Report on Early Unions in Mexico:

A National, State and Regional Analysis | 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Moving in with a partner is an important milestone. Not only are two people creating a new home together, they are embarking on a challenging transition with new responsibilities and expectations. When men and women freely decide for themselves to enter into a union, it is a cause for celebration. However, in many places in the world, men, and more noticeably, women, begin their unions at a very early age. Early unions occur for many reasons: girls and boys under the age of 18 lack other life choices, they are forced into the marriages, or they think it is their best option given current circumstances and societal norms. Under these conditions, unions are a violation of human and child rights, and have been linked to school dropout, early pregnancy, poverty, and gender-based violence.

Little is known about the unions of girls under the age of 18 in Mexico. A 2015 article revealed that the rate of early unions in the country was about 23 percent, and that such unions varied across states and populations (Pérez Amador and Rosana Hernández, 2015). To decrease early unions, more research is needed to guide policies and interventions.

To better understand the level and nature of early unions in Mexico, the Ford Foundation in 2015, commissioned Investigación en Salud y Demografía (INSAD) to pilot a project entitled "Furthering understanding and knowledge regarding the determining factors and consequences of early unions for Mexican women." The objectives of the project were to:

1. Characterize nuptiality and reproductive behaviors of young Mexican women at the national, state and municipal level.
2. Analyze the relationship between nuptiality and reproductive behaviors of young Mexican women, at different levels of aggregation.
3. Identify hot spots and target populations for interventions to decrease both child marriage and teenage pregnancy, as well as to support child brides and teenage mothers.
4. Disseminate the knowledge of this and other studies about child marriage and teenage pregnancy in Latin America, through a seminar.

To accomplish the first three objectives, INSAD conducted a mixed-methods study, using data from the 2015 Intercensal Survey, and in-depth interviews with women who had been in an early union and key community informants in Estado de México, Nayarit and Tabasco. This report presents the main findings of this study.

1. UNDERSTANDING EARLY UNIONS IN MEXICO: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Formal marriage or the informal union of girls before age 18, is referred to in literature, as child marriage (Parsons and McCleary-Sills, 2015), early marriage (UNICEF, 2005) or early unions (Plan International, 2015)[1]. On July 2, 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution to end child, early and forced marriage, stressing the need to include the issue in the post-2015 agenda (Girls Not Brides, 2015c). The resolution exhorts signing governments as well as civil and private organizations, to join efforts to make 18 the minimum age required for marriage and to raise public awareness of child marriage as a human rights violation (UN, 2012).

Growing awareness of the harmful consequences of early unions has led to intensified efforts to eradicate child marriage and to support those girls who are already married or in an informal union. International literature has shown that child marriage has direct social, economic and health implications. These include decreased school achievement, increased risk of lifetime poverty, increased teenage pregnancy and its accompanying health risks, decreased negotiating power within the household, and increased exposure to sexual and gender violence often exacerbated by an age difference between partners (Bruce and Erulkar, 2014; Parsons and McCleary-Sills, 2015).

Of particular concern are the links between child marriage, early pregnancy and the associated risks of early pregnancy. In developing countries, maternal mortality is the leading cause of death among girls age 15 to 19. Additionally, childbearing among young, underdeveloped girls increases the risk of obstetric fistula (Parsons and McCleary-Sills, 2015).

Another argument for the eradication of early unions is that they constitute a violation of human rights (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). Girls are forced into marriage or an informal union by their families who believe that marriage will ensure a safer, less vulnerable future for their child, or who do not have the money to pay a dowry, which increases as girls age (Parsons and McCleary-Sills, 2015). This directly contradicts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that men and women have equal rights when they enter into, during and at the marriage's dissolution (United Nations, 1948; Girls Not Brides, n.d.; International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), 2007). Extreme cases, where girls are forced into marriage and cannot leave the arrangement are considered deprivation of liberty (Girls Not Brides, 2015b). With marriage and informal unions come increased responsibilities and the abrupt end of childhood (IHEU, 2007). Early unions are a threat to human rights in at least two more ways. When girls leave school early because of a union, they are being forced out of their right to an education. Further, early pregnancy, motherhood and limited economic resources, are a threat to the girls' right to health (Girls Not Brides, n.d.).

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[1] Throughout this text, we will refer to formal and informal unions of girls younger than 18, together, as "Early unions." We will also make a distinction, when necessary, between formal unions - and call them "early marriages," and informal unions - and call them "early informal unions."

WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS ABOUT EARLY UNIONS IN MEXICO

Most of the evidence, in terms of causes, consequences and factors associated with early unions come from studies conducted in low-income countries, commonly in East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. Little is known about child marriage in Latin America, specifically in Mexico.

While the arguments for the prevention of child marriage are consistent through the developing nations, it is necessary to view the problem in the local context, as there may be cultural, economic or community aspects particular to each country or locality that either serve as a defense against or promote child marriage.

In this section, we review the lessons derived from studies that cover either directly or indirectly the topic of early marriage in Mexico. We divide these into the following subtopics: a) Prevalence of early unions at the national and subnational levels; b) Legal context regarding early unions in Mexico; and c) Determinants of early unions in Mexico and associated factors.

a) PREVALENCE OF EARLY UNIONS AT THE NATIONAL AND SUBNATIONAL LEVELS

According to the United Nations Population Fund's "Marrying too Young. End Child Marriage" report, early unions are formal and informal unions where are least one of the two members is younger than 18 at the time of union (UNFPA, 2012). Given that in most cases the age difference between partners adversely impacts women, the analysis of child marriage tends to focus exclusively on women.[2]

To measure the prevalence of child marriage, UNFPA (2012) proposes the use of the child marriage rate (which is estimated as the number of women 20 to 24 who were married or entered an informal union before age 18, divided by all women 20 to 24, multiplied by 100). [3] Since the average child marriage rate in developing countries where data is available, is 34 percent, UNFPA considers a child marriage rate higher than 30 percent critical. Based on estimates from the 2009 National Demographic Survey placing Mexico's child marriage rate at 22.9 percent, UNFPA's report asserts that the country's child marriage rate is not critical. Nevertheless, this is the fifth largest rate in Latin America, not including the Caribbean (UNFPA, 2012). What UNFPA's report does not mention but is important to note, is that Mexico's child marriage rate, as is the case generally in the region, has remained constant for the past 20 years.

Another indicator of the frequency of early unions, calculated using census data, is the percentage of young women 15 to 19 who have ever been in a formal or informal union.

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[2] For example, Pérez Amador and Hernández (2015) estimate, using the National Survey of Youth 2010, that only 3.9% of men age 20-24 entered a first union before age 18, whereas among women, this estimate ascends to 17.3%.

[3] The child marriage rate is estimated using women age 20 to 24, because this is the youngest, most recent, generation for which information is available and who might have completed the transition.

This indicator is used when there are no demographic surveys available or to have a disaggregation at smaller geographic levels. Census data shows that the percentage of young women 15 to 19 who have ever been in a formal or an informal union was 15.9 percent in 1990, 17.2 percent in 2000, and 17 percent in 2010 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2013)[4].

It is important to emphasize that the rate of child marriage has not changed in a generation. A 2015 UNWomen report states that, according to National Demographic Survey 2014 data, a comparison of women who were 50 to 54 in 2014, with women who were 20 to 24, shows only a small decrease in the percentage of those who married before 18 - 25.3 percent in the oldest generation versus 21.4 percent in the younger generation (OnuMujeres (UN Women), 2015).

If the country as a whole does not surpass the critical level designated by UNFPA, there are several subpopulations that do, according to a recent study by Pérez Amador and Hernández (2015) and the UNWomen state-level infographics (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015). Pérez Amador and Hernández use the National Demographic Survey 2009, the same survey used by UNFPA, to estimate the child marriage rate at the state level and according to place of residence (Amador and Rosana Hernández, 2015). Their results show that Chiapas and Guerrero have, at the state level, a child marriage rate greater than 30 percent. They also found that in Tabasco, Campeche, Quintana Roo and Veracruz, a fourth of all women were married before they reached the age of 18. These numbers are even higher if restricted only to the rural population. In 13 states, from the well-established Nuevo León to the underdeveloped Oaxaca, the rural population's child marriage rate surpasses the 30 percent threshold. These statistics suggest that if disaggregation is taken even further, say to the municipal level, child marriage rates may be even higher. States previously deemed low-priority, could find themselves the center of policy debate.

The UNWomen Infographics (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico) 2015) updates and expands the analysis conducted by Pérez Amador and Hernández (Amador and Rosana Hernández 2015). These documents present state-level estimates of child marriage rates using data from the 2014 National Demographic Survey, divided into two categories: The percentage of women 20 to 24 at the time of the survey who entered into a formal or informal union before age 15 (early child marriage rate); and The percentage of women 20 to 24 at the time of the survey who entered into a formal or informal union before age 18 (traditional child marriage rate). Data in these infographics show that, if analyzed at the state level, the percentage of women who married by age 15 varies between 2 and 8 percent, with Chiapas, Coahuila, Veracruz, Guerrero, Baja California, Oaxaca, Durango, Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Tabasco having the highest early child marriage rates. The percentage of women who married by age 15 in these states vary from 8.4 percent in Chiapas, to 4.4 percent in Tabasco. The states that have the highest traditional child

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[4] These numbers include women who entered a union when 18 and 19 years old, and are not considered early unions. Nonetheless, we use these numbers here because they are the only publicly available series that is comparable over time, and because they were calculated using similar methods and data.

marriage rates are Chiapas, Nayarit, Guerrero, Zacatecas, Coahuila, Veracruz, Quintana Roo, Oaxaca, Chihuahua and Baja California. The rates vary from 30.4 percent in Chiapas to 24.5 percent in Baja California. Conclusion: these results show that Chiapas, Guerrero, Coahuila, Veracruz, Quintana Roo, Oaxaca and Baja California are a priority in the fight against early unions since both the unions of women younger than 15 years old, and the overall unions of women younger than 18 years old are the highest in these states.

Child marriage rates disaggregated by place of residence (urban vs. rural) show an even more polarized reality, and help to better identify target groups. Countrywide, the percentage of women who entered a union before age 18 was higher in rural than in urban areas. At the top of this list, the women of Baja California: 43.3 percent of all rural women age 20 to 24 had entered a union before age 18, whereas the corresponding rate in urban areas of that state was 21.3 percent. Moreover, there are 14 states (Baja California, Campeche, Colima, Chiapas, Durango, Guerrero, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Veracruz and Zacatecas), where the child marriage rate among rural women surpasses 30 percent. No urban populations studied exhibited a child marriage rate higher than 30 percent.

Something similar happens when, within each state, child marriage rates are estimated by school achievement. UNWomen (2015) presents child marriage rates for women who completed at least one year of primary education but did not go to secondary school,[5] for women who completed at least one year of secondary education but did not go to high school and for women who completed at least one year of preparatory education. One problem with this analysis is that it does not control for what happened first, dropping out of school or the early union. Consequently, the effect of education as a cause or consequence of early marriage is unclear.

This problem is particularly true for women who completed at least one year of secondary education, usually between the ages of 12 and 15, and for women who completed at least one year of preparatory education, usually between the ages of 15 and 18. Despite these caveats, the data for women who only completed some primary school illustrates the strength of the relationship between education and early unions. With the exception of the Distrito Federal, where the child marriage rate among women who only completed some primary education is 6.9 percent, all child marriage rates for this subgroup are above 33 percent and go as high as 77.6 percent in Nayarit (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico) 2015).

The literature about the Mexican Model of Nuptiality and the changes that it has gone through in recent decades, is also useful for understanding the permanence of early unions. One of the characteristics of this model is the coexistence of formal and informal unions and the eventual transit from an informal to a formal union. In other words, many women and men start living together without having their union sanctioned either by the state or the church, but after some time they legalize their union (Julieta Pérez Amador Sep - Nov;

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[5] Child marriage rates for women who did not have any schooling were not calculated because primary education has become almost universal in recent generations.

Quilodrán 2001). Another characteristic of the Mexican Model of Nuptiality is that, until the 1970s, the mean age at marriage remained stable at about 24 years for men, and 21 years for women. But later, women started to delay their entrance into unions. As a consequence, in 1990, women's mean age at marriage was 22, whereas men's had only changed 0.3 years ((Quilodrán 2001), quoted in (Julieta Pérez Amador Sep - Nov)). The delay in women's mean age at marriage is even more noticeable when it is analyzed for different cohorts, as Coubès and Zenteno (2005) did using the Retrospective Demographic Survey 2004. This nationally representative survey allows the comparison of three birth cohorts: those born in 1936-1938, those born in 1951-1953, and those born in 1966-1968. According to these authors' results, the median age for men at marriage has remained constant at 23 years. However, women's median age at marriage increased one year with every cohort: from 18 for the 1936-1938 group, to 19 for the 1951-1953 group, to 20 for the 1966-1968 group.

On average, informal unions tend to begin at a younger age than formal unions ((Solís 2004), quoted in (Julieta Pérez Amador Sep - Nov)), and while a recent delay in entry into formal unions has been noticed, informal unions are happening at an earlier age. Julieta Pérez Amador (Sep - Nov) and Welti (n.d.) noted an increase between 1990 and 2000 in the percentage of adolescents age 15 to 19 who were in an informal union. Taking all the female adolescents who have ever been in a union as the universe of analysis, the share that were in an informal union rose from 35.4 percent in 1990, to 49.3 percent in 2000. This increase occurred while there was little change in the overall percentage of adolescents who have ever been in a union, therefore a decrease in formal unions among this age group was also observed. According to Welti, the percentage of adolescents in 1990 who had never been in a union was 94.3 percent for men and 83.9 percent for women. By 2000, this indicator was 93.8 percent for men and 82.5 percent for women.

The increase in the importance of informal unions at an early age may have two different explanations. One, is the socioeconomic differences between those who choose an informal union and those who choose to enter into marriage. The second potential reason is that women and men may be opting (as is more common in modern society) to start their union informally and legalize it, after they are certain that things work out as a couple. This second behavior is one of the characteristics of the second demographic transition (Solís 2004; Julieta Pérez Amador Sep - Nov; Quilodrán 2001; García and Rojas 2002). An event history analysis studied the following transitions for Mexican women in 1997: 1) entry into an informal union; 2) entry into a formal union; 3) moving from an informal union to a formal one; and 4) dissolution of a union, and found evidence of both phenomena (Pérez Amador, 2008). The majority of informal unions in Mexico could be considered traditional, as women who entered first an informal union, tended to be less educated and less likely to live in an urban area than women who started their conjugal life in a formal union. Nevertheless, this author also found a sector of urban, highly educated women, who entered an informal union first, and then transitioned into a formal union. These women tended to make faster transitions into a formal union than those who lived in rural areas and were less educated.

In sum, despite being somewhat common, according to 2009 data, about one in every four women 20 to 24 years old entered a union before they were 18 (UNFPA, 2012), early

unions in Mexico received little attention until recently. Consequently, the studies about their frequency, long-term trends, spatial distribution and determinants are scarce. But this is changing. According to the latest data, this practice is more common in rural areas than in urban ones. It is also more frequent in some states, which points to the importance of contextual and cultural factors in its explanation. The prevalence of this trend has varied little in the last 25 years, although its nature changed. The importance of informal unions, when compared to formal ones, increased in this period in particular.

b) LEGAL CONTEXT REGARDING EARLY UNIONS IN MEXICO

One of the first international documents to set specific recommendations about the minimum legal age at marriage, was the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). According to the text of CEDAW, signing states should take action to eliminate discrimination against women, and to guarantee equality of men and women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations. This implies that signing states should commit themselves to undertake necessary measures to ensure that men and women have the same right to: 1) enter into marriage; 2) choose a spouse, and enter into marriage only with their free and full consent; and 3) retain the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and its dissolution - including, among others, the same rights to choose a family name, profession and occupation as well as the same rights to own, acquire, manage, administrate and enjoy property. In addition, states agree that: 4) the betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect. Actions, including modifying existing legislation, need to be taken to specify a minimum age at marriage; and 5) actions should be followed to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory (UNWomen 2009). CEDAW is binding to states who ratify the convention. Participating states are expected to report on the progress and the implementation of actions to achieve CEDAW goals and comply with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) (Khan 1999).

International awareness about the need to end early unions has increased in the last three years due in part, to the actions of international agencies. This began with the 2013 request from the United Nations Human Rights Council for a report on the challenges, achievements, best practices and implementation gaps for preventing and eliminating child marriage. The report was meant to guide a panel discussion about why child marriage constitutes a threat and violation to human rights, and an impairment to the post-2015 development agenda (Council on Foreign Relations 2013; United Nations General Assembly 2013). More visibly, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted several resolutions to end child, early and forced marriage (Girls Not Brides 2015c; United Nations General Assembly 2013; United Nations General Assembly 2003). The last of these, adopted on July 2, 2015 and supported by a cross-regional group of 107 states, stresses the need to consider child, early, and forced marriage a human rights violation, and to include it in the post-2015 international development agenda (Girls Not Brides 2015c). The resolutions also call on states to implement holistic and coordinated strategies to eliminate child, early and forced marriage, and to support already married girls, adolescents and women (World Health Organization. The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health 2014).

As a result of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly to end child marriage, the Sustainable Development Goals, which set a specific post-2015 agenda with measurable objectives for 2030, include an indicator of early and child marriage. Target 5.3 is "Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations." This target is under goal 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations 2015).

Mexico signed CEDAW in 1980 and ratified it in 1981 (United Nations Treaty Collection 2016), which means that it should regularly report on its progress towards the achievement of gender equality. In addition, the National Development Program for 2013-2018 spells out the commitment with CEDAW and the achievement of gender equality (Gobierno de la República 2013).

In an effort to comply with CEDAW and the international recommendations regarding the minimum legal age at marriage, Mexico's General Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents was modified in 2014. It sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both men and women, and eliminates all exceptions to this age. However, federal and state laws and procedural and civil codes take time to be standardized. The General Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents does not coincide with the Federal Civil Code which establishes that the minimum age at marriage is 14 for girls and 16 for boys (OnuMujeres 2015). Additionally, many state-level laws and civil codes do not match the General Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents. Table 1 displays, for each one of the 32 states, the minimum age at marriage for men and women and whether there are exceptions to this minimum age, as established by state-level laws and codes. The last column of Table 1 indicates whether there are any discrepancies between the state law and the civil codes. The information for this table comes from the UNWomen Mexico review, state civil codes, and from state Laws for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents. [6]

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[6] The data in Table 1 coincides with that provided by UNWomen in most of the cases. However, there are some states where our review of the civil codes and Laws for the Protection of Boys, Girls and Adolescents yielded different information. This may be because the state-level civil codes and laws were modified after November 2015.

