

Changing Living Arrangements of the Young After First Marriage in Urban Mali

Changes in family formation have been documented in terms of the postponement of the age at marriage and a quasi-constant age at first birth in several African countries. However, the conditions in which young people reach greater autonomy (or not) have been less studied (Mensch in Lloyd 2005). In particular what are the living arrangements of the young married men and women after marriage and at the time of their first birth? The paper will focus on the urban areas in Mali (Bamako and other urban) following Montgomery and Hewett (2005) who specified that researchers concerned with poverty should focus more on the urban contexts.

I conducted a qualitative study in 2004 in Mali, a Muslim country where marriage is universal, and found that changes related to first marriage have been greater than what is often reported in quantitative surveys. Changes in union formation in the region of Muslim West Africa concerned the overlay of religious, customary and civil celebrations, the role of the bridewealth, the rights of spouses, children and the families. The results of the previous qualitative study give materials to build new assumptions on the conditions of living of the new spouses after first marriage.

Moreover, marriage in Mali is a process and co-residence of the spouses may be characterized by various situations. For instance, the date of marriage may not always correspond to the time when the spouses start to live together in the same household. Another situation is of spouses who start to coreside and who will most likely live in the same household as the parents of the groom. Or, the spouses may live in an independent

unit that the groom or the bride may rent or own. To each case is associated a specific status of the bride and groom and a group of characteristics that are related to the wealth of the household and the access of the bride and groom to education and employment for instance.

A second source of data comes from a large scale nationally representative and retrospective survey conducted in 2000. This survey allows us to measure quantitatively changes across generations in terms of living arrangements (including the status of ownership), education and employment after the first marriage of women and men separately, as well as the contexts in which the first child was born. Over 5,000 of women and men aged 30 to 59 years were interviewed for the EDFEEM survey (Survey on Family Dynamics and Education of Children in Mali).

The information on the mobility (number of times they moved and length of time they spent in each location) before and after the marriage of the young will be a good indicator of stability in urban areas. The survey questionnaire is composed of modules on the migration history of each individual, marital and birth histories. It is thus possible to know the characteristics of each place an individual lived in (quality of the roof and floor, source of light, type of combustible, access to water and status of residence) and the duration until the next move. This information allows us to define an indicator of wealth.

The paper will use both sources and will focus on the urban areas of Mali where important changes in the family occur and where we have detailed information at the level of the neighborhood too. The methodology of the event history analysis will allow us to better measure the social change in family formation in urban Mali. The curves of

entry into first marriage, drop out of school, access to a first job, occurrence of the first birth will be compared across generations of men and women. Cox regressions will permit us to determine the influence of variables of living standards on the events of family formation.

In a context of poverty, to have a better knowledge of what the young have access to at the beginning of their family life is crucial in order to reach them with the most appropriate population policy programs.