TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD OF MEXICAN WOMEN.

FAMILY TRANSITIONS

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The study focused on examining the ages at which the first sexual relation, the first marital union and the first pregnancy took place and comparing them to socio-demographical variables at the time of each transition. The theoretical framework for the study was that of Life-course approach. Life tables and Cox´s models were created to analyse the context of each transition.

Results show early median ages in each transition. The results allow us to affirm that the woman is still being educated to initiate her sexual, conjugal and reproductive life at earlier ages, which conjugates with the lack of opportunities of development and social recognition outside the family and with the construction of what a woman should be and do, that is getting married and having kid at earlier age. This limits the life options for the women in different fields as the familiar, such as the academic and labor field.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research is to study the entrance into adulthood of young Mexican women through the analysis of three transitional events within the family context: 1. First sexual relation; 2. First marital union (either cohabitation or legal marriage); 3. First pregnancy. This analysis was based on the data collected by the *Encuesta Nacional de Salud Reproductiva* (National Reproductive Health Survey) 2003.

The study focused on examining the ages at which these events took place and comparing them to socio-demographical variables such as birth cohort, socioeconomic stratum, place of socialization, ethnical group and religious adscription, and two more

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variables related to the situation of the woman as a student or working person at the time of each transitional event.

The theoretical framework for the study was that of Life-course approach, which considers the study of adulthood transitions as highly important, for it is during youth that people face a series of events in which they must make decisions that will affect their present and future lives, as well as that of their descendents.

We know that for women from countries like Mexico, the three transitions studied here appear in the first years of their youth, with short intervals between each other. Being, in most of the cases, the sexual initiation with the boyfriend or with the husband, passing few time between this and that the woman go to live with their partner if she hasn't do it yet, and due to the social pressures and to the command of starting the fecundity just a little later after the union is constituted, that the procreation starts, using birth controls only after the pregnancy has concluded (Samuel, 2001 in Brugeilles and Samuel, 2005).

TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD IN MEXICAN SOCIETY

Inside the approach of the life course, usually the first sexual relation is not considered in the transitions that facilitate the adulthood; however, because of their nature the sexual relations separate the asexual world of the children from the sexual world of the adults, and at the same time they provide the occurrence of other events such as marriage and paternity (Tuirán, 1999). Therefore, in this research we include the analysis of the sexual initiation as a key event in the transition to adulthood in the Mexican women.

In addition to this, in Latin-American countries, standing out Mexico, the legal marriage religious and/or civil marriage has never been universally adopted, because it has been proved that living together is an usual form to start a life with a couple (Quilodrán, 2004). Therefore, in this study we included the first union without making any difference between legal and consensual marriage.

DATA AND METHODS

The data source used in this research was the *Encuesta Nacional de Salud Reproductiva* 2003. It contains information from 7,381 women located in 8 states of the Mexican

Republic (Chiapas, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Sonora y Tamaulipas), which were the survey's domain states. The period age that was used to define the youth phase was from 10 to 29 years old.

Life tables were created so as to analyse the ages at which transitional events take place. These tables were controlled by three socio-demographic factors: birth cohort (1954-1963 and 1964-1973), place of socialization (rural or urban) up to the age of 12 and socioeconomic stratum (very low, low, middle and high-class). More than control variables, these characteristics were analytic axes for the research. In addition to this, three Cox´s models were adjusted to specify the socioeconomic variables.

In the next section, we present the results obtained with the life tables for each transition.

TIMING OF TRANSITIONS

FIRST SEXUAL RELATION

In this table is possible to observe that the median age[2] is 18.2 years old for the population's total. Also for each cohort we have a median age near to the 18 years.
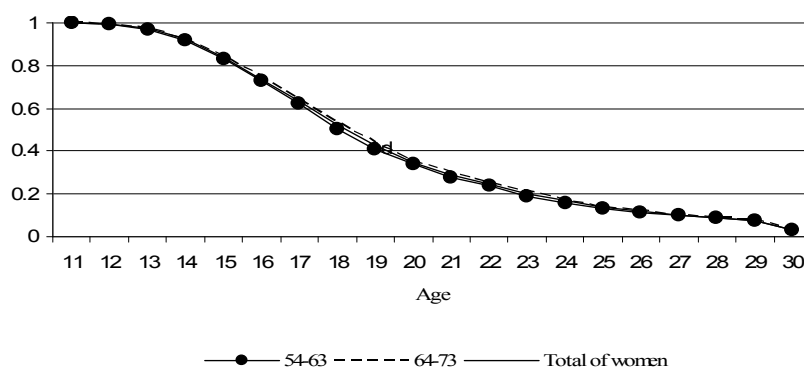
Table 1. Age at first sexual relation by quartiles and median according to socio-demographical variables.