Table 1. Minimum age at marriage for men and women, as defined by the state law and civil and family codes. Mexico, 2015

State	Minimum age at marriage in the state-law of the rights of boys and children	Exceptions to the minimum age at marriage, in the state-law	Minimum age at marriage in the family and civil codes	Exceptions to the minimum age at marriage, in the civil and family codes	Disagreement between the state law and the civil and family codes
Aguascalientes	18 years old for men and women	Yes, to be defined in the civil code	16 years old for men and women	Yes, if not younger than 14 years old	Yes
Baja California	18 years old for men and women	No	14 years old for women; 16 for men	Yes	Yes
Baja California Sur	18 years old for women and men	No	18 years old for women and men	No	No
Campeche	18 years old for women and men	No	18 years old for women and men	Yes, if not younger than 16 years old	Yes
Chiapas	18 years old for women and men	Yes	16 years old for women and men. Before 18 years old, parental consent is required	Yes	Yes
Chihuahua	Not specified	Not specified	14 years old for women, and 16 years for men. Parental consent is needed	No	Yes
Coahuila	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	No	Yes
Colima	Not specified	Not specified	14 years old for women, and 16 years for men. Parental consent is needed	No	Yes

Distrito Federal	18 years old for women and men	No	18 years old for women and men	16 years old for men and women, with parental consent; 14 years old when the woman is pregnant	Yes
Durango	18 years old for women and men	No	14 years old for women, and 16 years old for men	Yes	Yes
Estado de México	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	Yes	Yes
Guanajuato	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	Yes, with parental consent. But cannot marry if younger than 16 years old	Yes
Guerrero	18 years old for women and men	No	Not specified. Parental consent needed if younger than 18 years old	No	Yes
Hidalgo	18 years old for women and men	No	18 years old for women and men	Yes	Yes
Jalisco	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	No	Yes
Michoacán	Not specified	Not specified	16 years old for women and men. Parental consent needed if younger than 18 years old	No	Yes
Morelos	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	Yes	Yes
Nayarit	Not specified	Not specified	16 years old for women and men. Parental consent needed if younger than 18 years old	No	Yes

Nuevo León	Inexistent law	Inexistent law	Not specified. Parental consent needed if younger than 18 years old	No	Yes
Oaxaca	Inexistent law	Inexistent law	18 years old for women and men	Yes, with parental consent. But cannot marry if younger than 16 years old	Yes
Puebla	18 years old	No	16 years old for women and men, with parental consent for those younger than 18 years old	Yes	Yes
Querétaro	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	Yes, but cannot marry if younger than 16 years old	Yes
Quintana Roo	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	No	Yes
San Luis Potosí	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	No
Sinaloa	18 years old for women and men	No	Not specified	Not specified	Yes
Sonora	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	Those younger than 18 years old need parental consent	Yes
Tabasco	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	Yes	Yes
Tamaulipas	18 years old for women and men	No	18 years old for women and men	Those between 16 and 18 years old who have a child or are pregnant can marry, but need a parental or judicial consent	Yes

Tlaxcala	18 years old for women and men	No	18 years old for women and men	Yes, but cannot marry if younger than 16 years old. Those between 16 and 18 years old need parental consent	Yes
Veracruz	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	No	Yes
Yucatán	18 years old for women and men	No	18 years old for women and men	No	No
Zacatecas	Not specified	Not specified	18 years old for women and men	Yes. Those younger than 18 years old need parental or judicial consent	Yes

Source: Based on data from (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015), (Ley General de los Derechos de los Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes, 2015), and state-level civil codes (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2016).

In sum, the analysis of the information provided above yields the following conclusions:

- Federal and state-level laws in Mexico do not comply with international recommendations on the minimum legal age at marriage, even when these are binding, as is the case with CEDAW. International recommendations say that to eliminate child marriage and prevent children from marrying before they are ready, it is necessary to set the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 for both men and women, remove any exceptions, and ensure the adequate mechanisms for the enforcement of these laws (Girls Not Brides, 2015a). In México, the Federal Law to Protect the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents states that the minimum legal age at marriage should be 18 for men and women (Ley General de los Derechos de los niños, niñas y adolescentes, 2015). However, the federal civil code has not yet been updated to match federal law (OnuMujeres, 2015). The current definition of the minimum legal age at marriage in the federal civil code is 14 for girls and 16 for boys (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2016).

- In several instances, state-level laws and civil codes have not been coordinated with the most recent federal laws. For example, in Baja California, Campeche, Mexico City, Durango, Hidalgo, Puebla and Tlaxcala, state-level Laws for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents have been modified to match the most recent federal law. State-level civil codes have not. In others, state-level laws have not been modified to match the most recent federal mandate, but state-level civil codes have been revised (Coahuila, Jalisco, Quintana Roo, and Veracruz), or are more progressive than the state-

level law (Chihuahua, Colima, Estado de México, Guanajuato, Michoacán,[7] Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Querétaro, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, and Zacatecas).

- Finally, there are some cases where neither the state-level Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents or the state-level civil code have been updated (Chiapas and San Luis Potosí) and no minimum legal age at marriage is specified. These cases are problematic and need to be resolved, because in practice, civil procedures are regulated by state-level civil codes and laws. These should not contradict federal laws.

- One common problem with state-level civil codes is that they permit exceptions to the minimum legal age at marriage, allowing for the marriage of boys and girls. Many simply state that the marriage of those younger than 18 is allowed "under extreme circumstances," which are not clearly specified. States that allow exceptions to the minimum legal age at marriage, or which permit the legal minimum age at marriage to be younger than 18, are Aguascalientes, Baja California, Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Colima, Mexico City, Durango, Estado de México, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Puebla, Querétaro, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, and Zacatecas.

c) DETERMINANTS OF EARLY UNIONS AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS

International literature about the causes of early unions closely relates to the literature that analyzes age at first marriage.[8] These studies emphasize the role of education, especially women's education, access to paid employment, urbanization, the presence of arranged marriages, and child mortality and fertility expectations in the prevalence of early unions.

It has been noted that women's education increases women's autonomy and their power to choose a partner. Education raises their expectations and gives them a more modern outlook on life, making them want to reproduce modern behaviors and spend more time single. There are other ways in which education impacts age at marriage. The first of these being that women tend to marry higher status men, and as their education increases, so does the time it takes them to find an adequate partner. The second way is known as "role incompatibility." In most cases, school is incompatible with marriage, and therefore, if women stay in school, they may not have an incentive or the conditions to be married (Mensch, 2005; Lindstrom and Brambila, 2001). A third way is about the specialization and complementarity of roles between men and women. In societies where the gender division of labor is highly differentiated and women specialize in housework and men in paid employment, marriage is both desirable and convenient to both sexes. In these scenarios, incentives for continuing education are low since women who are not in the labor force will

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[7] Chihuahua, Colima and Michoacán are included in this list even though the minimum legal age at marriage listed in their civil codes is less than 18, because they do specify a minimum age at marriage; whereas the state Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents is nonexistent or does not specify a minimum legal age at marriage.
[8] In this section we refer to "early marriage," because most of the literature on the causes of early unions center on formal unions. However, the explanations outlined here can be applied to both formal and informal unions.

not experience the financial benefits of education.[9] Incentives to marry young are high because the earlier they marry, the more time they have to realize the benefits from marriage ((Becker, 1974), quoted in (Pérez Baleón, 2014)). In less gender-segregated societies, when women have more education and are active in the labor market, they have less incentive to marry because they can be independent from their husband. As a consequence, they delay marriage or do not marry at all ((Becker, 1973), quoted in (Pérez Baleón, 2014)). In other words, as women's education increases, so does the opportunity cost of being married (Pérez Baleón, 2014).

Urbanization is a second factor that has been associated with delayed age at marriage. Urban life promotes exposure to the modern value of marrying later, and in cities, women are less exposed to relatives who may control their timing of marriage and choice of spouse (Mensch, 2005).

A third factor associated with age at marriage is the presence of arranged marriages. When the decision of when and whom to marry depends on the parents and not on women, marriage tends to occur earlier because the process of spouse selection is simpler and faster. Marrying girls younger helps to preserve their virginity until marriage and younger girls are more likely to comply with the decisions that are imposed upon them (Mensch, 2005).
Child mortality and fertility expectations have also been argued to affect age at marriage, when the reproductive role of marital unions is considered. When child mortality and fertility expectations are high, women initiate their marital and sexual life early in order to extend their period of exposure to pregnancies (Mensch, 2005). This may be one of the explanations for the differences in child marriage rates between regions in Mexico.

Lastly, some authors have claimed that gender roles, expectations, and gender-based violence play an important role in early marriage, in ways that go beyond gender-differentiated access to education, paid employment, and the division of labor. For example, in Brazil, Taylor et al. (2015) conducted a mixed-methods study in the capital cities of Pará and Maranhao, with the objective of understanding the motivations of girls to marry young and the role that men and social norms played in these decisions. This study consisted of semi-structured interviews with women 12 to 18, married to older men; men married with children; family members of married girls; and key community members. To better understand the differences between those who choose to marry early and those who did not, the authors also conducted focus groups with unmarried men and girls, and a quantitative household survey among married and unmarried boys and girls.

The results of this study show that in Brazil, most unions of girls who are younger than 18 are consensual, and its most common motivations are associated with the social perception that girls engaging in sexual activity is undesirable and needs to be controlled and hidden. Family members have a motivation to marry girls, to legitimize and limit their sexuality, and to protect them from engaging in undesirable behaviors such as casual sex and serial

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[9] This hypothesis ignores the benefits that women derive from education in the form of autonomy, life skills, and negotiating abilities.

dating. When girls get pregnant, the family promotes a union, with the objectives of concealing the pregnancy, protecting the girls' and family's reputation, and to ensure the man's responsibility for the girl and the baby. This environment of sexual control encourages girls to enter into a union so they can execute their own choices and leave the parental home. In addition, men perceive younger women as more attractive, desirable and easier to control. Another common explanation for early unions, which is also associated with the perception of girls' vulnerability and dependency, is the family's desire to safeguard their financial security (Taylor et al., 2015).

In their qualitative study in rural Honduras, Murphy-Graham and Leal (2015) arrived at similar conclusions regarding early unions being the result of a combination of factors and the actions and interests of different actors. As a part of this study, the authors interviewed two girls, whom they met before either entered a union, and met with them repeatedly for three years. Additionally, they interviewed various family members and key informants, such as schoolteachers, which allowed them to describe the process that leads to an early union.

In the two cases analyzed, this process encompassed a struggle between the girls and their family members, who were always vigilant in preventing them from getting involved with boys. As a reaction to this control, the girls found ways to keep in touch with their boyfriends in secret, either arranging occasional rendezvous or communicating by mobile phone. Eventually, the girls ran away with their boyfriends, as a way of executing their own will. Besides the desire to have a relationship and be sexually involved with a man, another aspect was the girls' aspirations to be housewives and mothers. Where they were raised, there is a social perception that girls who have not married by the age of 20, turn into spinsters.

The research conducted by Oliveira (1995) revealed that, in addition to sexual control, another reason girls marry young and leave their families is to escape from a conflicted or unstable household. In Oliveira's study, which is based on qualitative life histories of young women in Mexican cities, this behavior was characteristic of poor households, while girls who came from better-off homes tended to delay marriage. Taken altogether, the results are another indicator of the importance of social status on age at marriage.

Despite the theoretical clarity of these explanations, disentangling the causal effect of education, paid employment, urbanization and the prevalence of arranged marriages on age at marriage, can be difficult because several factors may be simultaneously affecting their decisions. For example, women who intend to marry young may leave school early and postpone, or avoid, their entry into paid labor; while those who intend to marry late, may choose to continue in school and seek employment. Marriage can also interrupt school, work and social advancement trajectories (Mensch, 2005; Furstenberg, 2010). Consequently, empirical studies that disentangle the direct effect of these factors on child marriage are scarce.

In the case of Mexico, most of the research about the causes of child marriage focus on the effect of education and paid employment. In addition, much of the evidence about the factors that affect age at marriage come from the literature on transitions to adulthood.

One of the first and most commonly quoted studies about the effect of education on age at marriage was done by Lindstrom and Brambila (2001). These authors show that education affects age at marriage through three mechanisms: role incompatibility, investment in human capital, and the transformation of girls' experiences and expectations. Education increases the probability of being in paid employment, which in turn has a delaying effect on age at marriage and on first birth. To show how these effects work, Lindstrom and Brambila (2001) use a retrospective, nationally representative survey and event-history analysis. When they control for the direct effect of paid employment on age at marriage and on first birth, the importance of education decreases, but does not disappear. This is a demonstration that education serves as an investment in human capital. Even more, girls who are still in school have a lower risk of marriage and of a first birth than those who have already left school. This provides support for the hypothesis of role incompatibility. Nevertheless, at the time this study was conducted, most of the increases in schooling were at ages earlier than the mean age at marriage, which explains the low, direct effect of education on age at marriage. In this study, support for the hypothesis of the transformative power of education is weaker than the support for the hypothesis of role incompatibility and investment for human capital. This is provided by the fact that more educated girls and women have more positive attitudes towards women's work, independent of their school and employment status.

Pérez Baleón (2014) did another, more recent, analysis about the effect of education on age at marriage in Mexico. In her study, she uses data from the National Retrospective Survey 1998 (EDER, by its Spanish acronym) and compares the evolution of women's age at marriage, and the impact of education on this behavior, across three cohorts. Like Lindstrom and Brambila (2001), Pérez Baleon tries to distinguish between the three effects of education on age at marriage commonly discussed in the literature. To test the validity of the role incompatibility hypothesis, she includes, in her event history analysis, a dichotomic variable that indicates whether the person was in school a year before or not. To test the hypothesis of modification in expectations, she includes two variables, one that measures school achievement in completed levels, and another one that indicates whether each person was working the year before. The rationale for including paid employment is that school changes women's life aspirations, making them more willing to work. Finally, to test the hypothesis of education as a form of investment in human capital, Pérez Baleón (2014) included in her models the interactive effect of education and paid employment.

Her results mirror those of Lindstrom and Brambila (2001) and she finds support for the three hypotheses: Women with higher education have a smaller chance of getting married in a given year than less educated women. In addition, being in school one year before, decreases the probability of marriage. When included without an interaction with education, paid employment does not affect the probability of marriage. When this variable is interacted with education, paid employment again does not have a statistically significant effect on women with less education. However, women with more education, who worked

the year before, had lower probabilities of getting married than women with less education who did not work.[10]

Further evidence of the relationship between education and age at marriage is provided by the study of Mier and Terán (2011) who, using the National Demographic Survey 2006, estimate survival functions for first union. In other words, she uses Kaplan-Meier estimates to calculate the cumulative probability of not having entered a union by a certain age, and the rate of entering into a union at each age, for women according to the highest school level they achieved. The author also explores the relationship between three family transitions to adulthood - sexual initiation, first union, and first birth - to education, by analyzing how the most common trajectories vary by education level. This study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between education and age at marriage in four ways.

First, it shows that every school level achieved makes a contribution to decreasing the cumulative probability of being in a union and the rate of entering a union. When analyzing the effect of education, most authors make a distinction between some elementary school or less, some secondary school, and some higher education. Mier and Terán (2011) divides school achievement further, as she distinguishes between women who never attended school, those who have at least some elementary school, those who have some secondary education, those who have some high school, and those who have some college. By making a distinction between all the different levels, the author can see that having some primary education makes a difference, as does secondary school. This distinction also helps to show that the biggest decrease in the cumulative probability of being in a union comes from completing at least one grade of professional school, as opposed to having some high school. The next largest decrease comes from completing some high school. Second, the study shows that women with no formal education have a distinct pattern for entering a union. They have a very early start, and for this group the probability of entering a union peaks before 20 years old. For other education levels, the peak is after this age, and increases with each school level. Third, she shows that among the most educated women, the delay in age at marriage, and the decline in the probability of entering a union after age 30, may imply that many of them remain single permanently. Fourth, she demonstrates that education affects the way that women live the three transitions, adopting less conservative patterns as school achievement increases.

Of the eight potential family-life trajectories that Mier and Terán (2011) identifies, the most traditional ones are those where the beginning of sexual activity coincides, at least in year,

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[10] (Pérez Baleón 2014) constructed her interaction effects by having a categorical variable that combines the effect of education and paid employment. The reference category is women with low education who did not work, and the three categories that appear in the model are women with low education who worked, women with high education who did not work, and women with high education who worked. Comparing statistically the coefficients of these variables, could lead to conclusions about the effect of education, and the effect of employment in each education level. However, (Pérez Baleón 2014) does not do this. Indeed, if one looks at the effect of being a highly educated woman who did not work (OR=0.51), and the effect of being a highly educated woman who worked (OR=0.54), both are very similar, with women who did not work having lower odds of getting married than women who were educated and worked. As the author does not test if the two coefficients are statistically different or not (and given the standard errors provided, they seem not to be), this model seems to provide evidence for a general effect of education, but not for education as an investment in human capital.

with the entry into first union. The distinction between these two trajectories is that in one, women delay their first birth, while in the other, the first birth closely follows the union. These trajectories are not the most common in any school level, but its occurrence clearly diminishes with education. The author notes that while around one third of women with no formal schooling or limited primary education follow the trajectory where the three transitions coincide in the same year, among the most educated women this trajectory occurs only in 8 percent of the cases.

There are several other studies, in addition to Mier and Terán's (2011) that prove the existence of an association between the order and timing of the different transitions to adulthood, and schooling. One of these is an earlier study of Mier and Terán (2004), which focused on highly marginalized localities in Campeche, Quintana Roo and Yucatán, the three states of the Yucatán peninsula. Contrary to other studies that use longitudinal data which allows them to identify the temporal order of the transitions, Mier and Terán (2004) uses the Survey of Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Households (ENCASEH, by its Spanish acronym), cross-sectional data that only indicates the current status of individuals. The advantage of this survey, however, is that because it includes information on all households in highly marginalized communities, it allows the study, in detail, of the transitions to adulthood in a context of extreme poverty. To do this, the author examines the proportion of men and women age 12 to 34[11] who have gone through each of the following transitions: exiting school, leaving the parental household, first union, first birth, and entry into the labor market.

Through her analysis Mier and Terán (2004) proves that in marginalized contexts where opportunities are scarce, young men and women exit school early, with women leaving school earlier than men, in many cases before finishing high school. Another difference between men and women is that men start to work shortly after leaving school, whereas women spend their time on domestic activities in the parental household. Furthermore, women participate in the labor market much less frequently than men. Sixty percent of women never work for a pay. The family transitions occur in a very short time lapse for both men and women, and most commonly follow a traditional pattern of entry into first union, exit from the parental household, and first birth. However, women go through these transitions at a much earlier age than men. By the time they are 17, 20 percent of women have entered into a union, and a similar proportion have left the parental household. A year later, by age 18, 20 percent of women have had a first birth. Among men, these proportions are reached between two and three years later. Mier and Terán (2004) gives two explanations why many young people enter a union and remain living at the parental home: 1) they do not have the monetary resources to live independently; or 2) the parental household needs their labor for agricultural activities.

As noted above, there are several studies in Mexico that focus on the factors that affect economic and family transitions to adulthood. Among these, the main contribution of the study of Silvia Elena Giorguli Saucedo (n.d.) is to analyze both the importance of the economic and institutional context and the characteristics of the family of origin on the

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[11] The author focuses on this age group because most transitions occur between these two ages.

transition out of school, into the labor market, out of the parental household, into the first union, and to the first birth. The author's rationale for doing this, is that the economic slowdown that Mexico suffered in the mid-90s affected the conditions in which youth transitioned into adults. At that time, the labor market was dominated by jobs in the informal sector and vulnerable, formal jobs that did not adequately compensate increases in education. In addition, the growth in poverty rates and the weakness of the social system created family demands for help with caregiving activities and the pooling of more monetary resources.

The National Survey of Youth 2000 contains detailed information about the family of origin, even in the cases when the individual did not live with their parents anymore. This allowed Silvia Elena Giorguli Saucedo (n.d.) to measure the effect of the characteristics of the parents, as given by place of residence, completed education of both parents, and father's education, on the odds of having experienced the transitions listed above. The results of this analysis, which refer to men and women who were between the ages of 12 and 24 at the time of the survey, show that living in a rural community made little difference in the odds of transitioning out of the parental household and into a first union. They also show that the characteristics of the parents are important for determining whether men and women have experienced the different transitions. Children of more educated parents, and of fathers who work in higher status occupations are less likely to have left the parental household, and to have married, by any specific age. These results demonstrate the importance of the family of origin in the way that men and women become adults, but they are opposite to Silvia Elena Giorguli Saucedo's (n.d.) original hypothesis that children of poorer households would remain longer in the parental household and marry later because their family of origin needed their helping hand.

In the case of women, the author interprets her findings as evidence that parental education and economic status are a proxy for girls' motivation to delay their transition out of school and into the family life, while having some experience of paid employment before their first union. In the case of men, however, the results are more difficult to interpret, especially as they are read in combination with the finding that the sons of parents with lower educations have higher odds to have left school and start working than the sons of parents with more education.

