EPC 2014

Session 2: Sexual and reproductive health (Convener: Sabu S. Padmadas)

EARLY TRANSITIONS TO FIRST SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, MARRIAGE AND CHILDBEARING AMONG YOUNG-ADULT WOMEN IN KENYA: IS EDUCATION DELAYING ITS ENTRY?

Short Abstract:

Throughout the world, the prevalence of adolescent marriages has been relatively declining over the last decades. In Kenya, the age at first marriage has been rising as well as the educational level of its citizens. In this study, early transitions into adulthood among Kenyan women - that is first marriage, sexual intercourse and childbirth - will be explored, taking into account their educational level, as well as the cohort in which they were born. Thus, in this article we aim to examine to what extent educational expansion explains the delay in the age of these transitions, by performing not only a descriptive analysis of these event's patterns, but also a logistic regression in order to predict their probability of occurrence. Given the complexity of the country, other factors will be considered: ethnicity, region, and type of place of residence (urban–rural). The analysis is based on data from the standard Kenyan Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for the years 1988-89, 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2008-09, focusing on women aged 20-49. The results show a relative decline over time in the proportions of women who have experienced these transitional events at an early age, although the timing for first intercourse takes place rather earlier than for the other two transitional events. Taking into account that it is the urban and educated women who tend to delay more the transitional events into adulthood, especially those with secondary and more studies, in the case of early marriage in Kenya it seems that the change towards its postponement has been mainly due to changes in its population structure (educational structure) for the elder cohorts, followed by some change from the behavioural domain and a certain stability for the younger cohorts.

Extended Abstract:

Introduction

Throughout the world, Western/Middle Africa is generally the region with the greatest proportion of women marrying at young ages, followed by South-central/South-eastern Asia, Eastern/Southern Africa, and the Caribbean and Central America (Lloyd, ed. 2005). In the last decades, an increase in the age at marriage has occurred in most of these countries. Thus, a considerable body of literature on the timing of marriage in low-income countries suggests the importance of political, socio-cultural, and structural factors (Casterline et al. 1986; Malhotra and Tsui 1996; Mensch et al. 2005), as well as ideological shifts (changes in policy, increases in the legal age at marriage, expansion of education, changes in social norms, values, and ideas, etc.), and changes in the economic production systems; i.e. access to wage employment (Lloyd, ed. 2005; Mathur et al. 2003).

Nevertheless, this changing pattern arises one main question: Why is the postponement of marriage really taking place? There are two main forces that are usually given to explain the delay of marriage: education and labour force participation. Without any doubt, one can find strong empirical associations between education and marriage in recent literature, indicating a complex network of reciprocal causal forces linking family formation and school domains (Thornton, Axinn, and Teachman 1995; Lloyd and Mensch 1999, 2006; Bongaarts 2003; Marini 1978). In addition, due to the fact that in many countries the increase in the age at marriage has occurred in parallel to the expansion of education (Mensch et al. 2005), both phenomenons have usually been linked together.

In Sub-Saharan Africa marriage is not typically reducible to a distinct single event, rather it is mostly considered as a gradual process that can easily take years and several stages to its completion, which can mainly depend on lineage and tradition (Meekers, 1992; Hattori and Dodoo, 2007; Harwood-Lejeune, 2001; Clark, 2004; Magadi and Agwanda, 2009). Cohabitation sometimes can be difficult to differentiate it from a formal type of marriage (Bledsoe and Cohen, 1993). Nevertheless, it is considered as a step in the marital process and “has recently been recognized by the Kenyan courts as being marriage, albeit without a ceremony” (Humans Right Watch, 2003; Hattori and Dodoo, 2007).

During the last thirty years, the age at first marriage and at first birth has been rising in Kenya (Blacker et al. 2005). Even though the legal age at marriage is established in 18 years, or 16 with the consent of a guardian (Hattori and Dodoo, 2007), the country's median age at first marriage among the 25-49 age cohorts has slightly increased during this last decade: from 19.2 in 1998, to 19.7 in 2003 and to 20.0 in 2008 (Beguy et al. 2011). Nonetheless, the variation by provinces is even larger and has remained constant over time: where women from North Eastern, Nyanza, and Coast provinces generally enter into marriage earlier than women in other provinces (CBS, MOH, & ORC-Macro, 2004). However, not much further impact can be expected on fertility since the rise in age at first birth was less sharp than that in age at marriage, so much so that after 1975 there has been a reversal with first births preceding marriage (Blacker: 2002, 2005). As Ikamari (2008, pp.28) states "In Kenya, as in many societies, the ordering of these two events is not very clear in the sense that whereas the majority of first births occur soon after getting married, some first births occur before marriage".

