

**Spouse Choice among the Poor Rural Young People in Mexico:  
Age, Education and Language Spoken**

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During the second half of the 20th century, one of the major transformations in Mexico has been the expansion of the education system: the school attendance has been generalized, and students remain in school for longer periods. The benefits have been greater amongst young girls, who started from lower levels. <sup>1</sup>Associated to this process, in the last decades, took place a slight but persistent tendency to delay the first union formation, especially amongst women. The increasing education and the delay of marriage, as well as the gender differences reduction have implied the formation of the marital unions at older ages with smaller age and education differences between spouses, that is, more egalitarian couples.

Due to the profound social inequalities found in the country, the changes in education, marriage and fertility have been uneven. Changes have been initiated later and have had slower rhythms between the more traditional sectors, such as the rural and indigenous population.

In the rural communities youth is one of the more excluded sectors because they share poverty and the lack of opportunities with the rest of the members of the community. Besides, the autonomy of the youth in the different domains of their lives is restricted in the peasant societies with hierarchical and patriarchal kinship structures. This occurs particularly amongst women and ethnic groups.

The gender system consists in the socially built expectations of the behavior of men and women, that prescribe the work division and the responsibilities between men and women and grant them different rights and obligations (Mason, 1995). In traditional peasant societies, the gender system favors the disadvantage of women.

The norms related to the different ages at the marriage of men and women are socially established. They also define preferences in the age difference between the spouses. In societies with patrilineal and patrilocal structures the gender stratification is

marked and the age difference between spouses tends to be wider than in societies where bilateral kinship structures and neolocal residence predominate (Casterline, Williams and McDonald, 1986). On the other hand, in societies in which age/generation is one of the hierarchy axes, women in couples where the man is markedly older will have lower autonomy.

The formal education, linked to the preparation for the adult life, is influenced by the gender system. The benefits of the education are more easily noticed in the case of men who participate in public domains of work and the community, than in the case of women who stay home. Also the education promotes the knowledge, the power of choice, and the confidence in the interaction with the outside world and the economic self efficiency. Therefore the autonomy of the woman is generally associated with the education. Besides, the educational level is linked to potential income. Consequently greater educational differences in the couple will be associated to lower bargaining power amongst women.

In Mexico the majority of native language speakers live in small and isolated localities, frequently in extreme poverty. They have not received the benefits of the development of the country, especially the access to educational services. Also the language barrier has been one more obstacle. The speakers of an indigenous language with greater education are bilingual because they learn Spanish in the schools. The ones who don't speak Spanish have little or none schooling and many restrictions to interact with the outside world. This occurs particularly in the integration to the labour markets that are not strictly local. These peasant societies have a hierarchy where the extense family and community values are beyond those of the individual. Generally the autonomy of the woman is very limited, especially if she is young. Between couples it is possible to assume greater inequality when only the male can interact with the outside world.

The conjugal couple is in charge of the biological reproduction and of the care giving and the transmission of the culture, language, social position and values. Therefore, the selection of the spouse is of great social interest. In many societies, marriage represents the union of two families as well. In greater or lesser extent, the family and the community influence the spouse election. However, formal education weakens the influence of parents and other elders in the young people decision making in the different spheres of their lives. More educated young people play a more active role in the choice of their spouse. Also, the higher levels of formal education amongst women enhance their chances of work and the search for potential partners with higher education and economic standards.

In Mexico, arranged marriages do not prevail but in the rural areas the family and the community exert a strong influence in the spouse election. It is worth noting that in these communities, in the absence of marriage the couples in consensual unions have the same basic aims as those in formal unions.

Studies on marriage have generally focused on the experience of women, in a way that the role of the male and the couples' interaction have been minimized. In the peasant societies, where gender relations are much more stratified, the omission of the male experience is critical because it is generally men who assume the authority in the family.

The objective of this paper is to describe certain features on the patterns of the spouse election among the youth of the marginalized rural localities of the country. It is of special interest to investigate if this election obeys the socially established norms linked to the gender system, and if the patterns are similar in the different regional contexts. The analyzed features are: age, schooling and language spoken.

The questions to be answered are: Are young people always looking for a spouse with the preferred characteristics in the society or is there certain flexibility in their choice?

In this is the case, does the flexibility include age, education and ethnicity? Are there gender effects in the flexibility to choose a spouse?

The main hypotheses are:

- 1) Young people tend to form a couple with partners that fulfill the characteristics established by the social norms: older men with a higher educational level than women, and partners of the same ethnic group.
- 2) In these rural traditional societies, young males have more options than young women in their spouse election.
- 3) In the more traditional contexts options in the spouse election are more restricted, mainly for women.

### *Methodology*

The data base is the Survey of the Socioeconomic Characteristics of Households, carried out by the Ministries of Health, Social Development and Education, in the frame of the social program "Progresá". This information was collected between the years of 1996 and 1999. The information was used for the selection of the families who would benefit from the program. Localities with high and very high marginality levels, ranging from 50 to 15 000 inhabitants and with educational and health services within 10 km were included in the Survey. All households in the locality were interviewed. Around 3 million households were interviewed in almost 50 000 localities.

In this analysis, the population under study is the couples where at least one of the spouses is 12 to 34 years of age living in localities with less than 5 000 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> There are almost 1.2 million of couples with these characteristics. This study includes married and consensual union couples, and couples with neolocal residence as well as those who remain

in the parents' household.