In terms of the argument that women in rural areas have more conservative marriage patterns of marrying earlier and in a higher proportion than women in urban areas, the general literature about marriage has confirmed this hypothesis in Mexico (Quilodrán, 2001; Julieta Quilodrán and Viridiana Sosa, 2004; García and Rojas, 2002; Mier and Terán, 2004). The evidence of whether the effect of this variable remains once education, parental characteristics, and participation in the labor market are factored in, is mixed.

In the studies of Guadalupe Fabiola Pérez Baleón (2014) and Silvia Elena Giorguli Saucedo, (n.d.), the effect of place of residence disappears once other variables are included in the statistical models. This can be interpreted as evidence that it is not the place of residence per se, but the conditions and lack of opportunities that are clustered in rural communities, which affect age at marriage. However, Carlos Javier Echarri Cánovas and Julieta Pérez

Amador (2007) found, in their analysis of the National Survey of Youth 2000, that the effect of place of residence persisted even after controlling for other variables. In this study, rural women left the parental home mostly to get married, and did so on average almost two years before urban women. In the case of men, there are no differences between rural and urban communities on the median age of exit from the parental household.

These authors found similar, but less acute results, when they analyzed the time of entry into a first union instead of the exit from the parental household. In the case of age at first union, distinguishing between urban and rural place of residence makes a difference between both men and women. The median age at first union of rural men and women is one year earlier than that of urban residents. When attention is placed exclusively on those who marry early, and the authors do this by analyzing the age at marriage of the 25 percent who marry first, there are no differences between urban and rural women. This means that in both rural and urban communities there is an important proportion of women who marry early, and that these marry at about the same age independently of their place of residence. It also means that in rural communities, the calendar of first unions is shorter, which consequently has them marrying on average at an earlier age than urban women.

Several authors Guadalupe Fabiola Pérez Baleón (2014), Silvia Elena Giorguli Saucedo (n.d.), Carlos Javier Echarri Cánovas and Julieta Pérez Amador (2007) executed an event history analysis to assess the importance of different aspects on the probability of leaving the parental household, and of entering a first union. [12] In these models, they include place of residence, the social status of the parental household and four indexes that measure the democracy of household decisions, how much the youth contributes to household activities, whether the individuals' decision-making process is independent from their parents, and how strong communication is between the youth and their parents.

Contrary to what Guadalupe Fabiola Pérez Baleón (2014) and Silvia Elena Giorguli Saucedo (n.d.) found, the results of these models indicate that living in a rural place increases the risk of entering a first union, but not of leaving the parental household, even after social status, social independence, participation in household activities, and the quality of communication with the parents have been taken into account. The coefficients of the indexes described above support the argument put forward by Taylor et al. (2015), Murphy-Graham and Leal (2015) and Oliveira (1995) that living in a conflictive household increases a girls' incentives to enter a union and leave the parental home. In this particular case, having good communication with her parents decreases 70 percent of the relative risk of a woman leaving her parental home. Having good parental communication also decreases the relative risk of entering a first union, both for men and women. More significant, however, is the fact that of all the elements considered in the model of entry into first union, the index of independence in the decision-making process is the most important, for men and for women. Living in a restrictive household increases the relative risk of getting into a first union by more than fourfold for men, and by 133 percent for women.

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[12] In addition to these two transitions, the authors also study the transition out of school, into the first paid employment, and the birth of the first child.

d) CONCLUSIONS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW ON EARLY UNIONS IN MEXICO, AND PRESSING RESEARCH NEEDS

This literature review of early unions and the factors associated with this phenomenon in Mexico shows that despite claims that early unions are not important in the country, this perception is based on a general assessment that ignores a great variability in its levels and the lack of significant change in the last three decades.

Efforts have been made recently by UN agencies and institutions of the federal and local governments, such as the Ministry of Women and the Commission of Gender Equity in Parliament, to raise awareness about the importance of early unions in the country. These include a call to raise the legal age of marriage to 18 for both men and women, and to eliminate all exceptions that allow for the marriage of boys and girls. Another action considered in these efforts is the claim that federal and state-level civil codes and the laws that regulate age at marriage, such as the laws for the protection of the rights of boys and girls, need to be homogenized. This, however, is taking some time as it depends on various actors, and has caused several inconsistencies between the different legal instruments. Modifications in the Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys and Girls concluded in 2014, made 18 the minimum legal age for marriage.

All analyses about the levels of early unions in Mexico indicate that informal unions are more common than formal unions, especially among girls younger than 18 years old. Modifications in the law that only change the legal age at marriage, but do not include any clause for informal unions, may have little effect on more than half of the women who enter a union before age 18. There is also the possibility, that by prohibiting the formal unions of boys and girls, many of those who were to get married, voluntarily or otherwise, fall instead into an informal union. The literature about the differences between formal and informal unions is very scarce, especially when it refers to early unions. There is evidence that two decades ago, informal unions were more unstable than formal unions (Quilodrán, 2001; Julieta Pérez Amador, Sep - Nov). This has partially changed as cohabitation has become more common and many urban, well educated youths choose to live in an informal union before getting formally married. Among less-educated individuals, informal unions continue to follow the traditional pattern where they are a common resource, equivalent to a formal union, that seldom transitions into a formal marriage (Julieta Pérez Amador, Sep - Nov; Solís, 2004; Quilodrán, 2001; Julieta Quilodrán and Viridiana Sosa, 2004).

More research is needed about the difference between formal and informal unions, and the determinants and consequences of going into one or the other, especially for the most vulnerable girls. This is of particular interest to aid in designing evidence-based interventions, laws and programs that help decrease early unions, while minimizing the risk of driving boys and girls into informal unions.

With the same objectives in mind, it is also necessary to better understand the different forms of early unions in Mexico, how common they are, and how entering into each of them may affect the destinies of the girls. Up to now, the literature that contributes to the

understanding of early unions in Mexico comes from two different, but linked arenas. On the one hand, there are some studies that focus on explaining age at marriage. These studies have demonstrated that formal education, participation in the labor market, urban residence, an amicable and more educated family context and not living in a restrictive environment, are all important to delay age at first union (Carlos Javier Echarri Cánovas and Julieta Pérez Amador, 2007; Guadalupe Fabiola Pérez Baleón, 2014; Pérez Baleón, 2014; Oliveira, 1995; Mier and Terán, 2004; Mier and Terán, 2011; Silvia Elena Giorguli Saucedo, n.d.). On the other, the literature about transitions to adulthood has shown that there is an important variation in the sequence and tempo in which women complete different transitions, such as leaving school, entering the labor market, leaving the parental household, entering into a first union, and having a first child. The most common patterns in Mexico are those that could be considered traditional and normative, where women leave school, enter a union, and have a child, or where they have a child and enter a union shortly after. Nevertheless, these are not the only patterns that occur, and no research to date has analyzed what makes women more likely to follow a particular pattern.

To conclude with what we consider the research needs regarding early unions in Mexico, a field that has been completely unexplored, is that exploring the consequences of entering a union before age 18. The results of the studies about the determinants of age at marriage and about transitions to adulthood indicates that in most cases women leave school first and get into a union later (Lindstrom and Brambila, 2001), which has led to the conclusion that it is not a union that causes women to drop out of school. Still, it has also been shown that there is important variation in the conditions in which women enter an early union, and consequently one could also expect variations in the outcomes of this act.

2. NATIONAL-LEVEL RESULTS

Describing the level and geographic variation of early unions is relevant for policymakers because it allows identification of areas where the problem is more frequent, and where attention should be prioritized. In this section, we use data from the Intercensal Survey 2015 (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015), to analyze early unions at the national, state and regional level. Other studies about nuptiality and early unions use different data, such as the Demographic Retrospective Survey (EDER, in Spanish) (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF); Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI); and Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2011) or the National Survey of Demographic Dynamics (ENADID) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2014; Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2009).

In this report, we use the 2015 Intercensal Survey because it is the most recent source that allows for the disaggregation of results at a level more detailed than the state-place of residence combination. This decision, however, is not free of caveats, as most secondary data analysis often is. In this particular case, the use of the 2015 Intercensal Survey implies that we cannot estimate the rate of child marriage, as defined by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2015), because this data source only contains information about current marital status. Estimating

the rate of child marriage requires retrospective marital information. As a result, we are analyzing the following indicators:

a) The percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union, which we use to measure the current level of early unions.

b) The percentage of current unions of girls 12 to 17 that have not been formalized through a civil or religious marriage. We call these "non-formal unions" and use this indicator to measure the frequency of these, as opposed to marital or formal unions. This comparison is relevant because one of the actions the UN and Girls Not Brides recommend to eradicate early unions, is to set the minimum legal age for marriage at 18, under any circumstances (Girls Not Brides, 2015c; Girls Not Brides, 2015a; Communications Consortium Media Center (CCMC), 2015). Mexico has already made important efforts to move in this direction, although state and federal laws still need to be harmonized, as the literature review above showed (see also OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015). Nevertheless, a high prevalence of non-formal early unions may signal the need to take additional measures.

c) The percentage of girls 12 to 14, and the percentage of girls 15 to 17, who have ever been in a union. It is now a consensus among international organizations that the unions of girls younger than 18 is a harmful practice and a violation of their human rights (Girls Not Brides, 2015a; Girls Not Brides, 2015b). However, the effect of early unions is more damaging among younger girls. There are several reasons for this, including, among others, the association between early unions and school dropout: the earlier a girl enters a union, the younger she may quit school. Another reason is that early unions increase the possibility of early pregnancies, and these are riskier among very young women (UNICEF, 2015; Girls Not Brides, 2015b). Dividing early unions in two groups: 12 to 14, and 15 to 17 is an attempt to capture the distinction between very early unions, and early unions. This categorization has been used in other studies (see, for example, Amador & Rosana Hernández, 2015), and it coincides with a division between the normative age to finish secondary school (15 years old), and the beginning of high school.

The proportion of girls in each of the three age groups analyzed who have ever been in a union, and the proportion of these unions that are non-formal are affected by the age structure within each group. One can imagine, for example, that older girls are more likely to have ever been in a union simply because they have had more time to enter one, and because belonging to older cohorts may have exposed them to different growing conditions (e.g. access and acceptability of schooling, gender-related inequalities, etc.). A direct comparison of the indicators of interest across states and regions with different age structures may intensify the nature of some differences (e.g., in cases where an older age structure coincides with higher proportions of early unions), and diminish others (e.g. when the state with the younger age structure is also the state with lower proportions of early unions). In order to eliminate this effect from our analysis, we standardized the indicators of interest according to the national age structure in 2015. Therefore, our comparisons assume that all states and regions have the same age structure, and hence any estimated differences in the proportions of girls who have ever been in a union, and in the proportion of unions that are non-formal, are due to differences in these behaviors. Due to

the standardization, the numbers we present should not be interpreted as the observed behavior in a state or in a region, but rather, as what would be observed in that particular state or region, if it were to have the same age distribution that the country as a whole had in 2015.

One final note about the indicators used in this part of the report is necessary. As mentioned above, these results are not directly comparable with the rate of child marriage that UNICEF (2015) recommends, and other authors have used to study this custom in Mexico (e.g. (Amador & Rosana Hernández, 2015) and (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015)). The two indicators are not comparable because the rate of child marriage refers to women who are currently 20 to 24, while the percentage of girls age 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union refer to girls who are currently in that age group. The percentage of girls age 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union will always be considerably smaller than the child marriage rate because girls age 12 to 17 still have time to enter an early union. Girls who are 12 years old, have at least 5 more years of exposure to the factors leading to early union. This indicator is an estimate of how many of the girls who are currently at risk of entering an early union, have done so.

On the other hand, the women used in the estimation of the rate of child marriage have all passed through the exposure period. This indicator represents the percentage of women who actually end up in an early union. In addition to the difference in the exposure period, the two indicators differ because they do not refer to the same cohorts, nor to the same period. The estimate of the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union is a more recent indicator, as it makes reference to what is happening currently. On the other hand, the child marriage rate refers to what happened to women who are between 3 and 7 years older, and their early unions could have happened at least 6 years ago.

According to the 2015 Intercensal Survey, one in every twenty girls age 12 to 17 have ever been in a union, with 81 percent of the current unions being informal (see Table 1). This means that, in absolute numbers, between 319,000 and 329,000 women in that age group have been in a union, at least once in their lifetime.

As mentioned above, special attention should be given to the early unions of girls younger than 14. The 2015 Intercensal Survey indicates that, even when less frequent than the union of older girls, this practice exists in Mexico. In terms of percentages, 0.7 percent of girls in the 12 to 14 age group have ever been in a union or slightly less than one in every hundred. This small percentage is especially relevant when one looks at the absolute numbers: between 22-25,000 girls age 12 to 14 had been in a union. In the 14 to 17 age group, the percentage of girls who have experienced a union is greater: almost one in every ten have been in a union. Restricting the analysis to 17 year old girls gives an approximation of how many girls in that cohort will eventually marry before turning 18.[13] In this case, the percentage is 15.3 percent.

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[13] We say this is an approximation, because some of those who are currently 17 can still enter a union before their 18th birthday. Another option would be to consider only those who are 18. The problem with doing this is that, in this case, some may have entered a union after their 18th birthday.

Another difference between age groups that is important to note is that the unions of girls in the 12 to 14 age group are more likely to be formalized through a civil or religious marriage than the unions in the 15 to 17 age group, but non-formal unions represent the minority in both groups. Approximately 70 percent of girls age 12 to 14 who were in a union in 2015, were in a union that had not been formalized through a civil or religious marriage. Among girls age 15 to 17, this percentage was 82 percent.[14] These numbers take special relevance when compared with the review of the national and state-level civil codes and laws presented in the previous section (see Section b), which showed that even when the current General Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents sets the minimum age of marriage at 18, the federal civil code, establishes that the minimum age at marriage is 14 for girls, and 16 for boys (OnuMujeres, 2015).

Table 2.1. Indicators of early unions, Mexico 2014 and 2015

	%	Population estimates (Thousands)
Girls 14-17 who have ever been in a union	5.00	324
	[4.89, 5.02]	[319, 329]
Unions of girls 12-17 that are non-formal	81.01	248
	[80.52, 81.49]	[245, 250]
Girls 12-14 who have ever been in a union	0.70	24
	[0.67,0.74]	[22, 25]
Unions of girls 12-14 that are non-formal	69.79	15
	[68.24, 71.30]	[15, 16]
Girls 15-17 who have ever been in a union	9.42	300
	[9.29,9.54]	[296, 305]
Unions of girls 15-17 that are non-formal	81.88	233
	[81.38,82.36]	[230, 235]

Notes: The percentage of unions that are not formal was estimated with respect to the percentage of girls in the age group who are currently in a union

Numbers in brackets are 95% confidence intervals

Sources: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

As reported in the literature review section in this report, early unions are a concern to those interested in the development of girls. They represent an accelerated transition into roles and responsibilities that girls are not yet mature enough to assume, and they are linked, in many countries, with school dropout and early pregnancies. Being a cross-sectional source with no retrospective questions, the data from the Intercensal Survey 2015 (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015) does not permit the analysis of the concrete causes and consequences of early unions among girls. However, it does allow exploring correlations with several variables that may provide a better picture

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[14] The percentage of girls age 15 to 17 estimated with the 2015 Intercensal Survey is very similar to the one estimated with the 2014 National Demographic Survey (9.42% and 9.54%, respectively). The percent of these unions that is non-formal is almost equal in the two surveys as well: 81.88% and 82.92%.

of the situation of girls who are currently in a union,[15] and the conditions that they are experiencing. These include age difference with their partner; the relationship with their household head,[16] which may indicate whether they are living in their parent's household, with their in-laws, or in a household headed by them or their partner; whether they have had a live birth; and whether they are currently enrolled in school. Indicators in this table are presented for girls 12 to 14 who are currently married, and by several age groupings.

With the objective of analyzing differences in the conditions of girls who entered a union before age 15 and those who entered between ages 15 and 17, we present the indicators for these two groups separately. We also present the indicators for girls who are age 17, as these are the eldest among those who are considered in an early union. In each of these age groups, we divide girls according to the type of union they are currently in, non-formalized vs. marriage, and compare the indicators against those of girls in the same age group who are not in a union.

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[15] According to the Intercensal Survey 2015, only 0.49% of girls age 12 to 17 are separated or divorced (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015).

[16] The Intercensal Survey 2015 captures information of all persons who live in a housing unit, and codifies the relationship of each of these persons with respect to the individual who is classified as the head of the housing unit (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015). This differs from previous household surveys, where the unit of observation was households (defined as a group of individuals who live in the same housing unit and who share a common budget), as there may be more than one household per housing unit.

Table 2.2. Selected indicators of the condition of girls 12 to 17 who are currently in a union, Mexico 2015 (% of girls in each category)

	Not in a union	Marriage	Non-formalized union
Age difference with their partner			
All girls 12 to 17 years old			
5 years or less	N.D.	21.81	20.72
6 to 10 years	N.D.	13.14	13.24
11 years or more	N.D.	65.05	66.04
Girls 12 to 14 years old			
5 years or less	N.D.	15.65	16.54
6 to 10 years	N.D.	12.05	13.76
11 years or more	N.D.	72.30	69.70
Girls 15 to 17 years old			
5 years or less	N.D.	22.51	21.06
6 to 10 years	N.D.	13.27	13.20
11 years or more	N.D.	64.22	65.74
Girls 17 years old			
5 years or less	N.D.	23.61	22.49
6 to 10 years	N.D.	12.64	12.74
11 years or more	N.D.	63.74	64.77
School enrollment			
All girls 12 to 17 years old			
Not enrolled	15.22	82.90	91.85
Enrolled	84.78	17.10	8.15
Girls 12 to 14 years old			
Not enrolled	7.54	40.31	92.19
Enrolled	92.46	59.69	7.81
Girls 15 to 17 years old			
Not enrolled	24.43	87.59	91.82
Enrolled	75.57	12.41	8.18
Girls 17 years old			
Not enrolled	30.23	82.29	91.17
Enrolled	69.77	10.71	8.83

Table 2.2. Selected indicators of the condition of girls 12 to 17 who are currently in a union, Mexico 2015 (% of girls in each category) (cont.)

Fertility

Girls 12 to 17 years old			
Has not had a live birth	99.07	53.85	52.17
Has had at least one live birth	0.93	46.15	47.83
Girls 12 to 14 years old			
Has not had a live birth	99.91	87.06	78.55
Has had at least one live birth	0.09	12.94	21.45
Girls 15 to 17 years old			
Has not had a live birth	98.09	50.58	50.11
Has had at least one live birth	1.91	49.42	49.89
Girls 17 years old			
Has not had a live birth	96.46	43.64	42.07
Has had at least one live birth	3.54	56.36	57.93
Relationship with the head of the housing unit			
Girls 12 to 17 years old			
Head or spouse of the head	0.16	26.15	29.86
Daughter	96.87	27.34	16.82
Daughter in law	N.D.	42.40	48.56
Other	2.93	4.11	4.76
Girls 12 to 14 years old			
Head or spouse of the head	0.08	11.74	20.90
Daughter	97.44	66.10	16.69
Daughter in law	N.D.	19.20	57.34
Other	2.48	2.95	5.07
Girls 15 to 17 years old			
Head or spouse of the head	0.26	27.74	30.57
Daughter	96.19	23.07	16.83
Daughter in law	N.D.	44.96	47.86
Other	3.55	4.24	4.74
Girls 17 years old			
Head or spouse of the head	0.39	30.27	33.88
Daughter	95.54	21.12	16.63
Daughter in law	N.D.	44.57	44.93
Other	4.07	4.04	4.56

Notes: N.D. means Not Defined
Sources: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

As shown in Table 2.2, the majority of girls age 12 to 17 who are currently in a union are at least 6 years younger than their partner. There is no difference, in this respect, between girls who are married or those in a non-formalized union. Among girls in the 12 to 17 age group who are married, 21.81 percent have an age difference of five years or less with their partner, with the partner being older in most of these cases; 13.14 percent are younger than their partner by 6 to 10 years; and 65.05 percent are younger than their partner by 11 years or more. Among girls in the 12 to 17 range who are in a non-formalized union, 20.72 percent have a difference of five years or less with their partner; 13.24 percent are 6 to 10 years younger; and 69.70 percent are at least 11 years younger.

