

The adult trajectories in Mexico

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In the paper we discuss differences in early life trajectories among three cohorts of Mexican men and women who were born during the twentieth century. We use the concept of early trajectories to refer to the sequence, timing and speed given by three transitions in the life history of our subjects: the first drop out of school, the first marital union and the first stable job. These early transitions had a very important impact in their adult life. In order to clarify differences in these trajectories we contrast cohorts in terms of gender and socioeconomic background.

Theoretical orientation

We approach the problem through the life course perspective using the concepts of transitions and trajectories. They offer us a window through which we can better understand different aspects of our subjects' life. Life course takes place over an extended span of time; one example is the work trajectory (Elder, 1985:31). In this sense, the trajectories allow us to have a long-range perspective around certain areas of a person's life. Each trajectory is itself made up of transitions such as important changes of their status and roles that are more or less abrupt (Elder, Kirkpatrick and Crosnoe, 2003:8). But trajectories do not prejudge the direction, degree or rate of change of its course (Elder, 1985:31).

Data

The database used is the urban subsample of the Retrospective Demographic Survey (Eder) 1998, which collects information about person-years of the life histories of a

representative sample for both sexes, three cohorts (1936-1938, 1951-1953 and 1966-1968) and two populations groups (one with less than 15,000 inhabitants and other with 15,000 and more) (Coubès, Zavala de Cosío and Zenteno, 2005).

Methods

To specify trajectories in each group, we used a frequency analysis of the most representative sequences. This strategy was followed because other statistical methods such as event history analysis and computer programs are useful to study transitions in a quantitative form, but not life trajectories.

Once we had the most common statistically trajectories, we calculated the medians ages for each of the three transitions. Also we estimated the velocity and the number of years between the first transition and the final one.

Results

The results of the study indicate a greater diversity of trajectories among the female population as a result of gender and socioeconomic inequalities experienced by this population. This may be explained by historical changes in education and employment in Mexico during the twentieth century. These changes allowed women to reduce the gender gap in education and increased their participation in the labor market and postpone marriage and motherhood. Thus women were able to diversify their paths. However these processes not always resulted in the improvement of this population as a whole, since a number of difficulties were present in adulthood transitions among women with worse socioeconomic conditions.

In contrast, the three cohorts of males showed less variation in their trajectories over time and between socioeconomic strata. This may be explained by the fact that the majority of men had to enter the job market and earn an income before getting married

and start a family. This indicates a trajectory to adulthood more constrained for the male population than female population.

Moreover, the most common trajectories in men and women accumulated less human capital and concluded at an earlier age in comparison with other trajectories less common, reflecting the lack of socioeconomic opportunities among the young people which reduced the possibility of taking conscious choices in this part of its life.

References

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