

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN WOMEN'S AGE AT MARRIAGE AND
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The main aim of this chapter is to examine the historical evidence about marriage patterns in Latin America and critically analyze their possible influence on long-term growth. We will examine the question of whether the European Marriage Pattern can be used to help analyze women`s empowerment in Latin America.

This paper tries to explain the link between socioeconomic development and age at first marriage and focuses on eight Latin American countries. Age at first marriage could be interpreted as a measure of women`s bargaining power and can be used as an indicator of the degree of freedom they have when they take the decision to marry. We look at the relation between age at first marriage and the urbanization process, educational improvement and the fertility.

Keywords: gender inequality, age at first marriage, development

JEL Classification Number: N36, O1

1. Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to examine the historical evidence about marriage patterns in Latin America and critically analyze their possible influence on long-term growth. We will examine the question of whether the European Marriage Pattern can be used to help analyze women's empowerment in Latin America.

The social sciences have shown renewed interest in studying the institution of marriage throughout the development of societies. Since Hajnal's (1965) hypothesis about the existence of a European marriage pattern, historical demographers have found that – at least in Western Europe – the age at which a person gets married for the first time is strongly correlated to the evolution of population growth. For this reason, the subject of marriage started to be of interest to historical demography; there were studies of the key role that marriage plays in society, and through economic history these findings have been linked to changes taking place in the development of societies.

To socioeconomic historians, marriage is the moment at which a new economic unit, the household, appears. Besides this, there is another important reason to study marriage behaviour in depth. The decision of when and who to marry might be the most important that a person takes not only as regards their own life but also as regards the societal context. Especially for women, the timing of the decision about when to marry and form a new family reflects the level of independence they have achieved and their place in society.

This paper tries to explain the link between socioeconomic development and age at first marriage and focuses on eight Latin American countries. Age at first marriage could be interpreted as a measure of women's bargaining power and can be used as an indicator of the degree of freedom they have when they take the decision to marry. We look at the relation between age at first marriage and the urbanization process, educational improvement and the fertility.

To do this, first we explain our main goal in the context of our theoretical approach. Second, we examine women's age at first marriage, mainly in the second half of the twentieth century, in selected Latin American countries. Next we present the relations between the above-mentioned indicators that enrich the explanation of this process. Lastly, we will outline some reflections that can point the way to further research in this area.

2. Theoretical Framework

The increasing empowerment of women is important for the development of society, not only for its contribution to economic growth (Dollar and Gatti 1999, Forsythe, Korzeniewicz et al. 2000, Berik, Rodgers et al. 2009, Cuberes and Teignier-Baqué 2012) but also because increased participation means improved quality of life in the future. Therefore it would be fruitful to measure how this process has developed in different periods of time and to understand its determinant factors. Several studies have tried to measure achievements in terms of the power balance between the sexes, and include a gender inequality index such as the gender gap and the gender empowerment index (Bardhan and Klasen 2000; Sen 2000, Dijskstra and Hanmer 2000). Gender inequality is

reflected in men's and women's unequal access to the benefits generated by development and how far growth contributes to personal fulfillment. Women make up half the world population so it is important to examine whether their low participation levels in different spheres of society undermine a country's potential for development.

As Van Zanden (2011) noted, women's increased participation in decision-making in different societies seems to be an indicator of progress and is linked to economic development. This was what happened in Western Europe when the evolving marriage pattern prepared the way for those societies to transform. Marriage is usually associated with the establishment of a separate household from the family of origin and the creation of a new family. This Western European marriage pattern emerged in the sixteenth century and continued at least until the First World War (Foreman-Peck, 2011).

Demographic theory has focused on three main features of the European marriage pattern: a delay in women's first marriage (to around 25 years old), a low proportion of illegitimate births (2% or less) and a high proportion of women who remain single (over 10%) (Hajnal 1965). In demographic terms, the changing pattern of marriage in European societies has been enormously important as a regulatory mechanism in population growth. During the demographic transition the European marriage pattern contributed to a decline in fertility because people married later and more people did not marry at all. According to an important current of thought in historical demography, the age at which people first marry – at least in Western Europe – is an important determinant of population growth.

However, other research including that of Hajnal focuses on the decisions behind this phenomenon as an important part of the explanation. Marriage is a link between men and women and its evolution is closely connected to social and cultural changes that societies undergo. Less visibly, this link also responds to economic relations that are generated in different periods of economic development and thus to the social roles assigned to each gender. Moreover, while demographic studies have examined the role of marriage behaviour in modern societies, economic historians have attempted to link these findings to the changes that take place in the models of economic development (Foreman–Peck 2011).

De Moor and Van Zanden (2010) analyze the Western European marriage pattern in greater depth and emphasize that the main change was that the link between the bride and groom is voluntary and therefore based on an agreement. This assumes that both parties have autonomy to make the decision to marry, which implicitly reinforces the idea that women have strengthened their position in society. Moreover, because marriage has become a voluntary choice by the two parties, it can be postponed, which means women have other options such as staying longer in the education system or in the labour market. These West European marriage patterns have influenced economic outcomes by improving women's position through investment in human capital formation and by generating cultural and institutional changes that encourage a shift towards consensual marriage and equal bargaining power for both sexes. At the same time as delay in marriage the trend has been for the formation of nuclear-family households and an increase in the number of unmarried people. These new social arrangements, in particular women marrying older, encouraged them to work outside the home and gave them the opportunity and incentive to invest in

