicity of marital arrangements other than marriage, the disconnection between marriage and procreation, and a non-stationary population (Lesthaegue, 2010, p. 211).

Lesthaeghe explains that starting in 1950, a series of changes related to marriage revealed the first signs of the emergence of STD:

- 1. The rapid weakening of social control exercised by institutions correlates to the increase in the autonomy of individual morality.
- 2. Greater social acceptance of sexuality outside of marriage.
- 3. The accentuation of individual aspirations within the couple.
- 4. The development of more symmetrical exchange patterns within the unions.
- 5. The discovery of opportunity costs resulting from women’s economic autonomy.

- 6. The fusion of the domestic and spouses' careers in household transactions.
- 7. The availability of efficient contraceptives helps women control their reproduction. Lesthaeghe cited by (Quilodrán, 2011b, p. 72).

The idea behind this theory is related to the change in preferences; it is proposed that the First Demographic Transition (PTD) be anchored to the realization of basic material needs, while the second is the expression of the development of higher-order, non-material needs and the expressiveness of values (Lesthaegue, 2010, pp. 213-214), which includes greater equality in gender relations.

Collective behavior no longer obeys regulations based on the ideology of the family supported by the Church and the State. Instead, the new regime is governed by the primacy of individual decision (Lesthaegue, 2010, p. 217), characterized—above all by changes in the behavior of individuals at the level, basically, of training and family stability—(Quilodrán, 2011a, p. 69).

Other changes consistent with this question are increased free unions, divorces, remarriages, children out of wedlock, and marriages without children. In this sense, STDs refer to demographic elements that interfere with and shape households and to cultural, social (with a significant emphasis on education), and economic aspects linked to them.

Methodology

The sources used in this research were the National Household Survey (ENAHO) from 1990, 1995, 2005, 2010, and 2015. The ENAHO was provided by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), and the SPSS statistical package was used to process the data. A unified database was built to analyze the data using the 2015 ENAHO as a reference (as it has the most variables).

For constructing the unified database, the necessary variables from the 2015 ENAHO were selected according to the intervals of the quintiles calculated per year. The same variables for 2015 were chosen for the ENAHO of 1990, 1995, 2005, and 2010. As the coding differs each year, relabeling was done to homogenize the variables. If the variables were not found, they were not quantified, and the corresponding clarification was made.

Once the previous step was completed, quintiles were created for each year. Following this process, each of the databases was unified. Once the databases of each survey were united into one, the labels were standardized, and some categories were grouped to facilitate year-to-year comparisons. Subsequently, data imputation was performed to recover as much information as possible. Finally, to represent the characteristics of each household, a subbase was created by extracting the heads of

households from the unified base. In cases of shared household heads, only one head was selected.

The quintiles were created from the total gross income per household. If the database did not have this calculated, it was derived from all variables representing household income in each database. To calculate the quintiles, the head of each household was extracted. Since there must always be a head to whom the household's gross income is designated, a sub-database was created with the heads of the households per year to prevent the same household's from being presented multiple times. Based on this sub-database, the income was divided into five parts, and the quintiles were assigned. Households that did not report total gross income, those with zero income, and individuals who did not report their total income were not considered in the creation of the quintiles.

The family life trajectories of three generations in different geographical locations and socioeconomic contexts were reconstructed through interviews. A generational triad was chosen to carry out the interviews. The generational triad refers to three generations of the same consanguineous family (older adult mothers, daughters, or their daughters' children), which make up the study population.

Interviews are conducted per generation in each triad, with three interviews per triad and fifteen interviews. To select the sample (the triads), the "snowball" technique was used: initial informants introduced the researchers to other potential researchers (Taylor and Bogdan, 1987, p. 109). The number of households is not representative since the theoretical sampling strategy was used, where the number of "cases" studied is less important than the potential of each case to assist the researcher in developing theoretical understandings about the studied area of social life (Taylor and Bogdan, 1987, p. 108) and, in our case, the household and life trajectory.

