

# Changes in education and union formation patterns in Mexico

## **Description of the topic**

In Mexico, as in many other developing countries, the widespread of the educational system has taken place in the second half of the twentieth century. The number of years of schooling has increased notably, mainly amongst women who originally had lower levels. Closely connected to the improvement in schooling, women's participation in the labor market has increased. In spite of these and other social transformations related to the modernization process, union formation patterns have not been greatly modified. Women's ages at first union have had a consistent but small increase; the timing of first marriage has remained without changes in the majority of cases and it is only a relatively reduced group of young women who are postponing their union formation. Men's timing of first union has only been deferred slightly in the most recent birth cohorts.

On the other hand, the development of the country has been characterized by deep socioeconomic inequities. Even amongst recent birth cohorts, poverty hinders some sectors of the population, mainly in the rural areas, from remaining in school for longer periods so that they achieve only few years of basic education. Most of the students attain only middle education and although access to higher education has increased, it continues to be restricted to some sectors in the cities. Concerning the labor markets, trends towards greater precariousness (high levels of underemployment, low salaried and unstable jobs) have caused instability in life opportunities for broad sectors of the population. Specially, young people face growing difficulties in order to achieve economic independence; as a consequence, young couples increasingly remain in the family household for a few years.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the effect of the growing levels of education on the timing of union formation of women and men in a context of the social modernization process, deep social stratification and growing precariousness and instability in the labour markets.

## **Theoretical focus**

Theories of marriage have given special importance to education. There are three main mechanisms through which education affects the timing of union formation. These are the school attendance as incompatible with marriage, ideational change, and access to better jobs and higher salaries. If education acts mainly through the first two mechanisms, educated women and men will delay their union formation. If the effect it is through the last mechanism, given the males' family role as providers, educated young men will have access to better jobs and income, thus favoring their union formation. In the case of women, theories differ. The new home economics framework posits that higher education and better jobs will lower the incentive to form a conjugal union. Models of marital search, on the contrary, assume education to have a similar effect among

both women and men, because more educated women are better candidates, given their current and potential earnings.

The main hypothesis of the paper is that there is a changing effect of education of union formation of women and men. Amongst women, the effect is mainly through the attendance and the ideational change, so that higher levels of education will be related to older ages at union formation; however, the effect will tend to increase among younger birth cohorts given the growing female labor force participation and autonomy of more educated women. Amongst men, the effect in most cases is through attendance and access to better jobs so that those with more schooling will anticipate their union formation, after they have finished school; nevertheless, the growing precariousness in the labor markets will make education to have a smaller impact on union formation, especially because men from lower social sectors with lower education may remain in the family household after marriage.

### **Data and research methods**

The data source is the National Survey on the Family Dynamics<sup>1</sup>. Almost 20 000 individuals aged 18 years and over were interviewed in 2005. Questions concerning their nuptiality patterns, education and work were asked, and for those currently married, data on their couple's education was retrieved as well.

Four birth cohorts whose first union formation occurs from the 1930's until 2005 will be analyzed (1921-1940, 1941-1960, 1961-1975 and 1976-1987). By union formation, we refer to marriage as well as to the beginning of cohabitation.

The analytical axes are gender and birth cohort. A descriptive analysis will be used to characterize the evolution of the educational attainment and the labor force participation of different birth cohorts of women and men. Discrete time dichotomous logistic regression models are applied to analyze the effect of education on the likelihood of marrying or cohabiting. Finally, a discrete time multinomial logistic regression is applied in order to estimate the odds of remaining single, married or cohabiting in an independent household and married or cohabiting in the parent's home. In all models other variables concerning their socialization process, work and socioeconomic status will be controlled for. Separate models will be estimated for men and women of each birth cohort.

### **Expected findings**

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<sup>1</sup> *Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica de las Familias*, carried out by the Institute of Social Research from the National University of Mexico.

The effect of education on the timing of union formation during the twentieth century will be strong mainly amongst women and trends by gender will differ, given the different mechanisms through which it affects in most cases. Changes in time of the effect of education will be related to the expansion of the educational system, the increase in the number of years young people remain in school, the growing female labor force participation and the process of deterioration in the labor markets.