While there are no statistically significant differences in the age difference with their partners by the type of union, marriage vs. non-formalized union, there are notable disparities according to women's age. Younger women are more likely to be linked to older men, than older women. Less than 17 percent of girls 12 to 14 have an age difference of 5 years or less with their partner (15.65 percent among married women, and 16.54 percent among those in a non-formalized union), while about 70 percent are at least 11 years younger than their partner (72.30 percent among the married, and 69.70 percent among the ones in a non-formalized union). Among girls in the 15 to 17 group, 22.51 percent of those who are married and 21.0 percent of those in a non-formalized union, are with a man who is at most 5 years older; 64.22 percent of married women's partners and 69.70 percent of the partners of women in a non-formal union are older than they are by 11 years or more.

A multinomial model confirms the importance of the age differential between a woman and her partner, indicating that the difference in the percentage of girls 12 to 14 and 15 to 17 who are in a union with a man who is at least 11 years older than they are is statistically significant (p<0.001). The same model showed that there are no statistical differences between girls age 12 to 14 and girls age 15 to 17, in the probability of being in a union with someone who is 6 to 10 years older.[17] These results are relevant for at least two reasons. First, Taylor, Lauro, Segundo and Greene (2015) argue that part of the problem with eradicating early unions is that young girls are found very desirable by older men, so efforts to eradicate this practice should also work with men's perceptions of women's sexuality. Second, our results show that this is also the case in Mexico. Less than a fifth of girls 12 to 17 are in a union with a peer, or someone in a five-year age range which can suggest an unequal dynamic in the relationship. Even when women think or argue, as they did in our qualitative study, that they played an equal, active role in the decision to enter an early union, their partner likely had a greater influence since they are older and more apt to be higher educated and have more power and resources. Our results also reveal that this imbalance is even larger among younger women, as they tend to get into unions with much older men.

The second section of Table 2.2 analyzes the relationship between being in an early union, the type of union (marriage vs non-formalized), women's age, and school enrollment. The indicators presented show that in general, early unions are associated with school withdrawal, as girls 12 to 17 who are married and in a non-formalized union are more likely to be unenrolled than women of the same age who are not in a union: 82.90 percent for married women, 91.85 percent for women in a non-formalized union, and 15.22 percent for women who are not in a union[18]. Since the indicators in this Table refer to the status at the time of the interview, it is not possible to conclude which of the two behaviors preceded the other. Table 2.2 also shows that early unions are associated with school

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[17] The results of this model can be seen in detail in Appendix 2.

[18] The difference of each of the two types of unions with respect to women who are not in a union is significant with p<0.001.

dropout, but this effect is larger for women who are in non-formalized unions than for women who are married: 82.90 percent for married women, 91.85 percent for women in a non-formalized union, p<0.001.

An additional finding of Table 2.2 is that school dropout is associated with age. Girls in the 15 to 17 age group are more likely to be unenrolled than girls in the 12 to 14 age group. However, this association does not hold for all women. School unenrollment increases with age for women who are not in a union, and for married women, showing the prevalence of dropout after secondary education. For example, among girls who are not in a union, unenrollment increases from 7.54 percent in the 12 to 14 age group, to 24.43 percent among girls in the 15 to 17 age group. When one focuses on married women, unenrollment changes from 40.31 percent among girls age 12 to 14, to 87.59 percent among girls age 15 to 17. This means that about 60 percent of married women who are secondary school age manage to continue their education. Among those who are of high school age, this percentage is less than 15 percent.

Among women who are in a non-formalized union, school unenrollment is not correlated to age. About nine out of every ten women in a non-formalized union are out of school, and this number is the same, independent of their age group. This result indicates that, for the great majority of girls who are in a non-formalized union, entering an early union implies dropping out of school, even if they have not finished high school. The results also reveal that the disadvantage of early unions for school continuation works differently for girls who get married than for those who do not. Girls who are married are more likely to continue in school than those who are in an informal union. A logistic model that had the odds of being enrolled in school as the dependent variable, and marital status, age group (12-14 and 15-17), and the interaction between these variables as the explanatory factors, confirms that age does not significantly affect the odds of being enrolled for women who are in a non-formalized union, but that they do among married women and those who are not in a union.[19] These differences may be the result, among other things, of their socioeconomic status, place of residence, or the characteristics of the union itself. However, this data does not allow for further exploration of these issues.

Past studies have shown a strong association between teenage pregnancy and early unions, in Mexico as well as in other countries. This connection can be both because teenage girls who are not in a union when they get pregnant, are likely to get married or enter a non-formal union shortly after; and because girls who enter into an early union are more likely to get pregnant than those who are not in a union due to a greater exposure to frequent sexual activity (Jennifer Parsons & Jennifer McCleary-Sills, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015; Guadalupe Fabiola Pérez Baleón, 2014; Adriana Pérez Amador, 2004). The numbers in Table 2.2. refer to the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have had at least one live birth, by marital status and age group. This indicator does not measure the proportion of girls who have ever been pregnant, since not all pregnancies end with a live birth. The results of Table 2.2 show that in 2015 there was still a strong association between teenage pregnancy and early unions. About one in every two girls age 12 to 17 who were married or in a non-

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[19] Appendix 3 shows the detailed results of this model.

formalized union at the time of the Intercensal Survey had experienced at least one live birth. Of girls who were not in a union, only one in every hundred had ever had a live birth.

Only 0.9 percent of girls in the 12 to 14 age group who are not in a union have had a live-birth. This number contrasts with the percentages among married girls and those in a non-formalized union: 12.94 percent among married girls, and 21.45 percent among girls in a non-formalized union. The percentages differ between the three groups analyzed with a p<0.0001.[20] The analysis of this age group implies that, as in the case of school enrollment, girls in the 12 to 15 age group who are in non-formalized unions are especially disadvantaged, if compared against their married and not-in-a-union peers.

Among girls in the 15 to 17 age group, the proportion of girls who have had a live birth is greater than in the 12 to 14 age group, as one would expect based on the effect of age alone. This outcome is noticeable in all three marital status' analyzed. Among girls who are not in a union, the percentage of those who have had a live birth is still negligible at 1.91 percent, but larger than among those in the younger age group. Among married girls, the percentage is 49.42 percent, whereas among in a non-formal union, the percentage is 49.89 percent. These two last percentages do not differ statistically, which implies that the disparities between married and in-a-non-formalized union that are present among younger women level off after age 14.

The analysis of the relationship between fertility and marital status presented in Table 2.2 contributes another important piece of information. Whereas it is true, as the literature indicates, that teenage fertility and early unions are associated (Jennifer Parsons & Jennifer McCleary-Sills, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015; Guadalupe Fabiola Pérez Baleón, 2014; Adriana Pérez Amador, 2004), the percentage of married and in-a-non-formalized-union girls who have not had a live birth indicate that this association is not a perfect correlation. At least 78 percent of girls in the 12 to 14 age group who are in a union, and 50 percent of those in the 15 to 17 age group have never given birth. One implication of these results is that many girls enter an early union not because they are pregnant, but for other reasons.

The last segment of Table 2.2 explores the associations between marital status and the relationship with the head of the household. With the exception of 3 percent of young women who head their own household, or who have another type of relationship, all girls age 12 to 17 who are not in a union, are considered the daughter of the household head. This means that, as is common, they still live with their parents. The living arrangements for married girls and for those who are in a non-formalized union, however, are more diverse. Forty-two percent of married girls, and 48.56 percent of those who are in a non-formalized union, live with their in-laws. [21] Among married girls in the 12 to 17 age group, one in every four is either the head, or the partner of the head of household and 27.34 percent are considered daughters of the household head. The living arrangements of those who are in a non-formalized union are slightly different. Nearly 30 percent are either the head, or partner of the head of household. Only 16.82 percent of these girls are considered

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[20] See the models in Appendix 4 for more details.
[21] These two percentages do not differ statistically, as shown in the models in Appendix 5.

daughters of the head of the household, meaning that they are less likely to stay at their parental home than those who are married (p<0.001).

When one looks at the living arrangements of girls, divided into two age groups, one finds that age makes little difference for girls who are not in a union. Before age 18, almost all women, not in a union, live in the parental home, and this changes only slightly from 97.44 percent for the 12 to 14 age group to 96.19 percent for the 15 to 17 age group.[22] Moving from the 12-14 age group to the 15-17 one, has a larger effect among young women who are married or in a non-formalized union. Among married girls in the 12 to 14 age group, the most common living arrangement, at 66.10 percent, is to be the daughter of the head followed by a 19.20 percent who are daughters-in-law, and 11.74 percent, who are heads of their household or spouses of the head. For the older group, those 15 to 17, 44.96 percent are daughters-in-law of the head (vs 19.20 percent of 12-14 year olds, p<0.0001).[23] Over a quarter, 27.74 percent, are the head or partner of the head (vs. 11.74 percent of 12-14 year olds, p<0.0001), and 23.07 percent are daughters of the head (vs. 66.10 percent of 12-14 year olds, p<0.0001).

The most common living arrangement among girls who are in a non-formalized union and in the 12-14 age group, at 57.34 percent, is to live as the daughter-in-law of the head. The second most common arrangement, at 20.90 percent, is to be the head or spouse of the head, and the third, at only 16.69 percent, is to be the daughter of the head.

Among young women who are in a non-formalized union in the 15 to 17 age group, the most common living arrangement at 47.86 percent is still the daughter-in-law of the head. However, this percentage is smaller (p<0.0001) than the one for the 12 to 14 age group. The second most common living arrangement in this group, at 30.57 percent, is being the head or the partner of the head. Although this is a notable rise in percentage (vs. 20.90 percent for the 12 to 14 group, p<0.0001), it is not surprising since girls in the older age group are more likely to enter a relationship with a slightly older partner, who may have more resources to set up their own house. It may also be, due to the nature of cross-sectional data, that these young women have been in the relationship for a longer period of time, and consequently have had more time to become independent as a couple. The percentage of girls 15 to 17 who are in a non-formalized union and live in their parental home, at 16.83 percent, is not significantly different from the percentage among those in the 12 to 14 age group (16.69 percent, p<0.781).

This analysis of the effect of age group in the living arrangements of girls in early unions shows that the most common pattern is to live in the house of their partners' parents. There may be several reasons for this, including the link between early unions and low socioeconomic status, which has been noticed by other authors (Mier and Terán, 2004). It

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[22]A bivariate logistic model indicates that being in the 15 to 17 age group, as opposed to the 12 to 14 age group, decreases the odds of being a daughter of the household head (vs. having any other living arrangement) by 30% (p<0.0001). Even when statistically significant and apparently large, this effect is in the odds, and makes little difference in actual percentages, especially this high. The significance of this effect is also due to the large number of women who are not in a union (more than one million).

[23] The models that sustain these p-values can be found in Appendix 6.

may additionally be due to the young age and lack of economic resources of the couple, which renders them unable to guarantee a space of their own. Social norms, identifying men as the main provider, could also play a role. In the absence of economic resources, and with the male responsible for the new couple, it may be preferred that they live with his parents rather than hers.

Our quantitative analysis does not allow for the identification of which factor plays a stronger role in explaining any differences, nor how the living arrangements affect the girl's situation and negotiating power within the household. However, one can expect to find that girls in early unions who live with her parents face less discrimination and may have more resources to defend themselves than those who live in the house of her partners' parents. The in-depth interviews conducted as a part of this study confirm this, as shown in Box 2.1.

The analysis of living arrangements, type of early union and age group also serves to confirm that, among girls who are younger than 18, those who are married and those who are in a non-formalized union are two distinct groups, have different living conditions, and face different vulnerabilities. There are two particular findings important to highlight. The first is that there may be some family mechanisms that protect girls who get married before age 15, as opposed to those who enter into a non-formalized union. This is the group where living as a daughter of the head is most frequent, and as mentioned above and in Box 2.1. below, those who still live with their family after their union may be more protected than those who live with their in-laws.[24] The second finding further supports the claim that those who are in a non-formalized union and in the 12 to 14 age group, are the most likely to live in a situation of extreme vulnerability. In this case in particular, we show that these girls are the ones who are more likely to move with their partners' parents.

In sum, the analysis of Table 2.2 shows that girls in the 12 to 17 age group who are married or on a non-formalized union are in a more disadvantaged situation, when compared to their not-in-a-union peers. They are more likely to have dropped out of school, to have had at least one live birth, and less likely to live with their parents or in their own home. These disadvantages are larger for girls in a non-formalized union and are the most severe for girls in the 12 to 14 age group.

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[24] It is important to highlight that with this, we do not intend to mean that women who get married very early are a privileged group. We recognize that, compared with women in the same age group who are not in a union, these women are disadvantaged. However, their vulnerabilities are less than those faced by women who are in a non-formalized union.

Box 2.1. There are many factors that affect the living arrangements of girls in an early union

For this project, we conducted 17 in-depth interviews with women in the 15 to 25 age range who had entered a union before they turned 18. These are in no-way representative of all young women in Mexico, but they offer some variation in socioeconomic characteristics, place of residence, and indigenous origin, which allows us to capture a snapshot of the diversity of circumstance in the country.[25] [26] This diversity is particularly important in providing an accurate portrayal of the ways women experience early unions in Mexico and insight into the various influences at play in explaining their living arrangements after the union. Of the 17 women we interviewed, 13 had moved in with her partner's parents right after they started their union and, one of them had subsequently moved, along with her partner, to her parents' home. An additional two lived with other family members of their partners - one with the grandparents, and one with the sister. Three moved in with her parents at the start of the relationship. The 3:1 ratio of women who lived with their parents, to those who lived with in-laws, is not very different from what we found in our analysis of the 2015 Intercensal Survey (see Table 2.2).

We did not find among our interviewees any women who lived in a separate household with her partner and new family. This may be because moving to a separate household takes time and monetary resources that the women we interviewed did not have, although many spoke of this as a goal. A second explanation may be that those who live in a separate household have partners that are much older than them, and therefore may have greater monetary resources. Most of our interviewees' partners were close to their age. A third and final explanation, is that the Intercensal Survey had different household classifications. A survey interviewer may have considered the separate room, or section of the living quarters the young couple lived in, as an independent household while we identified this situation as housesharing with parents (see Box 2.2 for our description of what it means to live in the parental home).

Our interviews do not provide enough information to fully understand what causes some new couples to move in with her parents, and some to move in with his parents, particularly because we have a very small number of women living at their parental home. However, the results do illustrate both commonalities and subtle differences in the processes that will be further explained in the next two boxes.

We focused part of our qualitative study in Del Nayar, a municipality in Nayarit where 86 percent of the population age 5- or older speaks an indigenous language, mostly Cora or Huichol (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015), because our analysis of the Intercensal Survey 2015 indicated that this is the region, at 13. 5 percent, with the highest concentration of girls 12 to 17 who had been in a union.

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[25] More information about the methodology of the qualitative component of this study, of the characteristics of the women interviewed, and the mechanisms that were used to select these women can be found in Appendix 6. Additionally, Appendix 7 presents a summary of the characteristics of the women interviewed in this study, and their unions.
[26] An important limitation of our interviews is that we did not talk to women who did not enter a union before age 18.

Among the Huichola and Cora women in this municipality, moving in with the family of her new partner is natural, given the way they start the union. Courtship and dating is not something known in these communities. The longest these women had known their partners before moving in with them was eight months, and some had only known them for two weeks. Most commonly, they met in the park, and started talking. Some also met at school, but this did not make their courtship period any longer. In all but one case, their partners began asking them to move in with them within weeks of having met. Women saw this as a romantic gesture. Four of the women we talked to mentioned that their boyfriends had convinced them to move in with them promising them happiness and a new life. As Veronica,[27] a woman who had moved in with her boyfriend at 14 after having known for eight months, mentioned, "*They start talking to you nicely, and they trick you into moving in with them.*" These feelings were mirrored by those of Rafaela, of the same municipality, who moved in with her partner at 13, three months after they met, "*He convinced me to go with him, and I thought I'd be happy.*" It is important to mention here that, although this pattern seems to leave all the control and the decision making to the men, this is not the case.

Two clarifications are important to note. The first one is that women also participate in the decision by choosing to leave with their boyfriends. Their choice can be the result of different factors, such as the desire to escape from problems at home (e.g., violence or economic restrictions), the wish to practice their sexuality legitimately, and the influence of social norms and expectations. Indeed, social norms and expectations are key for understanding both why men are so eager to secure a young woman to live with, and why women accept their offer to run away with them at such a young age.

The comments of Lina Berrio, one of the experts on adolescence that we talked to during our interviews, are very important to better understand this. Lina has worked extensively with indigenous adolescents in Guerrero, and she concurred with our observations in Estado de México and Nayarit. She explained that this behavior is shaped by social expectations regarding transitions to adulthood. For both men and women, becoming an adult implies having a partner, having sex, having a child. These three transitions, which do not always occur in the same order, are closely linked and commonly occur, according to Lina, in a one-year period. In addition, men's transitions include quitting school, becoming economically active, and having a place of their own (Berrio, 2016). In the case of women, their acceptance of moving in with their partner is influenced by the importance society places on marriage (or being someone's woman), and maternity.

The only woman we interviewed in Del Nayar who continued living with her parents and not with her in-laws after cohabitation started, was an outlier. Sandra was the daughter of a female elementary schoolteacher, whose indigenous background and identity was not very strong. She started cohabiting with her then boyfriend, who she met at school when they both were 12, because she got pregnant seven months into the relationship. Unlike the other women we interviewed in the municipality, he did not ask her to move in with him so they could start a formal relationship. Moving in with her parents made sense, since they were more educated that the rest of the community, she was pregnant, and her parents were willing to support her.

In addition to conversing with the women in Del Nayar, we talked with four government officials who are well acquainted with the community and the problems facing local youth.

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[27] Names have been changed to protect the identity of our interviewees

These included the municipal secretary, the person responsible for the Government Office of the Development of the Family (DIF, according to its Spanish acronym), the under director of one of the local secondary schools, and the person in charge of the Antenatal Care Clinic. When we asked them about the speedy courtship process among indigenous women in the community, they all mentioned that this was perceived as normal, although not morally sanctioned. They also explained that men often got into a relationship with the first woman they met as a way of securing a partner and ensuring that they were her first. One of them even ventured to say that, given this dynamic, couples who got together later in life had more difficulties than those who started during puberty and adolescence because they had to contend with jealousies over their partner's past.

Unexpectedly, "running away" with a boyfriend was another way of entering into an early union that led to the newly formed couple living with the parents of the man. This behavior was observed in three different cases, two women living in marginal urban areas in Mexico City and Tabasco, and a woman in the rural community we visited in Estado de México.[28] In all these occasions, women went out with their then boyfriend for a date. While out, he asked them to stay longer than planned, or not to return to their home. After the women in our study accepted, they felt they had no way to go back to their house, and instead, they moved in with their boyfriend.

