

**FOR EVER YOUNG?
CHANGING TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD IN URBAN BURKINA FASO**

First draft

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INTRODUCTION

In Burkina Faso, like in many other sub-Saharan African countries, the socialization of children into adult life was traditionally the responsibility of the entire community. The transition from childhood to adulthood took place under the strict supervision of elders and was marked by a series of symbolic and educational steps. Among the Mossi ethnic group, for instance, it is the initiation camp and the circumcision ceremony that went with it, which gave the right to a young man to be accepted among adults, get a land, leave the parental home and get married (Gruénais, 1985). For both men and women, marriage was a crucial step in this ritualized path to adulthood. Traditionally, marriage was an agreement between two families rather than a contract between two individuals and female and male adolescents had little control over the marital process. Girls generally married and had their first child at a very young age and the period between childhood and adulthood was very short or even non-existent.

This traditional pattern of transition to adulthood has been gradually eroded by urbanization and modern education. In the 1960s, a growing number of youth started migrating to urban centers for employment or schooling. Formal school soon became the principal agent of socialization and training of the next generation. Migration to cities and wage employment have provided youth with a beginning of independence from parents and the kinship group (Pascalis, 1992). Urban young men and women have also increasingly postponed their first marriage to finish their education and premarital childbearing is on the rise (CERPOD 1996). Thus, the period between childhood and adulthood seems to lengthen and “youth” are emerging as a specific segment of the population in Burkina Faso.

The economic stagnation of the economy in the 1990s has further promoted the recognition of youth as a distinct social group which deserves the attention of both researchers and policy makers. In fact, young people in Burkina Faso, as in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, have been strongly affected by the economic recession and the accompanying structural adjustment programs. One can speak of a multidimensional crisis that have changed all aspects of

youth life. On the education front, first, youth are believed to increasingly drop out of school because of financial difficulties (Kobiané, 1999). Unemployment among urban African youth has also increased dramatically (Antoine et al, 2001). The economic crisis seems to have reduced the quality of jobs as well, and new generations of young Africans are increasingly turning to less profitable and less stable economic activities in the informal sector of the economy (Charmes, 1996). Access to residential independence and marriage seem also to have become more difficult and qualitative data suggest that a growing number of Burkinabè youth are constrained to stay at their parents' and remain single because of lack of financial means (Sévéde Bardem, 1997).

The purpose of the present study is then to explore how patterns of entry into adulthood among urban Burkinabè youth has changed over the last twenty years. More specifically, the study examines how important social steps in the transition to adulthood such as first paid employment, residential independence, first marriage and first birth have evolved over time among both male and female youth.

THEORETICAL APPROACH: THE NOTION OF ENTRY INTO ADULTHOOD

Since the notion of “youth” is relatively new in Africa, studies that focus on young African males and females are often segmented and rely on theoretical frameworks developed in specific research areas such as education, employment, fertility or migration. In sub-saharan Africa as elsewhere, research on youth in general is faced with the problem of definition, the ambiguity of the concept of “youth”, as well as the question of the existence of youth as a sociological category or as a homogeneous social group (Gauthier et Guillaume, 1999).

The theoretical framework adopted in the present study proposes a large sociological approach of the question of age and youth that avoids the difficult issue of definitions and takes into account the multi-dimensional life of youth. This perspective elaborated by Galland (1996), and since then used by others,

approaches youth through the notion of *transition to adulthood*. The idea is to “consider youth essentially as a passage that takes place on two main axes: the educational-professional axis and the familial-marital axis” (Galland, 1996 :38). The objective here is to study the social, professional, marital, familial and residential conditions of transition to adulthood. Moving away from the vague and ambiguous concept of youth and from the debate about the “nature” of youth, we focus on the organization of the various steps which constitute the trajectory towards adulthood. Entry into adulthood is therefore defined as socially significant criteria marking a change in social status such as the beginning of professional life, marriage, first child or residential independence. Importantly, this theoretical approach suits well the concepts of transition and trajectory at the heart of event history analysis favored by more and more demographers.

