

Consensual Union: Its Implications to Filipino Women's Well-being

Introduction

Marriage as an institution is viewed with high regard in the Philippines. Marriage can be either legal (through church or civil wedding) or consensual, but majority of Philippine marriages are legal. Data from the Public Use File of the 2000 Census of Population and Housing show that 54% of the population aged 15 years and older are legally married, 4.9% are widowed, 1.2% are separated, and 4.9% are in consensual or live-in arrangements. Marriage rates for women are generally higher than those of men at all ages below 40; after 40, more men than women are reported as married or cohabiting.

Although its prevalence is low, consensual unions are not a recent phenomenon in the Philippines (see e.g., Hunt, Pal, Coller, Espiritu, De Young and Corpus, 1963). However, it is only in recent times that statistical data have become available for quantifying its prevalence and trend. On a national scale, the Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Studies (YAFS) has been an important source of information on this topic. Using YAFS data, Kabamalan (2004) showed an increasing trend in cohabitation among the youth aged 20-24 between 1994 and 2002 (7.8% to 10.6%) and a corresponding decline in legal marriages (25.1% to 21.8%). The proportion single or never-married remained virtually unchanged at 66.4% to 66.6%. Kabamalan also described cohabiting youths as more likely to be males, of lower educational attainment, and not raised by both parents. Two of the most common reasons cited for cohabitation among the youth in her study are economic inadequacy and pregnancy. These reasons are indicative of the vulnerable position that young cohabiting couples find themselves in. However, these reasons also do not discount the possibility of either a subsequent legal marriage or a separation as these young people mature and strive to surmount the challenges that led them to cohabitation. Whether cohabitation is part of the marriage process or is a separate, alternative form of union (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel, 1990) cannot be readily determined from the YAFS or other cross-sectional national data. Such investigation is best undertaken with longitudinal data.

It is therefore the aim of this paper to use longitudinal data to examine marital trajectories of Filipino women who entered into their first union either consensually or legally. Further, it will examine relationships between marital trajectories and women's current psychological and economic well-being.

Data and Method

This paper uses panel data from the Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Survey (CLHNS). The CLHNS followed up a cohort of 3,327 women who had given birth between May 1983-April 1984. The study site is Metropolitan Cebu, the second largest metropolitan area in the Philippines with both urban and rural (or peri-urban) sectors. At the time of the baseline survey in 1983-84, the sample women were 15-47 years old. They were reinterviewed 18 times thereafter. The analysis focuses on the 2,009 women

who were followed up in the 2005 survey round and who had reported themselves as ever been married (legally or consensually). These women were 35-69 years old (median age of 47) at the time of the 2005 survey which helps mitigate, though not eliminate, the problem of censored data insofar as their marital experience is concerned. Attrition of the CLHNS sample was mainly due to outmigration, which accounted for 80% of loss to follow up.

Selectivity as a result of attrition is shown in Table 1. Using baseline characteristics, logistic regression reveals that the women included in this analysis are of lower educational attainment and less likely to be residing in an urban area compared to women who dropped out of the sample. No significant differences, however, are observed with respect to women’s age, household size and asset ownership such as a television set.

Table 1. Odds of women being included in the analysis sample

| Characteristics | OR | s.e. | p-value | 95% CI |
|---------------------------|------|------|---------|-----------|
| Ownership of television | 1.10 | 0.12 | 0.38 | 0.88-1.36 |
| Household has electricity | 0.85 | 0.07 | 0.06 | 0.72-1.01 |
| Household size | 1.02 | 0.01 | 0.20 | 0.99-1.04 |
| Mother’s grade | 0.96 | 0.01 | 0.001 | 0.93-0.98 |
| Mother’s age | 1.01 | 0.01 | 0.21 | 0.99-1.02 |
| Residing in urban area | 0.61 | 0.06 | 0.000 | 0.51-0.74 |

Key Variables

Marital status and trajectory. As defined in the CLHNS, marriage is a union between man and woman that is either legal (church or civil wedding) or consensual. The type of first marriage and subsequent marriages if any, as well as their outcomes, define marriage trajectories. Subsequent marriages or remarriage represent a change in spouse.

Psychological well-being is measured in two ways: the experience of depressive symptoms and domestic violence. The CLHNS enables the construction of indices from information regarding: 1) 12 depressive symptoms experienced in the last month prior to the survey, and 2) 5 acts of violence done to and done by women in the last year. The depressive symptom index used in this study yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.79, while the index for “violence perpetration” has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.59, and that of “violence victimization” has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.66.

Economic well-being. From CLHNS data, information on household assets (land ownership and ownership of household amenities) is available. Household expenditure per capita (especially on food) can also be computed. Questions on financial management such as “Do you usually find that you can cope with major household bills and expenses?” provides another indicator of economic well-being.