The data source is cross-sectional and allows the location of the spouses and of their children in the household. A bivariate analysis is applied with measures of central tendency for the numeric variables (difference of age, years in school and the difference of years in school). To measure the assortative mating by education level of the spouses (categorical ordinal variable), the gamma and tau-b of Kendall measures are used, this last being less sensitive to the categories formation. When the association is positive, these measures take values between zero and one, the closest the value to the unit shows a stronger association.

In the analysis the country is divided into four regions: north, central/west, central/east and southeast (figure 1).<sup>3</sup> These regions were chosen because they show socioeconomic and cultural differences and their marginalized localities show different aspects relevant for this study. In the central/east and in the southeast regions, peasant households predominate and there is a strong presence of indigenous speaking population. In the other two regions the proportion of households that own land and of indigenous speaking population are lower. Also, in the north the paid jobs are more frequent than in the southeast. The two regions in the centre have average conditions even though the conditions in the west are more similar to those in the north, while the east resembles more the southeast. Another distinctive feature of the regions is the emigration patterns, which among others greatly influence the marriage market. The central/west shows a more intense "definitive"<sup>4</sup> emigration followed by the north and the center/east, while this type of migration is very uncommon in the southeast region.

## **Results**

Marriage patterns in these rural localities are characterized by early marriage mainly among

women. By age 18, one out of ten males and one out of four females are married or live in consensual union. The majority of males and females are not single any more by age 24: six out of ten males and three out of four females. By age 34, only 9% of men and 7% of women remain single. Regional differences show diverse gender patterns. Marriage takes place at later ages in the north amongst young males, and in the center/west amongst females. On the other hand, the earliest ages at marriage are observed in the southeast region for both, males and females.

#### *Age difference between spouses*

According to the social norm, in average, men are almost four years older than their spouses (Table 1, Graph 1).<sup>5</sup> This figure reflects an intermediate situation compared with other contexts. For example, in many African countries, the difference of age in the couple is greater, in average males are seven years older. In Nigeria and Mauritania, for example, the difference is of 10 years; somewhat a different situation is that observed in the Philippines, where males are only 2.5 years older than females (Casterline, Williams and McDonald, 1986).

In Mexico in the seventies, including rural and urban areas, a difference of three years was observed. Comparing this value with the one obtained for the population under study (4 years in average) by the end of the nineties, it is possible to assert that in the poor rural localities, the pattern is to choose spouses with greater age differences than in the rest of the country.

Analyzing more in detail the data on the population under study, it is observed that in half of the couples the age difference between spouses is up to 3 years (Table 1). Also in half of the couples the man is older from 1 up to 6 years. The most common combination is

when he is two years older (12%) even if the differences of one and three years are also preferred (Graph 1). Couples that do not fulfill the norm of men being older are not common: only in 13% of the cases the woman is older; but there are even some couples where she is much older than her spouse (Graph 2). Couples where the man is much older are more frequent. For instance, in one out of every 10 couples he is at least 10 years older than her, and there are some couples where he belongs to a birth cohort more than half a century prior to hers'.

It is worth noting the fairly consistent patterns in the age difference between spouses across the four regions. Only in the central/west region, the pattern is slightly distinct: the average gap is almost one year less, that is three years, and the preference of closer ages between spouses is marked (Graph 1). In this region, women marry at later ages than in the other regions, while men have similar ages at marriage as men from the other regions. One distinctive feature of the center/west is the strong male emmigration that causes an unbalance between the male and the female populations in marriage ages. One possible explanation for this closer age gap between spouses in this region could be that women resort to this mechanism in order to face the scarcity of males in the marriage market.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, couples in this region would tend to be more egalitarian than in the rest of the country.

#### *Educational differences between spouses*

The differences in schooling between spouses also fulfill the established social norm: men have in average more schooling than women, even if differences are very slight (Table 2). One of the reasons for this gender gap to be small is the growing coverage of the educational system together with the younger birth cohorts of women. However what



stands out the most is the very low male and female educational levels: women have completed 4.88 years in average and men 5.22 years, which is not even the complete elementary cycle that is of 6 years.

The deep differences between regions are also striking, mainly in the case of women (Table 2). While in the north men and women almost achieve the six years of the primary education, in the southeast men do not complete five years and women only complete four years in average. It is clear that the expansion of the educational system observed in the country as a whole has been very heterogeneous and especially limited in the rural marginalized localities of the southeast region.

The mean difference in the number of years of schooling between men and women is only 0.34 (Table 3). In half of the couples, she has more or even years of schooling. As schooling is generally low, big education gaps between spouses are not common: only in one out of four couples the man has two more years of schooling.

These figures hide different regional patterns. In the north, the gender differences are small, and they are to the disadvantage of males (Table 3). In one out of four couples, the woman has at least two more years of education than the male and in average women have 0.15 years more than their spouse. An opposite situation is observed in the southeast region where the gender gap to the disadvantage of women is big: as was already mentioned, they have almost one year less in schooling than their spouses.

The most frequent combination within the couple is the same number of years of schooling; this occurs in almost one out of every three couples (Graph 3). Then the most frequent differences are 3 and -3, associated to differences between the complete schooling years of primary, secondary and preparatory levels. The greater levels of schooling of women in the north result in the more frequent negative differences between spouses,

opposite to what is observed in the southeast region.

A complementary perspective in the analysis of the educational difference in the couple is obtained through the educational levels reached: none, primary incomplete and complete, secondary incomplete and complete and preparatory studies or more. A first look to the assortative matching in educational levels is obtained through the gamma and tau-b of Kendall measures (Table 4). These measures show the extension of similar educational levels within the couples. Both measures point out a frequent difference between spouses, mainly in the case of central/east and southeast regions; instead, in the north region, where the education level is higher, similar levels within the couple are more common.