The best illustration of this is the case of Brenda, a woman we interviewed in Estado de México. She was 15 and had been going on and off with her boyfriend for four years. One day they started fooling around and ended up spending the whole night together in a motel. This was not the first time they had sex. Indeed, earlier the same year, she had gotten pregnant, and her mother had forced her to have an abortion. What was different, was that this was the first time she had spent the whole night outside of her house; that running away with her boyfriend was totally unplanned and impulsive, and that they did not think of the consequences before acting; and that in the aftermath of her night out, she and her boyfriend decided that what they had done was too serious for her to go back to her mother's place. This whole process can be seen in Brenda's own words:

BRENDA: He challenged me to go out him. I thought that he was only bluffing. Then one day, I went to buy bread, I ran into him, and he started asking me to go out with him again. We started teasing each other, "Do you want to bet you won't go out with me?" … "Do you want to bet I will?" and then we saw a bus in the street, and he said "Let's go!" We both jumped in and we went to a hotel in Indios Verdes.[29] Then I said "Fuck, what have I done?" Shortly thereafter, my phone started ringing and I did not answer. My mother says that she even went looking for me in the neighborhood.

INTERVIEWER: And then you got into the bus. It was nighttime and you went to spend the night in a hotel. What did you think would happen? That it was only a night, and then you would go back to your house?

BRENDA: Well, no. That day he told me that we should move in together, and I said that that was okay. Then we both thought about what we had done, he said that we should start our own life and I said okay. When he got home the next day, he told his parents that he had stolen

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[28] Appendix 6 describes the communities where we conducted the in-depth interviews
[29] Indios Verdes is a subway station in the northern part of Mexico City. This station is a hub for local and interstate public transportation.

me, and that I could not go back to my mother's house. My mother stopped talking to me for more than a year. She did not allow me to get the things I had in her house. I could not get a single one.

Something similar happened to Yolanda, a woman from the rural community we visited in Estado de México. She met her partner, Pablo, when she was 17. He did not live in the same community, but visited frequently because he was a baker and sold his merchandise from house to house. Yolanda's mother was a regular client, which gave him an opportunity to flirt with Yolanda frequently. One day he invited her to a party at his house. The rural community where Yolanda lives is about 27 miles from Pablo's home, but more than the distance, the last 8 miles are not paved, which further divides the two communities and increases the time it takes to travel between them. Yolanda went to the party, and once there, he asked her to stay with him. She says it all happened "very fast," as they were at the party when he suggested they should stay together. She did not think much of it, and accepted.

In Tabasco, we found an extreme case of the "running away with the boyfriend" explanation, but in this instance, it was the mother, and not the woman, who decided that she should not return to her home. Dafne was 16 when she went to the movies after school one day with her classmate, Juan. They were not a couple at the time. When she returned home, her mother did not let her in. She told Dafne that she was sure she had been out, behaving like a whore and having sexual relations. Despite Dafne's denial of those accusations, her mother did not believe her. Dafne then went to her aunt's, who lived nearby, but her aunt rejected her as well, claiming that she would not bypass her mother's authority. Having nowhere to go and no place to spend the night, Dafne called Juan, who took her to his parents' house. A few days later, Dafne's mother came to search for her at Juan's, demanding that they marry. Once again, Dafne did not want to do so, but she, Juan, and his parents could not fight against her mother's insistence. Dafne's recounting of these events provide a very poignant picture of how her mother forced her out of the house based on false claims and how she felt about getting into a union she did not want:

"In a certain way, my mother threw me out of my house. I did not want to go with him, but I felt forced. My mother did not love him. I thought it was forever. We went to the movies together, my mother scolded me, and he told me to go with him. Nobody else showed support. I went to see my aunt, and she did not even open the door."

Through our interviews, we identified another motivation for moving in with the parents of the man in the union, instead of with those of the woman - when the woman wants to escape problems at home. The testimonies of Teresa and Ofelia, two women we interviewed in Tabasco, are perfect examples of this.

Teresa was 17 when she went away with Tavo, whom she met at school and had been going out with for three months. When asked why she left with him, she explained that she had many problems at home. Her parents were too restrictive, constantly reprimanded her and put a lot of pressure on her. As a consequence, they were constantly fighting. Then came Tavo, who she was infatuated with and who offered his support.

Ofelia also had several problems at home when she moved in with Oscar and his family at age 14. Her mother abandoned her when she was only a child, and her father was always absent. As a result, she moved constantly from the house of one relative to another. She

lived with her grandmother for some time, but always felt that she did not have a family and that she did not truly belong there. That is when she met Oscar. He was her grandmother's neighbor, only one year older than she was, and they became friends. She explains that they trusted and supported each other initially, they talked a lot, and he treated her kindly. This led her to sleep with him, and to move in with his family.

It is important to acknowledge the conflicts that Teresa and Ofelia were experiencing at home to understand how these cases are different from those where the man simply asked his partner to move in with him. In these two cases, it was the men who made the offer, which may have had romantic undertones, but what ultimately triggered their actions (and their partners' responses), was that the women were unhappy with their family.

The final reason we found for women moving in with their partners' parents, is pregnancy. When the woman becomes pregnant, he offers to be responsible for her and the baby, and has the family and economic resources to do so. The cases of Arcelia, in an urban community in Estado de México, Elsa in Tabasco, and María in Nayarit, all fall into this category. Arcelia got pregnant by her secondary school boyfriend, her classmate, at age 15. When she told him that she was pregnant, he immediately responded in a positive way, claiming that he would take care of her and their baby. He later organized a meeting with both their parents, where his family assured Arcelia's parents that they wanted her in the family and asked for her to come live with them.

Both Elsa and Eduardo, her partner, live in a fringe area of a medium-sized city in Tabasco. They met at church when he was 15 and she was 14, and dated for a year and a half before she got pregnant. When they became aware of this situation, Eduardo, who still loves and protects Elsa very much, asked her to come live with him. They talked to Elsa's parents, who accepted the union, and took Elsa to his parents' house. He quit school and started working as a street vendor to pay for her expenses and those of their baby.

The story of María in Nayarit is very similar to that of Arcelia and Elsa. María became pregnant by her high school boyfriend, Mario and moved to his parents' house. María explained that Mario has always been, "a very nice man, very responsible" and that he, "supported her and her baby financially." He immediately took responsibility for the baby, even though he initially became angry with the news of her pregnancy. Nowadays, he is very happy with his family, which includes María and two children. María and Mario, of all the couples we interviewed, are the only ones who now live in their own home.

Above, we mentioned that during our interviews we found two women who remained at their parents' place after they started cohabiting. We already described Sandra's case in Nayarit. The other woman who remained in her parents' home, Patricia, is from a rural community in Estado de México. Patricia shares with Sandra two traits that distinguish them from all other women in their local context: 1) they started living with their partner because they got pregnant; and 2) relative to those of other women in their community, their parents are particularly well-educated and affluent.

As mentioned above, Sandra's mother in Del Nayar was a school teacher, and their house was the prettiest in town. Patricia was also the daughter of the richest family in a small community of no more than 3,500 people. Her father was an independent entrepreneur, who had both a clothing store and an office supply shop at home, and who sold fashionwear in a market in the capital city. These jobs may not seem overly qualified, but they provide

the family with comfortable living conditions. Their house was the largest and nicest in town. In an area with no paved roads, and where houses are scattered through the field, commonly one-story, and built of mud or cinder blocks, Patricia's house clearly stood out. It was next to the highway, fenced, surrounded by a large garden that was perfectly kept, built of red brick and had two stories. Had it not been for the fact that the back door of the house led to a dirt road, this house and its upholstered interior could have easily been found in a middle-class neighborhood anywhere in Mexico.

Box 2.2. Early unions: What does it mean to live with his or her parents, in terms of living conditions?

Approximately one in every two girls, age 12 to 17 who are currently in a union, live with the parents of her partner (see Table 2.2). During our in-depth interviews, we found this pattern to be the most prominent among our interviewees. Twelve out of the seventeen women we talked to had lived with their in-laws at some point in the relationship (we are not including in this number, one woman who lived with a sister-in-law and another who lived with his grandparents). In this section, we describe the living conditions of the women we interviewed. Our objective was to gain a more practical idea of what it is like for these women to live with their in-laws and to better understand the place they occupy in these households. We decided to highlight Brenda, who lives in an urban community in the extended Metropolitan Area of Mexico City, and Monica, who lives in a rural community in Estado de México, because these two cases summarize perfectly the different conditions we found when interviewing the other women.

Brenda lives in one of the most populated and violent areas in the country. More than a million people live in this municipality in the northeast of Estado de Mexico. To get there from Mexico City using public transportation, one has to travel to the northern part of the city, and then take an interstate bus that travels about an hour. Still, this area is highly urbanized and very integrated to Mexico City. The majority of the people living there commute to work in town every day.

The house where Brenda lives is in the last street of a neighborhood that is on the extreme outskirts of the inhabited area of the municipality. At the end of her street, which is paved, there are a couple of houses, a dirt road and nothing else. Behind Brenda's house is an open field. From the outside, the house is a two-story building that appears to be a single-family dwelling. Built of solid blocks and plaster and painted a bright color, the only thing that sets it apart from a house one would find in a middle-class neighborhood, is that instead of glass, some of the windows are covered with plastic, and some are only open holes. The inside, however, is another story. The two floors of the house are built around what was intended to be a garage, but is instead being used to collect water deposits and hold several old, useless electric appliances. Every room in the house is built with unplastered and unpainted cinder block. There are no doors, and the two floors are linked by a very thin, exterior, non-railed stairway. The second- floor hallway has no railing and is a mere 70 centimeters wide. With its uncovered windows, rooms without doors, and unpainted walls the house gives the overall impression of unfinished construction.

When one enters the property, directly to the right is the only bathroom in the house. It holds a toilet and a shower with no shower curtain. There is no sink. The toilet is not connected directly to the water supply nor to the sewage system, and one has to carry a bucket of water to use it. Each room that surrounds the garage is used as an individual household unit for a family with a mother, a father, 2 or 3 children and sometimes others. The largest space belongs to Brenda's in-laws, who own the whole house. When entering their area, one finds four separate rooms, all connected by arches instead of doors. One of these spaces is a kitchen, with a stove and an open space to store the pots. There is no fridge or sink. The second and largest room is the common area, where there is a wooden dining set that seats 6 people. The china cabinet is full of old porcelain figurines and mementos from christenings, quinceañeras and soccer tournaments. This is the only evidence of luxury in the house. Next to the dining set is a full-size mattress, covered in bedding made of synthetic fabrics that resemble animal skins. This area leads to two additional rooms used as sleeping quarters, one next to the dining area, and one next to the mattress. Brenda's in-laws sleep in the one next to the dining area, the only space that has a door, albeit a glass one, for privacy. The second room is occupied by Brenda's sister in-law, her partner, and two toddlers.

Brenda and her partner Beto slept on the mattress that is next to the dining area for quite a while, but four years ago Beto helped his father pay to finish one of the spaces on the second floor and they have lived there ever since. Their area has two rooms, one that has a large kitchen with cheap furniture, a fridge and a table with two chairs. The second room has one plastic chair, a chest and a full-sized mattress where Beto and Brenda sleep with their two children an 8-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl. Two years ago, Beto installed a kitchen, the newest addition to their space. Before that, they did not have a separate stove, so Brenda had to spend part of the day downstairs, using her mother-in-law's. Since she now has a separate, full kitchen, she seldom leaves her space.

We want to use the above description to make the following points: Sometimes it is difficult to make a clear distinction between a separate house, a household, and other forms of cohabitation with an extended family. This may affect the way that surveys classify living quarters, households, and families. Indicators based on these surveys may not be consistent, since each interviewer could classify women in similar conditions, differently. These indicators also cannot capture the nuances of living on a shared property, and how this shapes the interaction between the woman and her in-laws, even when the couple has a separate living space.

Brenda, for example, has gone through three different forms of cohabitation with her in-laws in the nine years that she has lived with Beto. Each circumstance has been marked with different degrees of conviviality. When they slept in the bed next to Beto's parents dining set, Brenda had to spend most of the day with her mother-in-law. She shared her kitchen, her dining space, and saw her repeatedly, as either woman moved around the house. This changed substantially when Beto and Brenda moved upstairs. In this circumstance, Brenda did not have to see her mother-in-law all the time, but she still had to ask to use her stove and to coordinate with her to do so. This certainly made Brenda's mother-in-law more powerful than Brenda, as she had something that Brenda did not, the stove, and was a constant reminder that Brenda was living on her property. Having a separate kitchen gave Brenda a lot more independence. She does not have to deal with her mother-in-law as much as she did before, but she is still not completely the owner of her space, nor free of interaction with the extended family. They must organize use of the one

shared bathroom and Brenda has to work out a schedule with the rest of the women living on the property when she wants to wash clothes. In these negotiations, Brenda's mother-in-law has the last word, and is considered the owner of everything.

Monica, the next woman we interviewed, lives in circumstances similar to Brenda although instead of an urbanized area, she lives in a small rural community in Estado de México. She moved there from Veracruz, following her boyfriend, Manuel, who she met working on a plantation. They live with Manuel's parents, who also shelter two of Manuel's grown brothers, his sister, their partners, and three other younger siblings. The rural community where Monica and Manuel live is classified as highly marginalized by the Ministry of Social Development ("Datos Generales", s/f). In 2015, it had approximately 3,600 inhabitants, distributed throughout approximately 650 households. The community is divided by a paved road which connects two, medium-sized cities nearby, but the rest of the roads are all dirt and the houses are scattered in a vast open field.

The house where Monica and Manuel live is one of the poorest in the community. Some of its walls are only compressed earth blocks piled chaotically, with no material holding them together. Others are made of cardboard or plastic. Its ceilings are large plastic sheets, kept in place with raw logs and ropes, and the floors are all dirt. They do not have electricity, gas, or a proper bathroom. The property is comprised of 3 separate rooms, all built in the same fashion. One is the kitchen and sleeping quarters for three families. The kitchen is nothing more than a bonfire that is lit early in the morning and kept going until late at night. All the women in the property use the same fire to cook, but they prepare different meals, each cooking for their own family. The second room is also a dormitory but holds cots and palm mats, no beds. The third room is the pigsty and barn. On the back of one of these rooms is a large bucket that serves as a sink, and a semi covered area that is used as a shower. Since there is no running water, baths are taken with a bucket of water, warmed directly in the fire. There is no toilet, so when people in the household need to, they go directly in the woods.

This building is next to a very large cornfield that belongs to and is tended by the family. On the opposite side of this field, there is another building, similar in structure, but smaller in size. This is where Mario's eldest sibling lives with his wife and three children. The room is large enough so that a fire is lit inside, and therefore, the partner of Mario's brother does not have to cook with all the other women. When we interviewed Monica, she explained that Mario's parents are the owners of a very vast piece of land, and that they expect each of their sons to build their own, separate, house on the property. She also mentioned that, even though she and Mario know that they can take advantage of the land at any time, they have not had the money to get the building materials.

When we interviewed Monica, she explained that Mario's parents are the owners of a vast piece of land, and that they expect that each one of their sons build their own, separate, house on the property. She also mentioned that, even when she and Mario know that they can use the land at any time, they have not had the money to get the building materials.

The results of Table 2.2 hint at the nuanced diversity of the conditions of girls entering an early union. It also indicates that this heterogeneity may be associated with the living situations that women find themselves in after their union. However, one limitation of Table 2.2 is that at most, it shows bivariate associations. To solve this problem and to

better understand how girls' situations at the start of an early union relate to their circumstance afterward, we identified groups of young women according to the three variables the 2015 Intercensal Survey (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015) uses to categorize girls' early unions: 1) girls' age, divided into 12-14 and 15-17 age groups;[30] 2) whether the union is non-formalized or a marriage; and 3) the age difference between the girl and her partner, divided into three groups, less than 6 years, 6 to 10 years, and more than 11 years[31]. Based on the combination of these three variables, there are 12 categories of early unions. Table 2.3 shows the relative commonness of each of these groups.[32]

Table 2.3. Percentage distribution of girls age 12-17 in an early union, by characteristics of the union. Mexico, 2015

Age group	Non-formalized union or marriage	Age difference with partner	Percentage of cases
12-14	Marriage	5 years or less	0.30
12-14	Marriage	6 to 10 years	0.22
12-14	Marriage	11 years or more	1.34
12-14	Non-formalized	5 years or less	0.97
12-14	Non-formalized	6 to 10 years	0.96
12-14	Non-formalized	11 years or more	4.18
15-17	Marriage	5 years or less	3.76
15-17	Marriage	6 to 10 years	2.28
15-17	Marriage	11 years or more	10.38
15-17	Non-formalized	5 years or less	15.61
15-17	Non-formalized	6 to 10 years	10.99
15-17	Non-formalized	11 years or more	49.01

Notes: The percentage of cases refers to girls in the 12-17 age group who are currently in a union
Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

Being a combination of some of the characteristics of the unions described above, Table 2.3.

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[30] In a strict sense, this variable does not represent the women's condition at the time of the union because it refers to current age. It may be the case that girls who are in the 15-17 age group entered the union before age 14. However, as Table 2.2 shows, the percentage of girls in the 12-14 age group who are in a union is small, so one can expect that to be an exception. Consequently, this variable helps to distinguish those women in a very early union.

[31] We classified the age difference between the woman and her partner in these three groups because this distinction is theoretically significant, and because it facilitates the distinction of groups.

[32] There are different statistical techniques that are useful to classify individuals in groups or clusters, such as cluster analysis and latent class analysis. We tested different clustering techniques (varying for example, the definition of the distance used between the various variables). However, we decided to construct these groups manually, as the result of the combination of the different categorical variables mentioned above. This decision is based on the fact that cluster analysis techniques that work with categorical variables (e.g. Jaccard) end up identifying the combination of responses that individuals have in common, which is similar to making cross tabulations of any two variables and combining these results. With the exception of the age difference between partners, which was originally continuous, all our other variables are categorical. In the end we classified the age difference between partners in three groups, because even when one loses information on the variability of this factor with this classification, the classification guarantees that the groups distinguish between small, large and very large differences. In addition, leaving the variable in continuous terms dominated the definition of clusters with cluster analysis and produced an unmanageable number of groupings. The number of clusters that were being produced, and the logic that the characteristics of the union influenced the living conditions was the reason for only including age, age differences between partners and type of early union in the clusters.

confirms that the most common in our study population are those who are 15 to 17, in a non-formalized union, and live with a partner that is at least 11 years older than they are. This group represents 49 percent of all girls 12 to 17 who are currently in a union. The second most common group are girls 15 to 17, who are in a non-formalized union and have an age difference of 5 years or less with their partner. This group represents 15.61 percent of all girls 12 to 17 who are in a union. Groups that include girls who are 12 to 14 are much less frequent, and since most of them are in a non-formalized union, the groups of those who are married, represent less than 1.5 percent each. Married girls 12 to 14 who have an age difference with their partner of less than 6 years, represent 0.30 percent of girls 12 to 17 who are in a union; those who have an age difference of 6 to 10 years, represent 0.22 percent; and those who have an age difference of 11 years or more, represent 1.34 percent.[33]

In addition to showing the relative importance of each of these categories, we formed these groups to analyze if they are associated with the current circumstances of these women. We do this as a way of assessing whether certain groups pose particular risks or disadvantages for young women in terms of their school continuation, beginning their reproductive behavior early (measured above by a variable that indicates whether they have ever had a live birth), and their living arrangements. Table 2.4 summarizes the results of our analyses.

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[33] Looking at the raw unweighted numbers in these categories, to have an idea of whether there are sufficient cases for analysis, one finds more than 160 cases in each category. Because we consider it important to analyze the combined effect of age, age difference with the partner, and type of union, we left these categories intact in our analysis at the national level. Nonetheless, at the state and regional level, we combined all women 12 to 14 in one group.