In Kenya studies that focus on adolescents can be considered of great relevance given that it is a country characterized by its youthful population (over three-fifths of Kenya's population are less than 25 years old) (KNBS, 2010). Key life course events occur during the adolescent ages well until the mid twenties, such as gaining independence by leaving the parental home and entering the labour force, or getting married and having children. These events are often considered as indicators on the transition from adolescence to adulthood and its sequencing can be influenced to a great extent by socioeconomic, cultural, demographic or educational changes (Beguy et al. 2011). As in the rest of Southern and Eastern Africa, it is the educated and urban Kenyan women who have higher ages at first marriage and at first birth (Harwood-Lejeune, 2001). However, each ethnic group has its own socio-cultural ideologies about childbearing and its initiation. These group norms, ideals and beliefs have been used to explain ethnic variation in the timing of marriage and childbearing (Addai and Trovato, 1999; Arnaldo, 2004; Ikamari, 2005).

Therefore, in this paper, early transitions into adulthood in Kenya among female young adults will be explored, taking into account their educational level, as well as the cohort in which they were born. Given the complexity of the country, other factors will be considered: ethnicity, region, and type of place of residence (urban – rural). In order to better comprehend the marriage pattern occurring in Kenya, it is rather necessary to include the transitions into first sexual intercourse and first birth for women in the equation. Thus, in this article we aim to examine to what extent educational expansion explains the delay in the age of these

transitions, by performing not only a descriptive analysis of these event's patterns, but also a logistic regression in order to predict their probability of occurrence.

Data/Methodology

In order to explore the trends on early transitions into adulthood in a context of educational expansion, the standard Kenyan Demographic and Health Survey has been used, as it provides not only data on population and health situation in Kenya, but also information on marriage, sexual initiation and childbirth. This household-based survey is conducted every five years and, for this study in particular, the selected total period of observation is from the survey years 1988-89, 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2008-09. By focusing on women aged 20-49, and not younger, we indirectly avoid unfinished and ongoing schooling of these younger generations.

In this paper we aim to examine to what extent educational expansion explains the delay in the age of these transitions, by performing not only a descriptive analysis of these event's patterns, but also a logistic regression in order to predict their probability of occurrence. Therefore, the object of analysis has been computed as 12 dichotomous dependant variables consisting of those Kenyan women who have had a first marriage, first sexual intercourse, and first birth before the ages of 16, 18, 20 and 22. Instead of using the mean age or the median age as the measure for these transitional events, in this study we will focus on the proportions of women who have undergone these transitions before the mentioned ages. Additionally, educational expansion has been included in the form of achieved educational level as well as mean years of schooling. And, given the complexity of the country, other factors have also been considered: ethnicity, region, and type of place of residence (urban – rural).

Most of the descriptive analysis has been transformed towards a cohort based study, although some graphs do account for the years in which the survey was conducted. The reason why it has been decided to use the year of birth instead of the year of the survey is that DHS data permits to reconstruct retrospectively the cohorts of its respondents. Instead of comparing between DHS surveys, we use 5-year birth cohort groups (ranging from those born in 1944 to the youngest generations born in 1988) in order to see trends over time.