DATA AND METHODS

This paper uses data from a unique nationally-representative retrospective survey entitled “Migration Dynamics, Urban Integration and Environment Survey of Burkina Faso” (MDUIE survey) conducted in 2000 in Burkina Faso among 8644 individuals. The analysis focuses on urban youth and only respondents living in the two largest urban centers (Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso) at the time of the survey and/or between ages 15 and 24 are considered. With populations of 710,000 and 310,000 respectively, Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso comprised two thirds of the urban population and ten percent of the country’s population in 1996 (INSD 2000). Although the survey, as its name indicates, focuses on migration and urban integration, it is well-suited to analyze transition to adulthood. The data includes detailed occupational, residential and marital histories for both men and women aged 15 to 64. Complete birth histories were also collected among women. More specifically, for each respondent, the section of the questionnaire devoted to economic activity history collected information on all periods of schooling, apprenticeship, economic activity (paid and unpaid employment), and inactivity (unemployed, at home, retired or sick) which lasted more than three months, since the respondent’s sixth birthday. For

each period of economic activity, additional information was collected including the type of activity (open question), whether the respondent was paid for the work performed, and whether he or she received or gave a pay slip (“fiches de salaire”). The questionnaire section on residential history collected information on all residences where respondents stayed more than three months since their sixth birthday. Respondents were also asked whether they lived at someone’s place (whether they were “hébergés”) or whether they own or rented their own residence. For those who declared living at someone’s place, information was collected about this person (mother/father, other parents, non-familial etc.). Finally, in the section on marital history respondents were questioned about all their unions. Both marital and cohabitating unions were considered. For each union the timing of cohabitation was collected, and for each marriage the date of religious, traditional, civil celebrations was recorded. Women were also asked about the marital status of their husband at the beginning of the union (single, married with one spouse, married with two spouses...), whether their partner married another woman during the union and if so the date of marriage for each new wife.

To document how the four social markers of adulthood (first paid employment, residential independence, first marriage and first birth) have changed over the last twenty years in urban Burkina Faso, we compare the experience of contemporary urban youth, those aged 15 to 24 years old at the time of the survey, with the experience of older cohorts at the same age. Because data collected among older cohorts are more sensitive to misreporting and omission, we excluded respondents born between 1936 and 1954 from the analysis. For each cohort, we restricted our sample to male and female respondents ages 15 to 24 who were living in urban areas. Respondents from the 1965-74 birth cohort were censored in 1990, and the 1955-64 cohort was observed until 1980, thereby simulating three surveys conducted among urban youth aged 15 to 24 at three different points in time. Since the survey was conducted nationally and includes full migration histories, we are able to account for urban to rural migration in our analyses. In other words, respondents who

used to live in urban areas between the ages of 15 and 24 (in 1980 and 1990) and subsequently left for rural areas could be included in the sample as well.

RESULTS

Growing unemployment, postponement and “informalization” of first job

Access to employment is a crucial step in the transition into adulthood and youth unemployment lengthens the period during which young people remain economically dependent on elders. To estimate how youth labor force participation and employment status has evolved over the last twenty years, Table 1 compares the employment status of men and women from the three cohorts when they were 15 to 24 years old (in 2000, 1990 and 1980). As seen in Table 1, youth aged 15 to 24 are significantly less likely to be working for pay in 2000 than they were ten or twenty years ago. Reflecting the general rise in school enrollment that has taken place in Burkina Faso over the last decades, Table 1 shows that young people are significantly more likely to be in school in 2000 than they were in 1990 or 1980. In fact, 40 percent of males and 24 percent of females from the youngest generation were in school between the ages of 15 and 24, compared to only 19 percent of men and 15 percent of women from the oldest generation. Despite this improvement in schooling, the gender gap remains and young men are still twice as likely to be in school as their female counterparts. A gender gap is also visible in less formal types of training. Confirming previous studies (Dijkman & Van Dijk 1993), our data show that, overall, young women in Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso have less access to apprenticeship than young men and are more likely to be at home.

