

V Congreso de ALAP: Las transiciones en América Latina y el Caribe.
Cambios demográficos y desafíos sociales presentes y futuros
Montevideo, Uruguay, del 23 al 26 de octubre de 2012.

Plenaria temática

Family changes in Latin America from a global and local perspective

Changes in Childbearing Careers: Opportunities and Constraints on Women's Lives

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This paper will provide an historical and comparative overview of how fertility decline in Latin America has radically redefined the reproductive constraints on women's lives, with particular attention to women at the completion of their reproductive careers (i.e. ages 40+). Consistent with the goals of this plenary session, the analysis will be sub-regional (comparison among Latin American countries, and possibly within-country as well, e.g. urban-rural or schooling), and it will be global (comparison with countries in other regions).

Change in the transition to adulthood, including the timing of the onset of childbearing, has received considerable scholarly attention. Much less attention has been given to later stages of the reproductive career, although this has many implications for women's (and men's) extra-household and domestic activities during their adult years and into old age. Note that this stage of the life-course has become far more salient because of increased longevity and improved adult health. We will examine cohort trends in the following facets of the reproductive career:

1. Age at first birth, age at last birth, and length of reproductive career
2. Completed parity
3. Onset of secondary sterility
4. Achievement of desired number of births (versus falling short)
5. Occurrence of unwanted births

The estimation of cohort trends will rely on survey data from the late 1970s (WFS) to the present (DHS, RHS, and national surveys in Brazil and Mexico). Estimation of each facet listed above presents analytical challenges: censoring in the case of all five, and measurement error (#3 - #5). The paper will discuss these challenges and propose (and adopt) optimal solutions, drawing on methodological research we have conducted during the past five years.

There will be three organizing themes/questions:

1. Consistency between childbearing goals and outcomes (i.e. items #4 and #5), as assessed at the end of the reproductive career.

2. Societal and regional variation in low-fertility regimes. While the paper will include an historical perspective, the main emphasis will be on contemporary patterns. It is often assumed, implicitly at least, that low-fertility regimes all possess essentially the same defining features; this assumption will be investigated via comparison of low fertility in Latin America with low fertility in other regions (Asia, Arab region).
3. Reproductive constraints on the latter half of adulthood, e.g. ages 40-60. At these ages most women in recent cohorts are healthy and can take advantage of expanding employment opportunities in secondary and tertiary sectors. Age at the last birth, for example, determines the age at which women are largely freed from the most time-consuming childrearing activities. Again we will make comparisons within Latin America and with select countries in other regions.