Results

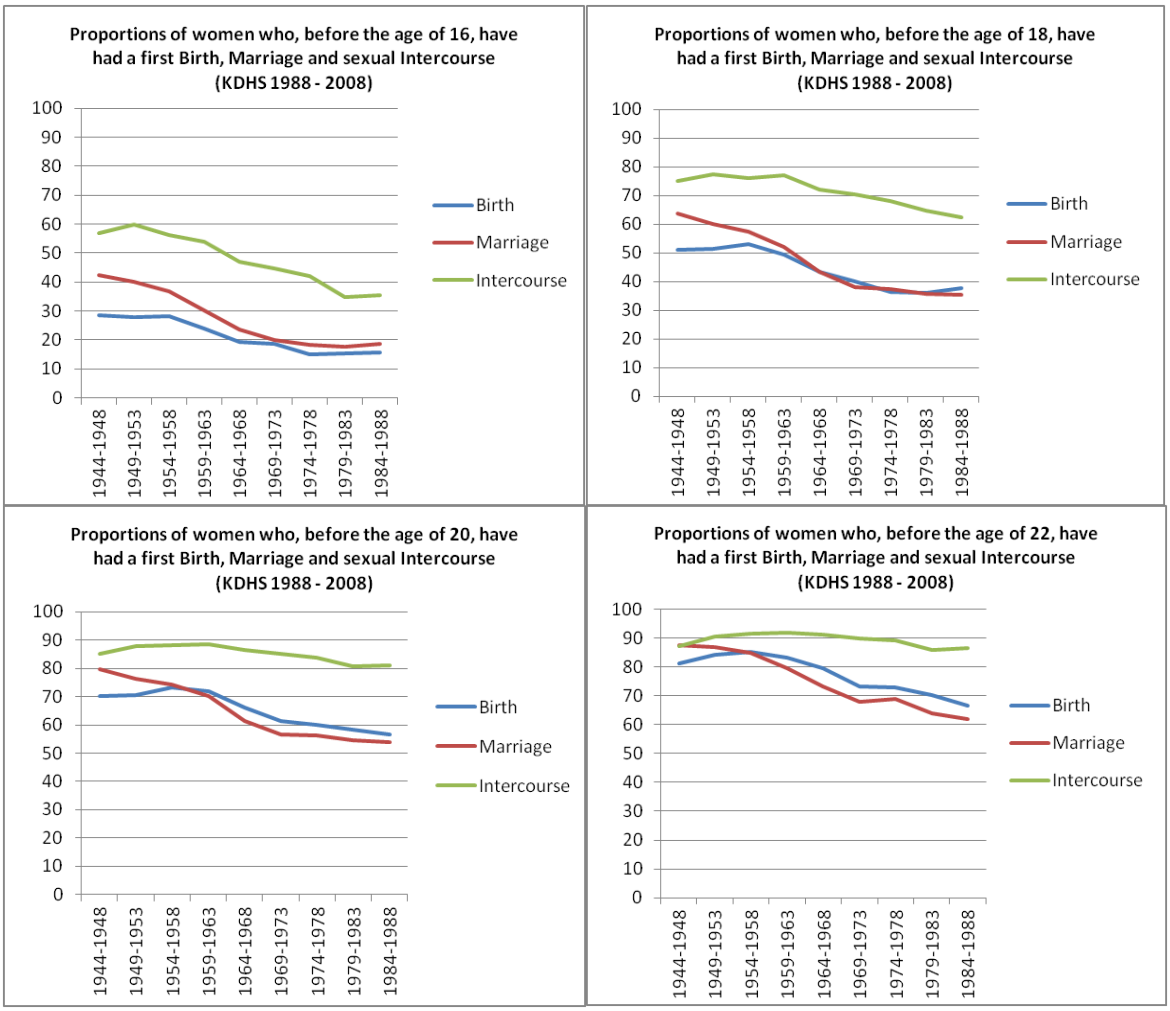
The first research question we intend to answer in the descriptive analysis is if we can observe a trend towards postponement and reduction in early transitions among Kenyan girls, with the available data from the Kenyan DHS (1988-2008). According to figure 1, there has been a relative decline over time in the proportions of women who have experienced these transitional events at an early age. Nonetheless, the proportions of women who have had a first sexual intercourse are considerably higher than the proportions for first union and birth. Thus, it can be assumed that the timing for first intercourse takes place rather earlier than the one for the other two transitional events. In this sense, in Kenya when talking about "early marriage" among women one should not leave out of the picture the issue on "earlier sex". Even though the intensity of early and very early marriage among women seems to have been brought down in Kenya, the plateau in the trend of the proportions of girls marrying before the ages of 16 among those born in the 70s and 80s, alongside with a similar trend for those married before the age of 18, means that early marriage in Kenya comes across as an issue that will still have to be tackled. In fact, this uncertainty found in the literature on the timing of marriage and childbirth can be observed here (especially on the second graph).