In order to study the educational combinations within the couples, their distribution according to the educational level of each spouse is presented in Table 5. In these rural localities, the most frequent level is incomplete primary, in men as in women, followed by the complete primary level. Those who never attended school or who did not achieve a year of studies are 11% of women and 14% of men. The highest education level, preparatory studies or more, is only achieved by 6% of men and 4% of women.

Within the couples, the most frequent combination is the incomplete primary studies in both spouses (17%) followed by the complete primary studies (14%); other common cases are when one has completed the primary level and the other one has not succeeded to complete the primary cycle. Only in two out of every 100 couples both spouses have completed the preparatory level. It is worth mentioning that, of the few young people who reach this higher level, less than half has a spouse with similar education level. This would suggest that eligible men and women with greater qualifications are very scarce and educated young people have to adapt to the existent offer.

Some regional patterns are worth mentioning. In the north, the greater schooling of

women is achieved because they complete the primary cycle more often than men; nevertheless more men reach higher education than women. In the southeast region, what stands out is that almost one in every four women never attended school or did not achieved a year of schooling; this proportion is somewhat lower in the case of men (14%). These women with no formal education marry men in the same situation, or with slightly more education, incomplete or complete primary level.

To resume, the greater schooling achieved by males occurs in only half of the couples. There is a clear preference for spouses with similar education: three out of every ten couples have the same number of years of schooling and four out of ten couples have a similar educational level. Nevertheless, there is a great flexibility for the election of spouse with different qualifications. It is common that one of the spouses did not complete the education level that the other partner did. In other cases, one of the spouses, mainly the women, finishes the primary level and the spouse finishes the secondary cycle. The general tendency in the educational system of greater gender equity would have propitiated more egalitarian relations within the couples. It could be stated that women in the north region possess more autonomy, not only because they have more education but also because they have smaller gender schooling disparities with their spouses and would tend to form more egalitarian couples. The opposite could be said about the situation of women in the southeast region.

#### *Differences between spouses according to the language spoken*

In the rural localities of the study, around one fourth of men and women are speakers of an indigenous language (Table 6 and Graph 5). Amongst them the majority speaks Spanish as well, given that only 2% of men and 4% of women are monolingual. As it was expected,

the presence of the indigenous language speakers is relatively scarce in the north and in the central/west regions, where 12% of the couples has at least one of the spouses who speaks an indigenous language. Instead, this proportion is more than one third (36%) in the central/east region and almost one half (46%) in the southeast.

In the two regions with less presence of ethnic groups, couples where both are bilingual concentrate the great majority of the indigenous language speakers. Practically there are no monolingual couples. It is worth mentioning that the following category in importance is couples where the male is bilingual and the woman speaks only Spanish; the opposite case, where the woman is bilingual and the man speaks only Spanish is less frequent. This suggests less restrictions in choosing amongst the males that are bilingual than amongst the bilingual females.

In the center/east region, the language spoken by the spouses follows somewhat the same patterns than in the previous cases. Nonetheless, in this region bilingual males marry also monolingual females, so that bilingual men have more options to choose from because they may marry women in the three speaking categories.

Besides a greater presence of indigenous language speakers, the southeast region has a greater proportion of monolinguals, mainly amongst women. These women marry also monolingual men (3%) but given the scarcity of them, it is more common that monolingual women marry bilingual men (9%).

Couples where he is bilingual and she is monolingual are expected to have a more unequal relation because the language capabilities reflect important differences in the interaction with the outside world, besides the difference they reflect in the level of education, given that the majority of those who do not speak Spanish did not attend school.

In summary, the comparison of the language spoken by the spouses shows the very

strong endogamy within the couples of these rural communities. Amongst those who only speak Spanish, barely 2% of women and 1% of men are married to an indigenous language speaker. Besides, there are two interesting features that reflect gender inequalities. First, the greater options to choose spouse among bilingual men than among bilingual women. The other feature is the greater isolation of women who speaks an indigenous language. In spite of belonging to younger birth cohorts than their spouses, in all regions the proportion of women who are monolingual is higher than men's. This is particularly critical in the southeast region, where the proportion of monolingual females triples that of males.

#### *Final remarks*

The study results confirm most of the statements about the traditional social norms concerning the spouse choice and the gender differences. Nevertheless some of the results were unexpected.

Relating to age differences between spouses, in the majority of couples he is older than she or at the most, they have the same age; she is seldom older than he is. However, what stands out is the similarity of patterns within three well differentiated regional contexts. This shows that traditional expectations concerning gender/age are deeply rooted in the communities. Smaller age gaps between spouses in the western region, as was already said are probably a result of the unbalance between sexes of marriage age.

In these communities where formal education is generally low and where higher education is a recent experience, people have relatively few limitations to choose a partner with different education capabilities. Some restrictions seem to obey gender role rules but others to the availability of suitable eligible partners. An interesting example is that of those with preparatory studies or more who have spouses with much lower education.

The language spoken shows a great endogamy. Couples where one of the spouses only speaks Spanish and the other is bilingual are very seldom. In the couples where spouses have different language capabilities, gender inequities to the disadvantage of indigenous speaking women are observed.