Variables	Category	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Inter quartile range
All women		15.9	18.2	21.9	6.0
Birth cohort	1954-1963	15.8	18.0	21.7	5.9
	1964-1973	16.0	18.4	22.0	6.0
Socioeconomic stratum	Very low	15.1	17.2	20.0	4.9
	Low	16.2	18.3	21.8	5.6
	Middle and high	17.5	20.0	23.9	6.4
Place of socialization	Rural	15.5	17.8	21.0	5.5
	Urban	16.8	19.3	23.0	6.2

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

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[2] To obtain the occurrence ages both for the quartiles and for the median, we used the series of l_x, which represents the survivor function or the number of persons alive at an exact age x.
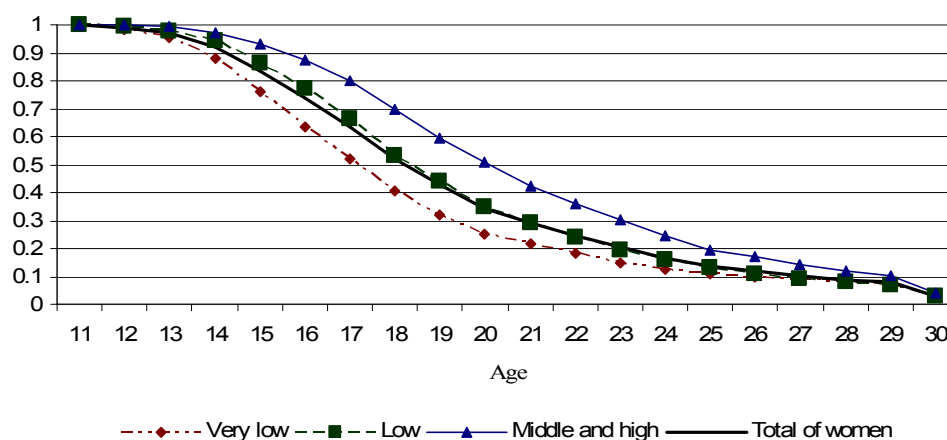
Guadalupe Fabiola Pérez Baleón

Figure 1.- Proporcion of survivor at first sexual relation
by cohort.

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

While for socioeconomic level, it is possible to observe that in the higher levels, the women delayed their entrance to the sexual life with a median of 20 years old; on the other hand women in the lowest level had a median of sexual initiation of 17.2 years old. That is, the difference between the two extreme levels is 2.8 years.
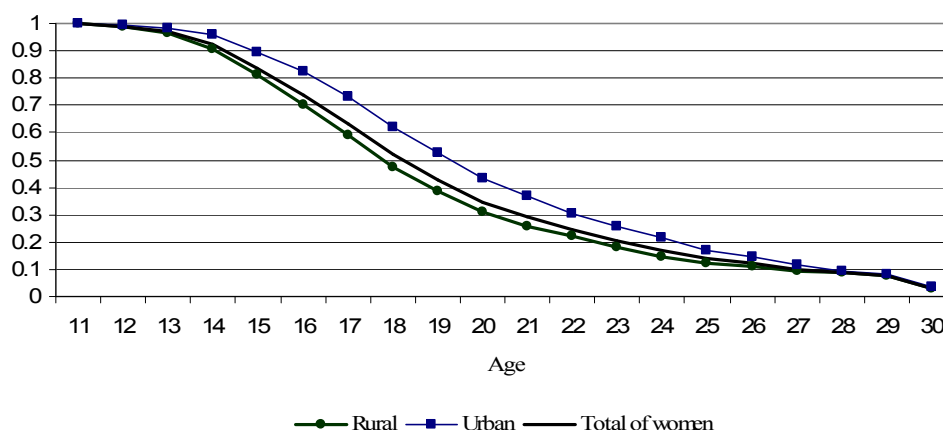
Figure 2.-Proporcion of survivor at first sexual relation
by socioeconomic stratum.

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

Meanwhile, in the place of socialization there are clear differences in the transition to the first sexual relation, as the women that in their childhood had lived in a rural environment initiated and ended this transition much earlier than the women from urban areas; the median is 17.8 years and 19.3 years, respectively.