Table 2.4. Current situation of girls 12-17 years old in an early union, by characteristics of the union. Mexico 2015

Characteristics of the union	Current school attendance		Children ever born		Relationship with the head of the housing unit			
	No	Yes	None	At least one	Head or spouse	Daughter	In-law	Other
12-14 y.o., married, age difference w/partner ≥5 years	38.01	61.99	92.42	7.58	7.24	70.14	20.81	1.81
12-14 y.o., married, age difference w/partner 6-10 years	55.21	44.79	84.25	15.75	12.20	48.78	32.32	6.71
12-14 y.o., married, age difference w/partner >11 years	37.54	62.46	86.59	13.41	13.37	66.36	17.59	2.67
12-14 y.o., non-formalized, age difference w/partner ≥5 years	91.91	8.09	79.37	20.63	21.14	15.86	57.14	5.86
12-14 y.o., non-formalized, age difference w/partner 6-10 years	93.71	6.29	76.73	23.27	23.89	13.02	58.94	4.15
12-14 y.o., non-formalized, age difference w/partner >11 years	92.13	7.87	79.25	20.75	21.17	14.44	59.18	5.21
12-14 y.o. not in a union (for comparison)	7.54	92.46	99.01	0.09	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
15-17 y.o., married, age difference w/partner ≥5 years	88.42	11.58	52.54	47.46	24.81	20.11	50.20	4.88
15-17 y.o., married, age difference w/partner 6-10 years	88.85	11.15	49.75	50.25	34.7	15.27	46.41	3.62
15-17 y.o., married, age difference w/partner >11 years	87.43	12.57	49.92	50.08	30.09	19.21	46.59	4.11
15-17 y.o., non-formalized, age difference w/partner ≥5 years	92.86	7.14	50.45	49.55	31.71	13.38	50.33	4.57
15-17 y.o., non-formalized, age difference w/partner 6-10 years	93.24	6.76	48.88	51.12	35.55	13.06	47.19	4.2
15-17 y.o., non-formalized, age difference w/partner >11 years	91.69	8.31	51.03	48.97	31.30	14.32	49.52	4.86
15-17 y.o. not in a union (for comparison)	24.43	75.57	98.09	1.91	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

Notes: The shaded cells indicate what we perceive to be particular vulnerabilities. These are associated with a p<0.05 with the cluster variable.
We use two different tones of shading, to indicate different levels of association. For example, the light shade in the column "Children ever born" indicates that the odds of having a child ever born in those categories is greater than that among married girls age 12-14, but is also less than the odds of having had a child among women who are 15 or older. These shadings come from the logistic and multinomial models in Appendix 12
N.A. stands for Not Applicable
Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

As mentioned above, early unions are strongly associated with school dropout and teenage pregnancy. Table 2.4 confirms these results, showing that, despite age and the characteristics of the union, all girls who are in an early union are more likely to have dropped out of school and to have ever had a child than girls in their same age group who are not in a union. Nonetheless, Table 2.4. also shows that these disadvantages are larger for girls in the 12 to 14 age group who are in a non-formalized union, and for those in the 15 to 17 age group, independently of whether they are married or in a non-formalized union. Girls in the 12 to 14 age group who are married are more likely to be out of school and to have had a child than girls in the same group who are not in a union, but of all the analyzed groups of women, they are the least likely to exhibit these behaviors. For example, 38 percent of girls age 12 to 14, who are married to a man who is less than 6 years older than them, are out of school. Among girls in the same age group who are in a non-formalized union with a man who is less than 6 years older than them, this percentage is 91.91 percent. Something similar happens when one compares the percentage of these girls who have already had a child. For those who are married, the percentage is 7.6. For those in a non-formalized union, that number rises to 20.6 percent.

In addition, the columns regarding the relationship with the head of the living quarters also show that girls 12 to 14 who are married are also more likely to continue living with their parents after they enter a union than all other girls in a union. On the contrary, girls in the 12 to 14 age group who are in non-formalized unions, and those in the 15 to 17 age group, independently of the type of union they are in, are more likely to live with their in-laws, which naturally presents some disadvantages.

The advantages of married girls in the 12 to 14 age group may be the result of several factors, including among others, socioeconomic differentials, the status that comes with a marriage (as opposed to a non-formalized union), the legal protection and knowledge that young women have legitimate standing in case of a problem, and the support from their families, who may have backed their union.[34] It may also be the case that these advantages are only superficial and are neutralized by drawbacks these numbers are not showing. For instance, very early marriages may be more likely to be explained by a forced marriage, and women within these unions may be particularly powerless when negotiating household decisions with their partners. Our analysis does not allow for the identification of the factors behind these apparent advantages.[35]

Another important implication of the numbers in Table 2.4. is that, at least for school attendance, birth of a first child, and living arrangements, the age difference

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[34] In most states girls who marry before age 18, but especially before age 15, need parental permission to do so.
[35] Although not directly related to married girls in the 12 to 14 age group, one of our results from the qualitative component of this study may help to understand one of the factors behind the relative advantages of this group. As Box 2.3. states, we found that women whose union was backed by their parents, even if they were originally mad, were more likely to be happy in their unions and to deal with potential problems than women who were not supported by their parents.

between a woman in an early union and her partner is not as important as the woman's age and whether the union has been formalized through a marriage or not. When one restricts the comparison to girls in the same age group (12 to 14, or 15 to 17), and type of union (non-formalized, or marriage), the disparities between girls who have a partner who is less than 6 years older, those whose partner is between 6 and 10 years older, and those whose partner is 11 years older or more are not significant ($p > 0.05$).[36] [37]

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Box 2.3. Parental support is key to help girls in early unions cope with the disadvantages that an early union may bring

Most of the parents of the girls we interviewed were upset or disappointed when they first learned that their daughter had moved in with their partner, or that she was about to do so. Some of them changed their mind afterwards, especially after confirming that the man their daughter was moving in with was willing to work and be a breadwinner. In some instances, pregnancies and the growing expectation of a grandchild were also key to softening the parents. For example, Patricia, a 15-year-old woman in a rural community in Estado de México, got pregnant during the last year of secondary school. When she informed her parents, they were very sad and reprimanded her strongly because they had expected her to follow her sister's steps and continue her high school education. They are the wealthiest family in the community and pride themselves in encouraging their daughters to be modern women. Nevertheless, after she showed them her baby's first ultrasound, everything changed. They switched their priorities from being angry, to being protective.

Nowadays, she and Paco, her boyfriend, live with her parents, and they pay all her medical expenses. Their parental support goes beyond having a place to live and any financial assistance they may provide. Since Patricia is very young and has being diagnosed with a high-risk pregnancy, her mother cooks for her and Paco, cleans her room and does her laundry. Furthermore, Paco now works with his father in-law who is a business man. This has been a great help to both Patricia and Paco because it has meant a significant increase in opportunity for Paco. He dropped out of secondary school when he started drinking heavily and running with a bad crowd. When Patricia got pregnant, he was employed as a construction worker, but the work was unstable and the wages bad. Now, he makes a good living accompanying Patricia's father selling clothes in the communities nearby. Working with Patricia's father has also helped Paco gain his in-laws trust.

It is partly because of the positive turns that her life has taken after her parents came to terms with her and Paco - feeling secure and protected in the event of a medical emergency, having a safe and loving home environment, enjoying freedom from monetary concerns, and perceiving a more positive and responsible attitude in Paco - that Patricia expresses her satisfaction and happiness with her current life. One can expect her pregnancy to play a role in this happiness as well.

The story of Rosa, in Nayarit, is another example of how parental support is necessary to help women deal with the obstacles that may arise from an early union. Rosa met Ricardo,

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[36] See Appendix 12.

[37] This result also needs to be further explored with a more detailed statistical analysis.

her former partner, at a party when she was 12. After their original encounter, they started seeing other in the plaza in the afternoons. They would talk and flirt with each other, but their relationship was not physical. Two months after they met, Ricardo told her that they

should run away together, and she agreed. Spending the first night at the house of Ricardo's parents sealed their union for the community. When Rosa went back to get her things from her parents' house, they were furious, but they ended up accepting the relationship.

Soon after moving in with Ricardo, they started having problems. He angered easily, drank a lot, and cheated on her with women in nearby communities. Moreover, he was very violent. He insulted her, screamed at her and punched her frequently. He abused Rosa so badly, that she is missing her four upper front teeth. Despite being miserable and living in fear, Rosa remained with him for several years and had two children. She thought about moving away but feared Ricardo's reaction and community gossip. Luckily for her, Ricardo went to work in another community and left her behind. When this happened, she and her two children returned to her parents' house. She now lives there and depends in many respects on her parents' help. She does not work and spends most of her time caring for her children. Ricardo does not give her alimony and she does not know where to find him. Consequently, she relies entirely on her parents for financial support. Living with her parents has also better protected her from gossip in the community. She is looked upon as an abandoned woman and has two small children, which makes it almost impossible for her to find a new suitable partner. Being with her parents grants her the status of "daughter" again, and sends a signal to those who may want to take advantage of her, that she has a support system.

Contrary to Patricia and Rosa, Ofelia, in Tabasco, did not have reliable family network until she was adopted by a family she worked with. This lack of support left her vulnerable to the abuses of her in-laws, and to the abandonment of men.. Ofelia was abandoned by her mother at an early age, and her father did not take full responsibility for her. Consequently, she never had a stable home. Instead, she spent periods of time with different family members. It was during one of these spans of time with her grandmother, that she decided to move in with Oscar, her grandmother's neighbor. He was friendly and trustworthy, and living with Oscar and his family originally comforted her. For the first few months of their living together, she lost her feelings of exclusion and alienation, but soon after, her relationship with her in-laws began to deteriorate. They gossiped about her a lot, accused her of flirting with other men, and when she became pregnant, they insisted that the baby was not Oscar's. He believed them, which damaged their relationship, and they eventually broke up. When she left Oscar's house, Ofelia had a months-old baby and no place to go but back to her grandmother's. With her self-confidence eroded by her former in-laws gossiping and no one to confide in or council her, Ofelia never asked Oscar for child support.

One year after leaving Oscar, she met another man and began an informal relationship. She was 16 at the time, and still living with her grandmother. As a result of this relationship, she got pregnant again and when he learned of the pregnancy, he disappeared. They never moved in together. Ofelia continued living with her grandmother during her pregnancy, and started working at a nearby optical store to support herself and her children. She hoped to save enough money to move out of her grandmother's, with whom she fought frequently.

She had been working at the optical store for two years, when the owners suggested she move in with them. They had grown very fond of her and her children, and thought, because their son was gay, they would not have grandchildren of their own. To make the adoption

process easier, they proposed that her son marry her, and this is exactly what he did. Ofelia recognizes that this is a fake marriage, and that her now-husband is free to carry on with his life. However, she is the happiest she has ever been, as she has a family to call her own, and feels very supported both by her husband and his parents.

3. STATE-LEVEL RESULTS

The most recent analysis published about early unions in Mexico, conducted by (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015), shows that, in 2014, at least one in every four girls enter a union before age 18. However, these numbers vary greatly across states. Chiapas and Guerrero, two of the poorest states in the country, have child marriage rates higher than 30 percent, a critical level according to UNFPA. This analysis also shows that, when the population is divided according to place of residence in urban and rural communities, the rate of child marriage is higher in rural areas than in urban ones. In 14 states (Baja California, Campeche, Colima, Chiapas, Durango, Guerrero, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Veracruz and Zacatecas), the child marriage rates among the rural population exceed the 30 percent threshold. Variation at the state level suggests there may be additional differences between, and within states, that must be analyzed to better understand the presence and nature of early unions in the territory.

The analysis we present in this section complements the ones by (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015) and (Amador & Rosana Hernández, 2015) because, as previously mentioned, it establishes indicators that refer to a more recent period and cohort. In addition, we analyze the percentage of current unions that are non-formal, and provide estimates of the total number of women living in a union in each state, which allows policymakers to better grasp the severity of the problem in each state.

Figure 3.1. shows the percentage of girls 12 to 17, and its 95 percent confidence interval, for each state in the country, ordered according to the lowest point in the confidence interval. It is easy to appreciate, in this graph, the variation between states on the current level of early unions. These go from a little more than 2 percent, in Mexico City, to just over 7 percent in Michoacán, Tabasco, Chiapas and Guerrero.[38]

Having the data displayed at the state level is useful for comparison purposes, and if one is interested in a particular state. Similarly, classifying states according to the level of one or more indicators is useful to understand how the behavior of the phenomena varies in the country. In the case of the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union, we classified states in three categories representing a

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[38] The point estimates of these percentages, its 95% confidence intervals, and the estimates of the total number of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union are listed, for each state, in Appendix 1.

low, medium and high level. The first group, where the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union is below 4 percent includes Mexico City, Querétaro, Baja California, Nuevo León, Estado de México, and Jalisco. In total, about 2.2 million girls age 12 to 17 live in these states. A second group consisting of states where the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been married falls between 4 and 5.7 percent includes Baja California Sur, Sonora, Aguascalientes, Colima, San Luis Potosí, Quintana Roo, Hidalgo, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Morelos, Guanajuato, Tlaxcala, Yucatán, Zacatecas, Puebla, Oaxaca, Sinaloa and Durango. Together, there are about 2.6 million girls age 12 to 17 in these states. The third group includes states where the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been married is 5.9 percent[39] or higher, and includes Veracruz, Coahuila, Campeche, Nayarit, Michoacán, Tabasco, Chiapas, and Guerrero. Approximately 1.6 million girls live in these states. It is important to mention that five of these states - Veracruz, Campeche, Tabasco, Chiapas and Guerrero - were also identified by (Amador & Rosana Hernández, 2015) as the ones with the highest child marriage rates in 2009.[40]

Figure 3.1. Percentage of girls 12 to 17 years old who have ever been in a union, by state. 2015
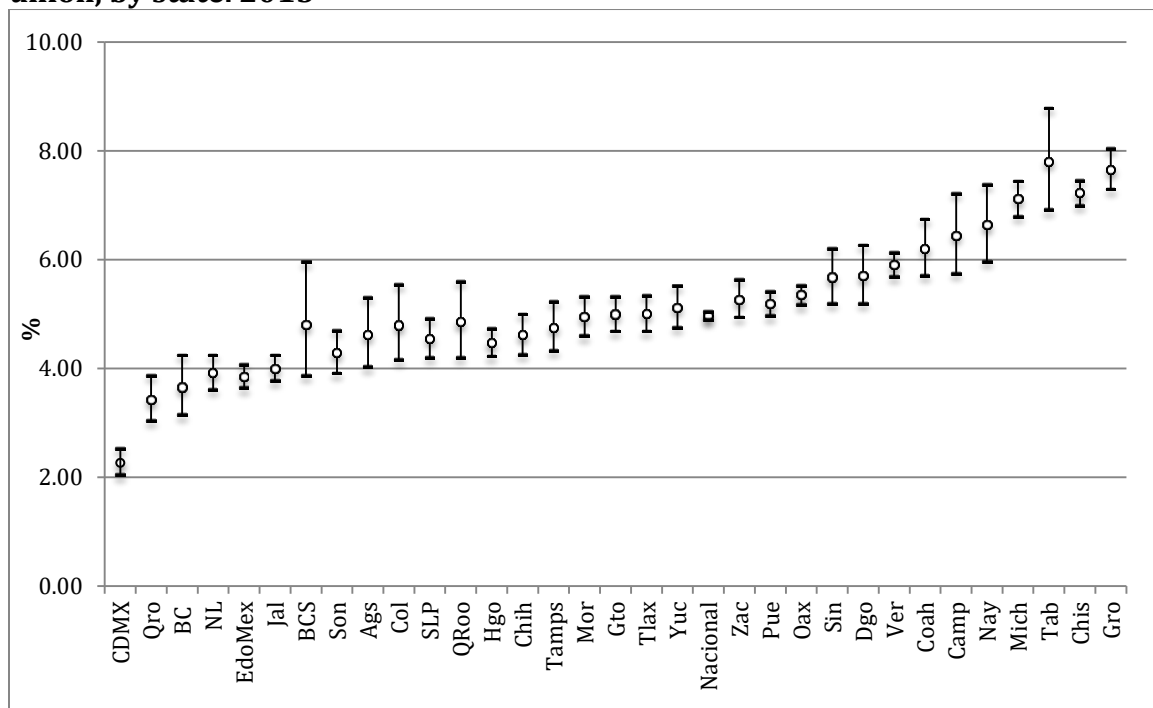
Note: The figure shows point estimates and 95% confidence intervals
Estimates are standardized to reflect the national age distribution
Sources: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

[39] These cutting points are, as well as the prior ones, based on the analysis of point estimates and confidence intervals. As can be seen in Figure 1, Veracruz, with a point estimate of 5.9% girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union and a 95% confidence interval that goes from 5.7% to 6.1% is closer to Coahuila, which has a 6.2% point estimate and a confidence interval of 5.7% to 6.7%, than to Durango (point estimate of 5.7% and confidence interval of 5.9% to 6.3%).

[40] In Amador and Hernández's analysis of the 2009 National Demographic Survey, Quintana Roo is mentioned as another state with a high child marriage rate (with more than 25% of women age 20 to 24 having married before 18 years old) (Amador & Rosana Hernández, 2015). In our analysis this state falls in the middle category.

The review of the civil codes and state-level laws presented in Chapter 1, Section b) of this report show that few states have adopted the United Nation's recommendation to set the minimum legal age at marriage to 18, and to eliminate all the exceptions to this rule. Furthermore, in many states the minimum legal age at marriage is not the same in the civil code and in the State Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents. Many of the modifications in the federal and state-level laws and civil codes that set the minimum legal age at marriage to 18 happened after 2014, so their effect in the prevention of early unions may not yet be appreciated, as the estimates shown here include unions that may have taken place before that. Still, it is useful to analyze how the level of early unions relates to the minimum legal age at marriage, as defined in state laws or civil codes. We do this in Table 3.2., which classifies the states by the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union (divided into the three categories defined above), and by whether state level civil codes, or the State Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents sets the minimum age at marriage to 18, without exceptions.

Table 3.2. highlights two points that are particularly relevant for the advancement of the elimination of early unions. First, it is important to note that early unions happen even in states where regulations declare 18 the legal minimum age at marriage. As mentioned before, Table 3.2. does not pretend to assess the effect of setting a legal minimum age at marriage on the presence of early unions, since many of the early unions registered in the intercensal survey may have happened before the regulations took place. Another factor that discourages drawing conclusions about the relationship between early unions and the legal framework, is that there are other influences affecting the probability of a girl entering into a union. Indeed, the literature has shown that community, family and individual variables such as the availability of schools nearby, family encouragement for continuing education, gender-based violence within the household, and the flexibility to allow inter-sex relationships are only some of the factors that may also affect the probability of entering into an early union (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015; Pérez Baleón, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). Having mentioned this, it is relevant to note that in Campeche, Coahuila, Guerrero and Veracruz, 5.9 percent or more of girls age 12 to 17 had been in a union, even though these states now have regulations that prohibit child marriages.

The second thing to note from Table 3.2. is that many of the states where a high percentage of girls entered into a union recently, do not have a regulation preventing early marriage. Ten of the sixteen states where the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union is between 4.0 and 5.8 percent, and half of the states where this percentage is higher than 5.8 percent, are in this situation. Even though our analysis does not imply a causal association between legal framework and the percentage of girls who have ever entered a union, it points toward the importance of establishing laws that define the minimum legal age at marriage at 18, with no exceptions, in these and all other states.