Declared unemployment between ages 15 and 24 is low overall among both men and women for all generations. Unemployment was not the main focus of the survey and was estimated simply based on spontaneous declarations made by survey respondents. Since efforts were made to obtain complete activity histories and to record all respondents' activities including unpaid activities, the unemployment category actually refers to an absence of activity. While declared unemployment among young people is low, Table 1 shows that, in all three

cohorts, a significant proportion of youth who were out of school were actually performing unpaid work (essentially as family workers), working as unpaid apprentices or staying at home. Thus, a significant proportion of youth across generations were not in school anymore and were out of the paid labor between ages 15 and 24. Table 1 further suggests a sharp increase in the unemployment rate among urban youth in Burkina Faso over the last two decades: the percentage of out-of school young men and women who are outside the paid labor force in 2000 is higher than it was in 1980 (around 10 percentage points). In fact, up to 40 percent of out-of-school men from the youngest generation, and 15 percent of those born between 1965 and 74 are out of the paid labor force. Fifty five percent of younger women and 30 percent of those from the 1965-74 generation are either unemployed or employed without pay. Thus, a very large number of young people are outside the paid labor force in urban Burkina Faso today. Although some of these young women may not be looking for a job (resulting in an overestimate of female unemployment), estimated unemployment remains higher among young women than young men.

The timing and the sector of youth's first paid employment have also changed significantly over time. Table 1 shows the percentage of men and women in each birth cohort who had a job at the exact ages of 15, 20 and 25, based on Kaplan-Meier estimates. Sector of activity for the first paid job is also presented. While there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes the informal sector in urban Africa, there is agreement that the informal economy mainly operates outside the sphere of government regulation (Dijkman & Van Dijk 1993; Osirim 1992). Self-employed workers or employees in the informal sector are generally not registered, nor are small-scale informal enterprises. Thus, for practical purposes, we treat public sector employees as well as all those receiving a pay slip as workers in the formal, or modern sector. Employers providing pay slips to their staff are also included in this sector. The formal sector is further divided into public and private spheres of activity.

Table 1 shows that access to first paid employment is currently significantly delayed among men. While 65 percent of men from the oldest cohort

already had a job at age 20, only 38 percent of the youngest men were employed at the same age. The median age at first paid job increased from 18.5 to 22. Among women, the trends are similar but less pronounced and not statistically significant. Changes in the type of first employment are even more striking. Table 1 confirms that the formal sector, its public component in particular, is no longer a significant first employment location for urban youth. In fact, while almost a quarter of urban young men from older generations found their first paid employment in the formal sector, only fifteen percent of men from the 1965-74 cohort and eight percent of those from the 1975-84 cohort did. Young urban men are clearly more likely to start working in the informal sector today than they were in the past. Similar trends of employment informalization are also visible among women. The formal sector has also become less of an employment option for them over time, although its role has always been much less important than it has been for men. While only four percent of employed young women from the 1975-84 cohort found their first job in the formal sector, almost eight percent of women from the 1955-64 cohort were first employed there. First, employment in the formal sector has been replaced by employment in the informal sector for women as it has for men. Confirming previous studies in Burkina Faso and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Lachaud 1997; Sananikone 1996), data show that overall, Burkinabe women are over-represented in the informal sphere of the economy compared to their male counterparts.

Delayed first marriage and first birth

A shortage of employment opportunities among youth, especially males, is likely to postpone marriage. Table 2 presents the marital status of young men and young women ages 15 to 24 by cohort. Reflecting gender difference in age at first marriage, Table 2 shows that the large majority of urban men, from all three cohorts, were still single between ages 15 to 24 while the majority of their female counterparts, except for the youngest cohort, were already in union at the same ages. For both men and women, however, urban youth are clearly less likely to be married today than they were twenty years ago: if 73 percent of

women and 11 percent of men from the oldest generation were already living in union (either married or consensual) between ages 15 and 24 only 37 percent of women and 6 percent of men from the their youngest generation were. In line with other recent data on marriage in urban Burkina Faso (INSD et Macro International, 2000), Table 2 also suggests that young married women today are less likely to be living in a polygamous marriage (18% of all marriages) than women from older generations at the same age (29% of married women form the 1955-64 cohort).