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**Table 1. Age differences between spouses, by region**

region	mean	st dev	min	max
north	3.90	5.33	-37	55
center/west	3.36	4.96	-38	55
center/east	4.03	5.57	-40	58
southeast	3.96	5.43	-40	59
total	3.78	5.33	-40	59

**Table 2. Number of years of schooling of spouses, by region**

	women		men	
	mean	st dev	mean	st dev
north	5.97	2.94	5.82	3.26
center/west	4.92	3.06	5.13	3.24
center/east	4.80	3.05	5.23	3.14
southeast	3.99	3.07	4.80	3.24
total	4.88	3.10	5.22	3.23

**Table 3. Differences in years of schooling between spouses, by region**

region	mean	st dev	min	max	p25	p50	p75
north	-0.15	3.26	-20	21	-2	0	2
center/west	0.21	3.27	-20	21	-2	0	2
center/east	0.45	3.12	-19	20	-1	0	3
southeast	0.83	3.17	-21	22	0	0	3
total	0.34	3.21	-21	22	-1	0	2

Note: The difference is obtained from the man's number of years of education minus the woman's. Positive values reflect the higher education of men.



**Table 4. Measures of association between his' and her's educational level, by region**

	gamma	tau-b de Kendall
north	0.48	0.37
center/west	0.50	0.39
center/east	0.55	0.42
southeast	0.55	0.42
total	0.53	0.40

**Table 5. Couples by educational level of spouses, by region (%)**

Her level of education	his level of education						total
	none	primary incomplete	primary complete	secondary incomplete	secondary complete	preparatory or more	
<b>north</b>							
None	1.9	<b>2.5</b>	1.0	0.1	0.3	0.1	5.9
primary incomplete	<b>2.3</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>7.1</b>	1.1	<b>2.1</b>	0.8	27.4
primary complete	1.5	<b>10.6</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>2.0</b>	36.3
secondary incomplete	0.2	1.5	1.6	0.9	1.1	0.6	5.9
secondary complete	0.4	<b>3.1</b>	<b>4.8</b>	1.3	<b>5.7</b>	<b>2.5</b>	17.9
preparatory or more	0.1	0.7	1.2	0.4	1.4	<b>2.9</b>	6.7
Total	6.5	32.5	30.3	5.8	16.0	8.9	100.0
<b>center/west</b>							
None	<b>5.0</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>2.6</b>	0.3	0.6	0.2	13.6
primary incomplete	<b>3.9</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>8.9</b>	1.0	<b>2.4</b>	0.6	32.8
primary complete	<b>2.2</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>14.8</b>	1.4	<b>5.2</b>	1.3	34.5
secondary incomplete	0.2	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.3	3.4
secondary complete	0.4	1.9	3.3	0.7	<b>4.3</b>	1.5	12.0
preparatory or more	0.1	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.9	1.6	3.8
Total	11.8	33.7	31.1	4.0	14.0	5.4	100.0
<b>center/east</b>							
None	<b>4.7</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>2.4</b>	0.2	0.6	0.1	13.7
primary incomplete	<b>3.1</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>10.1</b>	0.9	<b>2.7</b>	0.6	35.1
primary complete	1.4	<b>8.3</b>	<b>15.3</b>	1.2	<b>5.6</b>	1.3	33.0
secondary incomplete	0.1	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.7	0.2	2.9
secondary complete	0.3	1.7	<b>3.3</b>	0.6	<b>4.6</b>	1.5	11.9
preparatory or more	0.1	0.3	0.6	0.2	0.8	1.6	3.5
Total	9.6	34.3	32.5	3.3	15.0	5.3	100.0
<b>southeast</b>							
None	<b>8.0</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>4.1</b>	0.3	0.8	0.2	23.0
primary incomplete	<b>3.9</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>9.5</b>	1.1	<b>2.7</b>	0.8	38.2
primary complete	1.3	<b>6.8</b>	<b>10.8</b>	1.1	<b>4.2</b>	1.4	25.6
secondary incomplete	0.1	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.3	2.6
secondary complete	0.2	1.3	1.8	0.4	<b>3.2</b>	1.4	8.3
preparatory or more	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.5	1.1	2.3
Total	13.6	38.8	27.1	3.4	12.0	5.1	100.0
<b>total</b>							
None	<b>5.0</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>2.6</b>	0.2	0.6	0.1	14.2
primary incomplete	<b>3.4</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>9.1</b>	1.0	<b>2.5</b>	0.7	33.6
primary complete	1.6	<b>8.8</b>	<b>14.1</b>	1.4	<b>5.2</b>	1.5	32.5
secondary incomplete	0.2	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.8	0.3	3.5
secondary complete	0.3	1.9	<b>3.3</b>	0.7	<b>4.4</b>	1.6	12.3
preparatory or more	0.1	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.9	1.7	3.9
Total	10.5	34.7	30.5	4.0	14.3	5.9	100.0

