

Two Approaches to the Study of the Disassociation between Sexual and Marital Life of the Urban Women and Men in Mexico

Abstract

This work explores the existence of a process of disassociation among sexual and marital life of men and women in Mexico, in which marriage does not regulate their sexual activity due to the use of contraceptive methods. As hypotheses I consider firstly, that urban men tend to disassociate sexual and marital life, while for women the beginning of their sexual life is strongly related to their age at marriage; and secondly, that for both the use of contraceptives slows down the first union. With survival analysis as a tool, I will study urban women and men between 15-49 years of age, users of the Mexican Institute of Social Welfare (IMSS) and those interviewed in the National Survey of Reproductive Health (ENSARE, 1998).

Introduction

In the past, marriage played a role in regulating fertility since it determined the time that women remained exposed to the risk of conceiving. People did not marry young, and delaying the age at marriage constituted the true contraceptive weapon of classic Europe, which also implied a period of sexual abstinence between young people, since the church condemned sexuality outside the marriage. The consequence was a reduction of the time that the women remained exposed to the risk of conceiving.

Nevertheless, the age at marriage decreased considerably in the 19th century; the adoption of contraceptive technology offered the possibility of having a sexual life outside or within marriage without the risk of conceiving. In Mexico, the decline of fertility has been strongly related to contraceptive use. Once fertility can be voluntarily controlled by contraception, marriage does no longer govern sexual and reproductive behavior. This is one of the characteristics of the *Second Demographic Transition*.

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Objective

With survival analysis I tried to observe whether or not we encounter a process of disassociation between sexual and marital life in Mexico. The main hypothesis is that urban men in Mexico tend to disassociate sexual and marital life, while for women the

beginning of their sexual life is strongly related to their age at the marital union; and secondly, that for men and women the use of contraceptives slows down the first union. I study women and men between 20-49 years old, users of the Mexican Institute of Social Welfare (IMSS) and those interviewed in the National Survey of Reproductive Health (ENSARE, 1998).

Methodology

The first approach to the study of the disassociation between sexual and marital life is made by use of Life Tables. The technique is applied to the interval between the first sexual relation and the first union of male and female cohorts, who have had their first sexual relation. A Life table is a powerful analytical tool because it permits considering those groups of people who are exposed to the risk, but who have still not reached the event. So we can deal with the censored effect.

The second method of approach uses Cox's Regression Models with time-dependent coefficients. This technique permits to observe whether the beginning of sexual life accelerates or decelerates the occurrence of the union, considering the first sexual relation as a time-dependent covariate. In addition to this, three variables are introduced: schooling, use of contraceptive methods, and socio-economic status. This method, like the previous one, considers those groups of people who are exposed to the risk, but who have still not reached the event. The advantage on the previous technique is that it also allows us to consider those people who have not yet had their first sexual relation.

Results

As regards the timing of the first union, the medium interval between the first sexual relation and the first union, this means the time in which 50% of women and men have initiated their marital life after their first sexual relation, increases in the measure in which age decreases. 50% of women between 45 and 49 years of age married in the same month they had their first sexual relation, 50% of women aged 20 to 24 married 5,8 months after their first sexual relation. For men, 50% of those aged 45 to 49 married six and a half years after their first sexual relation, 50% of men aged 25 to 29 married 5 years after their first sexual relation.

The results of the Cox proportional hazards models indicate that the beginning of sexual life has important effects on the beginning of marital life, mainly for women. On the other hand, those who have a level of schooling of at least one year of secondary school delay their first union. The surprising result is that the use of contraception represents a greater propensity to be married. One conclusion is that although youngest cohorts tend to disassociate sexual and marital life, the beginning of sexual life accelerates marital union for women and men, but the propensity is much greater for women. Contraceptive use is not related to slowing down the union after the first sexual relation. This suggests that contraceptives are used not so much to allow sexual relations outside marriage without the risk of conceiving, but mainly as a means of protection within the union.