Table 2 shows that the timing of first marriage has changed significantly among both men and women. Marriage is clearly delayed and while 41 percent of men from the oldest cohort were married by age 25 only 18 percent of those from the youngest cohort were in that situation. Similar postponement is visible among women and if almost all women from the oldest generation (90%) were married by age 25 only sixty six percent of women from the youngest generation were. In fact the median age at marriage among women went from 17,2 to 22,2 in twenty years.

Not only are young Burkinabè marrying later in urban areas, they also seem to marry “differently”. Providing support for qualitative findings regarding the difficulty of youth to “get married properly” due to financial hardship (Sévédé Bardem 1997), Table 2 shows that marrying youth are less likely to perform all three marital ceremonies (traditional, religious and civil) like they did in the past or, at least, that the time between each marital event has lengthened. In fact, Table 2 shows that while 18 percent of married women from the oldest generation had performed all three ceremonies between ages 15 and 24, only 7 percent of their younger counterparts had. More young women ages 15-24 had married only traditionally in year 2000 (17%) than in 1980 (8%). Although the total number of married young men is too small to draw firm conclusions, similar trends are visible among men.

Birth history were also collected among women. Table 3 shows the parity status at time of censorship and timing of first birth among women aged 15-24. Like for marriage, Table 3 confirms that first birth is postponed in urban Burkina

today. In fact, while the majority (62%) of women born between 1955-64 had already a child between ages 15 and 24 that was the case of only 35 percent of women from the 1975-1984 generation. The median age at first birth has increased sharply and significantly over time and on average, young women have a birth three years later than they used to twenty years ago (at age 21.4 versus 18.4). Beside changes in the timing of both marriage and first birth, Table 2 reveals that some changes in the sequence of events also took place. Although the majority (62%) of births among youth still occur in the context of marriage, the percentage of young women who had a birth while still single or living in a consensual union has clearly increased. In fact, if only 6 percent of young mothers from the oldest generation had their child when still single, 20 percent of young women from the youngest generation did. Births within consensual union also increased from 3 to 18 percent.

A difficult access to residential independence

With paid employment marriage and birth, residential independence is an important marker of entry into adulthood. Table 4 shows the residential status of both men and women aged 15-24 by cohort and the timing of residential independence. As seen in Table 4, urban youth today are more likely to still be living at their mother's and father's than they were in the past. In year 2000 the majority of young men (62%) and more than a third of young women (37%) were still staying at their parents' while only 40 percent of young men and 20 percent of women were in that situation at the same age. Access to independent housing has clearly become more difficult for young urban Burkinabé. Only 9 percent of young men were renting or owning their residence in year 2000 while they were 20 percent to do so in 1980. Similar trends are visible among women. Because they are less likely to be married, women aged 15 to 24 are also less likely to be living away from their parents home: only 28 percent of young women from the youngest cohort were renting or owning their residence compared to 49 percent of women from the oldest cohort.

Like marriage, residential independence is significantly delayed among

both men and women. Kaplan-Meier estimates presented in Table 4, shows that if 43 percent of men from the oldest cohort had acquired residential independence by age 25 only a quarter of young men from the youngest generation had. Similar postponement is visible among women: the median age at residential independence increased from 20 to 22.

For ever young: the lengthening of dependence period

When all three criteria of transition to adulthood (paid employment, marriage, and residential independence) are combined, it is clear that the proportion of males and females who can still be considered as “non-adults” at age 24 has increased over the last twenty years in urban Burkina Faso. Figure 1 shows the percentage of male and female respondents who were still not working for paid, single and “residentially dependent” at age 24. As seen in Figure 1, if less than 20 percent (17.8%) of males from the oldest cohort had not lived any of the “adulthood event” at age 24, they were more than a third (34%) in that position among the youngest cohort. The percentage of “non-adult” at age 24 has also significantly increased among women: from 4 percent to 13 percent twenty years later.

While non-working youth are expected to be living at their parents and still be single, once they get a job young men are supposed to have the necessary financial means to marry and settle down in an independent house. Figure 2 shows the percentage of young working men who had not yet settle down (married and living in their own house) by age 24. As seen in Figure 2, the percentage of working men aged 24 who have not yet marry nor settle in their own house has steadily increased over the last twenty years and a large majority of male youth (78%) in year 2000 are not independent although they are working (versus 53% in 1980).