their human capital formation. As a result, the fertility rate was influenced by these changes and the number of children per family decreased. A smaller number of children per household has probably contributed to increased investment in education, resulting in higher levels of education in Western Europe for both sexes. Moreover, the European marriage pattern was affected by economic change after the Black Death when labour scarcity and a shift from arable to pastoral agriculture increased the demand for women to work outside the home. This process was associated with a new situation in which wage income –of women as well as men- became a large part of household income and these households could now invest in other consumer goods. In particular, families would invest in their children’s formal schooling or training as apprentices or as servants in other households, and in social capital to address issues of old age or single parenthood. As a result, a large section of society became partly or completely dependent on wage labour. This kind of society emerged in the late middle ages in the North Sea area—in England and the Low Countries in particular—which helps to explain the long run economic dynamism of this region in the early modern period (De Moor and Van Zanden, 2010).Not all academics agree with the idea that increased women’s participation in the labour market has discouraged marriage formation or the delay in marriage. In fact, new evidence suggests that marriage as a partnership also contributed to the couple's decisions about its benefits and costs, and women weigh the possibility to tap into their husbands’ wages against the difference between what they could earn as single or as married women. Although the Black Death increased female employment opportunities outside the peasant household, married women also gained to the extent that they were able through their husbands to access better-paid

casual labour and share in the boost that demographic collapse gave to men's remuneration and family incomes (Humphries and Weisdorf 2014).

3. Data and analytical approach

At present, gender inequality in Latin America is being studied by international organizations like the ECLAC, UNRISD, the World Bank, women's movements, NGOs and researchers in various social study disciplines. These approaches employ a wide range of indicators to measure economic, political and social inequality. However, there have been few studies that use quantitative techniques to examine gender inequality in Latin America from a historical perspective. Moreover, studies of divergent development in Latin America would be enriched if they included an analysis of the differential participation of men and women in this process. Therefore a study of marriage patterns and their evolution during the twentieth century may help to explain the differential performance of the Latin American economies. It could also contribute to the description of economic growth patterns identified in this period and indicate the relative weight of the involvement of men and women in generating growth in production.

Cardoso and Pérez Brignoli (1979) and Bértola and Ocampo (2010) classify the Latin American countries according to a range of factors such as the type of colonial power, the kind of market each society is linked to, the kind of product that is predominant (in particular the main exports), and the various steps towards establishing a formal labour market. In this research we will consider countries in three of the categories based on typology. There are the so called temperate climate settler economies (Argentina, Uruguay

and Chile) and other two groups that depend on size: the large and middle sized economies on the one hand (Colombia and Mexico) and the smaller economies, which form the largest group (e.g. Ecuador, Guatemala and Panama).

We obtained most of the measures of age at marriage from two sources: the work of Brígida García & Olga Rojas (2001) and that of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. We used Statistics Yearbooks from Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay to reconstruct average age at first marriage before 1950 and to check data from international databases. The indicators of female education level at age 15 and over are based on the Barro–Lee databases (2012). Our estimation of urbanization is the proportion of the population living in urban areas¹ based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2012). The fertility rate is the mean number of children per women based on data from the Latin America & Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2012). Lastly, for GDP per capita we used the estimation available at the MOxLAD databases.

First we examine general patterns of female age at marriage in the eight countries selected. We focus on the period 1930–2000 in order to use all the information we have, even though we do not have data for all the years for all the countries. In the second part of the analysis we will pay more explicit attention to the possible relation between age at marriage and the

¹ The proportion of urban (and rural) population is estimated from the most recently available census or official population estimate of each country. The term “urban agglomeration” refers to the population contained within the contours of a contiguous territory inhabited at urban density levels without regard to administrative boundaries. It usually incorporates the population in a city or town plus that in the suburban areas lying outside of, but being adjacent to, the city boundaries.

population's degree of urbanization, years of schooling, fertility rate, and economic growth in the period 1950–2000.

4. Marriage in Latin America

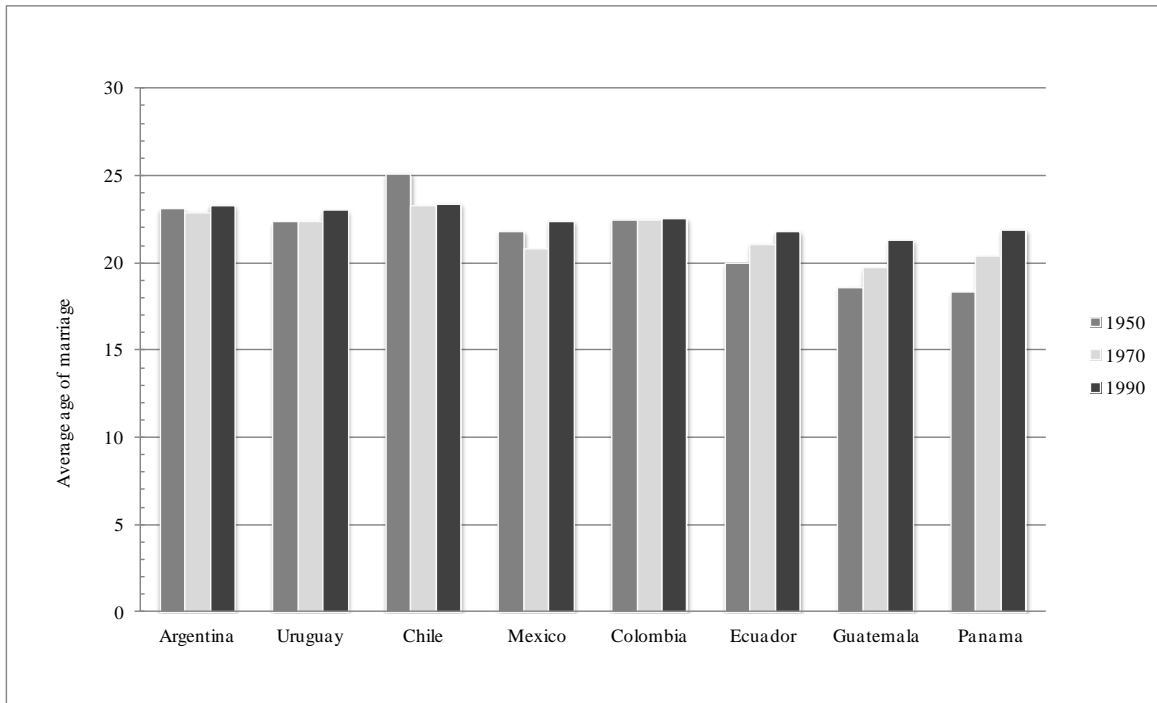
As noted above, historical studies considered that in Western European societies changes in marriage age and in the number of married persons were the traditional mechanisms that regulated population growth. At the same time, each marriage corresponds to the time a new economic unit is consolidated, the emergence of a new home and the institutional changes that these events reflect.

