

# Modernization, Globalization, and Women in Argentina: Their Changing Roles in the Economy and in Society



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## Introduction

A historical analysis of the status of women in Argentina reveals a picture of a society that nearly defies description. While on one hand characterized by traditional patriarchy and gender inequality, Argentine women's history is simultaneously illustrative of path-breaking feminist movements, feminist activism, and progressive policies. Both traditional conservatism and progressive modernism are woven together to form Argentine society today. In order to understand the socioeconomic status of Argentine women today, we provide with our research a historical analysis of women's status from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century until today, with particular emphasis on the globalization and economic restructuring policies that took place during the 1990s and 2000s. This poster focuses on Argentine women's achievements and challenges in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

## Data Collection

An integral component of our research consists of first-hand survey data collected from twenty-seven women living in Mendoza, Argentina. This data was collected during the Spring 2011 semester by Dr. Rose-Marie Avin.

The survey design allowed us to capture demographic information as well as extremely valuable opinions regarding personal empowerment in many spheres of life. The responses illustrate these women's continuous need to negotiate their rights, as well as the uncertainty that stems from the intersection of traditional patriarchy and the forces of modernization and globalization.

Because the surveys are in the Spanish language, all written responses were translated by Laurelyn Wieseman.

## Women in Argentina: from 1947 to the present

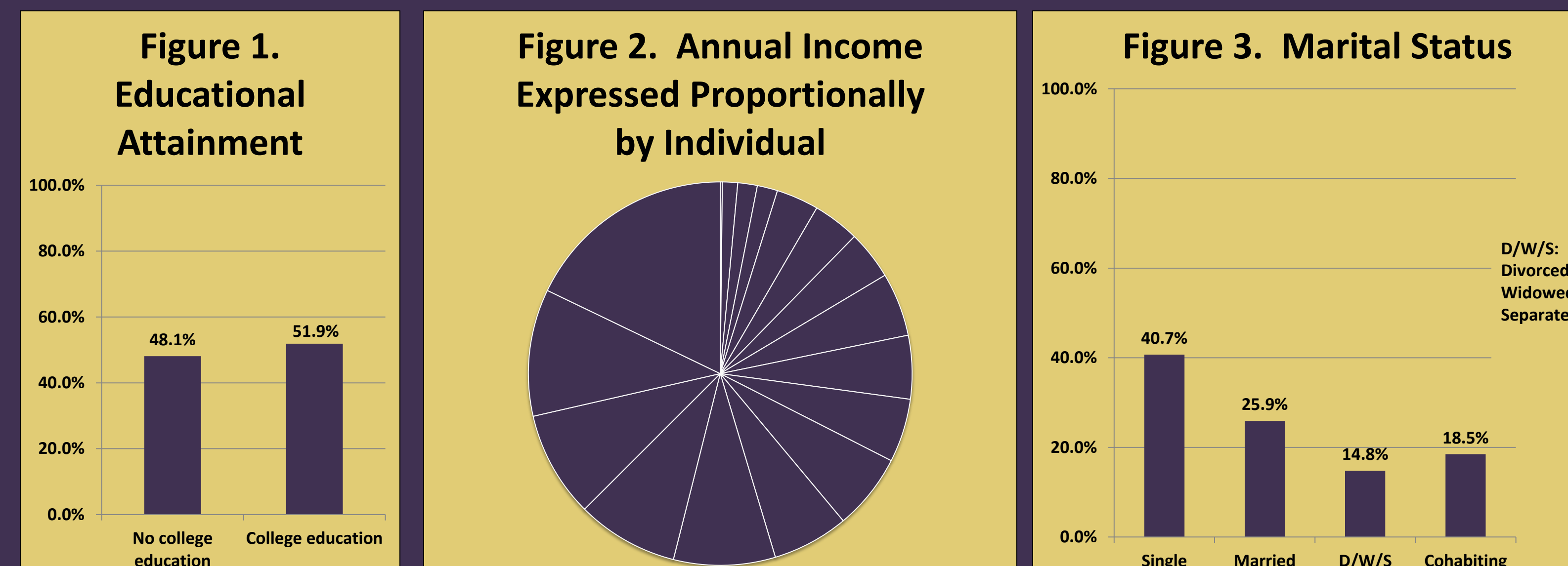
Although Argentine women received the right to vote in 1947, severe political disturbances during the period 1950-1990 made women's empowerment extremely difficult. During these forty years, Argentina experienced a military coup, a war with England over the Falkland Islands, and a brutal military dictatorship that *disappeared* a large percentage of the population.