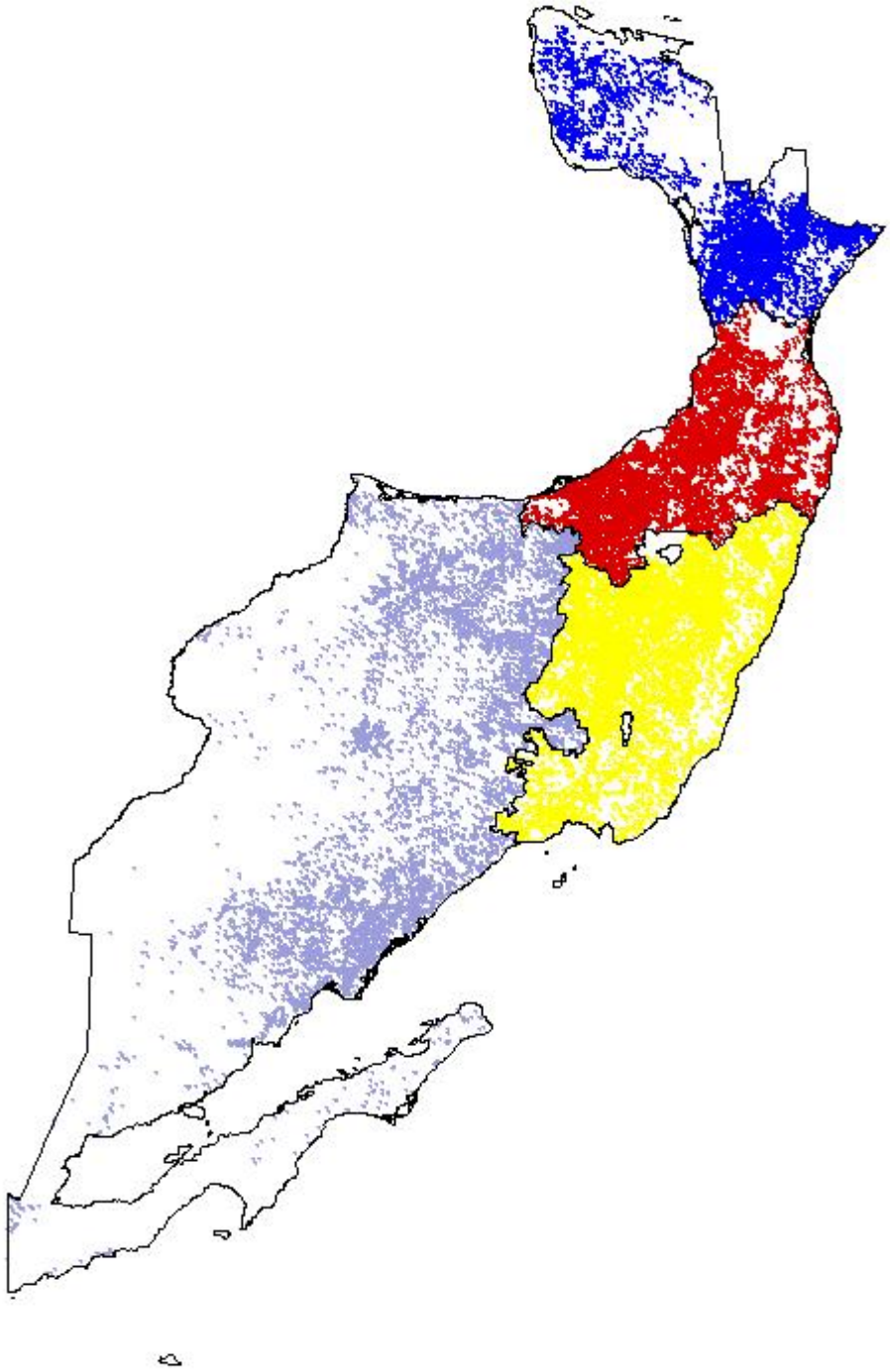
Note: Percentages refer to the total number of couples in the region. Figures in bold correspond to values of 2% or more.

**Table 6. Couples by language spoken by spouses, by region (%)**

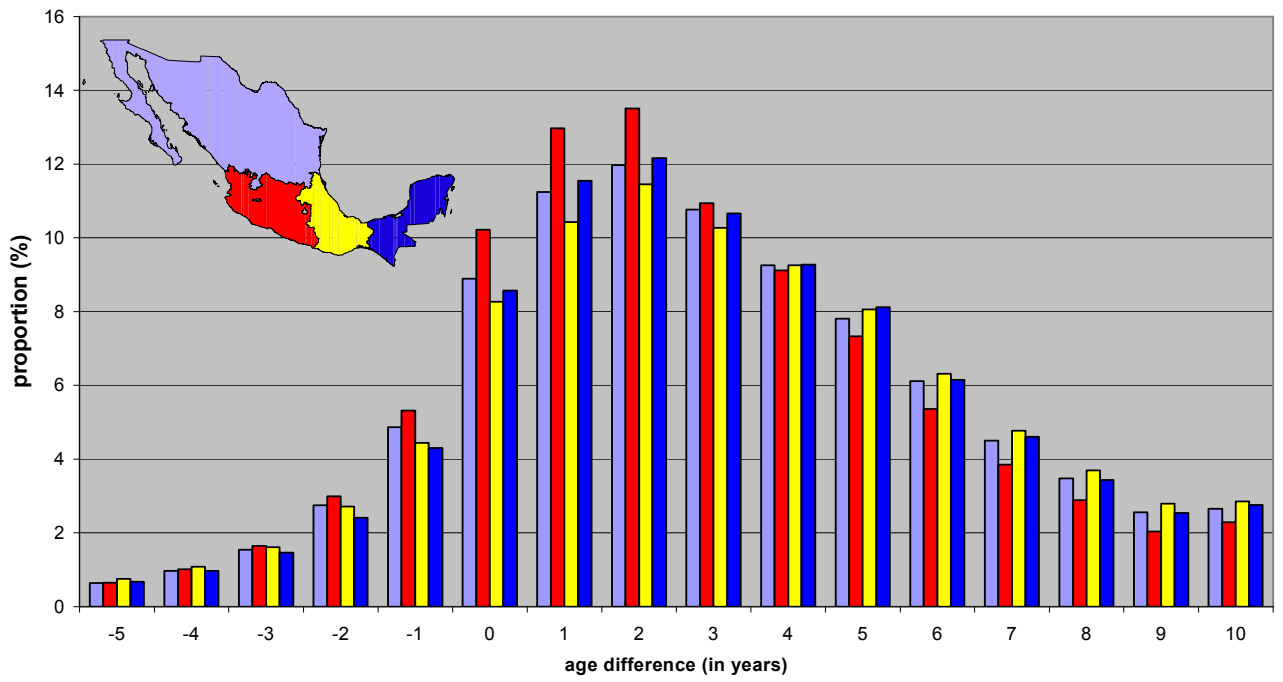
woman speaks	man speaks			total
	only Spanish	bilingual	monolingual	
<b>north</b>				
only Spanish	<b>88.2</b>	1.3	0.1	89.6
bilingual	0.9	<b>9.0</b>	0.0	9.9
monolingual	0.0	0.3	<b>0.1</b>	0.5
total	89.2	10.6	0.2	100.0
<b>center/west</b>				
only Spanish	<b>88.5</b>	1.2	0.1	89.8
bilingual	0.7	<b>8.2</b>	0.1	9.0
monolingual	0.0	0.8	<b>0.4</b>	1.2
total	89.2	10.2	0.6	100.0
<b>center/east</b>				
only Spanish	<b>64.1</b>	3.1	0.1	67.2
bilingual	1.7	<b>26.9</b>	0.4	29.0
monolingual	0.1	2.5	<b>1.2</b>	3.8
total	65.8	32.5	1.7	100.0
<b>southeast</b>				
only Spanish	<b>54.0</b>	3.1	0.1	57.1
bilingual	1.4	<b>28.5</b>	0.4	30.4
monolingual	0.1	9.0	<b>3.4</b>	12.5
total	55.4	40.6	4.0	100.0
<b>total</b>				
only Spanish	<b>73.7</b>	2.2	0.1	75.9
bilingual	1.2	<b>18.4</b>	0.3	19.9
monolingual	0.1	2.9	<b>1.2</b>	4.2
total	74.9	23.5	1.6	100.0

