

## **Twenty Years Hence: Changes in Young Filipino Women's Attitude toward Premarital Sex and Unmarried Childbearing since the 1980s**

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### **Extended Abstract**

Taking the view that sexual intercourse and childbearing are two of the many exclusive functions of marriage; this paper examines the changing attitudes toward premarital sex and unmarried childbearing and their implications to marriage. In the U.S. and Europe, cohabitation has become a norm (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Kiernan 2000). In those countries, cohabitation is viewed as an alternative to marriage, a stage in the marriage process or an alternative to being single (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004; Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990; Wiersma 1983). Others say that the rise of cohabitation has deinstitutionalized marriage (Cherlin 2004).

Kabamalan (2004) documented a small increase in cohabiting unions in the Philippines whereas the proportions marrying have decreased. And while young women, those between ages 15 and 24 years, continue to have the smallest proportions in unions compared with older women, they also have the highest proportions in cohabiting unions. There are also documentations of increased premarital sexual activity among Filipino youth (Raymundo and Cruz 2003; Natividad and Marquez 2004).

Cohabitation, or living together without a church, civil, or any other wedding ceremony duly recognized by the state, is believed to have been in existence in the Philippine society for a long period of time. The *querida* system, a type of cohabitation wherein a married man keeps a woman other than the wife, has been known to exist in Philippine society since the Spanish era although this is seen to be confined only to the elites who can maintain such relationships financially. This system may not have challenged the stability of the institution of marriage in that the family remains intact, the numbers of *querida* relationships might have proportionally been small (Vancio 1977), and the society continues to stigmatize them (Medina 1991). Increases in cohabitation and in premarital sex in recent years however, could actually be in the form of "sexual freedom" and not in the form of adultery and mistresses as in the earlier times (Davis 1985). There are plenty of news articles in the media about the sexual and marital behavior of people in the entertainment industry and other public personalities that seem to imply that cohabitation and premarital sex are now acceptable in the Philippine society. Thus, changes in behavior may also be accompanied by changes in attitudes towards these activities. And by extension therefore, liberal attitudes towards sexual intercourse and childbearing outside of marriage also makes marriage less important.

Research cannot be definite about the causal relationship between attitudes and behavior but it can definitely be said that there is a relationship between them. According to Triandis (1971), behavior is a function of attitudes, norms, habits, and expectancies about reinforcement. Likewise, attitude by itself serves some functions too. They help us adjust to our environment, "by providing a certain amount of *predictability*" and "by making it easier (for us) to get along with people who have similar attitudes" or by bringing our attitudes in line with the ones held by important people (Triandis 1971: 5).

This paper uses data from the Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Surveys (YAFS) conducted by the University of the Philippines Population Institute and Demographic Research and

Development Foundation, Inc. in 1982, 1994 and 2002. All three surveys are national in scope and consist of nationally representative samples of youth, ages 15 to 24 years old for the first two surveys and 15 to 27 years for 2002. The 1994 and 2002 surveys interviewed males and females while the earlier survey (1982) only included females. The surveys collected information on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of Filipino youth relating to their sexuality and related issues including marriage. For comparative purposes, only female youth ages 15 to 24 years old are included in this analysis. Totals of 5,204, 5,622 and 8,673 female youth were interviewed in 1982, 1994 and 2002, respectively.

This paper examines changes in attitudes towards premarital sex and characteristics that are related to these changes in a multivariate statistical model. Then, a decomposition technique is employed to separate the effects of compositional changes of the female youth population from the actual change in attitudes in producing the overall change in the attitudes from the three surveys. This method uses the principle of standardization (De Vos and Lee 1993) and removes “extraneous sources of variation in the data” such as differences in population composition (Shryock, Siegel, and Associates 1976). Thus, if there is significant change in the composition of the youth population, between 1982 and 1994, and between 1994 and 2002, but the attitudes of the different subgroups remain the same, then, change in composition alone can explain the observed change in attitudes of the youth population. However, if the composition of the youth population remained the same, and the different subgroups show different attitudinal changes, the change can be attributed to actual changes in attitudes. The same models were run separately for the three time points, two at a time. Characteristics included in the model include the youth’s socio-demographic characteristics, parental and peer influences, media consumption, and marital and premarital sexual behavior. Further, to test for interaction with year (i.e. to examine whether coefficients change significantly over time), data are pooled. The youth’s perception of whether the society, the neighbors, close friends, and the family will accept a young unmarried mother will also be examined using the same technique.

Initial results show that female youth in the Philippines have become more liberal when it comes to approval of premarital sex. Likewise their perception of the society in general and that of neighbors, close female friends, and family is that they would be liberal as well when it comes to accepting young unmarried mothers. Results from the multivariate decomposition technique also show that some characteristics that used to define the liberal from the non-liberal are disappearing while others remain important.