

“Langit ka, Lupa ako”
Exploring heterogamy and union dynamics in the Philippines
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Abstract

In the Philippines, heterogamous unions between couples with wide age and education gap are frowned upon. It is believed that these relationships are prone to dissatisfaction and eventual dissolution which can be attributed to power clash and conflict in values. Due to the dearth in local research along this area, this study contributes by exploring the determinants of these unions and their effects to variables related to union dynamics like fertility preference, contraceptive decision making and economic relationship. Drawing from the 2008 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey data, this paper uses multiple logistic regression to examine these interrelationships. Results show a relationship between type of residence and heterogamous unions which in turn is associated with fertility preference and economic relationship. These interrelationships are indicative of shifts in gender power relations within these types of unions which tend to contest dominant patriarchal societal values, hence frowned upon.

Background

Sharon: *"Ang problema sa'yo maaga kang ipinanganak!"*

(The problem with you is that you were born early!)

FPJ: *"Ang problema naman sa'yo huli kang ipinanganak!"*

(And the problem with you is that you were born late!)

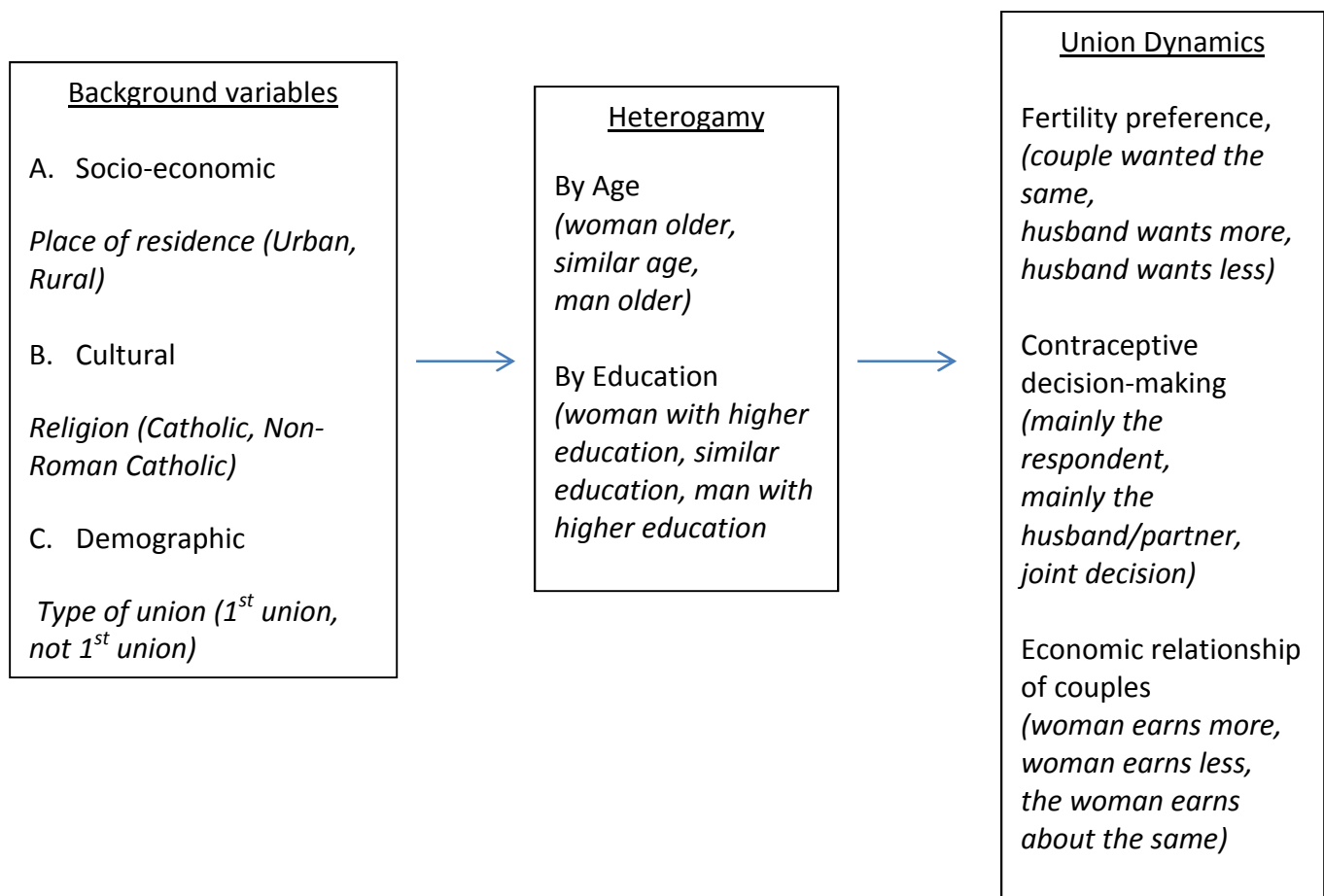
- Sharon Cuneta and Fernando Poe Jr., in the movie *Kahit Konting Pagtingin* (1990)

These quotes from a popular Filipino movie during the 1990s reflect the stigma attached to relationships with wide gap in age and education between the couple, otherwise known as age and education heterogamous union. These unions are apparently fraught with problems because of the tension in power and contradicting values brought about by the generational and socioeconomic differences (Boyd and Li, 2003). The negative perception of Philippine society towards these kinds of relationships is rooted to the patriarchal culture among Filipinos. The patriarchal views of women as full-time homemakers, as sex objects and being subordinated to men can be traced to the long history of colonialism of the country (Anonuevo, 2000).