Note: Figures in bold refer to cases where both spouses have the same language capabilities.

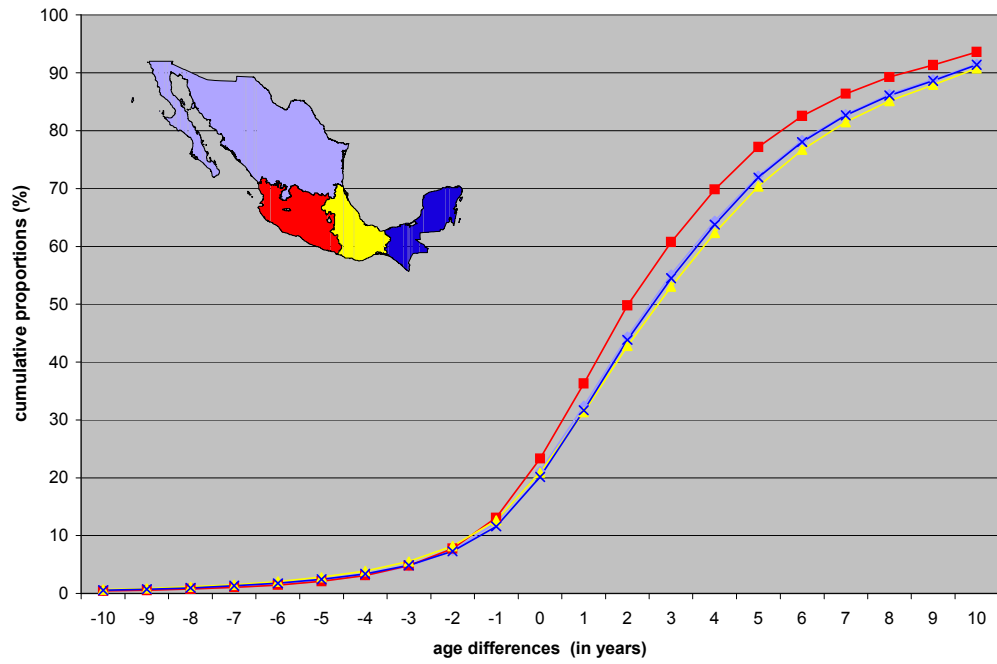
Figure 1. Mexico. Rural marginalized localities by region: north, center/west, center/east and southeast



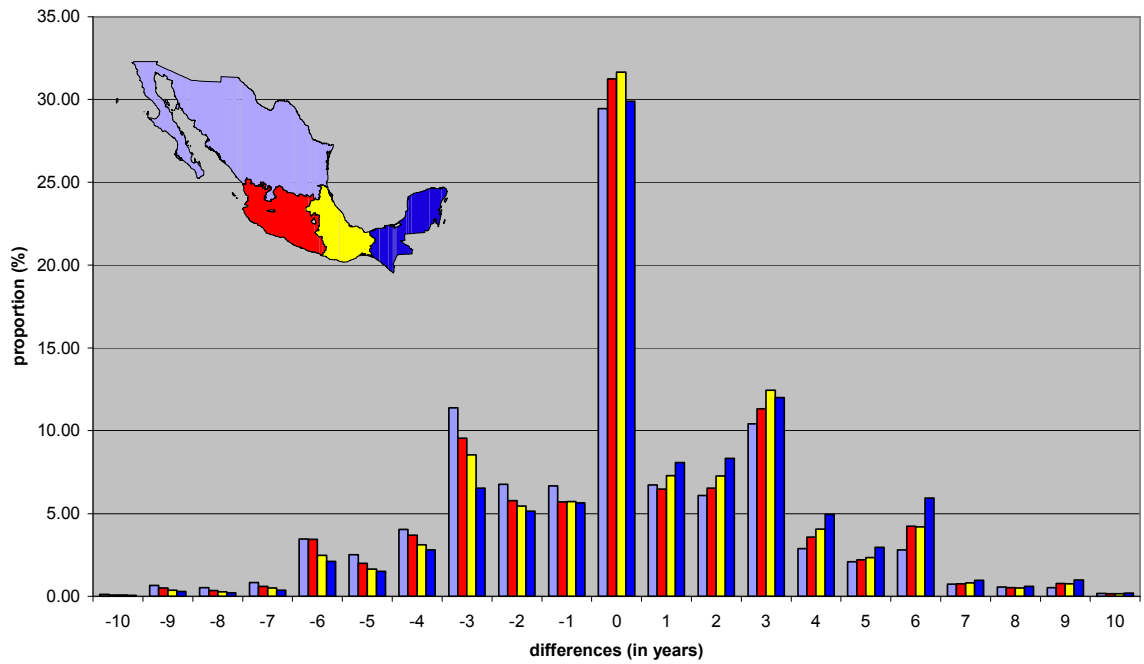
**Graph 1. Age difference between spouses,  
by region**



