



A Mediation Analysis of Sexual Behaviors, Gender Attitudes and Early Fertility among Young Women in Poor Departments in Nicaragua

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Abstract

This study investigated the mechanism linking sociodemographic status, women's attitudes towards male authority, risky sexual behaviors and early pregnancy and childbearing among young women in four poor departments in Nicaragua. Data of women aged 15-24 in departments with lowest wealth indices (N=1,356) were obtained from the Nicaraguan Demographic and Health Survey 2011/12. Structural equation modeling analysis was conducted to examine the associations between exogenous variables (ethnicity and residence), the first-level mediators (education and sexuality education), the second-level mediators (attitudes toward male's violence, attitudes toward male's decision-making power), the third-level mediator (sexual behaviors) and the outcome (early fertility). The results show education and risky sexual behaviors were mediators of all indirect paths connecting the exogenous variable (residence) and early fertility. Residence (urban or rural) was an exogenous variable, while ethnicity (indigenous, Afro-descendants, or mestizos and others) was not. Attitudes toward male's decision-making power and attitudes toward male's violence also were mediators between education and sexual behaviors, but not between sexuality education and sexual behaviors. Furthermore, attitudes toward male's violence was negatively associated with sexual behaviors. This study provides new insights into adolescent pregnancy and childbearing mechanisms. Educational attainment and risky sexual behaviors are crucial mediators of early pregnancy and childbearing among young women in poor area in Nicaragua. Attitudes toward male's decision-making power and sexuality education acted as mediators to some degree. Further discussion on ethnic and geographical differences is needed, and elaboration of variables measuring the relationship between attitude, intention, and behavior is suggested for future studies.

Keywords: adolescent childbearing, adolescent pregnancy, eastern Nicaragua, male authority, risky sexual behaviors, SEM analysis