That military dictatorship lasted until 1983 when Argentina elected Raul Alfonsín. However, Alfonsín was unable to stabilize the volatile economy. In 1989, urban food shortages and record levels of hyperinflation led to social pressures and citizen rioting that forced Alfonsín to resign. Carlos Menem was elected in 1989 and put into effect controversial economic policies that included the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the liberalization and deregulation of trade and finance, and a one-to-one exchange rate with the United States dollar known as *Convertibility*. These policies are also known as Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs).

In 2001, internal and external factors caused the Argentine economy to collapse. By 2002, as the crisis reached its peak, the peso was severely devalued, the unemployment rate reached 25%, and the poverty rate increased from 16% in 1991 to over 50% in 2002. The question is: How was women's socioeconomic status affected by these far reaching economic policies and the collapse of the economy?

We argue that, although women were disproportionately affected by these radical structural economic changes, the roles of Argentine women have evolved over time as they gain more empowerment. Despite political and economic instability, Argentine women's empowerment is visible in many spheres of life. We focus on their roles in the family, in the labor market, and in society; their security; their legal and reproductive rights; and their participation in activism and in politics.

## Selected Demographic Data of Our Sample



The above three tables contain demographic data for the women surveyed. This information is examined against two of the opinion questions in the tables below.

## Quotes from the Women

"I have tried to improve my employment situation, but it is very difficult, above all because of my age. I married very young, and I devoted myself only to the home (serious mistake). When I divorced, I began to think about myself and I raised my self-esteem. And I found out that you can always grow."

--Mendozan woman, born 1967

"To have a woman as president is clearly an achievement in the fight for gender equality. That a woman can obtain such an important political position is a symbol that can be used in any field: Today a woman can be a policewoman, taxi driver, lawyer, doctor, and much more; something that years back was impossible."

--Mendozan woman, born 1986

## Opinion Responses • measured against demographic data

**Figure 4. Can a woman be the sole earner of her family?**

Education Level	Number	Approve	Not Sure	Disapprove	
No college education	13	53.85%	30.77%	15.38%	100.00%
College education	14	64.29%	35.71%	0.00%	100.00%
	27				

**Figure 5. Can a woman be the sole earner of the family?**

Income Level	Number	Approve	Not Sure	Disapprove	
Income < \$1,000	1	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
1,000 ≤ Inc < 5,000	4	75.0%	0.0%	25.0%	100.0%
5,000 ≤ Inc < 10,000	7	57.1%	42.9%	0.0%	100.0%
10,000 ≤ Inc < 15,000	4	25.0%	75.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Inc > 15,000	1	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	17				

**Figure 6. Should unmarried women with no children work full time?**

Marital Status	Number	Approve	Not Sure	Disapprove	
Single	11	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%	100.0%
D/W/S	4	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Cohabiting	5	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Married	7	42.9%	57.1%	0.0%	100.0%
	27				

## Other Opinion Responses

**Figure 7. Should unmarried women with no children work full time?**

	Number	Percent
Approve	11	40.7%
Not Sure	14	51.9%
Disapprove	2	7.4%
	27	100.0%

**Figure 8. Should married women with no children work full time?**

	Number	Percent
Approve	3	11.1%
Not Sure	11	40.7%
Disapprove	13	48.1%
	27	100.0%

**Figure 9. Should women participate in the government?**

	Number	Percent
Approve	25	96.2%
Not Sure	1	3.8%
Disapprove	0	0.0%
	26	100.0%

**Figure 10. Is it a good idea to have a female president?**

	Number	Percent
Approve	16	61.5%
Not Sure	1	3.8%
Disapprove	9	34.6%
	26	100.0%

**Figure 11. Are you self-employed?**

	Number	Percent
Yes	11	47.8%
No	12	52.2%
	23	100.0%



## Conclusions/Discussion

Although the tables presented above contain only a small sample of our data, these findings echo what we discovered in our literature review: the intersection between tradition and transformation in Argentine society leads to a large degree of uncertainty by women about their rights and roles in society.

The responses to Figures 7 and 8 reveal an interesting picture, as the opinions are nearly opposite in magnitude from one question to the other. However, the significant proportion of women who responded "Not Sure" shows that many of these women are still conflicted.

The responses to Figures 9 and 10 reveal these women's overwhelming approval of female representation in government, juxtaposed with their polarized opinion on the female presidency. Given the relatively conservative nature of the city of Mendoza, Figure 10 may be better interpreted as a referendum on Argentina's current president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

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