The interviews followed a standardized format, with the wording and order of all questions being the same for each participant to ensure comparability. This consistency helps attribute variations between respondents to fundamental differences in answers rather than differences in the instrument (Valles, 1999, p. 186).

The information obtained from the interviews was analyzed using the Atlas.ti software, which facilitated the analysis of strategies related to fertility and marriage, educational, economic investment, and social and symbolic investment. The information was classified as follows:

- Fertility and marriage strategy: number of children, and questions about the spouse.
- Educational strategy: educational level of the interviewee and that of their children, spouses, or partners.
- Economic investment: questions about income, the ease of purchasing and obtaining essential and non-essential goods, the type(s) of work of the

interviewee and other household members, extra work, or various ways of making money.

- Social and symbolic investment: related to housing ownership and observations made during the interviews.

To maintain anonymity and respect the private and family lives, pseudonyms will be used when referring to the interviewees.

Results and discussion

The reproduction strategies of households —marital and fertility, educational, economic investment, and social and symbolic investment— provide insight into the mechanisms used to obtain the necessary goods to guarantee, maintain, or improve economic and social capital. These strategies are shaped by the socioeconomic context and demographic transformations.

In terms of socioeconomic context, “regardless of the type of society, strategies are conceived as a response mechanism that seeks to cushion the effects of successive crises” (Ayala-Carrillo et al., 2014, p. 403). Household income plays a crucial role in determining basic needs and the way to meet them.

The transformation of Costa Rica’s population pyramid in 2015 has significantly impacted the configuration of households. The changes attributed to the second demographic transition, particularly in nuptial and fertility aspects, result in households where multiple generations coexist. Similar to trends in other countries, the transformation involves a decrease in the young population and an increase in adults and older adults, disrupting the traditional structure and composition of households.

Marriage and Fertility Trends

The increase in free unions, the decrease in marriages, and the rise in divorces and separations across all quintiles and years studied (see Table 1) underscore a shift from collective decisions to individual choices regarding marriage. While the selected indicators do not allow us to determine whether marriages or alliances are between equivalent groups, they reveal that the highest percentage of married individuals is in the wealthiest quintile, whereas those in common-law unions are primarily in the poorest quintiles.

Contrary to the European context, free unions have been normalized in Latin America for years. From 1960 to 1990, these unions saw a general increase across the Latin American region, being more prevalent in the Caribbean, coastal countries, and in Central American nations (Quilodrán, 2011a, p. 86),.

Although the highest percentage of individuals in a free union is found in the poorest quintiles, there is an increase in these unions among middle and high-income households (quintiles 3, 4, and 5), accompanied by a decrease in the percentage of marriages. Dora Celton's research in Córdoba, Argentina, found that "since the 1960s, concubinage was once again an option, this time admitted by the middle classes in the name of individual freedoms" (Celton, 2008, p. 25). However, Julieta Quilodrán (2011a) notes that "those who resort to them [free unions] continue to be women who belong to the most unprotected social sectors" (pp. 86-87). In Costa Rica, for example, some laws channel household care toward its most vulnerable members such as infants and women. By 1991, there were 53 social programs aimed at the family or its members, distributed in 17 different government institutions.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Marital Status by Year and Quintile based on Gross Household Income

