

Decomposing Trends in Nonmarital Fertility Among Hispanic Women

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Introduction

A recent report from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) indicates that out-of-wedlock births in the United States reached a record high in 2004 (1.5 million), when nearly 36 percent of all births occurred to unmarried women. Significantly, over 46 percent of births to Hispanic women occurred outside of marriage, and rates of childbearing among teenage (15-19 year-old) Hispanics were especially high (82.6 per 1000 in 2004, twice the national level of 41.2). As previous research has linked non-marital childbearing to negative outcomes for both mother and child, and given the increasingly prominent position of the Hispanic population (many of whom are immigrants) in the United States, a careful analysis of Hispanic fertility is important. Further, with the current emphasis on issues related to both immigration and marriage in the policymaking community, research addressing Hispanic non-marital fertility is particularly salient. A detailed understanding of the components of out-of-wedlock fertility among Hispanic women in the United States is important to policymakers concerned about marriage, non-marital childbearing, and immigration.

Data and Methods

In this paper, we use data from the NCHS's Natality Detail File (Vital Statistics Birth Data) and the U.S. Bureau of the Census' population estimates to decompose recent trends in the non-marital fertility ratio and the non-marital fertility rate among Hispanic women. Our data series covers the 1990 to 2003 period. We use methods of demographic decomposition to partition changes in the fertility ratio (non-marital fertility rate) between 1990 and 2003 into rate and n composition components. These methods, which are taken from those developed by Kitagawa (1955), are described in Das Gupta (1993).

Objectives

Following the approach of Smith et al (1996) and Gray et al (2006), we examine the components of the non-marital fertility ratio for Hispanics. Smith et al.'s (1996) decomposition of national trends in the non-marital fertility ratio over the 1960 to 1992 period showed that the rise in the non-marital fertility ratio among the nation's minority women largely reflected declines in the share of married women rather than declines in marital fertility or increases in non-marital fertility. Gray et al (2006) found a similar result; increases in the share of non-marital births to black and white women can largely be attributed to changes in marriage rates. Our analysis follows this model and considers three proximate components of rate changes: marital status, marital fertility, and nonmarital fertility. Specifically, we examine whether changes in the non-marital fertility ratio of Hispanic women is an artifact of trends in marriage rates or if there are changes in fertility behavior among unmarried Hispanic women. (For a complete explanation of the decomposition method, see Smith, et al (1996) or Gray (2006)).

A second objective of this paper is to evaluate variation in the proximate determinants of changing non-marital fertility ratios over 1990-2003. Specifically, we focus on trends in the non-marital fertility ratio among Hispanic women distinguished by residence (e.g., gateway cities vs. other areas), nativity status (foreign-born vs. native born), and age/education. Our empirical approach is especially appropriate from a public policy perspective. The results indicate whether policy efforts should be targeted on (1) reducing non-marital fertility rates, (2) increasing marriage (and, and by extension, marital fertility), or (3) both. Moreover, the "mix" of components is expected to vary substantially across Hispanic groups distinguished by levels of economic and cultural assimilation in American society.

References

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