However, all these considerations about the institution of marriage depend on the formality of the relationship and the importance assigned to it in different societies. In the particular case of Latin America, from the beginning of Spanish (and to a lesser extent Portuguese) colonization, the Catholic Church was the institution responsible for performing marriages and registering them. In the second half of the nineteenth century, nation states started to take over this role. Some authors (Valdés, 2007; Quilodrán, 2010) agree that the introduction of civil marriage caused a brief decline in the marriage rate as legal marriage was re-located to the civil registry office. This occurred in a context of low levels of urbanization, a scarcity of civil registry offices in villages and small towns, and the custom of marrying at churches that were located inside the haciendas (big estates), which were the centers of power in rural areas.

However, in the demographic literature on the evolution of marriage and social and economic change in the different countries of Latin America it is generally agreed that the

family was a core value in all social and economic classes in the region (Kuznesof and Oppenheimer 1985; Saenz 1992) and that marital links were strongly determined by existing social divisions (Saenz 1992; Jelin and Paz 1991). Family arrangements were an important part of the consolidation of marriage in the colonial period. The emergence of nation states did not change the elitist nature of marriage patterns in the upper classes at all. Property ownership rights were one of the main concerns among the dominant elite families, and marriages tended to consolidate the existing property structure. In society as a whole the marriage rate increased slowly in the first half of the 20th century. The evidence from Latin America shows that the average age at contracting marriage in the second half of the twentieth century remained relatively low, in contrast to the Western European marriage pattern explained above (Hajnal, 1965).

Figure 1 Female age at first marriage

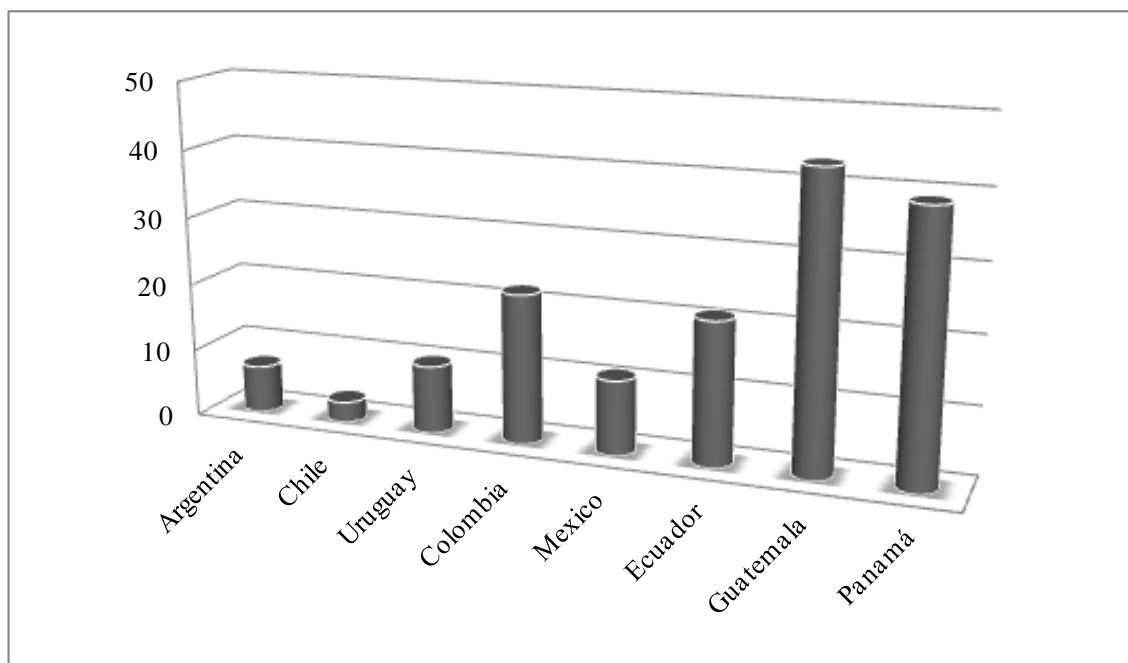


Sources: Based on García, B. and O. Rojas (2001) and Statistics yearbooks of Chile, Mexico and Uruguay. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Note: In the case of Argentina the 1950s average has been used to represent the 1960s.

However, different trends can be identified in this process in these Latin American countries. One group including Ecuador, Guatemala and Panama showed early marriage (under 19 years old) in the middle of the twentieth century, another group including Colombia and Mexico had an intermediate marriage age (21–22 years old), and there is a group (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) with a relatively late marriage age (an average of 23 or 24 years old). In this last group it is important to highlight that Argentina and Uruguay in particular received large numbers of immigrants from Western Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and brought with them different cultural behaviours (Camou and Pellegrino 2013). Chile, however, is quite different, first because it did not receive so many immigrants, and secondly because the age at which women first married declined until 1970 and stagnated between 1970 and 2000. It is difficult to find an explanation for

this behaviour, which goes against the trend of changes in the institution of marriage in the observed countries. Perhaps the answer may be linked to the cultural patterns mentioned above in which women's remaining in the home has tended to be reinforced, especially by the State. This Chilean trend may be seen in the context of a particular set of policies and administrative measures that were implemented in order to promote legal marriage (Valdés, 2007). In 1953, the State passed universal labour laws, under the principle of "moral motherhood and family wage", whereby family benefits were paid for a man's wife and children. In this context, many women returned to domestic duties and bringing up their children while the men went out to work.