Possible confounders such as current age, age at first marriage, education, number of pregnancies, work status and place of residence will be included in the regression models

for exploring the relationship between marital trajectory and measures of psychological and economic well-being of women in this study.

Expected and Preliminary Results

The data show that nine out of every ten women in the study have been married only once; only one in ten had married more than once (176 women married twice, 21 had married three times, six married four times, and one married five times). The data also highlights the fact that nearly all (96%) of those currently in legal union were still in their first marriage, while the majority (66%) of those currently cohabiting had already remarried.

The average age at first marriage for the CLHNS women was 20.3 years. Moreover, age at first marriage differed between mothers who married only once and those who had remarried: on average, those with multiple marriages had married about a year younger than those with single marriage (19.2 years vs. 20.5 years). Age at first marriage was shown to be positively correlated with mother's biological age and educational attainment.

Marriage trajectories

Of particular interest in this study is the nature or type of first marriage (whether legal or consensual) that women experienced and whether this led to varying marriage trajectories. From Table 2 it can be seen that as many as 20% of the sample women had started out their first union in cohabitation. Of the 408 women who did so, less than half (37%) had moved on to legalize their union. It is also apparent from the data that consensual first marriages were likely to lead to subsequent marriages, whereas church and civil marriages were more likely to endure. Illustrations of common outcomes/trajectories of first marriages are shown in diagrams below.

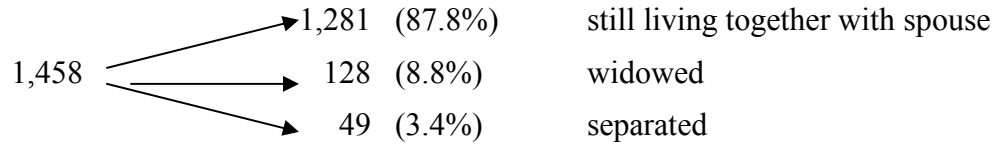
Table 2. Distribution of mothers by type or legality status of first marriage and number of times married, 2005

| Type of marriage | Number of times married* | | Total |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| | Once | More than once | |
| Church | 1,301 (94.3) | 78 (5.7) | 1,379 (100.0) |
| Civil | 182 (91.5) | 17 (8.5) | 199 (100.0) |
| Consensual | 150 (58.8) | 105 (41.2) | 255 (100.0) |
| Civil then church | 23 (100.0) | - | 23 (100.0) |
| Live-in before church wedding | 134 (97.1) | 4 (2.9) | 138 (100.0) |
| Live-in before civil wedding | 15 (100.0) | - | 15 (100.0) |
| Total | 1,805 (89.8) | 204 (10.2) | 2,009 (100.0) |

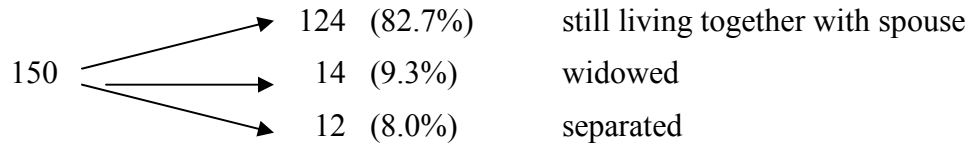
* Includes legal marriages and consensual or live-in arrangements.

Outcome of first marriage of women who married once (selected illustration)

A. Women who had a church wedding

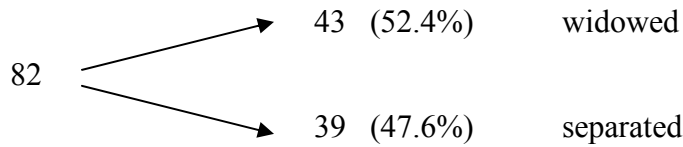


B. Women in consensual unions

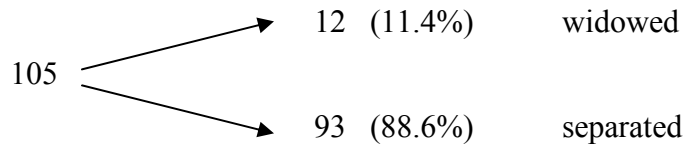


Outcome of first marriage of women who married more than once

A. Women who had a church wedding



B. Women in consensual unions



Among those who married more than once, the trajectories shown will be extended to their subsequent marriage(s). Dominant patterns will be determined and profiles of the women depicting these patterns described.

It is expected that those starting out in consensual unions are more likely to enter into less stable marriages (another consensual union) than those who had legal first marriages. As far as psychological and economic well-being is concerned, the expected results are that cohabiting first marriages (and subsequent ones) are more likely to compromise the well-being of women.