

# Having Children and Forming Marital Unions as Adolescents Negatively Impact Educational Outcomes for Brazilian Women

Letícia J. Marteleto and Aida Villanueva

## INTRODUCTION

Women who have their first child during adolescence tend to have worse social and economic outcomes, including lower educational attainment, compared to women who have their first child later in life or those who have no children. Teenage mothers are also more likely than other women to come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, it is not always clear if having a child while young causes poor outcomes in adulthood or if teenage mothers' higher levels of poverty and other disadvantages cause of their worse outcomes later in life.

In addition, little of the research about how much adolescent childbearing causes poor outcomes, specifically poor educational outcomes, focuses on women in low and middle-income countries. Disadvantaged women in low and middle-income countries are more likely to enter into a union (either a formal marriage or informal union) than more advantaged women in their own countries and disadvantaged women in higher income countries. Research shows that young couples with children are more likely to ascribe to traditional gender roles, leading young women in union to spend more time on domestic and childcare duties than if the division of labor were more equitable. In addition, young mothers in union tend to receive less financial and childcare support from extended kin than do single mothers. Together, these forces make it more difficult for young mothers in union to stay in school. Marital unions are therefore important to understand the impact of adolescent childbearing on education in the specific context analyzed here: Brazil.

This brief evaluates the causal effects of adolescent childbearing on young women's educational attainment in Brazil. Using methodologies to account for teenage mothers' higher levels of other disadvantages (their selectivity into early childbearing), it also demonstrates how early childbearing and early union formation negatively impact women's educational outcomes.

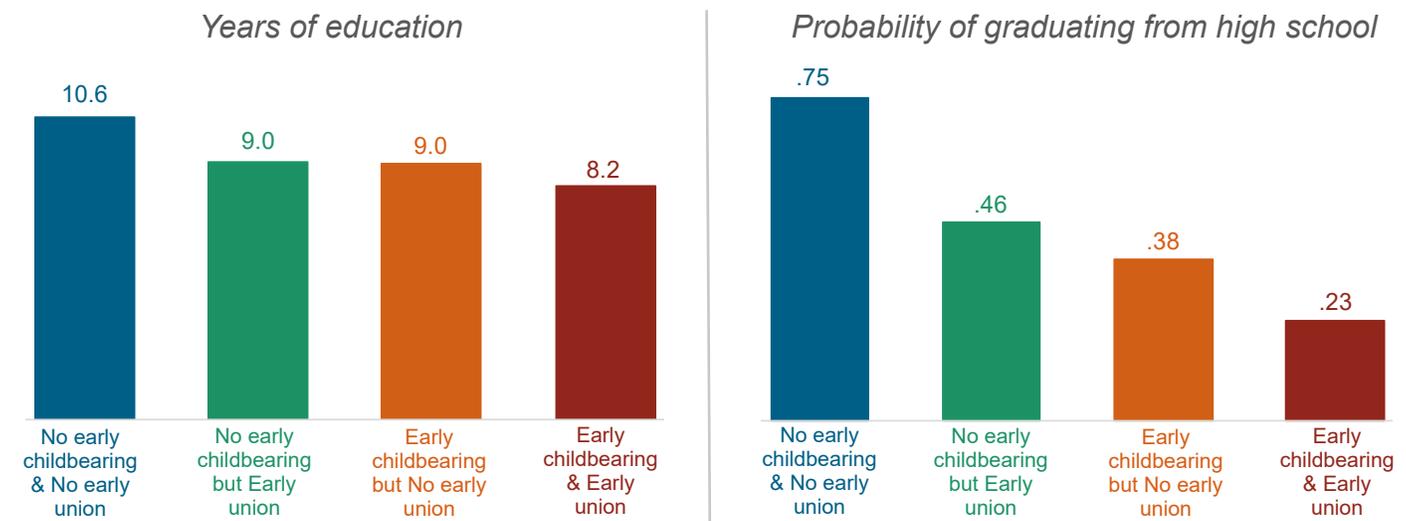
Brazil offers a compelling case for the examination of the causal consequences of adolescent childbearing and adolescent union formation on young women's education. The country has relatively high adolescent fertility rates. Indeed, the authors found that 26 percent of women ages 20 to 29 had a child before age 19. Moreover, early union formation is high, with over 50 percent of adolescent mothers in a formal or informal marital union by age 19.

This study uses data from the School-to-Work Transition Survey (SWTS), a nationally representative data source collected in 2013 by the International Labor Organization (ILO). The SWTS includes rich information on early socioeconomic background, which therefore provides key data before the onset of childbearing and union during adolescence.

## KEY FINDINGS *(see figure)*

- > Young mothers have worse educational outcomes—they have lower chances of completing high school and lower levels of schooling—compared to older mothers and childless women.
- > Young mothers in a marital union have worse educational outcomes compared to young mothers who are not in a marital union.
- > In addition, young women who enter early unions, even without early childbearing, have worse educational outcomes than women who are single and childless as adolescents.
- > Worse educational outcomes among young mothers who form early unions are not merely the effects of existing disadvantages: early childbearing and early union have a causal relationship with these worse outcomes.

## HAVING CHILDREN AND FORMING MARITAL UNIONS AS ADOLESCENTS NEGATIVELY IMPACT EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR BRAZILIAN WOMEN



This figure shows that women who have children before age 19 have lower levels of schooling and lower chances of graduating from high school. It also shows that young mothers who formed early unions have even worse educational outcomes.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

While Brazil has made considerable progress in recent decades towards expanding educational opportunities, the country remains highly unequal. In Brazil, and Latin America as a whole, a person who attains secondary and postsecondary education can reap large economic and social benefits. Young mothers, particularly those who form early unions, are much less likely to even graduate from high school. This is likely because a male partner's presence reinforces traditional gender roles by relegating women to the domestic sphere, curtailing women's education and leading to even more disadvantage.

For those from disadvantaged backgrounds, completing high school is the first step in pushing through the bottleneck of social mobility, particularly in a highly unequal society such as Brazil. Providing information about contraception and sexual health and to expanding access to contraceptive methods can help prevent adolescents from becoming young mothers. Further, policymakers must invest in alternative models of schooling that allow young mothers to complete their education.

### REFERENCE

Marteletto, L.J. & Villanueva, A. (2018). The educational consequences of adolescent childbearing and union formation in Brazil. *Studies in Family Planning* 49(3):183-211.

### SUGGESTED CITATION

Marteletto, L.J. & Villanueva, A. (2018). Having children and forming marital unions as adolescents negatively impact educational outcomes for Brazilian women. *PRC Research Brief* 3(16). DOI:10.15781/T2MK65V02.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by grants, P2CHD042849 and T32HD007081, awarded to the Population Research Center by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.



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