Figure 2 Women aged 20–29 in consensual unions (1950–1990)



Sources: Sources: (Fussell and Palloni 2004)

Another distinctive factor in Latin America is that high levels of informality in marriage persisted. Cohabitation without marriage is often associated with a relatively large

indigenous or rural population and with a weak central government that has little practical control over much of its territory (Fussell and Palloni 2004). On the other hand, in countries with a majority of inhabitants of European descent and where the State has real legitimate authority we find less cohabitation without marriage, which may be because cultural patterns from outside the region were adopted. Clear examples of this effect are Argentina and Uruguay.

As noted by various researchers (García and Rojas 2001, Fussell and Palloni 2004, Guzmán, Rodríguez et al. 2006), countries that have a lower proportion of consensual unions also generally have a delayed age at first marriage. Although there is scant data about population distribution by ethnicity in the region, it is well known that rural areas have higher percentages of indigenous population and we can assume that rural areas therefore had higher levels of consensual unions.

5. Selected variables related to female age of marriage

In order to understand the persistence of early marriage among women in Latin America, we try to link these trends with indicators in the literature cited above, which considers the spatial distribution of the population, women's education levels, the fertility rate, and per capita GDP. For each point we explain the theoretical link between the indicator and age at marriage.

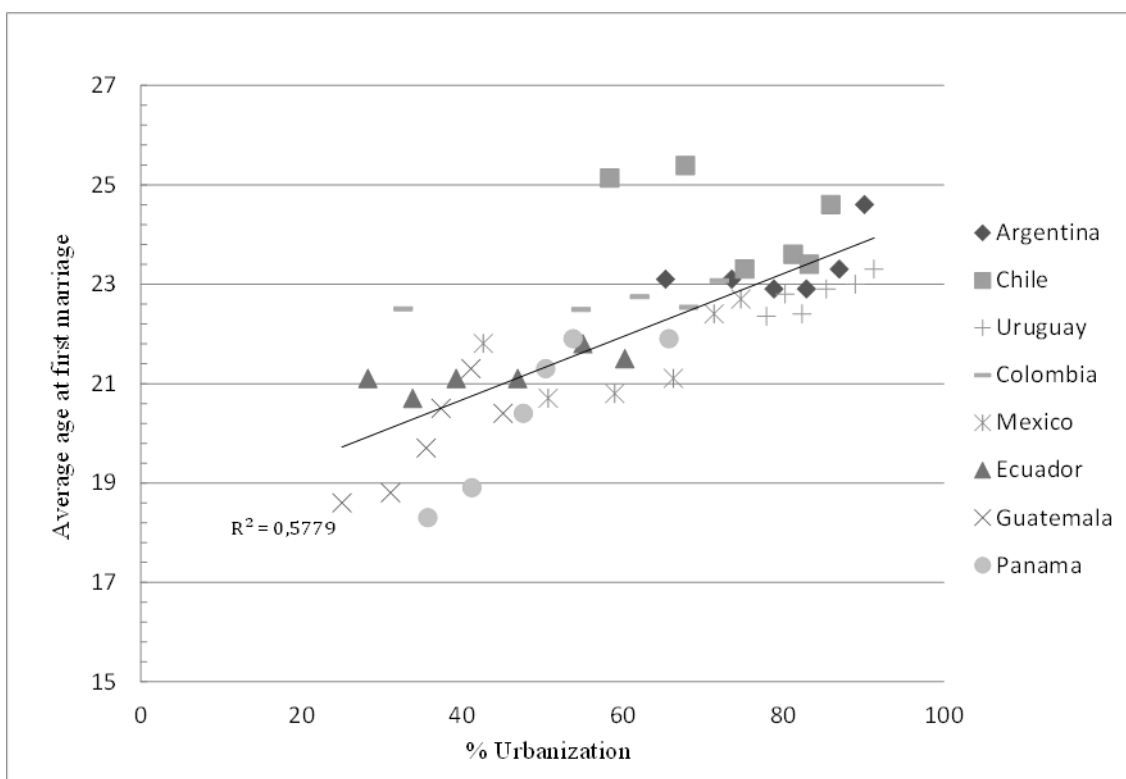
5.1 Spatial distribution of the population in Latin America

According to United Nations estimates, at the beginning of 21st century Latin America and the Caribbean was the most urbanized region in the developing world. Today, 4 out of 10 Latin Americans live in a city of at least 500,000 inhabitants, and the majority of the

population lives in towns of 20,000 or more inhabitants (Guzman, 2006; da Cunha 2003). These trends could be related to many factors like the gradual process of industrialization that started in the 1930s and led to an increase in labour market opportunities in the cities. At the same time agricultural production was modernized and land ownership was concentrated in few hands, which made for an excess of rural population. Finally, cities generally offer access to public services, in particular health and education, although not all the population enjoys this access.

But the effect of the population's spatial distribution on women's age at first marriage could be combined in different ways. The urban-rural differences in marriage patterns can be explained not just by place of residence but also by differences in the composition of the population that live in urban or rural areas. In the particular case of Latin America, rural populations have a relatively high proportion of indigenous peoples who retain their own cultural and family patterns, and social control in such communities is strong and decisive in personal matters such as marriage. These traditional marriage patterns have more consensual unions than formal marriage and also an early age at marriage. However, in an urban context social control is probably less evident, in particular for women, and they could be more exposed to modern values that support delay in marriage, investment in education and increases in human capital.

