

School-leaving, Sexual Initiation and Union Formation Among Filipino Youth

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Adolescence is an important transition stage to adulthood, and where life-defining choices are made. Jocano, a Filipino anthropologist once referred to this stage as a “period of potential conflict between biological and social factors”. The conflict arises due to the “incongruence between the biological demands for mature role in society and the socio-cultural constraints set up by society itself” (Jocano 1978). These biological, cognitive and psychosocial changes expose adolescents in opportunities to engage in behaviors that have important long-term repercussions (Millstein, Petersen & Nightingale 1993 as cited in (Harris 2002).

The occurrence of life-defining events is part of the exploratory nature of adolescence. This includes leaving the parental home either because of work or school, completion of formal education, entry to romantic relationships, all of which could precipitate cohabitation or union, marriage, and parenthood. In the Philippines, it used to be that the sequence of these events is well-defined with synchronization of completion of education, marriage and living away from home as important markers for the transition to adulthood (Raymundo, Xenos and Domingo, 1999). However, recent developments both in the cultural and social realms have spawned various pathways for adolescents’ entry to adulthood. The living away from home experience has become increasingly tied to the pursuit of education or employment. Thus, as adolescents are coming to grip with the changes in their own individual sphere – they have to do so in an environment away from what their older counterparts (at least) were accustomed to, making them more vulnerable to outside influences. It is against this backdrop that adolescents in most societies are making the transition into adulthood.

This paper focuses on school-leaving, sexual initiation and union formation and explores the possible link in the timing of school-leaving and sexual initiation as well as school-leaving and union formation. Moreover, it assumes that the changing social, economic, cultural environment has affected not only the probability of school-leaving and sexual initiation during adolescence, it has hastened the occurrence of these events among young people and removed the previously conceived notion of an ideal sequence, which is school-leaving, marriage and parenthood.

The 2002 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS 3), a nationwide study on Filipino young adults ages 15-27 was used as data source for the study. The analysis however, is confined to those aged 15-24. Corresponding data from the 1994 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study were included to establish trends in important life-events. The study used methods such as descriptive, life-table estimation, and event-history analysis which involves the creation of person-age records to reflect time-varying variables such as age first left school, age at sexual initiation and age at first union. A multivariate analysis using logistic regression is fitted to predict factors affecting occurrence of premarital sex at certain ages. Once the coefficients of binary logit models are estimated, multiple classification analysis (MCA) technique is applied to compute for

age-specific probabilities, controlling for timing of school leaving. In MCA, appropriate values for age at PMS and marriage/cohabitation are substituted in the estimated model equation, holding other variables at their sample means to compute for age specific probabilities. Finally, to compute for proportions of young males and females engaging in PMS at particular ages, taking into account a specified home-school leaving schedule, and holding other covariates constant, we compute for cumulative statistic of age-specific probabilities using the life table method. The paper also takes into consideration the varying effect of gender, thus separate analysis was conducted for males and females.

Results shows that more than half of young people aged 15-24 were not in school at the time of the survey. School-leaving peaks at age 16 or upon completion of secondary education while sexual initiation commonly occurs at age 18. Financial difficulties remain the major reason for premature school-leaving, although 10% admitted to dropping out of school due to pregnancy and/or marriage. Women more than men, are likely to face the consequences of early sexual initiation such as dropping out from school. Similarly, early departure from school appears increases the likelihood for early sexual initiation, particularly among young women. Partly, findings point to possible role of contextual changes altering not only the timing of various transitions marking adulthood, but also making the transition markers more variable.