



Early Unions in Mexico

Uniones tempranas en México

The Relevance of Social Norms

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Our INSAD Study



- **Exploratory**
 - Inter-census survey: 2015
 - National, state and regional level estimations
 - Association with variables that contribute to the vulnerability of young women in a union
 - In-depth interviews with women who entered a union before age 18 in four states and key informants in six states
- **Not focused on social norms, but turned out to be an important explanation for early unions.**

Key Findings



Early unions are still frequent in Mexico.

- One in every 10 women age 15 to 17 has been in a early union.
- 82% of early unions are non-formal.

Women who had been in early unions were more likely to:

- Drop-out of school (90% vs. 15%)
- Have at least one child (47% vs. 1%)

There is no single profile of women in early unions.

Percentage distribution of girls age 12 to 14 in an early union



Non-formalized union or marriage	Age difference with partner	Percentage of cases
Marriage	5 years or less	0.30
Marriage	6 to 10 years	0.22
Marriage	11 years or more	1.34
Non formalized	5 years or less	0.97
Non formalized	6 to 10 years	0.96
Non formalized	11 years or more	4.18
TOTAL		8

Percentage distribution of girls age 15 to 17 in an early union



Non-formalized union or marriage	Age difference with partner	Percentage of cases
Marriage	5 years or less	3.76
Marriage	6 to 10 years	2.28
Marriage	11 years or more	10.38
Non formalized	5 years or less	15.61
Non formalized	6 to 10 years	10.99
Non formalized	11 years or more	49.01
TOTAL		92

Great variations in the conditions and nature of early unions across regions

% of informal unions	80%-100%	31 ... Chiapas CDMX Guanajuato Nuevo León	100	25 ... Chiapas Chihuahua Guanajuato
		19	39	17
		3 Chihuahua CDMX	4	5 Chiapas Durango Guerrero
	40%-60%			
		0.5%-4%	4%-7%	7%-13.5%
% of women 12-17 in a union				

A Social Norms Framework

Individuals make their decisions based on the preferences they have, the options they have to choose from, and the beliefs they have about these options.

Major decisions in life are influenced by social norms about the appropriate timing, sequencing, and major events in life.

Social norms influence decisions affecting the options that individuals perceive, the implications they believe their options have, and their preferences.

Social norms about age are also part of the system that divides the life-span into recognized seasons of life.

Bicchieri, et al 2014

Life Course Theory
Elder, Billari

The role of social norms in the early unions were analyzed.

Sexuality can only be legitimately practiced when in a union

Societal:

Out of wedlock pregnancy is a disruption of the normative life course

Parents: When in an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, union is the way to save the girl's honor

Women: To experiment with sexuality they must be in a formal union

Men: Expect sex and can better control a non-experienced partner

Perceptions of **adulthood and status**

Agency is an attribute of adults

Becoming an adult, for women, means having a partner

A woman's status is dependent on being someone's wife

Romantic expectations

Women:
Eloping/asking a woman to move in together is a manifestation of men's love and commitment

Examples: How these Social Norms Impacted the Women Interviewed



Women in our study	Proximate determinants of the union	Perceived social norms that played a role
María, Arcelia, Elsa	Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pregnancy is expected to happen within a union.• Need to repair their honor
Brenda, Yolanda, Dafne, Patricia, Sandra	Spent a night out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women can only experience their sexuality within a union• Need to repair their honor
Veronica, Rafaela	Accelerated courtship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Romantic expectations• Women's status comes from being someone's wife

Summary



Importance and nature of early unions in Mexico:

- Very common in some communities
- Great variety of characteristics, conditions and determinants
- Happen in very different contexts

Social norms play out at different stages of the process:

- Governs who/when can have sex
- Determines the options of out-of-wedlock pregnancies
- Signals the status of individuals
- Shapes the consequences of early unions

Summary



Policy implications:

- Evidence-based
- Transform norms regarding:
 - Gender/women's options/ destigmatize teenage sexuality
 - Empower/agency

Future research needs:

- Better understanding of factors leading to early unions and interventions to prevent/mitigate
- Meanings of being in a union
- The role of social norms in the consequences & coping alternatives of women and girls



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For access to the Executive Summary and the full 83-page report, go to:
<http://insad.com.mx/site/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Insad-Report-Early-Unions.pdf>