Figure 3.-Proporcion of survivor at first sexual relation
by place of socialization.

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

Finally, the interquartile range shows that, for the women of each cohort, socioeconomic level and place of socialization, the time that takes between each transition was of approximately six years; that means that the interval variation in each case is similar, and that indicates that there exists a tendency of having the first sexual relation in a more or less established period of age.
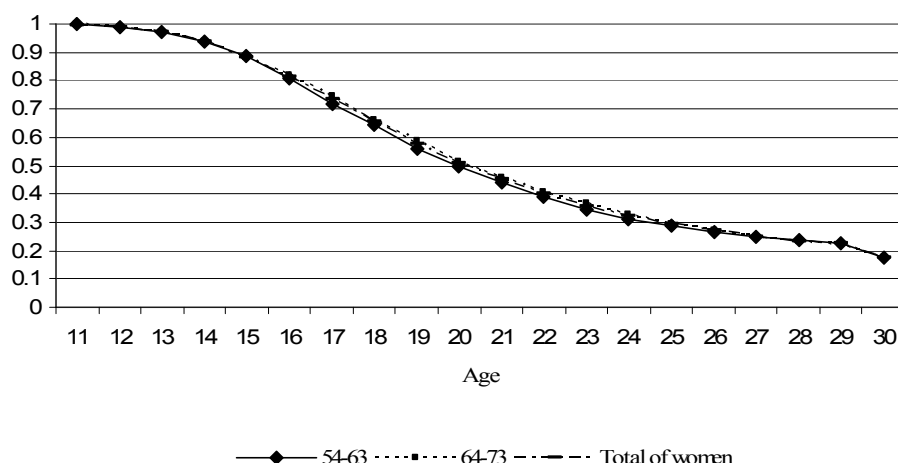
First marital union

With regard to the first union, the median age for the total of the population was of 20 years, similar to the one presented by the cohorts, with minimum variations through the time.

Table 2. Age at first marital union by quartiles and median according to socio-demographical variables.

Variables	Category	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Inter quartile range
All women		16.8	20.0	27.0	10.2
Birth cohort	1954-1963	16.7	19.9	27.0	10.3
	1964-1973	16.9	20.2	26.9	10.0
Socioeconomic stratum	Very low	16.0	19.2	29.0	13.0
	Low	16.8	19.8	25.0	8.2
	Middle and high	18.4	21.8	27.4	9.0
Place of socialization	Rural	16.5	18.9	22.9	6.3
	Urban	17.9	21.0	25.6	7.8

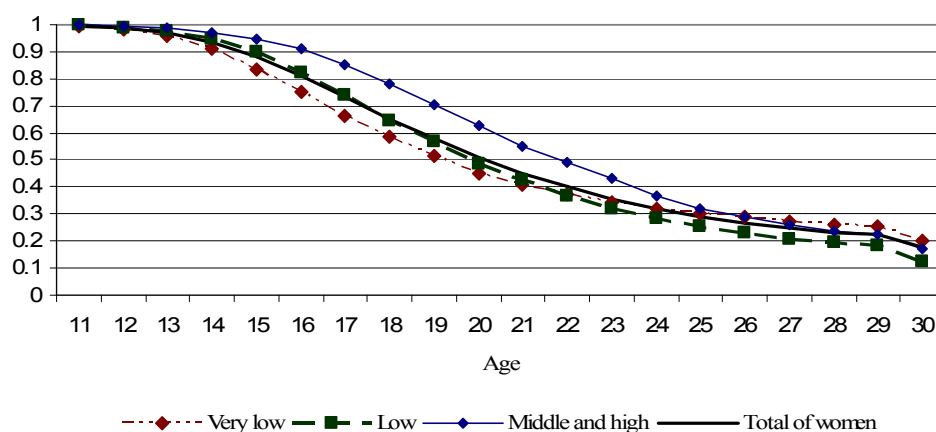Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

Figure 4.- Proporcion of survivor at first marital union
by cohort.