Figure 3 Female age at first of marriage and % of urbanization (1950–2000)



Sources: Urbanization based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Age at marriage García, B. and O. Rojas (2001) and Statistics yearbooks of Chile, Mexico and Uruguay. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Note: In the case of Argentina the 1950s average has been used to represent the 1960s.

If we compare the process of urbanization in the second half of the twentieth century with female age at marriage in the region, a positive relation between the variables can be seen. The urbanization process may contribute to the delay of marriage among the female population. We find that the countries whose population is located mostly in rural areas (Guatemala, Panama and Ecuador) are those in which a greater proportion of marriages (and also consensual unions) are undertaken at younger ages. On the other hand, in countries that have a higher percentage of the population living in urban areas (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) age at first marriage is delayed. As mentioned above, cultural factors

could explain part of this process and good examples would be Mexico and Colombia, which are in an intermediate position. In rural areas the patriarchal family has persisted in the upper and lower social classes, and early marriage may be the only way for younger daughters to leave the family (García, B. and O. Rojas 2001; Pachon, 2007). But other factors may play an important role in explaining the observed differences between rural and urban areas. One is easier access to the formal education system, which led individuals to postpone their entry into formal marriage.

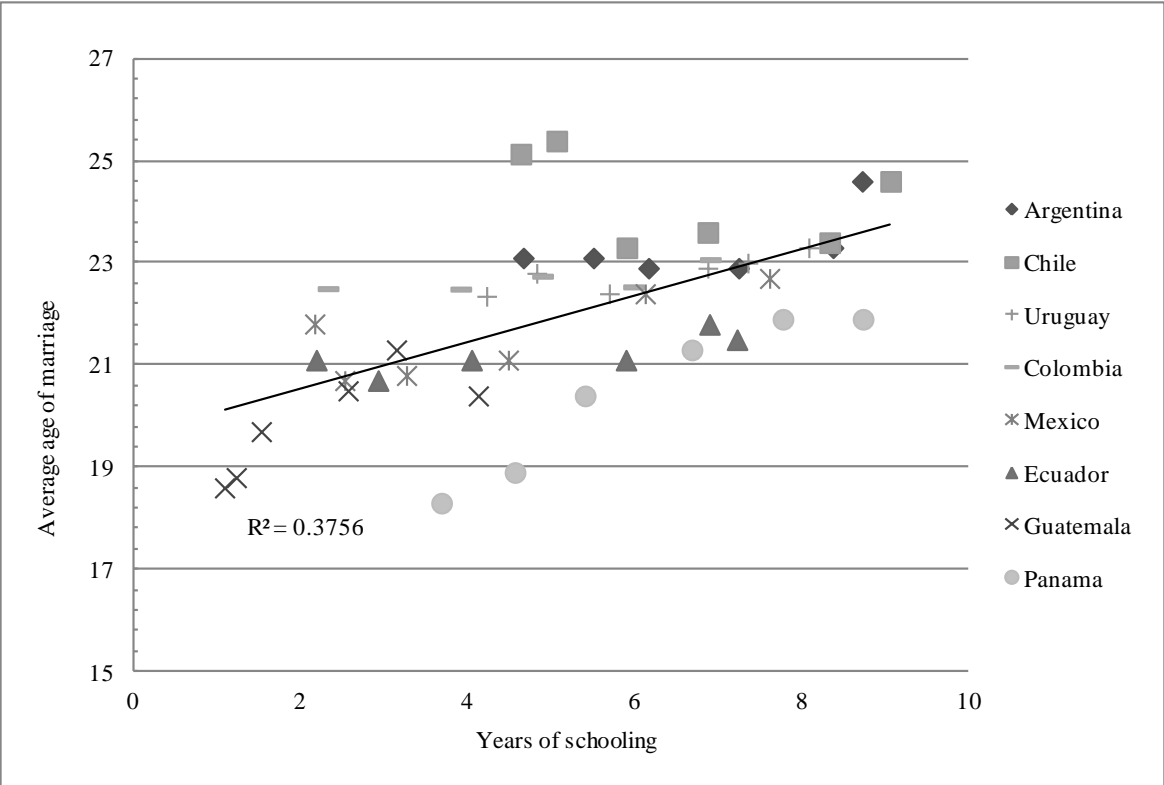
5.2 Education improvements in Latin America

Over the last fifty years, the educational level of Latin American and Caribbean populations has progressed to an unprecedented degree. In 1950, the region had an illiteracy rate of around 40% among persons aged 15 and over, but by 2005 it had dropped to less than 10%. In all countries in the region, the proportion of persons who have completed primary schooling has increased rapidly. Nevertheless, although educational level is rising everywhere, there are still large disparities between countries.

As mentioned above, education is one of the main factors that promotes a widening of options as regards personal choices, especially among women, because it is related to increased personal autonomy, to the incorporation of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, to different possibilities in terms of developing their human capital in the labour market and to greater scope for independent search in the "marriage market". With the increase in people's human capital we can expect a change in the cultural patterns behind personal decisions about partner choice and procreation. Staying longer in the

formal education system would tend to make women delay marriage and decide not to have children at an early age. Contrary to what happens in traditional societies, where women’s social status is linked to marriage and family formation (Mason 1987), in modern societies education is seen as more important than the social status that men and women attain through marriage.

Figure 4 Female age at marriage and years of schooling (1950–2000)



Sources: Average Years of Total Schooling (Barro and Lee 2000); Age of marriage García, B. and O. Rojas (2001) and Statistics yearbooks of Chile, México and Uruguay. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Note: In the case of Argentina the 1950s average has been used to represent the 1960s.

However, the connection between increased years of schooling and changes in decisions about marriage is not straightforward. In the case of Latin America, the data show that women’s years of education are not always clearly positively correlated with delaying

marriage. Even though general trends show a positive relation between the two variables, there are differences among countries.