Year	Quintile	Married	Divorced	Separated	Single	Free union	Widowed	Total
1990	1	36,46	1,14	5,03	39,78	11,24	6,35	100
	2	41,74	0,89	3,05	37,71	13,71	2,90	100
	3	41,76	0,94	2,89	41,43	10,54	2,44	100
	4	40,56	1,10	2,71	44,75	8,34	2,54	100
	5	39,14	1,80	2,18	49,39	5,28	2,21	100
1995	1	34,56	1,79	5,86	39,32	11,88	6,59	100
	2	37,56	1,42	4,17	39,23	14,16	3,48	100
	3	38,45	1,61	2,63	41,86	12,60	2,84	100
	4	38,55	1,24	3,37	45,68	8,63	2,54	100
	5	39,91	2,00	2,42	47,62	6,04	2,02	100
2005	1	26,73	3,65	10,51	38,82	12,65	7,64	100
	2	31,45	1,91	5,68	39,12	18,38	3,46	100
	3	34,10	1,98	4,63	41,32	15,35	2,62	100
	4	33,62	2,42	4,39	43,90	12,93	2,75	100
	5	38,69	3,05	3,56	45,24	7,08	2,39	100
2010	1	27,24	3,93	8,37	38,46	14,30	7,69	100
	2	29,84	3,08	4,95	39,57	18,74	3,82	100
	3	31,23	3,41	4,42	41,20	16,34	3,40	100
	4	32,52	2,99	3,53	45,01	13,45	2,50	100
	5	37,42	3,94	2,76	44,18	8,86	2,83	100
2015	1	24,57	4,28	12,62	35,78	15,68	7,07	100
	2	27,98	4,08	7,45	36,79	20,05	3,65	100
	3	29,74	3,54	6,90	39,06	17,47	3,30	100
	4	31,54	3,93	6,00	41,43	14,22	2,88	100
	5	40,86	3,78	3,52	40,35	8,77	2,73	100

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the unified base.

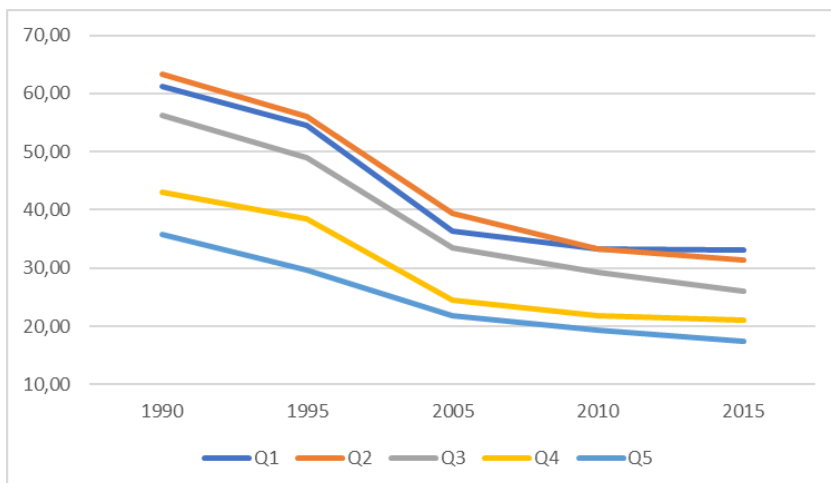
The trend of increasing free unions, decreasing marriage rates, and rising divorces and separations is evident in the reconstructed life trajectories of interviewees. For example, Mrs. Abarca and Mrs. Carrillo (second generation) divorced after nearly twenty years of marriage and entered into second civil marriages their late fifties. Both lived with their partners before remarrying and had various relationships between their divorce and second marriage.

Most individuals in the third generation share the commonality of not having married. For instance, Mrs. Herrera lived with her partner for almost five years before marrying civilly shortly after their first and only child was born, and the later separated. Mr. Marín and Mr. Cascante, both in dating relationships, continue to live with their mothers and explained that neither marriage nor children are priorities for them.

This shift in priorities, where marriage or children are not seen as essential, aligns with the separation of union with procreation. Figure 1 illustrates the decrease in the number of children across all income quintiles under study. Reducing the number of children as a strategy leads to fewer household members and less strain on resources. For households in the poorest quintiles, this reduction alleviates resource pressure, while for the wealthiest quintiles, it results in greater resource availability, savings, or the ability to make more significant expenditures or investments.

Examining the profiles of the interviewees reveals a significant decline in the number of children between the first and the third generations. The first generation had a total of 20 children, the second generation had 16, and the third generation had only 2.

Figure 1. Child-Woman Ratio According to Year and Quintile by Gross Household Income.



Source: Compiled by the authors based on the unified base.

