

Age at First Birth and Completed Family Size in Chile, Ecuador and Uruguay: Does Postponement of Childbearing Lead to Low Fertility?

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Previous studies have found an attenuation of the association between the timing of first births and completed fertility in developed countries. However, no study has examined the nature of this relationship in Latin American countries. This study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing changes in cohort fertility for women born in 1940-45, 1950-55 and 1960-65, in Chile, Ecuador, and Uruguay. A negative non-linear association between age at first birth and completed fertility was found. This association has weakened in countries who experienced a significant fertility decline (Chile and Ecuador), as women from younger cohorts with an early onset of childbearing are having fewer children compared to their older counterparts. Although it is not possible to disentangle the contribution of spacing and stopping mechanisms, the limitation of higher order births after first birth has driven completed cohort fertility decline, possibly through a larger use and increased effectiveness of available contraception.