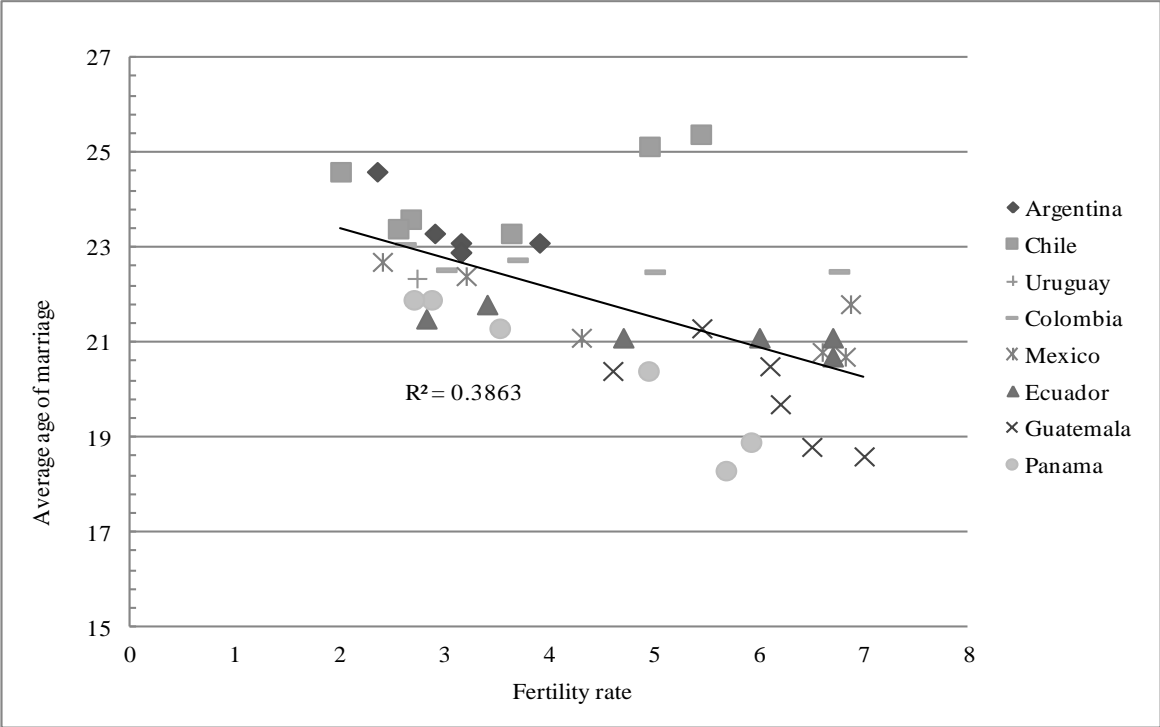
Countries such as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, whose main distinguishing characteristic is that marriage takes place later than in the rest of the countries, show a positive connection (even though not very strong) between women entering into their first marriage later and years of study. In this case, we must take into account that these countries already had high levels of education at the start of the period analyzed. In fact, in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, some 95% of the women born in the 1980–1984 period completed primary schooling (Guzman, Rodriguez et al. 2006). Mexico and Colombia appear to contradict the general result because, in spite of the increase in years of schooling which brought these countries up to similar levels to the three mentioned above, average age at marriage has remained unchanged. Lastly, Ecuador, Guatemala and Panama show a positive relation between an improvement in women's education and delayed marriage. This trend probably reflects what we would expect as regards the importance of education for women's opportunities. This result shows that women with more education are less likely to marry young. Even though marriage age and women's education levels in this group are the lowest in the panel of countries, education probably contributed to raising the average age at marriage from 18 to 22.

5.3 Fertility rate in Latin America

The demographic transition is one of the most important social changes that took place in Latin America over the last century. It has produced not only a reduction in the absolute

number of births in the short term, but also a medium- and long term restructuring of the population pyramid. As elsewhere in the world, models of demographic transition are very diverse. In Latin America, a number of main models can be identified: Argentina and Uruguay began their transition very early, following a similar pattern to Europe at the end of nineteenth century. At the other extreme, countries such as Guatemala began their fertility transition much later (at the end of the 1980s) and progress was much slower. The transition in Mexico also started much later, with a natural growth rate that only began falling in the late 1970s. The other countries fall into an intermediate group: the transition process was similar to that of the last-mentioned group, but started from lower levels.

Figure 5 Female age at marriage and fertility rate (1950–2000)



Sources: Fertility rate http://www.eclac.cl/celade/proyecciones/basedatos_BD.htm. (The average number of children a hypothetical cohort of women would have at the end of their reproductive period if they were subject during their whole lives to the fertility rates of a given period and if they were not subject to mortality. It is expressed as children per woman)

Age of marriage García, B. and O. Rojas (2001) and Statistics yearbooks of Chile, México and Uruguay. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division Note: In the case of Argentina the 1950s average has been used to represent the 1960s.

It seems a reasonable hypothesis that age first at marriage should be linked to fertility because the number of children per woman can be expected to fall as marriage age increases. However, in contrast to what we find in other regions and especially in Western Europe where delayed age at marriage has been correlated with a decline in the fertility rate, in Latin America the birth rate indicator has fallen independently of the age of entry into marriage, which has remained relatively stable.

In a globalized world, it is expected that many processes occurring in some countries, especially in more developed regions, have a massive impact on other regions. In the context of this research, advances in health care, access to contraception and the diffusion of more integrated family planning policies in developed countries in the first half of the twentieth century have generated positive spillovers in less developed societies. These advances happened when Latin America's demographic transition was still not complete. The region received the benefits of these advances and integrated them into its own process. This facilitated a fall in fertility rates and made it less important to delay marriage as a mechanism to limit the birth rate.