Economic and Educational Strategies: Impact on Household Wealth

The change in the economic model and the role of the state, which began in the 1980s, led to a process of household impoverishment. This resulted in households adopting various survival strategies, one of the most significant being the increase dropouts rate from the educational system, particularly at the high school (Pérez Brignoli, 2004). This trend is evident in the rise in the percentage of individuals aged 15 to 17 who do not attend regular education: from 12% in 1990 to 25% in 2015 (Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage distribution of the educational level of individuals aged 15 to 17 not attending regular education, by year and quintile based on gross household income

Year	Quintile	None	Elementary	High school	Total
1990	1	6,63	81,02	12,35	100
	2	5,81	87,82	6,37	100
	3	2,52	81,37	16,10	100
	4	5,03	76,58	18,39	100
	5	3,84	74,59	21,58	100
1995	1	7,20	80,16	12,64	100
	2	5,19	77,41	17,40	100
	3	2,21	87,76	10,03	100
	4	2,35	82,77	14,88	100
	5	1,15	75,61	23,24	100
2005	1	1,91	83,59	14,50	100
	2	0,51	78,27	21,22	100
	3	3,95	76,27	19,79	100
	4	2,53	77,41	20,06	100
	5	5,43	68,95	25,63	100
2010	1	0,86	84,13	15,02	100
	2	3,27	70,64	26,09	100
	3	1,82	66,32	31,87	100
	4	2,90	58,10	39,01	100
	5	3,57	61,33	35,10	100
2015	1	1,57	72,91	25,52	100
	2	2,64	55,31	42,06	100
	3	2,37	52,96	44,67	100
	4	0	68,44	31,56	100
	5	5,96	55,03	39,01	100

Table 2.1: Absolute values of the educational level of individuals aged 15 to 17 not attending regular education, by year and quintile based on gross household income

Year	Quintile	None	Elementary	High school	Total
1990	1	640	7818	1192	9650
	2	690	10431	757	11878
	3	378	12189	2412	14979
	4	879	13386	3214	17479
	5	653	12693	3672	17018
1995	1	642	7149	1127	8918
	2	687	10238	2301	13226
	3	354	14033	1603	15990
	4	427	15054	2706	18187
	5	172	11320	3480	14972
2005	1	179	7824	1357	9360
	2	79	12104	3281	15464
	3	583	11266	2923	14772
	4	413	12639	3275	16327
	5	554	7040	2617	10211
2010	1	77	7575	1352	9004
	2	419	9050	3342	12811
	3	192	7011	3369	10656
	4	477	9572	6427	16476
	5	289	4959	2838	8086
2015	1	114	5311	1859	7284
	2	245	5142	3910	9297
	3	218	4865	4104	9187
	4	0	4836	2230	7066
	5	211	1947	1380	3538

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the unified base.

As a survival strategy, dropping out of school adversely affects individuals' opportunities and work characteristics. Not completing high school often limits job opportunities to the informal sector, which is more vulnerable to economic cycles

and typically offers precarious conditions. These consequences can persist over time, affecting the financial stability of households and the life cycles of their members.

A clear indicator of this trend is the notable increase in uninsured individuals from the poorest quintiles, the decrease in contributory insurance, and the rise in non-contributory insurance (Table 3). While the highest percentage of people with contributory insurance is found in households with greater resources, over 26% of individuals in the poorest households (quintile 1) remained uninsured from 2005 to 2015. Furthermore, the percentage of these individuals with contributory regime insurance decreased from 1990 to 2015.

