

## **Patterns and Factors Influencing Entry into First union in Nairobi by Generation and Sex**

Anne A. Khasakhala, Population Studies and Research Institute, University of Nairobi, Box 30197, Nairobi, Kenya, [akhasakhala@yahoo.com](mailto:akhasakhala@yahoo.com) or [akhasakhala@uonbi.ac.ke](mailto:akhasakhala@uonbi.ac.ke)

In this study, data from the Urban Integration Survey conducted in 2001 in Nairobi, Kenya (first in an English-speaking country) following standard that has already been adapted in several cities in Africa (Dakar, Bamako, Yaounde, Antananarivo, Lome and Ouagadougou) are used to examine the patterns and underlying factors influencing entry into first union for three generations spanning from the seventies to the nineties for men and women during the period of economic crisis.

The analysis uses event history methods more specifically Cox Proportional Hazards regression stratified by generational age and done separately for each sex. The unit of analysis was person years of observation hence the standard errors were therefore adjusted for clustering on the individual. Using these different techniques optimal use of the data can be made taking into consideration all the time at risk and controlling for the factors that can bias the analysis but excluding time when the respondents were not yet in Nairobi or temporarily out of Nairobi.

The study indicates that the delay in entry into first marital union is more pronounced in Nairobi than for Kenya as a whole. The delay is more prominent among the males and within the middle and younger generations, aged less than 45 in 2001. The question here is whether this could be a response to the economic crisis of the late 1970s onwards.

In terms of the factors that have influenced the observed patterns, these differ by sex. For males the cultural, religious and social origin factors are almost non significant, showing a weak pressure from peers and the community. Dependence on the head of household showed a negative effect to entry into first marital union for males: this could be as a result of security and comfort in the household. Males probably with poorer economic prospects may continue living with their parents and relatives and thus declining to marry. This is confirmed by the postponement of entry into first marital union by those who are still studying, unemployed and with no fixed salary with no payslip which suggest that job security is a crucial factor for entry into first marriage. Similarly, the fact that males with secondary and high school delay their entry into marriage confirms the hypothesis that those who see economic potential as high due to educational attainment, tend to delay their marriage and consolidate their human capital investments. The results for women also show a similar trend to that of males.

For the females the factors that stand out are migration, education, employment status, and number of children/pregnancy status prior to marriage. Thus the results support the fact that women who may have some form economic independence or potential are more likely to enter into marriage. The data may therefore support the marriage search model which asserts that the timing of marriage is dependent upon the interactions of human capital acquisition or potential by both males and females. The linearity of the effect may however vary slightly for males and females in terms of education and employment. For women in

the informal sector with intermediate education who fail to secure employment in the upper tier job markets, may face poorer marriage market thereby reducing their chances of entry into marriage. The same applies to those with no or primary level of education who also appear to have less chance of entry into marriage. It may be the case that the economic downturn may have encouraged both couples to enter in the labour market as a form of family survival strategy. Thus women with higher potential or who may be working, form attractive mates than those not working or with low human capital investment.

Because marriage is not universal in Nairobi, it was interesting to test whether fertility has an accelerating effect on union formation or not. Results show that having children and pregnancy status have opposite and highly significant effects for males and females: there seems to be a window of opportunity for marriage while pregnant for the first time, but failing that, the chance to marry decreases. Similarly for males, having children out of wedlock appears to accelerate entry into marriage:

In conclusion one may argue that there are a number of reasons that have led to the decline or delay in entering into marriage. While some social and cultural factors play a minor role in accelerating entry into first marriage, the economic constraints appear to play a major role. This therefore supports our hypothesis that the decision to get into marriage is dependent on the ability of the individuals to be independent in terms of economic stability as exemplified by the ability to obtain secure employment, which in turn is facilitated by attainment of higher levels of education. This is also in line with the literature, which states that economic or cost considerations have to be carefully weighed before entry into first marriage. However there are also normative costs derived from social pressure where traditional moral codes are challenged or sanctions from relatives and peers. In addition, one has to understand that Nairobi is unique in that there is higher migration than any other city or town in Kenya this because it is the capital city. Those who come to Nairobi are those who are in most cases lowly educated or with some level of educational attainment and the main purpose for migrating to Nairobi is to look for employment opportunities. This may therefore explain the reasons for delaying entry into first union before one can secure employment.