Table 3.2. Classification of states according to the percentage of girls age 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union, and state-level regulations about the minimum legal age at marriage. 2015

% of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union	State-level regulations regarding the minimum legal age at marriage	
	The minimum legal age at marriage is 18 years old, without exceptions, as defined in either state laws or civil codes	The minimum legal age at marriage is younger than 18 years old in state laws and civil codes
Less than 4.0%	Baja California Mexico City Jalisco	Estado de México Nuevo León Querétaro
4.0% - 5.8%	Baja California Sur Durango Hidalgo Puebla Quintana Roo Tamaulipas Tlaxcala Yucatán	Aguascalientes Chihuahua Colima Guanajuato Morelos Oaxaca San Luis Potosí Sinaloa Sonora Zacatecas
5.9% or more	Campeche Coahuila Guerrero Veracruz	Chiapas Michoacán Nayarit Tabasco

Sources: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data, and data from (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015), (Ley General de los Derechos de los Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes, 2015), and the state-level civil codes (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2016)
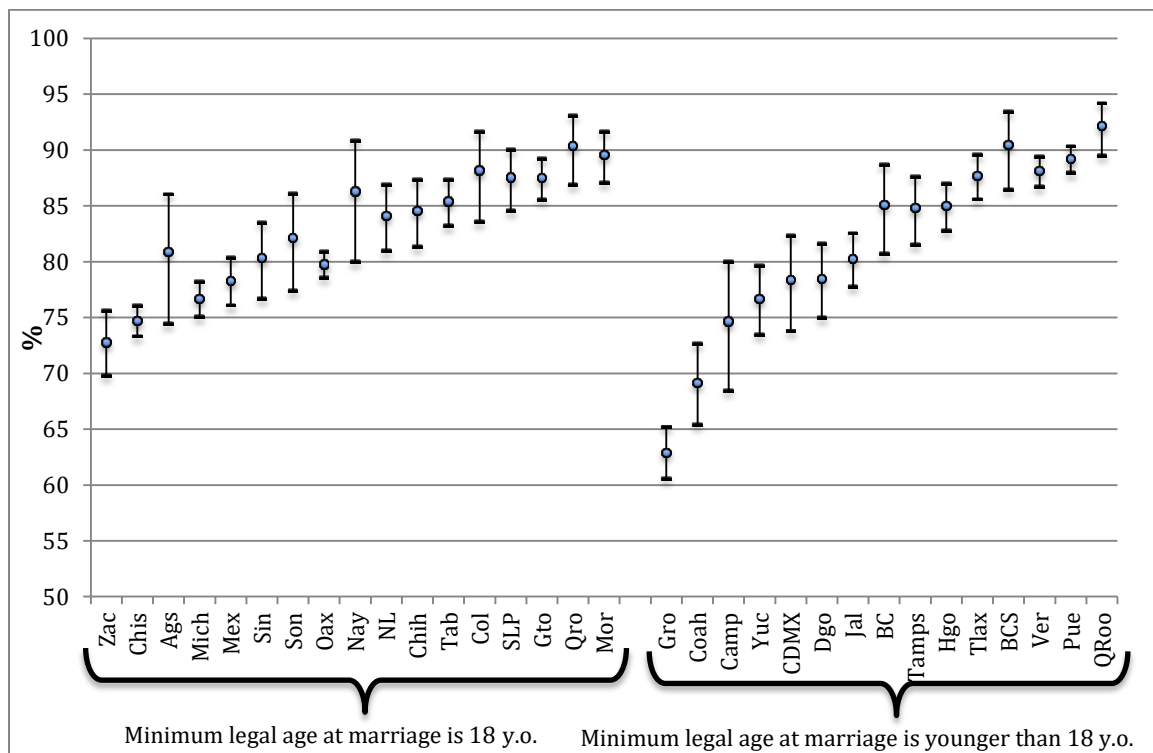Note: Estimates are standardized to reflect the national age distribution

Another way to investigate the relationship between state-level regulations and the presence of early unions is to consider the percentage of current unions of girls 12 to 17 that have not been normalized by either a civil or religious marriage. In Figure 3.2 we show these numbers at the state level, with states grouped according to whether the state civil code or the State Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents define the minimum legal age at marriage at 18, without exceptions.

The numbers in this figure show the predominance of non-formal unions over marriages among current unions of girls age 12 to 17 in all states. In every case, this indicator is higher than 50 percent signifying that half of all current unions are some kind of marriage, and half are non-formal unions. From 62.9 percent in Guerrero, to 92.2 percent in Quintana Roo, the other states fall somewhere between these two extremes. An additional result revealed by Figure 3.2. is that the percentage of current unions of girls age 12 to 17 that are non-formal does not seem to bear a relation to the presence of a state law setting the legal minimum age at marriage at 18.

The level and distribution of the percentage of current unions of girls 12 to 17 that are non-formal is very similar in both groups, except for the fact that both the two states with the lowest percentage of non-formal early unions (Guerrero and Coahuila), and the two states with the highest percentage (Baja California Sur and Quintana Roo) do not have a law preventing marriages before age 18. This has two implications. First, that it is important to establish the minimum legal age at marriage at 18 in all states, including Guerrero and Coahuila, where more than 30 percent of early unions are formalized through a marriage. This, in conjunction with the fact that the percentage of early unions in these two states is particularly high (see Figure 3.1.), implies that such legislation could have an important effect. The second implication of Figure 3.2. is that, even though legislating the minimum legal age at marriage at 18 is relevant for the elimination of early unions (OnuMujeres, 2015) (Girls Not Brides, 2015a), other actions are also important since the majority of early unions in Mexico are non-formal.

Figure 3.2. Percentage of current unions of girls 12 to 17 years old that are non-formal, by state and whether at least one state law or civil code defines 18 as the minimum legal age at marriage

Note: The figure shows point estimates and 95% confidence intervals
Estimates are standardized to reflect the national age distribution
States classified as having a minimum legal age at marriage set at 18 are those states where either the State Law for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents or the state civil code define the minimum legal age at marriage at 18, without exceptions. States classified as having a minimum legal age at marriage younger than 18 are all other states.
Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data, and data from (OnuMujeres México (UNWomen Mexico), 2015), (Ley General de los Derechos de los niños, niñas y adolescentes, 2015), and the state-level civil codes (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2016).

Box 3.1. Increasing legal age at marriage may help to eliminate early unions, but other actions could also be necessary

One of the actions currently underway in the country to eliminate child marriage is the systematic inclusion of 18 as the minimum legal age at marriage, without exceptions, in civil codes and in state Laws for the Protection of the Rights of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents. Even with this development, in Mexico, almost eight of every ten girls age 12 to 17 who are currently in a union have not married underscoring the need to consider additional actions, as necessary, for the elimination of early unions. Our in-depth interviews with women who began a union before age 18, but never married, do not provide enough information about what other factors may be driving the trend. They do show, however, that girls occasionally enter a union without even considering a formal marriage.

All the women we interviewed during the qualitative component of this project were not in formal marriages, which reflects the dominance of non-formal unions among women who start cohabitation before age 18. During our conversations, the topic of marrying formally never emerged as a reason the women entered their union or an eventual goal. It did not seem to matter whether they started cohabitation as a result of an unintended pregnancy, because they ran away with their boyfriend, or because their boyfriend arranged for them to live with him. They were not worried about the formality of the process or the support, or lack thereof, of their parents. Several of the women we interviewed started their cohabitation after the parents of both the girl and her partner had formally met to talk about the commitment of both families (what in Mexico would be known, had the couple formally married, as the "pedida de mano"). None of the women interviewed even thought of marrying formally before cohabiting. Nevertheless, every single one of them referred to their partner as their "husband," and to their partners' parents, who they commonly lived with, as their in-laws. This may be an indication that in many cases unions are socially sanctioned or recognized just by their inception.

Moreover, we asked those who had been living with their partner a long time whether they had ever considered marrying, and they all have an excuse, even if not fully articulated, for not doing so. For example, Arcelia, one of the women in our study, started living with her partner after she became pregnant, at age 15. When we interviewed her, she had been living with her partner for 10 years, and had 3 grown children and one baby. After all that time, they had not married, even when, according to her accounts, he constantly asked her to do so. She recounted that he had become so insistent on them getting married, that he started asking her to marry him in front of their children, who would, in turn, ask her why she did not want to marry their dad. Her response to these efforts was to laugh them off, to cheerfully tell her husband that, "he was not thinking clearly," and to keep delaying the decision with phrases such as, "We'll see what happens."

The story of Arcelia illustrates two additional aspects of how individuals think about the possibility of formalizing an early union through marriage. The first of these is that, even when they are fully committed and responsible about the decision to live together, sometimes they simply do not think about marrying. Despite having started their union at a very young age, when they both were 15, Arcelia's partner, Andrés, seems to have always had a very mature and committed, albeit conservative, position regarding their union. He did not hesitate to show his support to Arcelia when the news of her pregnancy became public, and he had his parents talking to Arcelia's parents to make it clear that his intentions towards her were serious. However, he started talking marriage only recently. According to

Arcelia, when she responds to his proposals with questions such as, "Why did you not think about marrying before?" or "Why marry now?" he tells her that he wished they had gotten married when they started living together, that he understands now that they were too young and did not think their situation through more thoroughly, but that they can fix that now by getting married.

Arcelia's story also illustrates that men sometimes use a marriage proposal to soften their woman's feelings towards them, especially when they have been misbehaving. In this sense, a formal marriage, or the promise of one, is a powerful tool that men play to their advantage. In our conversation, the topic of marriage, and Andrés' proposals, was brought up spontaneously by Arcelia, just as she was recounting the most common problems she faces in her life with Andrés. She explained that she dislikes that some weekends he drinks heavily, but remarked that nowadays they do not argue a lot about it because whenever he does drink excessively, he responds to her complaints by telling her that he truly loves her, and that they should marry.

Box 3.2. Girls begin an informal union in different ways, even in indigenous communities

In the quest to better understand the nature of early unions in Mexico, we interviewed three community workers who have participated in the design and implementation of youth programs in indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero. These are three of the poorest and most marginalized states in Mexico, and are, as can be seen in Figures 3.1 and 3.3, among the states with the highest percentage of girls 12 to 17, and 12 to 14, who have ever been in a union.

All the community workers we interviewed mentioned that, in their communities, early unions are still fairly common. They also revealed that while early unions do happen in the cities, they are particularly frequent in the more remote areas, where there is less contact with the modern world. These unions are almost always non-formal, since they were not performed or recorded in the civil registry, but are often sanctioned by local authorities. The Tzotzil and Tzetzal communities of Chiapas are highly illustrative of such non-formal unions.

According to the community worker we interviewed in Chiapas, there are four different ways in which girls and boys enter into a union. Each involves some degree of courtship and agreement between the couple. Courtship, however, is expedited and differs from the type of dating done in urban centers. In indigenous communities in Chiapas, public courting is frowned upon. In fact, in some local communities, boys and girls are forbidden from hanging out together even going so far as jailing boys who have publicly courted a girl.

The social pressure to not interact with the opposite sex, and the public censorship of any kind of sexual or romantic manifestation, motivates boys and girls to accelerate their relationships and formalize them too quickly.[41] Three of the four common ways in which union are started in Chiapas, are prompted by this social pressure.

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[41] (Murphy-Graham & Leal, 2015) found something similar in her study of early unions in Honduras. There, one of the main reasons girls had to start living with someone, was to overcome parental restrictions to meeting with their boyfriend.

The first of these, is when a girl and a boy are interested in having a relationship, and the girl asks the boy to formally ask her parents to approve the union. This is equivalent to an American engagement, or a "pedida de mano" in other parts of the country. The boy and his parents meet with the girl's family and express their interest in a serious union. Since boys and girls in Chiapas do not usually experiment with several different partners, and such behavior would be frowned upon by the community, this meeting almost always finalizes the commitment between the boy and the girl, who immediately thereafter goes to live at the boy's home.

A second manner in which a union can start in these communities is when a boy and a girl are seen chatting or kissing in public. As mentioned above, these behaviors are still forbidden by the local authorities and by parents. Therefore, if a boy and a girl are found interacting, local authorities may jail the boy, or force him to "marry" the girl as a way to repair the dishonor. These marriages are not civil, but they are approved and formalized by the local authorities.

The third way in which boys and girls may begin a union is when both are interested in having a relationship, and run away together. This is different from the first situation we mentioned because in this case, girls usually just go to live with the boy and his family, without asking her parents first, and without both families meeting.

Finally, the fourth way in which young people commonly start a union in indigenous communities in Chiapas is a repair union following a pregnancy. According to our interviewee, whenever this happens, the couple is forced to start living together before the delivery of the baby.

Box 3.3. Among early unions, non-formal unions may mean many different things

Authors like Quilodrán (2001) and Julieta Pérez Amador (2008) claim that two decades ago, informal unions were more unstable than formal unions. These authors also maintain that among less educated groups today, non-formal unions seldom transition into formal marriages (Julieta Pérez Amador, 2008; Solís, 2004; Quilodrán, 2001; Julieta Quilodrán & Viridiana Sosa, 2004). However, not much is known about the difference it makes in terms of the gender and power dynamics within the union, nor about the opportunities that the girls will have later in their life, had the union been formalized through a marriage.

Our in-depth interviews with women who started cohabiting with their partner before age 18 show significant differences in experiences, even for women who come from similar backgrounds. The story of Arcelia and Brenda[42] is a good example of this. The women, who both live in an extremely poor area of Mexico City and were next door neighbors growing up, became family when Brenda ran away with Arcelia's brother. This happened two weeks before Arcelia, herself, started living with her boyfriend. To better understand what we want to highlight from their cases, it is important to tell their stories.

Arcelia met her boyfriend Andrés when she was in secondary school, and soon became his girlfriend. She has very fond memories of this two-year period during which, she says, they

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[42] Names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees.

had a good relationship. They got along well, and cared for each other. She became pregnant when she was 15 and they were close to finishing high school. After giving him the news and explaining that she planned to continue the pregnancy, he told her that he would support her, and he did, within his limited resources. Arcelia's parents were extremely upset and disappointed when they learned of the pregnancy. However, Arcelia claims that they calmed down and became more supportive after Andrés and his parents spoke with them, to formalize the relationship. After this meeting, Arcelia moved in with Andrés and his parents. It has been ten years. They never got married, and currently have four children, whose ages range from ten to four.

When asked about her life, about whether she would like to get married someday, and about what she misses from her youth, Arcelia paints a relatively positive picture. Indeed, she may be, in terms of her attitude and the way she expresses verbally, the happiest of all the women we interviewed in this study. According to her, Andrés is a good man, very responsible, caring, and committed to his family. As Arcelia did because of the pregnancy, he discontinued his education after finishing secondary school and started working with his father as a carpet installer. This is the job he still holds, but their business has grown a lot in the past ten years. From specializing in carpets, they are now also installing floors, have bigger clients and several employees. In terms of the quality of their current relationship, Arcelia misses that they do not go out as much as they did when they were dating, but still, from time to time, they watch a movie together or go shopping to the tianguis on the weekends. Sometimes Andrés offers to buy her something for herself, and he loves playing with the kids. However, not everything is idyllic. Sometimes Andrés drinks more than he should, and he loses his temper. He also becomes mad when he gets home and the food is not ready yet, or when the kids bother him, or do not do as he says.

Brenda's story is very different from Arcelia's. Her relationship with Beto, Arcelia's older brother, started when they were little kids. For a time, they kept their relationship platonic and only wrote each other love letters and went out for walks together. When she turned 13, they became boyfriend and girlfriend. According to Brenda, they were very much in love, and their relationship was so serious that Beto was her escort at her quinceañera Shortly after her party, she became pregnant with Beto's baby. At the time, she had already quit her second year of secondary school to work full-time and help her family financially.

Beto, on the other hand, was still in school. When she gave Beto the news, his first reaction was to worry and question their future together because he was still in school and did not have any immediate plans to work. Things got worse for Brenda after that. Her mother went to talk to Beto's parents, and immediately after, they forbid contact between the couple. She would call his house or go looking for him, and everyone in his family would deny knowing where he was. This gave Brenda's mother even more reason to believe that Beto would not take responsibility for the baby, and she forced Brenda to have an abortion. At the time, Brenda felt abandoned by all the people she loved.

Shortly after her abortion, Beto went against his parents' wishes and began looking for Brenda, chasing her in the street, claiming to have changed and asking her to elope with him. Initially, she resisted, but one day he followed her on her way to work and they ended up spending the night in a motel. It was the first time Brenda had ever spent the night outside of her home, and she felt that after doing this, "she no longer belonged to her mother, but to Beto." She did not go back to her mother's house after that. When they returned to his house the next morning, he talked to his parents and asked for their support,

saying that he loved Brenda, that he "stole her from her house," and that she could no longer go back. His parents refused to support him so they went to live with his aunt instead. Brenda's mother was furious when she learned what had happened, and broke all contact with her daughter for one year. They only started speaking again after Brenda's first child, a boy, was born.

Brenda now has two children, a boy and a girl, and she lives with her in-laws. When conversing with her, one can easily perceive that she is resentful and feels her life has been miserable. In addition to the abandonment she felt during her first pregnancy, and afterwards when her mother stopped talking to her, it saddens her that Beto is not more present in their family life. He does not help her take care of the kids or with the housework, and he rarely has time to play with the children. He works as a carpenter and often has to work in other states. He once was gone for more than a year, and Brenda was left living with her in-laws and two small children, without his support. She also resents that, when he is around, he drinks a lot and spends the weekends away, going to rock concerts or with his friends, while she has to take care of the kids.

These two contrasting cases are relevant for illustrating some of the heterogeneity that exists among non-formal unions. Both Arcelia and Brenda started their union when they were 15, but entered the union in very different conditions and with different resources. Arcelia was pregnant, and her union was very much motivated by the pregnancy. Brenda was not, but the beginning of her union also felt pressured by circumstance because after spending a night away from her maternal home, she felt that she could not return there.

Another difference between the two cases is that, despite her pregnancy, Arcelia's union was supported by her partner, her parents, and her parent's family. Brenda, on the other hand, felt isolated throughout the whole process. Her partner had shown a lot of indecision and lack of commitment in the beginning, and he continued to do so after the union. Her mother withdrew her support when she got together with Beto, and his parents openly rejected her in the beginning. The differences between the two cases seems to be key in understanding their current situation and in the ability they have to negotiate their power and options within the relationship.

There are several reasons early unions may be particularly damaging when they occur before age 15. Since girls who enter an early union are more likely to drop out of school, a union before age 15 would mean stopping their education at the secondary level or lower. Early unions also increase the probability of pregnancy, which poses particular health risks for younger girls (UNICEF, 2015). In Figure 3.3. we show how the percentage of girls, age 12 to 14, who have ever been in a union varies across states, along with the confidence intervals of this indicator. Even though the numbers are low, there are cases of unions among girls 12 to 14 in all states. The indicator varies between a low of 0.36 percent in Ciudad de Mexico and 0.37 percent in Queretaro, meaning four out of every 1,000 girls 12 to 14 have ever been in a union, to a high of 1.5 percent in Guerrero, where one could expect to find 15 out of every 1,000 girl 12 to 14 who have ever been in a union.

Since the percentages of girls age 12 to 14 who are in a union are relatively small, the confidence intervals of this indicator are broad, especially in small states where

there are not many girls in the age range. These broad confidence intervals happen in some states with a very low percentage of girls 12 to 14 who are in a union, as well as in some where this percentage is higher (see Figure 3.3). This makes it difficult to classify states according to the presence of very early unions but, as Figure 3.3 shows, the variation in the punctual estimates of this indicator can be used to divide states into at least three groups.

The first group would include states where the percentage of girls age 12 to 14 who are in a union is less than 0.5 percent. These states, all in the central and northern part of the country, are Ciudad de México (formerly DF), Querétaro, Sonora, Baja California Sur, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Baja California, and Chihuahua. The second group would include states where the percentage of girls age 12 to 14 who have ever been in a union varies between 0.5 and 0.99 percent. This group includes Estado de México, Colima, Durango, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Quintana Roo, Guanajuato, Puebla, Coahuila, Tamaulipas, Morelos, Sinaloa, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, Oaxaca, Yucatán, San Luis Potosí, and Puebla. The last group consists of a smaller group of states where the percentage of girls age 12 to 14 who have ever been in a union is above 1.0 percent. These include Campeche, Chiapas, Nayarit, Michoacán, Tabasco and Guerrero

When all the states in a group are taken together, one concludes that there are approximately 650,000 girls 12 to 14 living in states where the union of girls in this age range is relatively small; 2,200,000 girls in states where unions in this age group are estimated between 0.5 and 0.99 percent; and about a million girls in states where it is 1.0 percent or larger.