Secondly, DHS data confirms the educational expansion that has been taking place in Kenya (figure 2), where not only has there been a steady increase in the mean years of schooling (data not shown here) for Kenyan women, but also a rise in the proportions of women with Primary and Secondary and more education. Overall, the percentage of women with secondary or more education has timidly but positively spread from figures around 5% for the eldest cohort to 30% for the youngest one. One should bear in mind that in this extended abstract only the national overall figures have been illustrated, and that Kenya is a country where the educational outcomes are relatively different when taking into account its diversity with regards to ethnicity, region and even socio-economical status.

Hence, does there seem to be a linking trend between the increase in the educational outcomes of Kenyan women and their delay in the age at first marriage? It appears so at first sight, especially for the graph on the transitional events before the age of 18 (figure 3), where we can observe that as the proportions of girls married before that age have been diminishing, the mean years of schooling have been going up over time. For the other transitions into first birth and first sexual intercourse, as the proportions of women who have gone through these events are relatively constant for the elder cohorts (where the slope of the increase in the mean years of schooling seems to be notable), although one has to be careful in interpreting

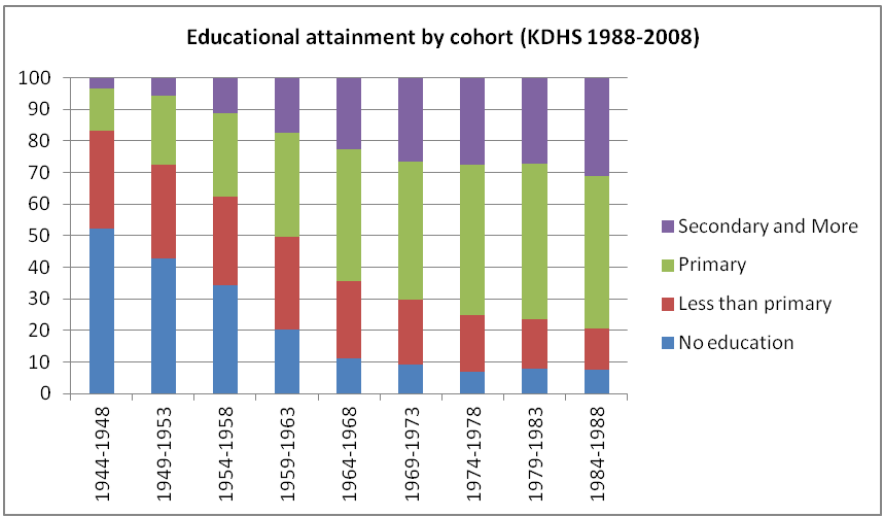
the possible relationship between educational expansion and the timing of these life events. Thus, perhaps it is rather more preferable to compare the calendar of first unions, birth and sexual intercourse by educational level instead of mean years of schooling so as to obtain a clear picture of the subject matter (figure 4). One could probably expect that if there is little change going on between cohorts, reflected in relative constant proportions throughout time, the changes towards postponement in the national level in Kenya would be due to changes in the population structure (in this case, the educational structure). Thus, as more women reach higher educational levels, these women somewhat adopt the patterns of their educational level counterparts. These results, as well as the descriptive analysis by ethnicity, region and urban/rural type of place, and the logistic regression model will be shown in the final presentation.

Figure 1: Proportions of women who have had a first birth, marriage and intercourse before the ages of 16, 18, 20 and 22, by cohort.