Table 3. Percentage of People by Type of Insurance, According to Year and Quintile Based on Gross Household Income

Year	Quintile	Insurance			Total
		Not insured	Contributory	Not contributory	
1995	1	23,90	76,10	0,00	100
	2	19,50	80,50	0,00	100
	3	17,30	82,70	0,00	100
	4	17,90	82,10	0,00	100
	5	15,50	84,50	0,00	100
2005	1	28,50	63,60	7,90	100
	2	24,50	73,20	2,30	100
	3	23,70	74,40	1,80	100
	4	23,10	75,70	1,30	100
	5	20,50	78,90	0,60	100
2010	1	26,00	66,60	7,40	100
	2	20,20	77,10	2,80	100
	3	18,90	79,00	2,10	100
	4	18,30	80,60	1,00	100
	5	13,70	85,40	0,90	100
2015	1	26,60	64,90	8,50	100
	2	21,70	75,30	3,10	100
	3	20,60	77,30	2,10	100
	4	19,80	78,50	1,80	100
	5	11,60	87,60	0,80	100

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the unified base.

Despite the decrease in the percentage of people with no educational level and the consequent increase in rates for elementary and high school education, the poorest households remain at a disadvantage compared to the richest households, which have a higher percentage of members with higher education (Table 4).

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Educational Levels According to Year and Quintile Based on Gross Household Income

Year	Quintile	None	Elementary	High school	Higher education	Total
1990	1	21,24	66,14	11,26	1,36	100
	2	13,05	68,57	16,87	1,51	100
	3	8,58	63,16	23,56	4,70	100
	4	7,13	55,23	29,79	7,84	100
	5	3,62	39,09	29,12	28,17	100
1995	1	16,27	69,37	12,04	2,32	100
	2	10,54	66,24	21,08	2,14	100
	3	7,59	61,26	25,75	5,39	100
	4	4,64	54,58	28,78	12,00	100
	5	2,90	34,76	30,71	31,63	100
2005	1	14,72	67,81	14,93	2,54	100
	2	7,43	64,81	23,83	3,93	100
	3	5,40	57,70	29,84	7,06	100
	4	3,82	47,07	33,13	15,99	100
	5	1,39	24,04	31,56	43,00	100
2010	1	14,46	67,81	14,80	2,93	100
	2	7,04	62,56	26,06	4,35	100
	3	5,83	52,94	32,13	9,10	100
	4	4,02	44,89	34,88	16,21	100
	5	1,20	22,97	30,72	45,11	100
2015	1	10,32	65,30	21,36	3,02	100
	2	6,47	58,01	30,20	5,31	100
	3	4,13	50,61	35,25	10,01	100
	4	2,86	37,94	39,26	19,93	100
	5	1,11	16,95	27,29	54,65	100

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the unified base.

However, when examining the family life trajectories of the interviewees, a different picture emerges. Among the women in the first generation, the highest level of education achieved was completing high school. Mrs. López attended up to the fourth year of high school. She studied accounting (“I did account and book technology”) (N. López, personal communication, March 1, 2020)). Mrs. Moreno completed one year of high school, Mrs. Morales has finished elementary school, and Mrs. Rojas only spent a brief period in the first year of school.

In contrast, their children and grandchildren have generally attained higher levels of education. Most have either completed some years of high school or obtained higher education degrees. In the third generation, all individuals have higher education qualification, with some holding two university degrees.

Income Generation and Dependence

The strategy of each household employs to perpetuate or increase their economic capital depends on their total available capital and varies depending on the head of the household. According to the income gap (IG), the greatest income inequality between households headed by men and those headed by women is found in the extreme quintiles (Table 5). This means the most significant differences in average household income, favoring households headed by men, are seen in the quintiles with the lowest and highest incomes.

Table 5. Average Household Income and Income Gap (IG) by Quintile Per Capita Income, Year, and Head of Household

