The Past and Future of Partner Preferences:
Partner Homogamy in a Sub-Saharan Setting

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Abstract & Extended Abstract

Abstract
Sub-Saharan Africa has seen massive educational expansions, with enrollments rising from 25% in the 1960s to 65% by 2010. This shift has important implications for union formations. The impact of education is extremely important, as increasing social similarity between partners can improve equality within unions, but can also foster inequality in the distribution of education or income. As West Africa is already marked by drastic inequality, greater educational homogamy may signal future increases in economic disparities. Using two datasets, we examine patterns of marital homogamy in Cameroon, retrospectively and prospectively. We use Demographic Health Survey data to estimate changes in assortative marriage longitudinally, and use decomposition to examine how shifts have driven changes in the educational and rural/urban composition of the population. We then draw upon a 2018 dataset of Cameroon students that asks about their marriage and partner preferences. Our findings suggest increases in marital homogamy by education.

INTRODUCTION: What education expansion means for assortative marriage practices
Why educational homogamy matters- why tracking it matters?

Increases in educational attainment may hold several implications for what qualities the growing Cameroonian youth population looks for in familial partners and who they decide to marry. Students may begin to align their romantic relationships with their financial and career aspirations rather than tribal or ethnic affiliations. There are three routes for assortative marrying: homogamy, hypergamy, or hypogamy. Marriage homogamy describes how individuals select a spouse with similar educational or wealth background whereas hypergamy occurs when persons marry others with higher education rates. Hypogamy on the other hand is when a respondent marries someone of a lower educational standing. These marriage trends in Cameroon contribute to the broader regional discussion on how economic growth and modernization impact assortative marriage practices. Then on the national level within Cameroon, assortative marriage holds the potential to predict the long-term trajectory of intra-age group income inequality or equality within marital unions.

Many demographers in sub-Saharan Africa acknowledge how with greater schooling, youth populations across the continent may exhibit increased concerns for their professions, influencing long-term relationship pursuits. Cameroon's possesses a relatively high gross school enrollment rate and large youth population (approx. 60% below age 25) (CIA 2018)According to the USAID's Demographic Health Survey (DHS), a majority of women complete either primary or secondary schooling. From the DHS 2011 data set, Cameroon made education improvements as the percentage of respondents who possess no education decreased steadily from **33%** in 1991 to **18%** in 2011. In 2014, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) similarly indicates that secondary enrollment is approximately 60% for the enrolled population (National Education Profile 2014). Several demographers propose theories about how citizens in developing countries make decisions about their partners as education and wealth levels increase (Anukriti & Dasgupta 2017; Blossfeld 2009). Given these trends of educational expansion, now is the opportune time to analyze how male and female students of various wealth and educational backgrounds view the importance of family life and make decisions on who to spend the rest of their lives with.

This research into Cameroon's youth population seeks to answer two questions regarding the countries past assortative marrying practices and the indicators of future partner preferences.

1. **PAST PATTERNS -** Is the Cameroonian population segment increasingly practicing marriage homogamy or hypergamy based on educational attainment overtime?
   - By using DHS couple data from 1991 to 2011, longitudinal analysis can be conducted to describe patterns of marriage based on their educational attainment. This analysis will be used for descriptive background on how various generations of Cameroonian decided to commit to long-term relationships. A second component of the DHS analysis will incorporate the inclusion of a decomposition of the rural or urban environment of the respondent. Since the

DHS is a nationally representative survey, this research can also differentiate areas classified urban or rural with precision.

2. **FUTURE PREFERENCES -** What socioeconomic factors does the current youth population look for in familial partner? And how these variables correlate with their career aspirations?

   ○ PICHNET's panel survey of 5,000 high school seniors across 25 schools in Yaoundé asks a series of questions regarding an individual's family aspirations and professional goals. The results can provide a general consensus on how students view their financial prospects and how family dynamics play a part in their futures. Compared to Q.2, this question focuses on what partners characteristics the urban populations values in partner and what socioeconomic factors impact this decision-making. This portion of the analysis will also control for wealth and family background as the survey asks respondents about their parents employment status and income.

BACKGROUND

MARRIAGE AND UNIONS IN CAMEROON. Using data from Project D'Investissement En Capital Humain (PICHNET), a survey organization studying the Cameroonian youth population, and USAID's Demographic Health Survey, this relationship between the economic aspirations of students and their views on family life can be analyzed thoroughly. Even though the student population is more likely today to delay relationship commitments, Cameroon has experienced a steady decline in marriage rates since the 1980s. Today's culture of family aspirations and assortative marrying reflects a hybrid of desires for men and women. Young Cameroonians approach their relationships with greater caution in order to build mutual trust before committing to the challenges of raising a family. Cameroonian men and women may take more time to see if their potential partner's lifestyle and background fit their ideal family scenario (Johnson-Hanks 2007). According to Johnson-Hanks, marriage is a powerful social resource, especially for those with high levels of schools and strong ambitions for socioeconomic growth. But this resource is easily tarnished by missteps such as unwanted pregnancies, which can force women to give up employment pursuits and bring about negative social judgment. Within the Beti ethnic group in southern Cameroon, for example, "honorable motherhood is understood as equivalent with intended and well-managed motherhood" (Johnson-Hanks 2002, p.1338). Marriage rates are declining, but not because the practice is becoming irrelevant or less systematically valued than in the past (Johnson-Hanks 2007). The combination of financial stability and personal connection represent relationship determinants that differ from traditional Cameroonian norms around bridewealth marriages and gendered divisions of labor. Marriage is becoming rarer precisely because it is important to women's status that it be done well.