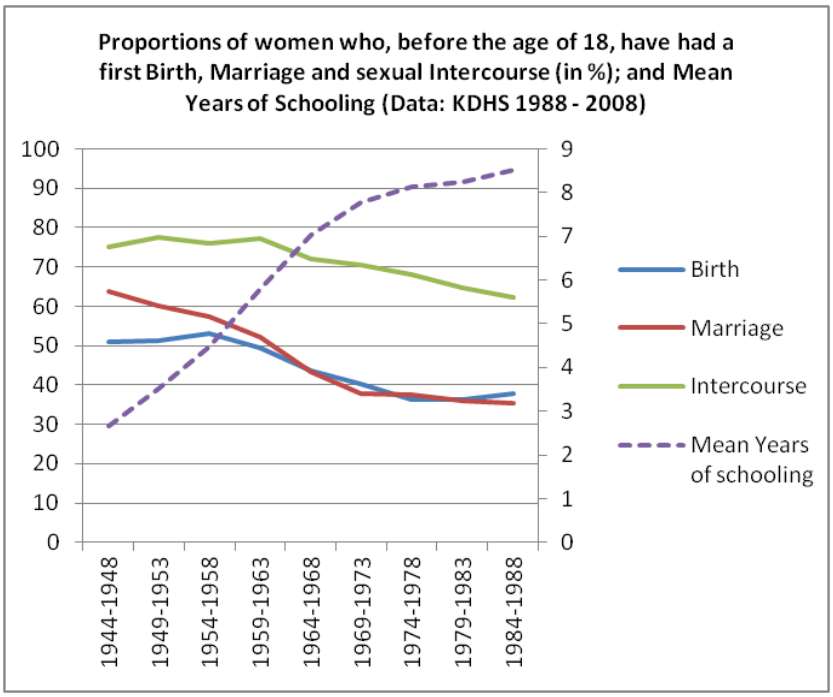
(Source: own calculations based on KDHS data)

Figure 2: Educational expansion by educational level and cohort.



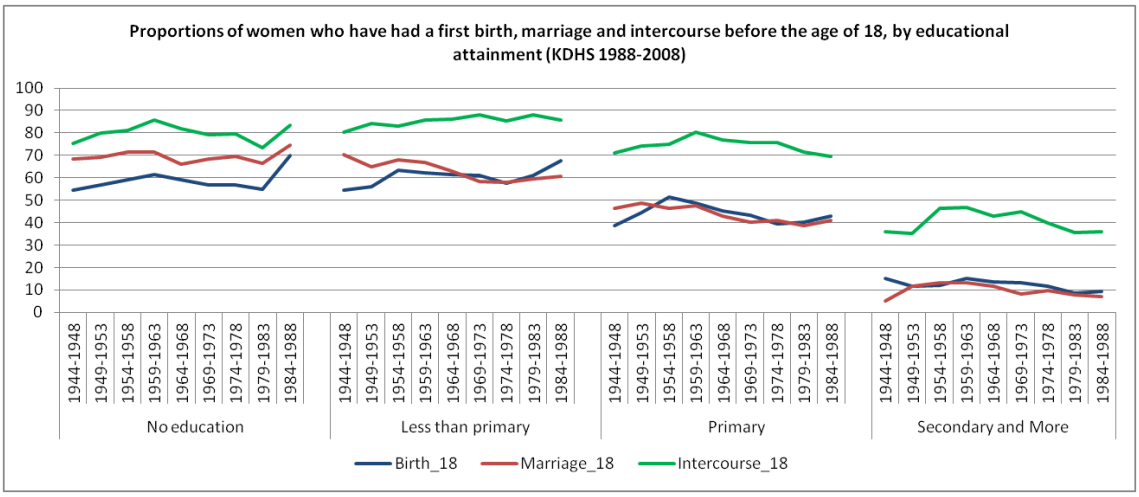
(Source: own calculations based on KDHS data)

Figure 3: Mean years of schooling and Proportions of women who have experienced the transitions into first birth, marriage/union and sexual intercourse before the ages of 18 by cohort.



(Source: own calculations based on KDHS data)

Figure 4: Proportions of women who have experienced the transitional events of first birth, marriage/union, and sexual intercourse before the age of 18, by cohort and educational level.



(Source: own calculations based on KDHS data)

Discussion

In the particular case of the delay in early marriage in Kenya it seems that, among the eldest cohorts in our analysis, the change towards this postponement has been mainly due to a structural change in its population (educational structure), followed by a change more driven on the behavioural domain and a certain stability for the younger cohorts. Taking into account that it is the urban and educated women who tend to delay more the transitional events into adulthood, especially those with secondary and more studies, in Kenya it is also important to note the differences between regions. Because ethnic groups are regionally located, having an acute understanding on the distinctive patterns of union formation among Kenyan young adults can be helpful when interpreting the country's complexity in terms of educational outcomes and its possible influence on the timing of the transitional events towards adulthood.

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