Year	Quintile	Head of household		Total	IG
		Man	Woman		
1990	1	₡ 8 830	₡ 5 618	₡ 8 147	36%
	2	₡ 18 114	₡ 15 974	₡ 17 763	12%
	3	₡ 26 248	₡ 23 708	₡ 25 804	10%
	4	₡ 38 709	₡ 33 086	₡ 37 703	15%
	5	₡ 74 630	₡ 55 446	₡ 71 188	26%
1995	1	₡ 25 149	₡ 18 305	₡ 23 464	27%
	2	₡ 49 115	₡ 43 194	₡ 47 942	12%
	3	₡ 71 191	₡ 56 898	₡ 68 682	20%
	4	₡ 103 448	₡ 82 210	₡ 98 927	21%
	5	₡ 205 017	₡ 151 052	₡ 194 962	26%
2005	1	₡ 76 280	₡ 57 193	₡ 69 876	25%
	2	₡ 151 725	₡ 129 918	₡ 146 487	14%
	3	₡ 220 901	₡ 198 708	₡ 215 331	10%
	4	₡ 335 062	₡ 286 921	₡ 322 477	14%
	5	₡ 726 925	₡ 581 089	₡ 687 725	20%
2010	1	₡ 185 602	₡ 154 999	₡ 174 490	16%
	2	₡ 352 622	₡ 291 645	₡ 332 996	17%
	3	₡ 527 937	₡ 478 249	₡ 510 492	9%
	4	₡ 820 157	₡ 682 488	₡ 774 607	17%
	5	₡1 974 916	₡1 612 308	₡1 855 941	18%
2015	1	₡ 211 807	₡ 184 205	₡ 199 465	13%
	2	₡ 479 190	₡ 438 171	₡ 464 327	9%
	3	₡ 766 437	₡ 700 582	₡ 743 459	9%
	4	₡1 191 254	₡1 045 405	₡1 141 648	12%
	5	₡2 806 938	₡2 375 618	₡2 668 383	15%

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the unified base.

Although the average income of female-headed households increased, it always remained below the average income of male-headed households. Therefore, households headed by women faced more significant difficulties in perpetuating

or increasing. their capital compared to those headed by men. This disparity is particularly problematic given the historical prevalence of female-headed households in Latin America.

In Costa Rica, for example, at the beginning of the 20th century, 35.3% of all households in San José were headed by women (Molina, 2003, p. 114). This trend is consistent throughout the region. Data from the mid-1990s indicate that female-headed households comprised around 25% in countries such as Uruguay, Honduras, and Venezuela. In some Caribbean nations, they represented more than 40% of households (Ariza and de Oliveira, 2003, p. 28).

Female-headed households encompass a wide range of situations, including single or separated mothers, widowed women, and young single women with high education levels (Ariza and de Oliveira, 2003, pp. 28-29). These households are crucial for understanding household transformations. For example, Mrs. López's household is a female-headed household and has included her mother, nephews, daughters, and grandchildren over the years.

In male-headed households, individual agency, tactics, and family networks play significant roles. Household income is primarily recognized as contribution of the husband, who typically worked in agriculture, construction, sales, or other miscellaneous jobs, while the wife took care of the household.

Even when the husband's income was insufficient, women engaged in various activities to supplement the household's economic capital. For example, Mrs. Chavarría son is the primary contributor, while she occasionally works with an uncle, and her husband works whatever possible.

Women with more than one union often reported being the main economic contributor in their first union, working multiple jobs to increase household capital. In subsequent unions, their husbands became the primary financial supporters. For instance, Mrs. Quesada stated that her husband had been the main financial contributor throughout their thirty-year marriage.

Third-generation individuals living in their mothers' houses contribute to the household economy by paying bills and buying food, although they are not asked for a specific or regular amount. Mrs. Herrera, for example, works independently to support herself and her son, with occasional help from her ex-partner. Mr. Jiménez contributes a specific weekly amount for his son's support.

The average income of quintile 1 increased from 1990 to 2015 (Table 5). However, the most notable observation is the drastic rise in the income gap between the poorest and wealthiest quintiles. In 1990, this difference was ₡63,041 (less than one hundred thousand colones); by 2015, it had ballooned to more than two million colones. Over fifteen years, the disparity between these two quintiles grew more than twentyfold, highlighting a trend that demands immediate attention.

