

## **Title: New Path to Marriage: Union Formation among Youth in the Philippines**

Author: Maria Midea M. Kabamalan

### Extended Abstract

There is recent evidence of change in the character of unions occurring in Philippine society. Filipinos continue to form unions but they do not necessarily “marry.” Data show that increasing numbers of the population are in cohabiting unions. These are couples who live together as husbands and wives but do not go through any wedding ceremony recognized by the state to officially mark their married status. As of the year 2000, the census estimates there are more than 2.4 million Filipinos who are “living in” or in “common-law” unions. Five years earlier, this number was only less than 900,000. During the same period, the proportion legally married has declined.

Literature from western countries show that cohabitation is generally perceived as inferior compared with marriage. It is short-lived because couples may either separate or eventually marry. It is believed to be selective of people who have liberal views about marriage, gender roles attached to it, and divorce. People in cohabiting unions tend to be younger and less religious. Like marriage, cohabitation has a strong economic nature. Those wanting to form unions but are economically insecure may choose cohabitation over marriage (Thornton, Axinn, and Teachman 1995). This view is shared by Seltzer (2000) who shows that cohabitation is more common among those with less education and with more constrained economic resources. Similarly, Carter (1999: 274) opines that “the prevalence of cohabitation might be a consequence of economic necessity rather than a preferred lifestyle for the least educated.” This she attributes to the less initial economic commitment required of cohabiting unions compared with marriage.

The absence of divorce also partly explains the occurrence of cohabitation. In 19<sup>th</sup> century France, cohabitation is said to be prevalent partly due to the unavailability of divorce (Glendon 1977 in (Lamanna 2002)). Kiernan (2000) likewise believes that in some European countries before the 1970s when cohabitation was seen largely as statistically and socially invisible, cohabitation is resorted to by those whose marriage failed but were unable to obtain a divorce because it is simply not legal or perhaps due to the expense associated with it.

Paradoxically, despite the presence of this alternative marital arrangement, people still value, desire, and aspire marriage and parenthood (Thornton 1989; Waite and Gallagher 2000). Marriage is highly valued but there is recognition of the need for economic gains as well (Tucker 2000). This last statement can perhaps bridge the seeming disjoint explanations of union formation. Marriage is ideal but other (practical) considerations may fall into the picture.

The Philippines has had a long history of colonization under Spain. During this period, the Spanish imposed Christianity on the Filipinos. Since then, the Catholic religion has had a major role in the people’s lives. Societal norms reflect Catholic teachings. It also has a major influence in the country’s laws and these are reflected most recently in the 1986 Constitution and the 1987 New Family Code. Divorce is not allowed. The State considers marriage as “the foundation of the family,” and one of its requisites is a marriage ceremony (Pineda 1994). For Filipinos, the majority of whom are Catholics (although the proportion has been slowly decreasing over time),

the wedding is not only a public affair but also a religious event. Marriage is a sacrament. Even civil marriages are frowned upon such that some couples married by public officials eventually go through a church wedding later (Medina 1991). Hence, cohabitation is unacceptable.

Filipino literature often point to the still very strong norms against premarital sex, unmarried childbearing, and cohabitation but media articles now present these issues as if they are common occurrences. While personal views may have changed, the perception of the opinion of others may have remained the same (see Fields and Schuman 1976). The stigma people are afraid of, in reality, may not be present anymore. According to Falk (2001), stigma has a temporal quality.

However, stigmatization may not translate into other concrete negative sanctions. In this case, because cohabitation and unmarried childbearing involves another life, that of an innocent child, the product of the “illicit” relationship, the reaction is not to punish the child but to accept him/her. In fact, provisions have been made in the country’s inheritance laws so that the “illegitimate” child, a child born to a couple not legally married to each other, will be provided for. It is possible then, that the norms and implicit societal sanctions take the back seat when other concerns occur—like that of a new life, or economic matters. As Coontz (1997) argues, referring to U.S. experience, “stigmatization would not necessarily prevent unwed motherhood among impoverished women.” In the Philippines, Eviota (1994) believes that sexual mores may not have been effectively embedded among the poor populace. For the lower class, Hunt and others (1963) believe that cohabitation is a substitute for marriage. Additionally, while marriage remains desirable, marriage is postponed due to financial inadequacy (Williams, Kabamalan, and Ogena 2001).

If marriage is the socially and legally accepted way to form unions, does this mean that increase in cohabitation has led to the decline of marriage as an institution? Or does this suggest that a new path to marriage is occurring in the Philippines? Unofficial results from the 2002 Philippine Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS3), a nationally representative survey of the population 15-27 years old, show that among those who have ever married, 31 percent are currently “living-in” but 67 percent reported having had a lived-in episode before formal marriage. Insights from in-depth interviews of selected respondents from the YAFS3 survey reveal that those who are currently living-in did so for economic reasons. They have plans of (formal) marriage and that marriage remains ideal. This may suggest that the path to union formation has undergone a change recently. This change will be examined here as well as some reasons and differentials associated with such change.

## References:

- Carter, Wendy Y. 1999. "Attitudes toward premarital sex, non-marital childbearing, cohabitation, and marriage among blacks and whites." Pp. 257-286 in *With This Ring: Divorce, Intimacy, and Cohabitation from a Multicultural Perspective, Contemporary Studies in Sociology, Volume 19*, edited by R. R. Miller and S. L. Browning. Stamford, Connecticut: Jai Press Inc.
- Coontz, Stephanie. 1997. *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families*. New York: Basic Books.
- Eviota, Elizabeth U. 1994. "The social construction of sexuality." Pp. 53-78 in *Sex and Gender in Philippine Society*, edited by E. U. Eviota. Manila: National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women.
- Falk, Gerhard. 2001. *Stigma: How We Treat Outsiders*. New York: Prometheus Books.
- Fields, James M. and Howard Schuman. 1976. "Public beliefs about the beliefs of the public." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 40:427-448.
- Hunt, Chester L., Agaton P. Pal, Richard W. Collier, Socorro C. Espiritu, John E. De Young, and Severino F. Corpus. 1963. *Sociology in the Philippine setting*. Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House.
- Kiernan, Kathleen. 2000. "European perspectives on union formation." Pp. 40-88 in *The Ties That Bind: Perspective on Marriage and Cohabitation*, edited by L. Waite, C. Bachrach, M. Hindin, E. Thomson, and A. Thornton. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Lamanna, Mary Ann. 2002. *Emile Durkheim on the Family*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Medina, Belen T. G. 1991. *The Filipino family: a text with selected readings*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.
- Pineda, Ernesto L. 1994. *The family code of the Philippines: annotated*. Quezon City: Central Professional Books, Inc.
- Thornton, Arland. 1989. "Changing attitudes toward family issues in the United States." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51:873-893.
- Thornton, Arland, William G. Axinn, and Jay D. Teachman. 1995. "The influence of school enrollment and accumulation on cohabitation and marriage in early adulthood." *American Sociological Review* 60:762-774.
- Tucker, Belinda M. 2000. "Marital values and expectations in context: results from a 21-city survey." Pp. 166-187 in *The Ties that Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation*, edited by L. J. Waite, C. Bachrach, M. Hindin, E. Thomson, and A. Thornton. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Waite, Linda J. and Maggie Gallagher. 2000. *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*. New York: Doubleday.
- Williams, Linda B., Midea M. Kabamalan, and Nimfa B. Ogena. 2001. "Attitudes toward marriage in the Philippines." in *American Sociological Association Annual Conference*. San Francisco, California.