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

In the socioeconomic levels, there are interesting differences, where 50% of the women located in the medium and high level had their first union at the age of 21.8, the women from the low level had it at the age of 19.8 and the women from the lowest level showed a median of 19.2 years old. Due to all this, it is possible to prove that there is an associated relation between this transition and the socioeconomic level.
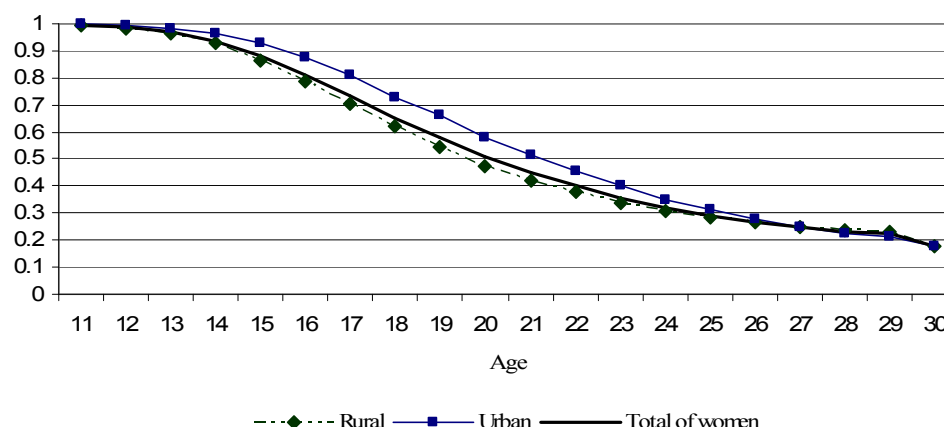
Figure 5.- Proporcion of survivor at first marital union
by socioeconomic stratum.

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

The transition timing at the first union considering the place of socialization shows differences in favor of the women that lived in urban areas until the age of 12, in relation with those that lived in rural areas such as a ranches or small towns, being the median age of 21 and 18.9 years old, respectively.

Figure 6.- Proporcion of survivor at first marital union
by placer of socialization.

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

Finally, the interquartile range shows that both in the cohorts and in the socioeconomic level took almost ten years to complete this transition. This measure shows a large variation of the age at the first union, which indicates that in this transition does not exist a range of age socially established for the union, in contrast of the first sexual relation. Such situation may suggest that the women are choosing to delay the first union in order to achieve other life objectives or that the matrimonial market is suffering decomposition in the male members' number due to the mortality and migration, which leads that not all the women find a conjugal partner.
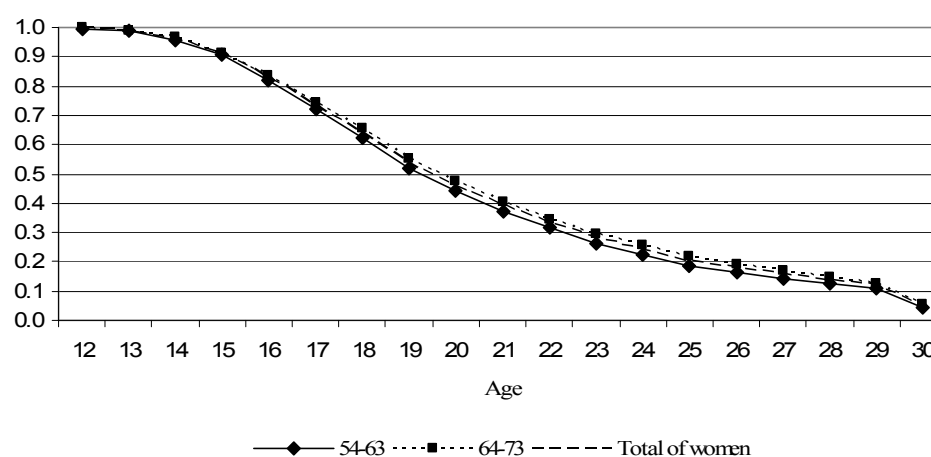
First pregnancy

As for the median age at the first pregnancy of the total population analyzed, it is located at 19.5 years old. Also, we observed that the timing distribution for the first pregnancy by cohorts does not present large changes between each other; although there are differences in favor of the youngest cohort, these do not exceed the half year.

