Pathways and Timing of Marriage, Childbearing and Sexual Behavior: the case of Mexico

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ABSTRACT

JUSTIFICATION
One of the most important transformations in the last century, both at the individual and family level, has been the dissociation between sex and marriage and childbearing greatly attributed to the availability of modern contraception and the growing secularization in the recent past. The effect of the secularization, understood as a reduction of the believes attributed to the religion respect the fertility control and increased laity is expressed as an growing autonomy respect to fertility and health, and Mexico is not an exception in this trend of secularization. The country has experienced many developmental, structural, and demographic changes that have contributed to the process of secularization. It has been experienced a rapid process of urbanization, and currently only 25% of the areas are rural; women's education level has increased, while in the 1970's 5% achieved high school or more school level, today it reaches 27% (INEGI 1970 and 2000). The fertility transition started in the mid-sixties, and preceded the National Family Planning Plan of 1977 (Quilodrán, 1983, 1991, Quilodrán and Juarez 2006). The maximum fertility reach by Mexican women is around 7 children as indicated in the Encuesta Mexicana de Fecundidad 1976-77 (part of the World Fertility Survey) and the most recent estimate of 2006 indicates a total fertility of 2.3 children. A national rural survey of 1969 showed that women living in rural areas did not know contraceptive methods at that time, and therefore modern contraceptive used in those setting. By 1976, the national level of contraception reached 31%, and currently the contraceptive prevalence is above 70% (mostly modern methods), but marked difference are observed throughout the country (SPP-IISUNAM, 1979; SSA-CRIM-UNAM, 2003, CONAPO 2005). Sexual intercourse outside marriage has become more common, though still low compared to developed countries, Estimates of 1995 and 2006 indicate that around 20% of single young adolescents 15-19 have initiated sexual activity (Mendoza, 2006). Contrary to what has been observed in fertility and contraception, the historical serie of censuses (1890-2000) do not indicated much change in the marriage pattern or age at union (Quilodrán et al, 2004). At national level the age at marriage is around 23 years for men and women. On the whole the marriage trends have remained constant with a slight rejuvenate in the decade of 1960's, and un negligible delay since that time (Quilodrán, 2001). Given this evidence it becomes relevant to focus on the family diversity from a life course perspective,

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where sexual relation outside marriage are occurring, and where possibly different patterns and timing of marriage and childbearing might be occurring.

OBJECTIVES

A neglected area of research in Mexico has been the marriage institution due to its apparent constant pattern in the past. The important changes in the developmental and demographic changes occurring in Mexico, in particular, the increasing dissociation between the couple, marriage and reproduction has been experienced poses important questions remain unanswered such as "To what extent and how does the timing of marriage as well as the terms of marriage affect patterns of sexual behavior before marriage, and childbearing".

The aim of the study is to a) describe the recent trend in marital status, births before marriage, and early childbearing, b) identify changes in the timing of marriage and childbearing, c) explore the dissociation of sexual behavior and marriage, and to develop a typology of transitions that characterize the different pathways or strategies follow by women in Mexico. Differential behavior will be considered, in particular, in various contexts and transition to marriage and childbearing that derives in a more vulnerable condition for women.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data to be use is the National Survey of Demographic Dynamics 2006 (ENADID 2006). It is a random sample with nationally, rural and urban and state representation collected for women aged 15-54 (N=41,133). The survey obtained information on different aspects such as background information, birth histories, marriage history, information on sexual initiation, contraceptive preferences, maternal health, among other. The target population for this study are women aged 15-49. The central variables of this study are age at first sex, age at first marriage, age at first birth. Demographic techniques and multivariate analysis will be conducted to investigate the changes in the timing of marriage and childbearing, and to explore the dissociation of sexual behavior and marriage. Findings will be used to develop a typology of transitions that characterize the different pathways or strategies follow by women in Mexico. Differential behavior will be considered, such as urban and rural context and transition to marriage and childbearing that derives in a more vulnerable condition for women.

RESULTS

Analysis has just started and it is expected that the paper will be completed by January 2008.

CONCLUSIONS

Though we do not have finding at present, it is expected that large difference will be observed in the timing, childbearing and relative importance of sexual behavior. As the life course is central to the approach followed in this study, from the multiple pathways, the main strategies followed by women in Mexico will help us foresee the future patterns of interrelation of marriage, childbearing and sexual behavior in the country.

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