In Cameroon, it is possible for either marriage homogamy or hypergamy to occur within the current youth population. Due to how a majority of 15-24 year-olds spend longer periods of time in the schooling system, homogamy may occur as educated persons are more exposed to students with similar backgrounds within their social network. Educational attainment in this

scenario is an example of a positive matching factor where partners assort into a relationship that fits their ideal lifestyle. Hypergamy may also occur, however, as industrialization may "decrease parents' control of the marriage process and the increase in the number of contacts between persons from different classes and status groups in the course of more extensive education, greater urbanization, and increased geographical mobility" (Blossfeld 2009, p.515). Given Cameroon's recent economic and education trends, the youth population may shift their assortative marrying practices from those of previous generations.

PICHNET and the DHS provide sufficient data for analyzing how the financial and occupation aspirations of male and female students relate to their ideal family scenarios. This assessment can be teased out based on various longitudinal and demographic factors such as a student's socioeconomic background, age, and household family structure. As the current literature on Cameroonian youth indicates that greater schooling leads to desires for career enhancement, PICHNET's survey results will most likely provide similar results. In addition to providing compelling insight into the thought-process of Cameroon's growing youth population, this analysis will add to the prevailing literature by including greater specificity on which aspirations, whether income, higher education, or familial, different students value for the future.

DATA SOURCES & RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses data from the Project D'Investissement En Capital Humain's (PICHNET) student survey and USAID's Demographic Health Survey nationally representative couple datasets.

Question 1: Past Patterns

DATA SOURCE: Demographic Health Survey Couple Dataset, Cameroon 1991-2011

We incorporate the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) Couple Datasets in order to assess the educational attainment of household partners over time. With the datasets' nationally representative surveys of 30,000 households, the DHS can provide substantial information on socioeconomic drivers of assortative marriage practices.

METHODS: Decomposition

Patterns of marital homogamy are then decomposed by education level and residence. A decomposition analysis was selected because it allows us to evaluate to what extent changes in homogamy at the national level are due to compositional (i.e. the expansion of the women's education and changes in residential patterns) vs. behavioral effects (in this case, marrying homogamously). The overall rate of homogamy (H) at time (t) is a function of group specific homogamy rates for each education/residence group (rjt) multiplied by the size of each education/residence group group (wjt) group. We use 4 education categories (no schooling, primary, secondary, and higher) and two residence categories (rural/urban), resulting in 8 groups.

$$H_t = \sum r_{jt} * w_{jt}$$

The above expression can then be decomposed, so we can determine whether changes in marriage were driven predominantly by behavioral changes within education group versus changes in the size of each education group:

$$\Delta H = \overline{r} * \Delta w_j + \overline{w} * \Delta r_j$$

Term 1   **Term 2**

Where the term 1 represents the change driven by changes in the size of education/residence groups, while term 2 represents the proportion of change driven by changes in prevalence of homogamous marriage within each group. More conceptually, term 1 tracks the effect of the general socioeconomic development (educational expansion and urbanization), while the second term tracks the actual behavioral change (i.e. increasing preference for homogamy within groups).

Question 2: Future Preferences
DATA SOURCE: Project D'Investissement En Capital Humain (PICHNET) Student Surveys

The PICHNET data was collected through a randomly drawn full roster of Yaoundé, Cameroon's 400+ secondary schools, after stratification by school quality (as indicated by tuition rate) and between public and private institutions. Within each school, PICHNET randomly selected 4 to 8 classes, focusing on final year students. This sampling strategy will provide us with approximately 5000 students and allow for robust data analysis on their partner preferences. The student survey uses a questionnaire and multiple life history calendars to collect detailed information on key life events and the social circumstances of these youth. PICHNET asks questions regarding partner preferences, career aspirations, and family background.

Using a logistic regression approach, we will identify key sociodemographic predictors of homogamous or hypergamous union preferences. Even though this data set represents a snapshot of the Cameroonian youth population, it will provide a sufficient depiction of changing norms around partner preferences.

Expected Findings

Given the increases in educational attainment within the Cameroonian population and shifts in residential patterns, we expect to find higher levels of marriage homogamy between partners due primarily to compositional changes rather than behavioral ones. While micro level decision making around partner preferences may drive individuals to choose their future partners, we believe that broader demographic shifts of urban residence and school attendance in the youth population will play a larger role in determining marriage practices. The metropolitan centers of Yaoundé and Douala contain the majority of the citizenry reaching

secondary-schooling levels. These findings will then be complemented by the school-level data from PICHNET. These results are slightly difficult to predict as the survey contains several questions on the importance of preferences ranging from physical attractiveness to family wealth. But from a descriptive perspective, we expect that the student sample will rate partner characteristics related to socioeconomic background and education level with the most importance.

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