CONCLUSIONS

Several important results emerge from the present study. Our data document a sharp increase in the unemployment rate among urban youth in Burkina Faso over the last two decades. In 2000, up to 40 percent of out-of-school young men and 55 percent of their female counterparts were out of the paid labor force. The timing and nature of youth employment have also changed significantly. Access to first paid employment is significantly delayed among males and the share of the informal sector in youth employment in Burkinabe cities has considerably increased over time. Increasing unemployment and postponement and informalization of first employment are accompanied by a significant delay of first marriage among both males and females. Not only do urban youth marry later but they also seem to marry “cheaper” (performing less ceremonies) or on a longer period (spending more time between ceremonies). Confirming previous data (INSD and Macro International 2000), results also show that the median age at first birth among women has increased sharply and significantly over time. Not only do young women start their family later, they also do not wait for formal marriage to do so and the proportion of births to non-married women has clearly increased over the last twenty years. Finally, access residential independence, an essential marker of transition to adulthood is also significantly postponed among both urban males and females. Leaving parental home seems to be more difficult for younger generations of urban youth, even working ones, and the period where youth remain dependent upon elders is clearly lengthening in Burkinabe cities.

This trend has some important implications for inter-generational relationships and dynamics of family exchange. Are we witnessing a reversal of “wealth-flow” where parents have to financially support their adult children at an age where these children should be taking care of them? How do young adults and their parents cope with these changing conditions? Are new implicit “family contracts” emerging?

The above results also call for further research on entry into adulthood in Burkina Faso. While the present study has documented the increasing lengthening of the

period between adolescence and adulthood, information to further define this life period where youth are still dependent of elders and to further categorize sub-groups of dependent youth would be useful. Does a working young man who still stay at his parents but who contributes to the family expenses has the same social status within the parental household as a dependent student without financial means or a unemployed son? When will a young man or woman who is still at his/her parents' be considered as an adult and will have a say in the family decision making process? It may be useful to go beyond the typical markers of transition to adulthood such as first paid job, residential independence and marriage to better capture the growing complexity and diversity among youth situation. This will involve collecting both qualitative and quantitative data specifically design to study transition to adulthood in sub-saharan Africa rather than rely on existing retrospective data not originally collected for that purpose.

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Table 1. Employment status, timing and sector of activity for first paid job of men and women aged 15-24, by birth cohort, weighted sample

	Men			Women		
	Birth Cohort			Birth Cohort		
Employment status	1975-84	1965-74	1955-64	1975-84	1965-74	1955-64
Working	45.2	52.0	64.4	45.6	55.0	55.7
<i>Paid work</i>	35.7	39.3	56.4	34.2	43.7	45.1
<i>Unpaid work</i>	09.5	12.7	8.0	11.4	11.3	08.6
Apprenticeship	11.4	9.8	11.5	02.3	03.5	02.0
Student	40.3	33.3	18.6	24.5	18.4	15.1
Unemployed	02.5	04.1	05.6	01.1	01.1	00.7
At home	00.7	00.9	00.0	26.5	22.1	28.5
N = 2477	561	404	207	652	414	239
Estimated unemployment (% of non-students out of the paid labor force)	40.2	39.4	30.1	54.7	45.1	45.1
N = 1847	342	293	163	499	343	207
% of respondents who had a job at:						
Age 15	13.7	11.7	13.5	18.4	18.8	13.3
Age 20	38.2	38.7	64.6	44.4	50.0	54.4
Age 25	71.3	77.6	78.9	68.0	67.7	72.2
Median age at first paid job	22.0	21.4	18.4	21.1	20.0	19.7
Cox test for significance (1)		***			n.s.	
N = 2477	561	404	207	652	414	239
Sector of activity of first paid job						
Formal sector	08.3	15.4	23.2	03.7	03.9	07.5
<i>Public</i>	03.3	07.9	13.4	00.8	00.5	01.8
<i>Private</i>	05.0	07.5	09.8	02.9	03.4	05.7
Informal sector	91.7	84.6	76.8	96.3	96.1	92.5
N = 1145	215	200	114	307	197	112

