

# Out-of-wedlock childbearing increasingly common among educated women in Latin America

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"Consensual unions," two people living in the same dwelling in a relationship akin to marriage, have been an integral part of family life in Latin America for centuries. In fact, in Latin America, legal marriages and consensual unions are seen as similarly acceptable family arrangements for bearing and raising children. However, consensual unions have historically been more common among disadvantaged populations and in rural areas than among more advantaged populations

and in urban areas—indicating that such unions are rooted in limited economic and social opportunities. But a study in the March 2015 issue of *Population and Development Review* finds that childbearing within a consensual union among highly educated women has transitioned from rare to increasingly common in 13 Latin American countries.

Educated women in Latin America are increasingly entering consensual unions not merely as a childless stage on the way to marriage but instead to have children with their cohabiting partners in a similar fashion to their less-educated counterparts, according to the study's authors Benoit Laplante, Teresa Castro-Martin, Clara Cortina and Teresa Martin-Garcia. Lead author Benoit Laplante is a professor at the Universite du Quebec. The authors compare the fertility patterns of women in consensual unions and marriage in 13 Latin American countries using data from the four most recent census rounds. The countries studied were: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

"Around 1980, in Latin America, having a child while living in a consensual union was not an option for highly educated women except in Panama," said Laplante. "But things have changed. Not only are today's university-educated women much more likely to enter a consensual union than they were three or four decades ago, but their childbearing patterns do not differ much from those of their married counterparts. Having a child while living in a consensual union is now an option for highly educated women in most Latin American countries."

It's unclear, says Laplante, whether this shift stems from greater tolerance for "nonconformist" values among more advantaged populations or from an increase in economic uncertainty in these groups. The spread of childbearing within consensual union in the upper classes may have been facilitated by changes in other aspects of [family life](#), including an increase in women's [labor force participation](#) and the

implementation of legal provisions guaranteeing the economic protection of children in the event of union disruption in most Latin American countries. More research is needed to understand the causes of this shift in family formation behaviors in Latin America.

**More information:** This article is available free of charge at [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10...015.00027.x/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1471-6546.1450027)

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