Housing tenure

Understanding social and symbolic investment through housing tenure involves examining the type of housing, ownership status, access to public services, overcrowding, and construction materials. Housing serves as a reproducer of social relations and a channel for recognition capital. The highest percentage of households fall into the category of independent houses, followed by row or adjoining houses (Table 6). For wealthier households, row or adjoining houses often refer to condominiums or apartments. In contrast, for poorer households, this category typically includes apartments or adjoining houses that maximize the use of available space or land.

Table 6. Percentage of Households by Type of Housing, According to Year and Quintile of Gross Household Income

Year	Quintile	Housing type					Total	
		Independent house	Condominium or closed residential	In a row or adjacent	In a building	Cuartería Slum		
2005	1	67,80	0,00	29,21	0,73	0,00	2,27	100
	2	65,58	0,00	31,70	1,76	0,00	0,95	100
	3	59,69	0,00	36,76	2,26	0,00	1,29	100
	4	52,17	0,00	45,12	2,56	0,00	0,15	100
	5	48,68	0,00	46,41	4,84	0,00	0,07	100
2010	1	67,73	0,46	28,90	1,03	0,34	1,54	100
	2	60,36	1,11	35,59	1,82	0,53	0,59	100
	3	57,49	1,62	37,61	2,47	0,20	0,62	100
	4	53,74	2,64	41,07	2,40	0,10	0,05	100
	5	47,44	5,22	43,69	3,41	0,14	0,09	100
2015	1	65,96	0,33	31,69	1,06	0,19	0,77	100
	2	57,92	0,98	38,20	1,93	0,36	0,60	100
	3	52,55	1,31	44,14	1,72	0,09	0,19	100
	4	47,82	2,52	47,14	2,47	0,05	0,00	100
	5	40,76	9,53	46,60	3,11	0,00	0,00	100

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the unified base.

A significant finding of examining housing tenure across income quintiles is that over 56% of households have fully paid for their homes over the ten years under study. For households in quintile 5, there is a high percentage being paid for in installments and rented properties. In contrast, for households in quintile 1, the second highest rate is in the rented or other ownership categories, indicating a trend towards housing ownership without incurring rental or purchase expenses.

The lowest percentage of households in installments are in quintiles 1, 2, and 3. This exemplifies how these households must resort to other forms of ownership that do not involve purchase credits. For low and medium-income households, this often means renting housing, while for those with fewer resources, it typically means rented or borrowed housing (Table 7).

Table 7. Percentage of Households by Housing Ownership, According to Year and Quintile of Gross Household Income

Year	Quintile	Dwelling					Total
		Fully paid	Paying in installments	Rented	Precarious	Other tenure	
2005	1	69,06	3,69	9,94	3,30	14,02	100
	2	61,68	6,66	16,34	1,68	13,64	100
	3	59,34	11,12	18,62	2,53	8,39	100
	4	59,39	13,00	21,40	1,04	5,16	100
	5	61,19	18,59	17,42	0,40	2,40	100
2010	1	66,98	3,01	15,08	1,73	13,20	100
	2	62,68	5,04	19,99	0,69	11,59	100
	3	61,04	6,79	21,10	0,66	10,41	100
	4	61,67	7,82	22,80	0,94	6,77	100
	5	63,97	14,28	17,03	0,25	4,46	100
2015	1	66,84	3,25	12,60	3,57	13,73	100
	2	57,61	6,18	20,69	3,77	11,75	100
	3	56,60	8,74	22,34	2,02	10,29	100
	4	58,96	12,46	20,97	1,45	6,16	100
	5	60,42	21,01	15,95	0,21	2,41	100

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the unified base.

Regardless of the gross income of the household or the year, all households have access to essential public services (piped water, sanitary service, in-house bathrooms, and electric). The only significant difference is in terms of internet access, which has increased over time, but remains concentrated in higher-income households. Despite variations in the physical condition of the houses observed during interviews, all the women of the first generation welcomed me into their homes. The forms of housing ownership varied, including land inherited from a husband or brother, or a house purchased with proceeds from selling a previous home, often with the help of daughters.