Source: Migration Dynamics, Urban Integration and Environment Survey of Burkina Faso (MDUIE), 2000

(1) Testing for equality of survival curves (cohort 1975-84 compared to cohort 1955-64), two-tailed

*** significant at 0.01 level

Table 2. Marital status and timing of first union among men and women aged 15-24, by birth cohort, weighted sample

	Men				Women		
	Cohort				Cohort		
Marital status	1975-84	1965-74	1955-64		1975-84	1965-74	1955-64
Single	94.0	90.8	88.4		60.9	42.5	26.5
Consensual union	02.2	02.9	01.0		10.5	11.5	07.8
Married	03.7	06.4	10.3		27.0	44.8	65.4
<i>Monogamous</i>	--	--	--		22.2	34.9	46.6
<i>Polygamous</i>	--	--	--		04.8	09.9	18.8
Separated/Divorced/widowed	00.2	00.0	00.3		01.7	01.2	00.3
N = 2477	561	404	207		652	414	239
% of respondents who were married at:							
Age 15	00.0	00.4	00.0		03.8	08.6	13.2
Age 20	01.7	04.5	04.5		33.8	57.2	78.2
Age 25	17.6	21.4	40.6		66.6	80.0	90.3
Median age at first marriage	----	----	----		22.2	18.8	17.2
Cox test for significance (1)					***		
N = 2477	561	404	207		652	414	239
Marital ceremonies performed							
Religious ceremony only	39.7	33.5	35.0		26.0	26.9	24.6
Traditional ceremony only	31.7	27.4	07.0		17.2	14.0	07.9
All three ceremonies	00.0	02.6	21.1		06.7	07.3	18.2
N = 683	27	27	26		226	213	163

Table 3. Parity and timing of first birth among women aged 15-24, by birth cohort, weighted sample

	Women		
	Cohort		
	1975-84	1965-74	1955-64
% of women who had a child at time of censorship:	35.4	40.3	62.0
% of respondents who had a first child at:			
Age 15	00.6	02.6	05.1
Age 20	34.9	47.0	65.5
Age 25	77.2	75.7	90.6
Median age at first child	21.6	20.5	18.4
Cox test for significance (1)		***	
N = 1305	652	414	239
Mother's marital status at time of birth			
In union	80.2	95.8	94.2
<i>Consensual union</i>	17.8	10.0	03.4
<i>Married</i>	62.2	85.8	90.8
Single	19.8	04.2	05.7
N = 551	248	169	134

Source: see Table 1

Table 4. Residential status and timing of residential independence of men and women aged 15-24, by birth cohort, weighted sample

	Men			Women		
	Cohort			Cohort		
Residential status	1975-84	1965-74	1955-64	1975-84	1965-74	1955-64
Living at:						
Mother's/father's residence	59.7	38.7	39.4	35.1	34.0	20.5
Other parents' residence	27.1	40.2	30.8	24.2	16.9	21.4
Boarding school /non relative's	02.3	04.6	08.8	04.0	01.4	02.8
In-laws'	01.1	00.3	00.6	06.0	06.8	06.8
Renting/co-renting own place	08.5	09.2	13.6	13.3	14.0	14.5
Owner/Co-owner of own place	01.3	07.0	06.7	17.4	26.9	34.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N = 2476	561	404	206	652	414	239
% of respondents who had acquired residential independence:						
Age 15	01.6	03.6	02.9	01.8	06.7	04.7
Age 20	09.2	14.6	16.1	30.1	44.3	54.2
Age 25	24.6	40.2	42.9	63.7	61.5	68.5
Median age at residential independence	---	---	---	22.4	20.5	20.0
Cox test for significance (1)		***			***	
N = 2476	561	404	206	652	414	239

