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**Author**

PINILLA, Bernarda

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**Abstract**

The transformation of universities from elite to mass models in developing countries has given the opportunity to new social groups to participate in higher education. As a part of this process, diverse groups of students have benefited in different ways from the equal educational opportunities offered to them. In this paper, we approach the problem of institutional efficiency versus social inclusion in a developing country through the case study of the academic performance of a social group of recent participation in a public university in Venezuela, specifically that of student mothers in the Universidad de Los Andes. This work investigates how student mothers make use of the educational opportunities opened to them and how their academic performance is affected by their particular life circumstances. Evidence shows that the academic performance of student mothers is lower than that of other groups of university students. In practice, student mothers participate as part-time students, although this category is not officially recognized by most Venezuelan public universities. Almost all

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the life circumstances of student mothers negatively affect their academic performance. The only circumstance that contributes positively to the performance of a student mother is the help provided by her extended family in taking care of her children. The fact that student mothers are able to participate in higher education is mainly due to the help they receive from their extended family. This is a distinctive cultural feature associated to this social group in the context of a developing country such as Venezuela. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)