**Table 3 Age at first pregnancy by quartiles and median according to
socio-demographical variables.**

Variables	Category	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Inter quartile range
All women		16.8	19.5	23.8	7.0
Birth cohort	1954-1963	16.7	19.2	23.4	6.6
	1964-1973	16.9	19.7	24.0	7.1
Socioeconomic stratum	Very low	16.0	18.3	21.9	5.9
	Low	17.0	19.6	23.6	6.6
	Middle and high	18.6	21.8	26.6	8.0
Place of socialization	Rural	16.5	18.9	22.9	6.3
	Urban	17.9	21.0	25.6	7.8

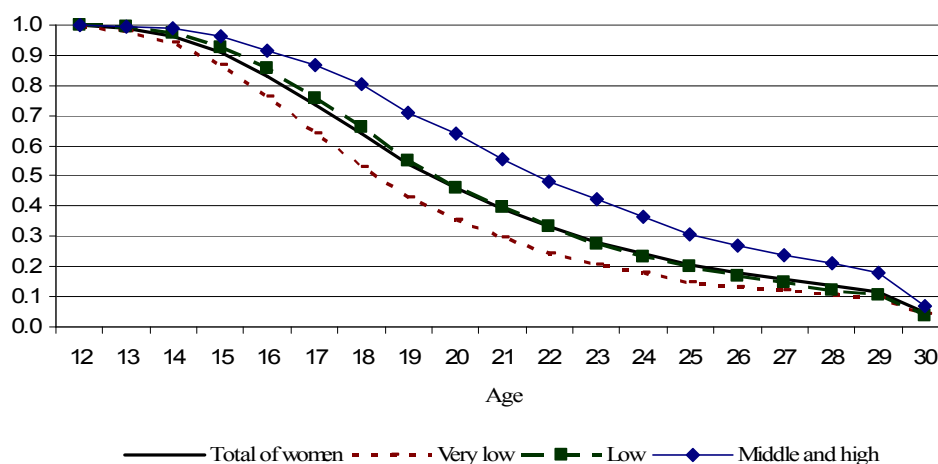Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

Figure 7.-Proporcion of survivor at first pregnancy
by cohort.

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

In the case of the first pregnancy by socioeconomic level, the differences were the same that the ones reported in the two previous transitions. We observed that 50% of the women in the lowest level started their transition at age 18.3, and the median of the women in the medium and high level was located at the age of 21.8 years.
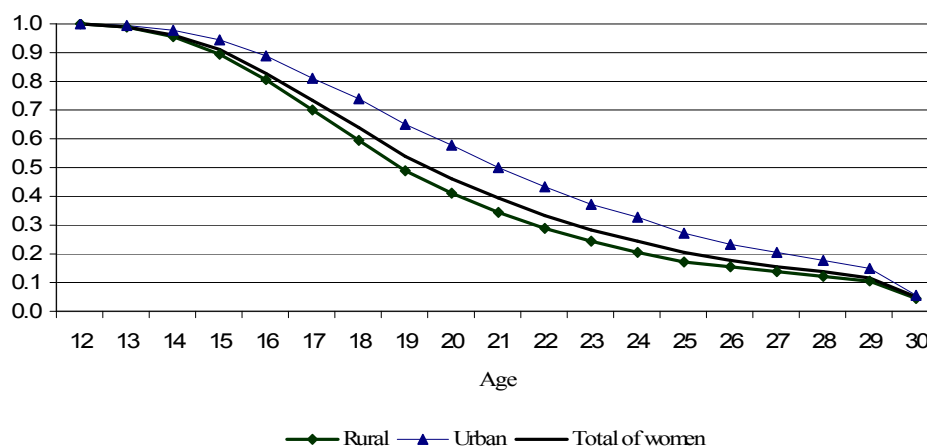
Figure 8.- Proporcion of survivor at first pregnancy
by socioeconomic stratum

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

Finally, the analysis by place of localization allow us to note earlier transitions in the women that lived their childhood in rural areas, with a median of 18.9 years, while the women socialized in an urban area had a median of 21 years.

Figure 9.- Proporcion of survivor at first pregnancy
by place of socialization.

Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

On the other hand, the interquartile range shows relatively a little intern variability between cohorts and places of socialization and a large variability between socioeconomic levels, with an average of 7 years for the total of the population. This will indicate that there was a social established age to transit to the first pregnancy, which is presented at earlier ages in the life of these women.

Also, it is emphasized that the median age of this transition is less than the one found for the first union, with 19.5 and 20 years old, respectively. This can be the result, in first place that the oftener transition after the first sexual relation is motherhood, and in second place that a percentage of the women get married being pregnant or they even do not get married, raising their children as a single mother.

Concluding, in this section our hypotheses has been confirmed; that is, we do not observed huge changes between cohorts, but they appeared in the socioeconomic levels and in the place of socialization, in each transition studied.