Historically, high fertility rates have been associated with the most vulnerable economic sectors, which are further characterized by low educational levels and are located in rural areas and peripheral towns. In Latin America, the evidence shows that fertility is lower in urban as opposed to rural areas. Rural areas are likely to have a greater proportion of indigenous people, which makes for additional cultural and linguistic barriers. Furthermore,

we find that countries that have the lowest fertility rates are those that have achieved higher levels of education and also have a higher proportion of urban population, especially among women, which results in greater control of fertility in marriage through access to contraceptives and other means of birth control.

As mentioned above, this transition did not occur in a homogeneous way in all the Latin American countries. There was an early decrease in fertility in countries where age at first marriage was already delayed and where there were fewer consensual unions. In the 1950s, in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay the average number of children per woman was around 3. In particular, there was an early fertility transition in Argentina in the period 1870 to 1915. Torrado (1999) points out that this almost exclusively involved immigrant populations residing in the metropolitan area and in the cities of the Pampas. Among the rest of the population, especially the native population, who mostly lived in rural areas and peripheral regions, the pre-transitional demographic balance did not change until at least until the 1930s. The more widespread fertility transition occurred among the less educated, the poor, and middle-class sectors including both rural and urban women, and it began somewhat later and proceeded more slowly. The countries where an earlier age at marriage persisted and that had a slower decline in fertility rates were mainly those with majority indigenous populations.

5.4 Economic growth in Latin America

From a historical perspective, the economic gap between Latin America and the more developed countries has widened. In the early period of its modernization at the end of

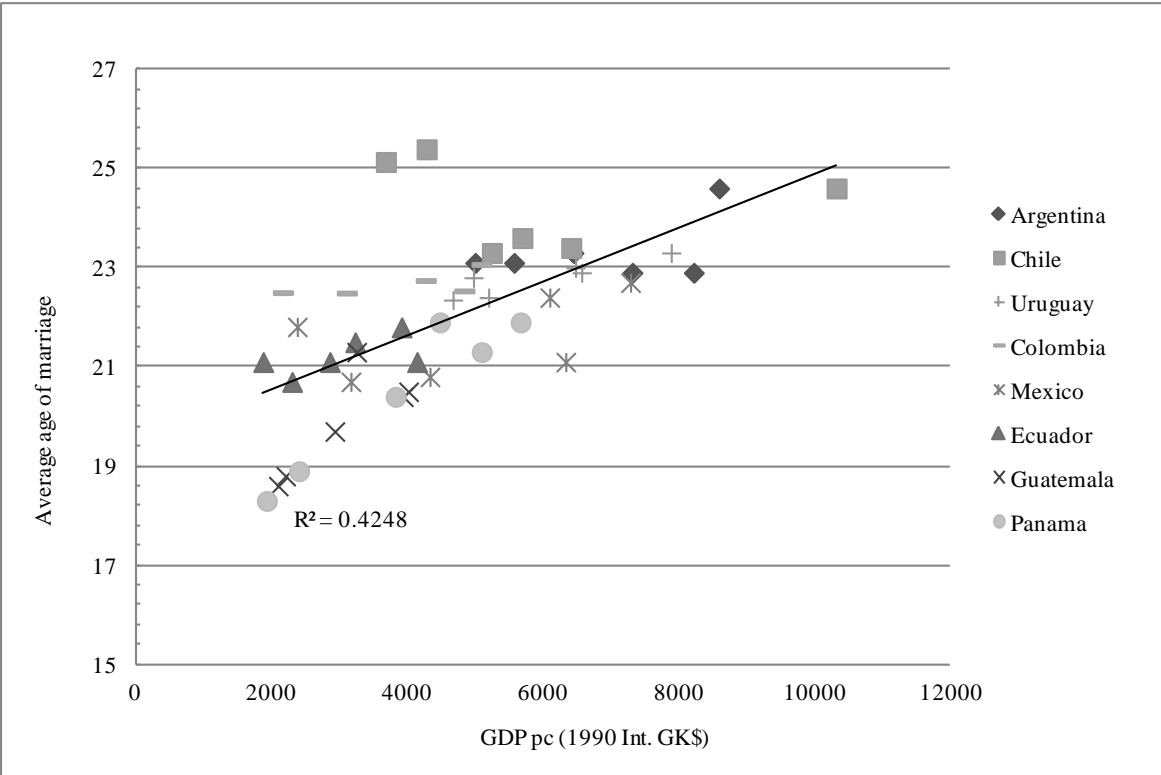
nineteenth century, Latin America moved far ahead of the poorest parts of the world, but in recent decades the situation has changed and the region has been overtaken by Asian economies that had previously lagged behind. Compared to the world average of economic performance, in some periods of the twentieth century Latin America's efforts to "catch up" with the leaders enabled it to improve its position but in the long term it was unable to reach the levels of those countries. To make matters worse, Latin America's performance has been particularly poor in recent decades and its situation deteriorated sharply around the end of the 20th century (Bértola and Ocampo 2010, Bértola and Gerchunoff 2011).

Economic growth is regarded as an opportunity to improve the well being of the population since resources can be used for investment in healthcare and education, which makes it possible to improve living conditions and the quality of services offered to the population. Reinvesting in economic growth creates a chance to "harvest" what are sometimes referred to as "demographic dividends". Accelerated economic growth and human development can result from these structural demographic changes in a virtuous circle. In our research we want to highlight the relation between economic growth and women's empowerment through the expansion of their rights. If men and women have equal rights and opportunities, then marriage becomes a contract and both sexes can decide freely about it. Therefore economic growth could provide women with different options during their lives, such as improving their education or obtaining economic independence with a job. These offer an alternative to early marriage.

The evidence shows that economic performance does not necessarily have a direct impact on the population's decisions. In fact, when discussing the effect of economic growth on

gender equality, and in particular its impact on marriage patterns, policies for institutional change and economic development need to be considered and the prevailing gender inequalities in rights, resources, and freedoms need to be addressed. Nevertheless, the general trend in the relation between GDP per capita and age at marriage shows that economic growth has a positive correlation with women’s equality. But if we analyze these results more thoroughly we can find two ways to understand what happened in this panel of countries.

