

The Nicaraguan Family

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- define common terms concerning family life.
 - evaluate the importance of the extended family in contemporary Nicaragua.
 - compare the Nicaraguan family structure to that of today's American culture.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **Family Life in Nicaragua**
 - Poster board
 - Pictures of people from magazines and newspapers
 - Glue, tape, colored pencils (optional)
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Activities

1. Distribute the student handout entitled **Family Life in Nicaragua**.
 - a. Direct students to read the first four paragraphs of the handout.
 - b. Place each of the following terms on the chalkboard and ask students to define them based on the information in the handout.
 - **compadrazgo**- the relationship between a child's parents and the child's godparents.
 - **Padrino** – godfather
 - **Madrina** – godmother
 - c. Ask students to explain the significance of godparents in Nicaraguan family life.
 - d. Ask students to explain why the extended family has an important role in economic life.
2. Direct students to read the remaining paragraphs of the handout.
 - a. Place the following term on the chalkboard and ask students to define it based on the information in the handout.
 - **Machismo**- eccentric male pride, where men believe they are superior: the “macho man”.
 - b. Explain that *machismo* means that a man cannot let anything detract from his image of himself as a man's man, regardless of the suffering it might bring on himself and the women around him.
 - c. Reinforce that according to *machismo* the proof of every man's manliness was his ability to completely dominate his wife and children, to never let anyone question, deprecate or attempt to thwart his manhood, and never to reveal his true feelings to anyone lest they somehow take advantage of him.

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Activities

- d. Ask students to evaluate the impact of *machismo* on family life, particularly upon Nicaraguan women.
 3. Provide each student with a posterboard.
 - a. Explain that each student is to imagine that he/she is from a Nicaraguan family, and the assignment is to create an extended family tree with all of their relatives using the following format:
 - The student should cut pictures out of magazines or newspapers for his/her “unique” family.
 - Direct students to glue pictures on the poster board creating the formation of a family tree.
 - Direct students to label the pictures of their family members with their name and position in the family, madre, padre, hermano, etc.)
 4. Concluding Activity
 - a. Direct students to write an essay comparing the similarities and differences in American family life to that of the Nicaraguan family life.
 - OR**
 - b. Have students create a story about the family life of a child/woman/man in Nicaragua.
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Family Life in Nicaragua

Latin Americans are known for their large kinship patterns. These kinship patterns shape family life in Nicaragua. There are two forms of family structure, a nuclear family and an extended family. The nuclear family is the basic form of all families. It consists of the mother (madre), father (padre), and any brothers or sisters (hermanos). The extended family consists of the larger family, such as grandparents (abuelos), cousins (primos), aunts and uncles (tios). But in Nicaragua, a very strong aspect of the family is the godparents. The godmother (madrina) and godfather (padrino) play an important role in the social, economic, and political relations in Nicaragua.

Social prestige, economic ties, and political alignments frequently follow kinship lines. If you are born to a poor family with none of the above mentioned ties, how is your child to achieve a better life than the one you have lived? Through the compadrazgo system (the relationship between a child, the child's parents and the child's godparents), your child can achieve a better life. This system relies on people who are unrelated to you by blood or marriage to establish bonds of ritual kinship that are also important for the individual in the society at large. Through the institution of compadrazgo, the attributes of the madrina and padrino are extended. When an infant is baptized, the parents choose a madrina and padrino for their child. Even though the Roman Catholic Church practices this around the world, in Nicaragua it assumes a broader social significance. The godparents are responsible for the baptism ceremony and the festivities afterwards. They are also expected to concern themselves with the welfare of the child and his or her family, and come to their aid in times of hardship.

Godparents are typically trusted friends of the parents. However, lower-class families often chose godparents of superior economic, political or social status, who are in a position to help the child in the future. Bankers, affluent business people, government officials and politicians may become godparents to the children of social inferiors in order to build up a system of personal loyalties. For example, if a Nicaraguan male owns a bank, he would give a job to his godchild. Godparents are sometimes called compadre/comadre, which means co-father/co-mother.

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Both the nuclear family and extended family play a large role in the economic well being of a family. Because of high fertility and the presence of the extended family, households are large, six to eight people living in a household is common. Large families help supply the parents with the labor needed for everyday labor needs. Children in Nicaragua work at an early age. They begin to sell products in the park, in the market, or on the streets as early as age five. Some children go to work before they attend school or work late at night in the central parks. In time of economic crisis, the survival strategies of the urban poor often center on mutual assistance among their relatives.

Besides economic hardships, the Nicaraguan family also has to deal with crime. Someone reports a crime in Managua every 90 minutes. The real crime rate may be three to four times greater, but in this poor, overcrowded city, residents often don't bother to report them. Reporting a crime means a trip to the local station and waiting until an overworked officer can listen to your complaint.

A crime the family has to endure is the crime from one of your family members, abuse. There is a long tradition of machismo or male pride, where men believe they are superior over any woman and that women are the property of men. Men turn quickly to violence as a response to life's problems: "Nicaraguans like to have things settled, one way or the other. There is a winner and a loser," says Manuel Ortega, a student who studies the roots of social attitudes.

When men bring home the defeat and despair of their daily lives, the losers are often the women. Violence and abuse of women and children is very much a part of domestic life in Nicaragua. To Nicaraguans it is not a crime; it is part of life. The United Nations estimates that 75% of married Nicaraguan women have been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in some way. Why is abuse so common in Nicaragua? There are quite a few possible reasons: debilitating poverty, 50% unemployment, incredibly high teen birth rate and one of the youngest, fastest-growing populations in Latin America. Basically, more people and no new jobs results in increased tension, and lots of poor young women who are forced to rely on men.

Women are beginning to see things differently because of Law 130, which allows for women to ask for a restraining order against their partner, and domestic violence can bring a prison sentence up to one year. This law helps put a glimmer of hope for Nicaraguan women living in Managua's barrios (neighborhoods), but what can they expect from their future?