The phenomenon of age and education heterogamous unions has existed for many centuries not only in the Philippines but also in other parts of the world. The controversy that revolves around this phenomenon which is aggravated by its deviation to existing and acceptable

societal norms of age and education differences between couples prompted an array of research in this area. Research along this line mostly dealt with the determination of factors that will help explain this type of union like race, ethnicity, type of residence (Boyd and Li, 2003; Cruz and Novilla, 2010) and its effect on union stability, marital satisfaction (Vaijayanthimala, Kumari & Panda, 2004) and health (Tim, Monden & Kraaykamp, 2009) among others. There is very limited research on these types of unions in the Philippines hence this paper will give its contribution by presenting the level and profile of age and education heterogamous unions in the country and identify the factors that affect these unions. Also, it will extend the analysis by looking into the effect of age and education heterogamous unions to variables related to union dynamics such as fertility preference, contraceptive decision making and economic relationship of couples.

The study is grounded on this framework:



Data and Methodology

The data used in this study are drawn from the 2008 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) collected by the Philippine National Statistics Office in partnership with ORC Macro International. The 2008 NDHS is a nationally representative sample of 13,594 women, aged 15 to 49 years old from 12,469 households. The overall response rate is 98

percent. It is the ninth in a series of demographic and health surveys conducted to assess the demographic and health situation of the Philippines.

The 2008 NDHS collected detailed information on fertility levels, marriage, fertility preferences, family planning, nutrition and other health related data including violence against women. The sample used in this study is limited to women who are currently in either a marital or cohabiting union with the final sample comprised of 8549 respondents.

Explanatory variables used in this study are socio-economic (Education, Place of Residence), cultural (Religion) and demographic (type of union) in nature. Education is the highest educational attainment of the respondent and it has three categories: No schooling/Elementary, High School and College. On the other hand, Place of Residence is the current resident which is a dichotomous variable with Urban and Rural as categories. Religion was recoded into two categories – Roman Catholic and Non-Roman Catholic. Type of Union is categorical variable that indicates if a respondent is in union for the first time or not.

Age and education heterogamous union serves as both dependent and explanatory variables for this study. Both are used as dependent variables when examining its determinants and serve as explanatory variables when evaluating its effect on fertility preference, contraceptive decision making and economic relationship of couples. Also, both are multinomial variables with three categories namely: age heterogamy - woman older, similar age, man older; education heterogamy – woman with higher education, similar education, man with higher education. The 2008 NDHS provided for the age and education of the spouse which was used to compute for the difference. Women older union is age heterogamous if the woman is older by more than two years while men older union is considered age heterogamous when the man is five or more years older and the remaining unions are classified as similar age unions. On the other hand, education heterogamous unions are unions where the woman or the man attained an education one level higher than their spouse.

Fertility preference is a categorical dependent variable which provides for the desire for the number of children: couple wanted the same, the husband wants more or the husband wants less. The respondents who are using contraception were asked who mainly decides on this and the responses are mainly the respondent, mainly the husband/partner and joint decision. Lastly, economic relationship refers to the comparison of income between the couple, if the woman earns more than the husband/partner, the woman earns less, or the woman earns about the same.

Bivariate analyses were done employing the chi-square test to test for association between the dependent and independent variables. Multinomial logistic regression is employed to examine the interrelationships between the variables under study.

Initial Findings

Among the women who are currently in union, about nine percent is in a women older age-heterogamous relationship and about one-third is in a men older relationship. Meanwhile, 22 percent is in a woman with higher education heterogamous relationship and 18 percent is in a man with higher education heterogamous union.

Additionally, results show the following relationship of the background variables to heterogamous unions:

- More second unions are age heterogamous.
- More women from urban areas are in age heterogamous unions
- More women from rural areas are in education heterogamous unions specifically with a woman with higher education.
- Religion was found to have no association with age heterogamous unions but reflected a relationship with education heterogamous unions.

Meanwhile, the following is the relationship of age-heterogamous unions to the variables related to union dynamics:

- More women-older age heterogamous unions have women who want more number of children
- More women-older age heterogamous unions have women who have more economic power than their husbands.
- Age-heterogamy does not have a relationship with the contraceptive making decision of couples.