The construction and acquisition of housing often relied on family support and various strategies. For instance, Mrs. Morales bought her current house by selling her first one, which she acquired in a unique way:

When her husband passed away, he had already prepared the wood and other materials for building their first house. After his death, an aunt who loved him greatly took over the construction but also passed away before completing it. Builders working in a nearby bank rented the unfinished house from Mrs. Morales and paid her in kind by completing the construction. This enabled her to finish the house and eventually buy her current home (B. Morales, personal communication, February 8, 2019).

Mrs. Moreno's experience also highlights the role of family support in housing construction. In addition to securing a loan, her husband and brother helped build the house. Her brother's contribution was particularly notable as he offered his assistance for free (K. Moreno, personal communication, January 14, 2019).

Most second-generation women interviewed own their households, but initially rented or lived with relatives. The strategies and tactics for acquiring or constructing these homes varied widely, from family assistance to paying off loans, demonstrating collective agency, obtaining permission to remodel, or receiving help from the state. In contrast, the third generation typically lives in their parents' homes, with in-laws or rents apartments.

Conclusions

The study of Costa Rican household strategies from 1990 to 2015, examined through income quintiles and family life trajectories, reveals the dynamic nature of households influenced by socioeconomic contexts and life cycles. Economic, political, and social changes compel households to make decisions and implement strategies for survival and reproduction. The premises of the second demographic transition theory provide a framework for understanding these practices and strategies.

Reducing the number of children emerged as a common strategy across all households, leading to fewer members and less pressure on resources. For the poorest quintiles, this strategy reduced strain, while for the wealthiest quintiles, it allowed for more resource availability.

Educational strategies also varied for low-income households, the focus was on escaping illiteracy, whereas wealthier households prioritized higher education. Despite a general increase in educational levels, poorer households remained disadvantaged. Many had to withdraw their children from school before completing high school, compromising future opportunities.

The income gap analysis reveals that households headed by men had higher average incomes than those headed by women, particularly in the lowest and highest income quintiles. As female-headed households saw an increase in average income, it

consistently lagged behind that of male-headed households, make it more challenging for them to accumulate or perpetuate capital.

The type of insurance coverage also reflects economic strategies and decisions related to education. The highest percentage of people with contributory insurance (salaried, pensioned, family, self-employed) were found in wealthier households. From 2005 to 2015, about one-fifth of the poorest households were uninsured, with contributory insurance rates from 1990 to 2015. Less than 10% had non-contributory insurance, relying on state support.

In terms of housing, the highest percentage of households lived in independent houses, secondly, followed by row or adjacent. Wealthier households were more likely to live in condominiums or apartments, while poorer made the most of available often living in adjacent houses.

Most households had fully paid for their homes between 2005 and 2015. Wealthier had a high percentage of homes being paid in installments or rented, while poorer households tended to rent or have other forms of tenure, avoiding purchase expenses. Low- and medium-income households often resorted to renting, transferring, or borrowing housing instead of purchasing on credit.

Generationally, significant changes in household composition and strategies are evident. Second and third-generation marriages or unions typically involved partners with educational backgrounds, often having higher education. First and second generation-women were commonly married through religious ceremonies, while free unions and decreased fertility were more common in the third generation.

Educational strategies improved across generations. For some second-generation women, studying after having children enabled economic independence from their partners. The socioeconomic stratum influenced access to educational opportunities, such as scholarships or university fees, rather than the level of education itself.

Household strategies to guarantee, perpetuate, or increase economic capital depended on socioeconomic stratum, available financial capital, the economic contribution of the husband, the tactics of women, family support networks, and their capacity for individual and collective agency. Strategies for obtaining housing were influenced by socioeconomic stratum, family support, debt capacity, state assistance, and collective family agency.

Households have evolved dynamically, reflecting changes in composition and kinship networks. The first generation typically had one marriage and a secondary, yet crucial, economic role, within the household. Second generations often experienced multiple unions, with shared responsibilities in subsequent unions. The third generation showed trends of independent living, either with roommates in apartments or staying in the parental home, even after starting their own families.

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