

## **Educational Attainment, Labor Force Participation and the Transition to First Marriage among Mexican and Costa Rican Women: Is marriage here to stay?**

One of the most important transformations in family behavior occurring in a majority of industrialized societies is the delay in marriage (Cherlin 2004; Lesthaeghe 1995). At the beginning of the last century women generally got married in their earlier twenties, by the end of the century, however, they were postponing union formation until their late twenties. The timing of marriage has very important implications not only for individuals, but also for society at large in its relation to the timing and level of fertility. At the individual level, marriage marks the transition from the family of origin to the family of orientation and into adulthood. As a result, research on marriage has focused on its consequences and on the factors thought to postpone its occurrence. Among the more important reasons credited are the substantial increase in educational levels among men and women, and the growth in women's labor force participation.

Marriage scholars have outlined several key theories to help explain the transformations in marriage due to these socioeconomic changes, including the new home economics' specialization/independence theory (Becker 1973, 1974), marital-search theory (Oppenheimer 1988), ideational change (Lesthaeghe 1995; Van de Kaa 1987) and gender systems theory (Mason 1995, 1997, 2001; McDonald 2000, 2002). Scholars have also explored the role of family influences (e.g., Thornton 1991) and family ties as part of a cultural explanation for marriage patterns (e.g., Giulio and Rosina 2007; Reher 1988). The economic theories and those that emphasize cultural change intersect at a number of places; the most salient of these is that the increase in education and labor force participation among women has an effect on their marriage behavior by delaying or foregoing union

formation. Although controversy exists, some of these theories have found empirical evidence to support their postulates in many regions of the industrialized world where marriage is in fact occurring later in life (e.g. Blossfeld 1995; Liefbroer and Corijn 1999; Oppenheimer and Lew 1995; Ono 2003; Raymo 2003; Sweeney 2002).

I argue, however, that these theories when applied to developing countries are insufficient, particularly in relation to Latin America. In this region, marriage still occurs relatively early despite the steady rise in women's educational attainment and labor force participation. Moreover, during the second half of twentieth century, most of the countries in this region experienced the so-called fertility transition; as today, almost all have reached replacement levels. While the increase in the average age at marriage has been an important component of the fertility reduction in most Asian countries and a factor in the relatively low pre-transitional fertility in Europe, Latin American scholars suggest that marriage timing has played a minimal, if any, role on the region's fertility decline (Quilodran 1991; Rosero-Bixby 1996). Because family-limitation practices has occurred mainly among married women there has been little need for delaying marriage as a strategy to lower the average family size. In this sense, Fussell and Palloni (2004) explain that the forces driving fertility decline do not seem to discourage early marriage. Marriage timing thus appears immune to demographic and socioeconomic transformations occurring in Latin America.

I argue that within Latin America, Mexican society is an ideal context in which to test theories of marriage timing that claim education and labor force participation affect marriage behavior directly or indirectly through ideational change. On the one hand, the most important aspect of contemporary demographic trends in the Mexico is the heterogeneity in socioeconomic status. Consequently, scholars have suggested that the country has experienced two

fertility transitions: one that occurred among the educational elite as a result of ideational change, and the other among the middle and lower classes, occurring as a result of government family planning policies beginning in 1974 (Juarez and Quilodran 1989). Similarly, marriage has only been delayed among highly educated women, it has not been diffused among the general population, suggesting a limit for ideational change towards marriage reflecting a strong family orientation in Mexican society. On the other hand, despite the rise in education and women's labor force participation, the country still shows divergent gender roles and strong family ties between generations. That is to say, an important proportion of working women in Mexico leave their careers to become wives or mothers; perform most housework and childrearing, independent of their work status; and are the predominant caregivers to their elderly parents.

Another interesting context to test such theories of marriage timing is the Costa Rica. This country is considered more advanced than Mexico regarding both demographic and socioeconomic indicators. Fertility decline occurred earlier and its current level is lower than in Mexico, but the age at marriage remained also constant through the fertility transition. Moreover, this country enjoys higher levels of education but interestingly lower levels of women's labor force participation and a slightly younger age at marriage than in Mexico. These characteristics amount to an interesting puzzle to test the role of socioeconomic change in transforming traditional family behaviors

The objective of this paper is to investigate the role of educational attainment and labor force participation on marriage timing among early and late cohorts of women in Mexico and Costa Rica. I hypothesize that the importance of education and labor force participation for marriage formation has remained constant regardless of the increase

in their levels, reflecting the importance of family formation in women's life. Therefore, the slightly delay in marriage occurring in Mexico is a result of an extended enrollment in the educational system and not a response to ideational change about marriage timing.

I will use data from the National Demographic Dynamics Survey (Enadid) conducted in Mexico in 1997 and from the National Reproductive Health Survey of 1999 in Costa Rica. Both samples include retrospective marital histories for women 18-44 years old, allowing the use of event history techniques to analyze the transition to marriage. In addition measures of educational attainment and labor force participation are included in both surveys, making these data suitable for my investigation. I will use logistic regression analysis to estimate discrete-time hazard models of the effects of these variables on the entry into first marriage or consensual union, controlling for other background variables as well. Since the focus of the analysis is on contrasting cohorts and countries, four separate models will be estimated.

Overall, this paper will begin filling the gap in our understanding of the transition to marriage in Latin America, a society experiencing important socioeconomic change, but little family change. At the same time, this paper will contribute to the current debate on the different effects of educational attainment on marriage timing across societies and within societies (e.g. Blossfeld 1995; Liefbroer and Corijn 1999; Ono 2003; Raymo 2003) by testing the role of socioeconomic change on marriage trends in Mexico and Costa Rica.