Source: see Table 1

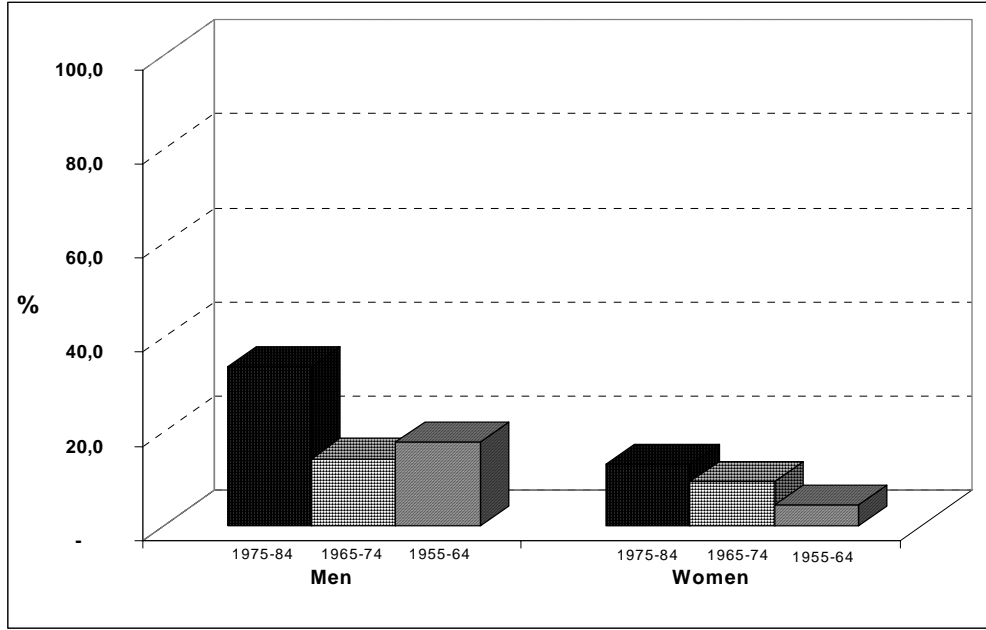


Figure 1 : Percentage of male and female respondents who had lived none of the “adulthood events” (paid employment, residential independence, marriage) at age 24

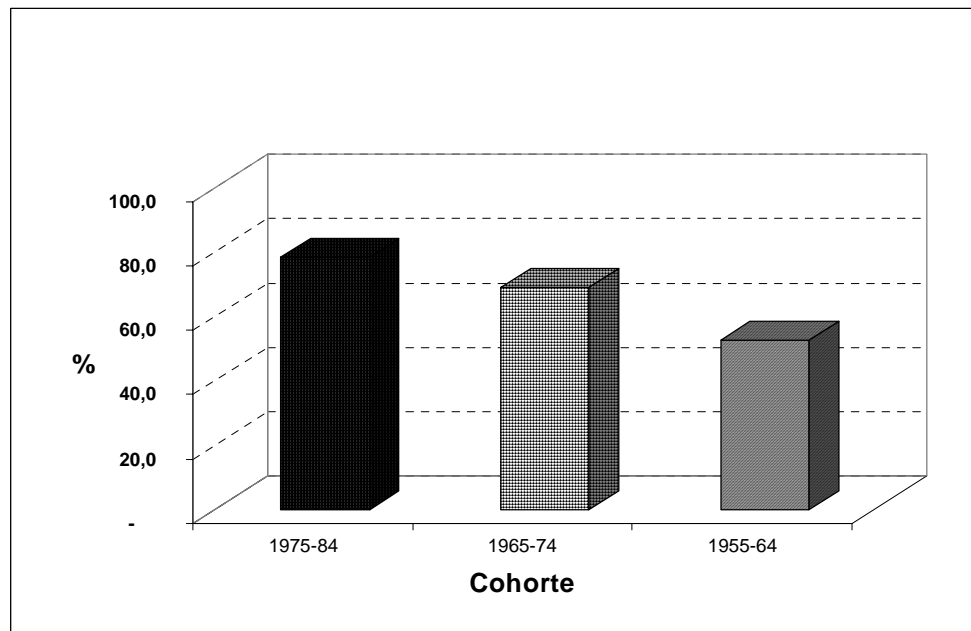


Figure 2: Percentage of working males still “residentially dependent” at age 24