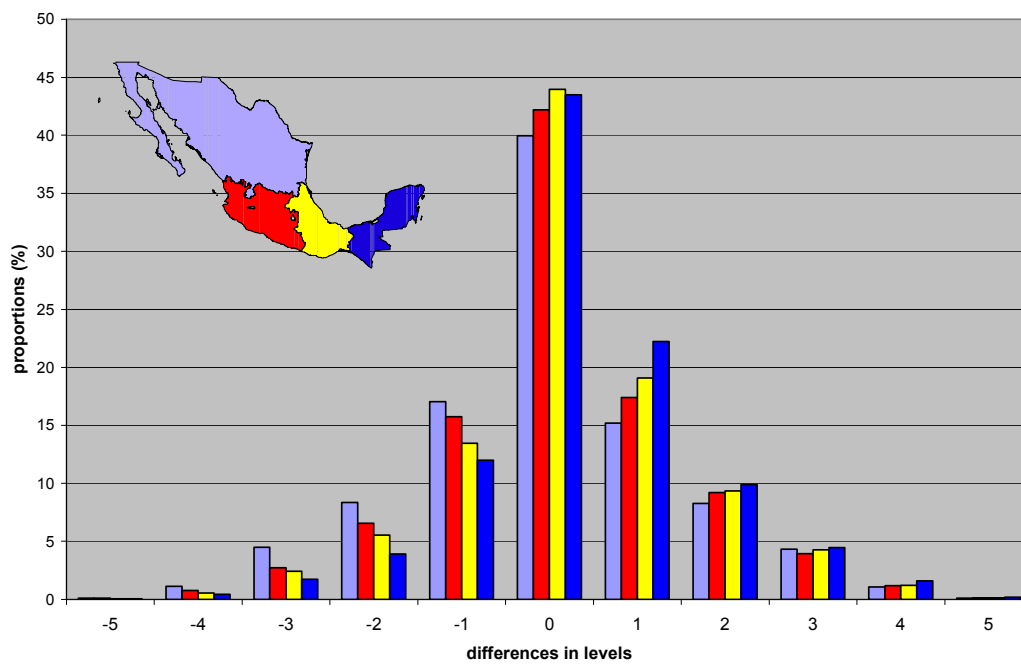
**Graph 2. Cumulative proportions of age difference between spouses by region**