Figure 3.6 Female age at marriage and GDP pc (1950–2000)



Sources: GDP <http://moxlad.fcs.edu.uy/en/databaseaccess.html>. Age of marriage García, B. and O. Rojas (2001) and Statistics yearbooks of Chile, México and Uruguay. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Note: In the case of Argentina the 1950s average has been used to represent the 1960s.

Clearly, in high inequality countries (Bértola and Ocampo 2010), there is also high gender inequality. As a result the impact of economic growth takes more time to play out in benefits in terms of education, labour opportunities, and even in personal rights for women.

Panama and Guatemala are around 50% urbanized, and this sector has the lowest rate of access to education among the whole population and in particular among women. To improve this situation, economic benefits will have to spread, but this seems difficult to bring about. In Argentina and Uruguay, the relation between age at marriage and economic growth can probably be better explained by the expansion of social spending and the progress of women's rights. Starting in the late nineteenth century, economic growth was based on the agro-export development model. This kind of production did not demand much labour so there was earlier migration to cities in search of jobs in services and the expanding industrial sector. During the twentieth century women joined the labour market more slowly, despite having improved education (Camou and Maubrigades 2013). Expanding education and the development of the economy since the mid-twentieth century, coupled with the industrialization process, generated increased opportunities for female participation in the labour force, and also led to periods of strong State redistribution policies, which had a big impact on women's lives. Lastly, in recent years the large countries, Colombia and Mexico, have caught up with the temperate climate Southern Cone economies. We can suppose that this catch-up process has been due to specific public policies by States to improve the population's lives. In particular Mexico has found it difficult to balance two different situations in the country. On the one hand, it has one of the most urbanized areas in Latin America, but on the other hand it has large rural areas with a majority of indigenous people. This profile has resulted in a cultural mix that distinguishes these countries from the rest of the panel. Until the last quarter century, however, Mexico was moving closer to the pattern found in developed societies. This change coincided with improving education, especially for women, who were mostly near

illiterate in the mid twentieth century. This could explain the stagnant age of marriage, combined with low levels of education and a high fertility rate.

6. Concluding remarks

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the evolution of women's age at first marriage in Latin America. We have tried to find evidence of the relation between marriage patterns and social and economic development. We have looked at both cause and effect. On the one hand, in terms of causes, we analyze the increase in years of schooling because this would contribute to generating new opportunities to enter the labour market, especially for women. In the same way, the urbanization process is considered because an increase in urban population can promote new opportunities for work and lead to different family arrangements. In the long run, economic growth promotes structural change and creates new conditions for bringing women into the workforce. On the other hand, in terms of effects, we highlight the impact of a delay in the age of marriage on family arrangements. In particular, we study the decline in fertility rates as a result of these changes in family structure.

We tried to investigate the changes that the female population in the region has undergone, such as the empowerment process and being able to make choices about their own lives. In the literature on the subject, this is identified as a process of recognizing freedom and exercising it. These processes do not occur in isolation, and we compare these trends with other variables that have an influence when people make decisions that affect their personal lives and society.

Thus, in this paper we introduce education as a key variable in human development. However, the increase in years of education does not seem to directly influence the decisions women make as regards the age at which they marry. In general, age at first marriage has remained fairly stable: women marry young in this region. This profile is unlike the trend in most developed countries, especially in Western Europe. The persistence of marriage suggests a central role of this institution in Latin American society and was probably an important point of family stability in the context of a period with strong social changes. The family was an important social support, at least until the 1970s, while others significant changes were observed such as reduced fertility rather than delay or forego marriage.

The difference between countries seems to be influenced by the proportion of indigenous and/or rural people in the total population. This feature is linked to the clear difference in marriage patterns between countries that received massive European immigrant flows during the period and countries where immigration was lower. These population differences also seem to be linked to the global pattern of demographic transition in the region, especially when it comes to fertility, which has been declining since the mid-twentieth century. . This trend suggests that even though women's age at first marriage has not substantially changed, the number of children per woman has changed, the number of children per woman has changed, and this behavior may be positively related to improved education, which has been the overall trend, albeit at different rates in different countries.

The main discussion in this paper is about the prevalence of early marriage in the region. At the end of the twentieth century a substantial proportion of women in the panel of countries

we studied still married at a young age. However, the data suggest there are three distinct marriage patterns in the region. First, there is the profile in the Southern Cone countries, which is the closest to the modern Western European marriage pattern. Age at first marriage is higher, and we have shown that this was linked to structural social changes and increases in educational attainment, urbanization and the participation of women in the process of economic growth.

The other countries in the region can be classified into two distinct groups depending on their size and the level of economic development they achieved in the twentieth century. The group of large countries which achieved good economic growth during the period (Colombia and Mexico in our panel) have populations that are more culturally and ethnically diverse. Their marriage pattern is that women tend to marry younger than in the first group, even though women's years of study are gradually increasing and economic growth should offer more labour opportunities for them. The third group is made up of countries in which indigenous people have greater weight in the population (Ecuador, Guatemala and Panama), and this cultural difference has made for age-at-marriage patterns that are even further from the European model. In these countries, whose economic growth is below the average of our panel of countries, education for women appears to be improving more slowly.

In conclusion, what is important in this study is that we constructed a time series of age at first marriage and analyzed the relation with other indicators. This gave us clues as to the explanatory factors influencing the different observed behaviors, and led us to identify three patterns of marriage in Latin America. With these first results, the marriage age

indicator and its explanatory potential as regards gender inequalities, we can assert that Latin American societies in this aspect seem to resist change. . Despite an increase in women's years of schooling and a reduction in fertility rates, we find that in Latin America the delay in age at first marriage does not evolve as expected.

7. References

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