A last element that we have to point out is that the median age of these transitions was concentrated between the ages of 17 and 22 years, which indicate that these transitions appear in the first years of the Mexican woman's youth. In this respect, it is interesting to investigate which were the factors that lead to the delay or advance of these transitions. Due to this, in the next section we will show the results of the Cox's models to know the associated variables to the transitions.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD OF MEXICAN WOMEN
First sexual relation

On the other hand, the models applied show that the factors contributing to reduced speed for a woman's sexual initiation are: belonging to a younger cohort, belonging to a better positioned socioeconomic strata (low or middle and high class), and having been socialized in a urban environment. Contrary to this, practicing a religion other than Catholicism, being a declared atheist, or not having gone through the transitions of finishing school and entering the labor forces, all contribute to accelerate this event.

Table 4. Cox´s Model for the first sexual relation.
Dependent variable: age at first sexual relation

FIRST SEXUAL RELATION		
	-2 Log Likelihood	111615,562
	x^2	847,241
	gl.	9
	Significant	0.000
Variables	**Category**	**Exp $^{(\beta)}$**
Birth cohort	1954-1963	Ref.
	1964-1973	0.946*
Socioeconomic stratum	Very low	Ref.
	Low	0.852*
	Middle and high	0.630*
Place of socialization	Rural	Ref.
	Urban	0.931*
Ethnical group	Yes	Ref.
	No	0.952
Religious adscription	Catholicism	Ref.
	Atheist	1.167*
	Other than catholicism	1.128*
Left full-time education	Yes	Ref.
	No	2.002*
Entered first job	Yes	Ref.
	No	1.647*

*Significant at: p< .05.
Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

First marital union

Regarding the beginning of life as a couple, it is shown that belonging to the higher socioeconomic strata reduces the speed of initiation, while not belonging to an indigenous group, being at school and having worked accelerates this transition.

Table 5. Cox´s Model for the first marital union.
Dependent variable: age at first marital union.

FIRST MARITAL UNION		
	-2 Log Likelihood	96095,6306
	x^2	912,785
	gl.	9
	Significant	0.000

Variables	Category	Exp $^{(\beta)}$
Birth cohort	1954-1963	Ref.
	1964-1973	0.946
Socioeconomic stratum	Very low	Ref.
	Low	0.852*
	Middle and high	0.630*
Place of socialization	Rural	Ref.
	Urban	0.941
Ethnical group	Yes	Ref.
	No	1.216*
Religious adscription	Catholicism	Ref.
	Atheist	1.018
	Other than catholicism	1.074
Left full-time education	Yes	Ref.
	No	2.497*
Entered first job	Yes	Ref.
	No	1.979*

*Significant at: $p < .05$.
Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

First pregnancy

On the other side, belonging to a younger cohort and to a higher socioeconomic stratum, as well as having been socialized in urban places contribute to delaying motherhood; the opposite was found to happen with non-catholic women who had not quit school or who started to work at the time of the transition.

Table 6. Cox´s Model for the first pregnancy.
Dependent variable: age at first pregnancy.

FIRST PREGNANCY		
	-2 Log Likelihood	107423,124
	x^2	939,836
	gl.	9
	Significant	0.000
Variables	**Category**	**Exp** $^{(\beta)}$
Birth cohort	1954-1963	Ref.
	1964-1973	0.933*
Socioeconomic stratum	Very low	Ref.
	Low	0.870*
	Middle and high	0.630*
Place of socialization	Rural	Ref.
	Urban	0.900*
Ethnical group	Yes	Ref.
	No	0.933
Religious adscription	Catholicism	Ref.
	Atheist	1.075
	Other than catholicism	1.099*
Left full-time education	Yes	Ref.
	No	2.363*
Entered first job	Yes	Ref.
	No	1.755*

*Significant at: p< .05.
Source: National Reproductive Health Survey 2003.

CONCLUSION

The previous results allow us to affirm that the woman is still being educated to initiate her sexual, conjugal and reproductive life at earlier ages, which conjugates with the lack of opportunities of development and social recognition outside the family, with the construction of what a woman should be and do, that is getting married and having kid at earlier age. This limits the life options for the women in different fields as the familiar, such as the academic and labor field.

Finally, amongst the most important findings in the research process, is the usefulness of the three analysis axes in order to determine differences in the ages and the factors associated to adult life initiation, which serves to prove that the time and way in which women go through the mentioned transitions depends on their cultural, educational, historical, social, and economic conditions.

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