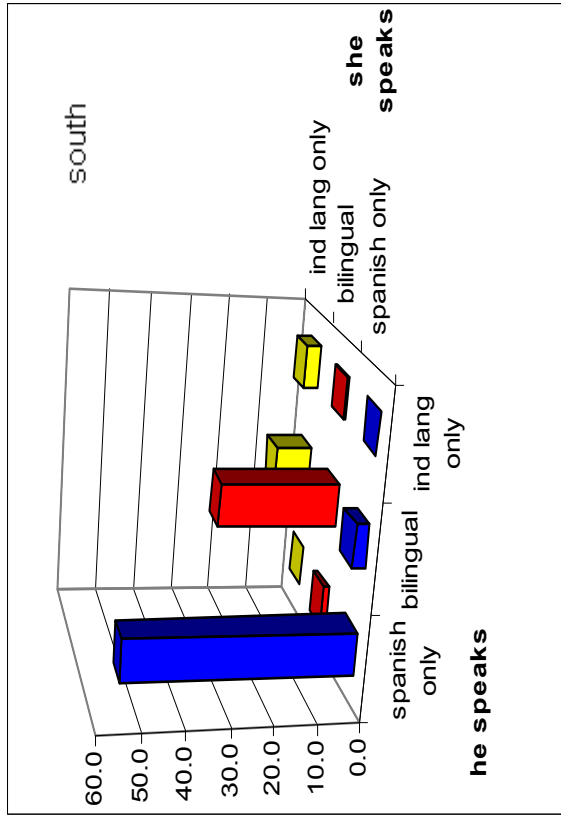
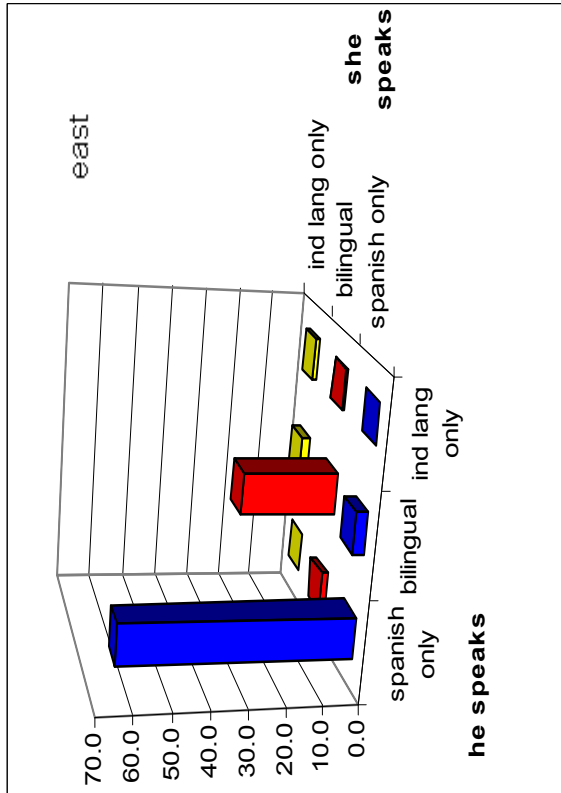
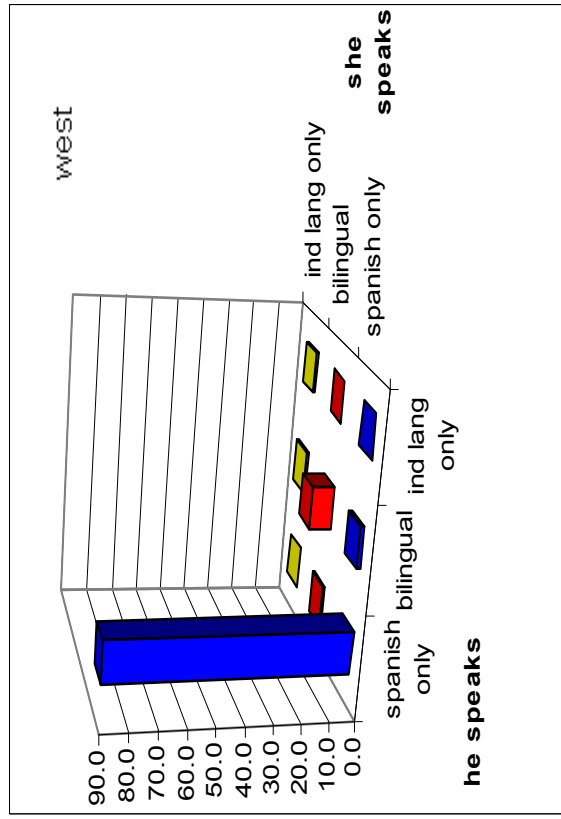
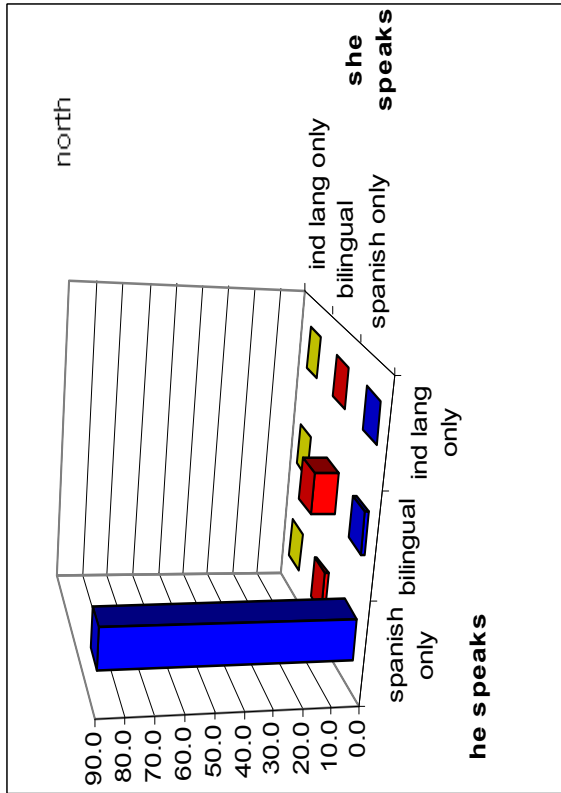
**Graph 3. Differences in number of school years between spouses, by region**



**Graph 4. Differences between spouses in education levels by region**



**Graph 5. Spouses' spoken language, by region**





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- <sup>1</sup> The increasing levels of education in the last decades and the greater benefits among young girls have been observed in almost all developing countries (Lloyd, 2005).
- <sup>2</sup> In the couples, only 5% of women are aged less than 18 and 2% are ages more than 34. Amongst men, 1% are aged less than 18 and 22% more than 34.
- <sup>3</sup> The north region is formed by 11 states: Baja California, Baja California Sur, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Durango, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas y Zacatecas. The center/west region includes 9 states: Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, México, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit y Querétaro. Guerrero, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Puebla, Tlaxcala y Veracruz form the center/east region. The southeast contains Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Tabasco y Yucatán.
- <sup>4</sup> In the questionnaire, it was asked whether somebody in the household had left in the last five years and had not returned ever since. The proportion of households in who had at least one migrant of this type in the municipality was 2.4% in the north, 3.0% in the center/west, 2.2% in the center/east, and 0.4% in the southeast.
- <sup>5</sup> Couples in the analysis were those where at least one of the spouses was 12 to 34 years of age; therefore, the other spouse may be older. In average, women are 26 years old and men are 30; one in every four women is older than 30 and one in every four men is older than 34.
- <sup>6</sup> Among people 15 to 34 years of age in the rural localities of this study, the sex ratio (the number of men for every 100 women) is 98 in the whole country, 103 in the north, 94 in the center/best, 97 in the center/east and 100 in the southeast.