Figure 3.3. Percentage of girls 12 to 14 who have ever been in a union, by state
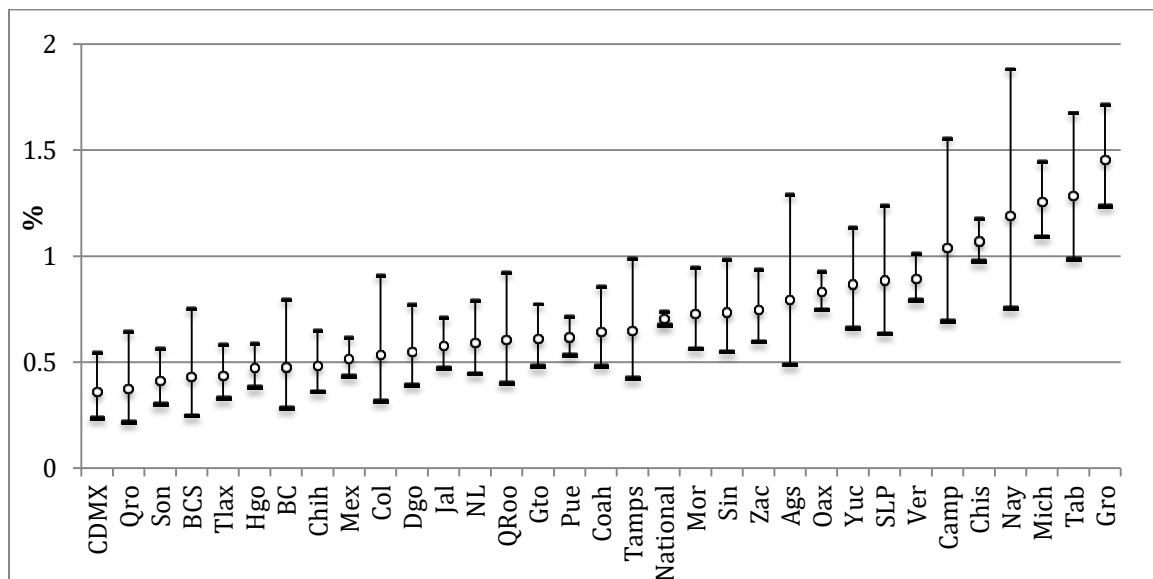
Note: The figure shows point estimates and 95% confidence intervals
Estimates are standardized to reflect the national age distribution
Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

ASSOCIATION BETWEEN WOMEN'S CONDITION AND EARLY UNIONS, AT THE STATE LEVEL

Up to now, we have shown that there is important variation between states on the occurrence of early unions and unions among girls 14 or younger. Our national-level analysis indicated that there is heterogeneity in the characteristics of early unions which we demonstrated by forming a typology combining women's age, type of union, and age difference with the partner. We also showed that this typology is associated with women's current school attendance, the birth of at least one child, and the people they live with.

In what follows, we deepen the analysis of the relationship between women's early unions and the life conditions mentioned above. We start by exploring the relationship between being in an early union for girls in the 12 to 17 age group, and each condition individually. We then analyze whether there is variation between states in the more common types of early unions. This analysis is important for two reasons. First, it hints at cultural and contextual differences in union formation. Secondly, it highlights the importance of addressing the role geographic differences play in union vulnerabilities.

With the objective of analyzing the heterogeneity in the association between school attendance and being in an early union, Figure 3.4 shows the percentage of girls age 12 to 17 who are in a union and currently attending school, ordered from lowest to highest.[43] Appendix 13 shows the same percentages for women in a union and not in a union, as well as the percentage difference between these two groups.

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[43] Because these percentages are estimated for women in an early union, which are rather small within states, we do not include confidence intervals in these graphs. These are too broad and do not contribute to the discussion.

Figure 3.4. School attendance, by state. Girls 12 to 17 who are in a union (%)
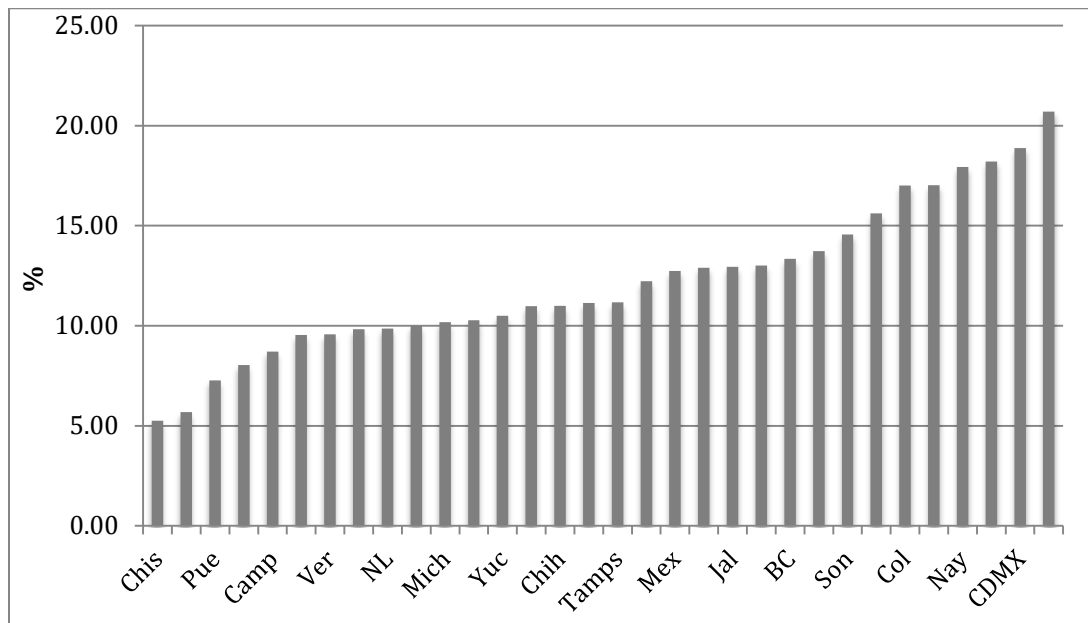
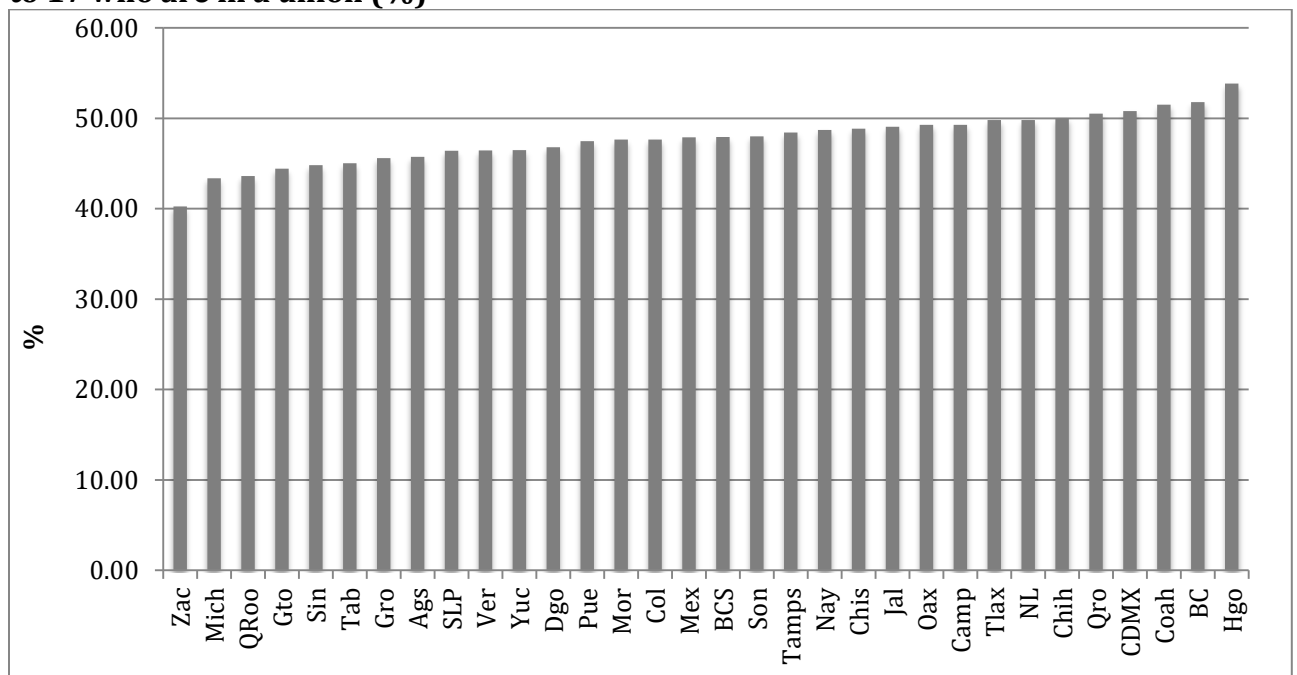Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

School attendance among girls 12 to 17 not in a union, range from 74 percent to 93 percent in Baja California Sur (see Appendix 12). The numbers in Figure 3.4. show that, as was already demonstrated at the national level, school attendance among girls in the same age group who are in a union are much lower. More important, however, are the disparities across states in school attendance of girls in a union. In Chiapas and Oaxaca, two of the poorest states in Mexico, being in a union is almost synonymous with being out of school. Only one in every twenty girls age 12 to 17 who are in a union still attend school. Tabasco, Colima, Aguascalientes, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Ciudad de México and Baja California Sur have the largest percentages of girls age 12 to 17 attending school, but even those percentages, between 16 and 21 percent, are very small. Even in these states the percentage of girls in a union who are attending school is still between 78 and 83 percent smaller than among girls who are not in a union. As we mentioned previously, this analysis indicates an association between school attendance and early unions, but it does not confirm that girls who enter a union drop out of school

When performing a comparable analysis on the birth of a first child, the results again show a heterogeneity between states (see Figure 3.5). The state where the percentage of girls 12 to 17 in a union who have ever had a child is lowest in Zacatecas at 40 percent and highest in Hidalgo at 54 percent. There are five other states, in addition to Hidalgo, where at least half of the girls 12 to 17 who are in a union have ever had a child including Chihuahua, Queretaro, Ciudad de México, Coahuila and Baja California. None of these are the poorest states. In fact, Guerrero, Chiapas and Oaxaca, three of the poorest states in the country, are mid-range on this indicator measuring between 46 and 49 percent.

As is the case with school attendance, it is difficult to interpret the percentage of girls age 12 to 17 who are in a union and have ever had a child as a measure of the degree to which early unions are caused by teenage pregnancy in a particular state. Indeed, this indicator may also reflect that in some places early unions commonly take place without the occurrence of a previous pregnancy. Both imply the vulnerability of a group of young women, but the vulnerabilities in each case are different. As long as data do not reflect the timing of pregnancy and entrance into a union, it is impossible to disentangle which of these explanations is more predominant in a particular location and whether there are cultural and social norm differences between states that account both for differences in the percentage of children ever born, and for early unions.[44]

The most important implication of this analysis, in terms of policy formulation, is that everywhere in the country between 40 and 55 percent of girls age 12 to 17 who are in a union have had at least one child. This is key to understanding the kind of sexual and reproductive health services that need to be offered to young women in a union. Some of them may need family planning services to delay pregnancy, while others may want to limit their fertility. It is also relevant to understand that a large proportion of women have children who need services as well.

Figure 3.5. Percentage of women who have ever had a child, by state. Girls 12 to 17 who are in a union (%)

 Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

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[44] There are some data, such as the National Demographic Surveys, that capture the timing of entry into a union and the birth of a child. However, because of sample-size limitations, these do not allow this analysis at the state level.

Another condition affecting girls age 12 to 17 in a union, is who they most commonly live with. Variation exists across states and can relate to cultural differences, diversity in the type of unions and how they began, and financial considerations. Table 3.3. shows the percentages of women, in each state, that live in their in-laws' house, with their parents, in their own house (identified as those who identified as the head or the spouse of the head of the living quarters), or in some other arrangement. These percentages are in the four columns, next to the name of the state. The last two columns of Table 3.3. indicate the first and second most common living arrangements in the state.

The in-depth interviews we conducted with women who had been in an early union revealed that most women either continue living with their parents, or move in with their in-laws after they start their union. These interviews also showed that most women aspire to have a place on their own, but, even if their parents gifted them land, their partners have not yet earned enough to pay for the construction. In addition, when comparing the living conditions, negotiating power, and social support of women living with their parents with those of women who live at their in-laws, women who live with their parents are predominantly better off. They have more helping hands, their parents provide monetary assistance when needed, and they do not have to deal with problems such as gossiping.

Taking all this information into account, one can assume that women who are classified as being the head or spouse of the head are the ones that exhibit the most favorable conditions overall, followed by those who are daughters of the head.[45] However, these two conditions are not very common. The percentage of girls 12 to 17 in a union who are still living with their parents varies between 12 percent in Chiapas (close to 12 percent in Guerrero) and 32 percent in Ciudad de México. Similarly, the percentage of girls 12 to 17 who are either the head, or the spouse of the head oscillates between 18 percent in Tlaxcala, and 43 percent in Baja California. Between 25 and 53 percent of all girls in the 12 to 17 age range who are in a union are living with their in-laws. The lowest percentage is in Baja California Sur and the largest in Tlaxcala.

The last two columns of Table 3.3. provide further evidence of the heterogeneity of early unions and of the living arrangements of women who are in these situations. We identified three different groups of states, based on the two most common living arrangements: 1) states where the most common living arrangement is to be the daughter-in-law, and the second most common is to be the head or spouse of the head; 2) states where the most common living arrangement is to be the daughter-in-law, and the second most common is to be the daughter; and 3) and states where the most common living arrangement is to be the head, and the second most common is to be the daughter.

These three groups clearly indicate differences in the nature of the unions, the social norms regarding their formation, and the social supports available to women living in an early union. They may also hint at how women transition from one living arrangement to the other throughout their life. Unfortunately, the data we are using does not permit the exploration of any of these issues.

The largest group is the one where the most common living arrangement is women living with their in-laws and the second most common is women who are the head or the spouse of the head. The states in this group are Aguascalientes, Campeche, Coahuila, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Veracruz and Zacatecas. This is a very large and diverse assortment of states, indicating this is a very common pattern. Within this cluster, one can readily identify at least three groups whose existence supports the argument that culture and economic factors play an important role when deciding the living arrangements of newly-formed early unions.

The first group of states contained in this cluster are Guerrero, Chiapas, Nayarit and Oaxaca. These are states with a strong indigenous presence (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015). In addition, Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca were, according to the national entity responsible for the measurement of poverty in Mexico, the three states with the largest percentage of inhabitants in extreme poverty (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL), s/f). The second group of states in this cluster are Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí, Querétaro and Zacatecas, and Jalisco and Michoacán (one can also include Nayarit here). These states are commonly identified as the Northwest and Bajío regions in México, because they share similar economic and cultural characteristics. In particular, they are very Catholic and conservative both politically and socially. Consequently, one could expect early unions, when not occurring among indigenous populations, to be very sanctioned. A third potential group is comprised Coahuila, Nuevo León, Sonora, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, and to some extent, Durango. These northern states are the most developed and industrialized in the country.

The second cluster of states is where the most common living arrangement is to be the daughter-in-law, and the second most common is to be the daughter. In these states it is less frequent to have women moving to their own house with their partner, at least before they turn 18. States in this cluster are Ciudad de México, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Estado de México, Tlaxcala and Yucatán. As in the case above, it is impossible to say with the current data what explains the living arrangements in each of these states, and whether they imply a conservative pattern, or a highly protective one. It is possible that Guanajuato, which is itself a very conservative state, exhibits the first option, whereas Ciudad de México, Hidalgo, Estado de México, and Tlaxcala (which all together form the central region, and are highly influenced by the urban modernity of Ciudad de México), represent the second case.

The third cluster of states is where the most common living arrangement is to be the head, and the second most common is to be the daughter. This cluster includes Baja California, Baja California Sur, Colima and Quintana Roo. There is no unifying thread joining these states together that could justify why these two patterns (in particular the presence of heads and spouses of heads) are so common. One possibility is that the internal migration of young people to Baja California, Baja California Sur and Quintana Roo is very high, and those who form a union do not have their family or their partner's family to live with. Still, more analysis is needed to confirm whether this is the case.

Table 3.3. Living arrangements of girls age 12 to 17 in a union, by state

	% in each arrangement				Most common arrangements	
	Daughter	Daughter-in-law	Head	Other	Most common	2nd most common
Ags	21.28	48.79	23.88	5.71	D in law	Head
BC	27.79	32.63	33.53	6.04	Head	D in law
BCS	24.14	24.71	43.10	8.05	Head	D in law
Camp	23.45	38.35	32.30	5.28	D in law	Head
Coah	27.47	38.21	28.68	5.24	D in law	Head
Col	20.60	35.55	36.54	6.98	Head	D in law
Chis	11.49	50.04	34.61	3.48	D in law	Head
Chih	21.15	37.07	34.74	6.37	D in law	Head
CDMX	31.63	35.71	25.34	6.80	D in law	Daughter
Dgo	20.26	47.82	25.13	6.08	D in law	Head
Gto	23.12	51.62	19.92	4.89	D in law	Daughter
Gro	12.72	51.88	30.00	4.96	D in law	Head
Hgo	22.22	51.38	21.98	3.89	D in law	Daughter
Jal	22.66	37.15	33.30	6.60	D in law	Head
Mex	24.96	46.09	24.52	3.96	D in law	Daughter
Mich	16.54	48.82	28.74	5.42	D in law	Head
Mor	18.13	46.70	29.99	4.26	D in law	Head
Nay	20.00	43.98	29.70	5.89	D in law	Head
NL	28.70	34.89	29.21	6.92	D in law	Head
Oax	15.84	50.08	30.24	3.47	D in law	Head
Pue	17.82	52.47	25.82	3.51	D in law	Head
Qro	25.48	42.11	26.34	5.03	D in law	Head
QRoo	18.36	32.34	41.52	6.99	Head	D in law
SLP	20.00	51.91	23.23	4.42	D in law	Head
Sin	17.93	44.70	29.63	7.24	D in law	Head
Son	25.80	36.54	31.81	4.73	D in law	Head
Tab	21.02	41.46	33.00	4.02	D in law	Head
Tamps	21.42	36.57	35.90	5.36	D in law	Head

Tlax	24.52	52.78	17.52	4.65	D in law	Daughter
Ver	16.79	48.80	29.54	4.51	D in law	Head
Yuc	26.37	46.22	23.49	3.51	D in law	Daughter
Zac	18.42	48.88	26.61	5.39	D in law	Head

Note: The colors of the last two columns identify the different combinations of most common living arrangements in Mexico: ☐ Daughter-in-law is the most common, head or spouse of the head the 2nd most common; ☐ Daughter-in-law is the most common, daughter the 2nd most common; ☐ Head or spouse of the head is the most common, daughter is the 2nd most common.
Sources: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

The last analysis we conduct at the state level has the objective of identifying heterogeneity between states according to the most common characteristics of early unions. For this, we use a modification of the typology of early unions we defined in our analysis at the national level. We do this because the typology of early unions that we created at the national level is not functional for an analysis at the state level due to the low occurrence of marriages of girls 14 years or younger. In addition, in the analysis of the relationship between this typology and women's current condition, we discovered that the two most important factors are women's age and the type of union. The age difference with the partner bears, at the national level, little importance when explaining differences in school attendance, having at least one child, and living arrangements.[46] Consequently, in the analysis that follows, we use the following groups:

Table 3.4. Groups characterizing early unions in Mexico, 2015

Age group	Non-formalized union or marriage	Age difference with partner	Percentage of cases in the country
12-14	Marriage	All age differences	1.87
12-14	Non-formalized	All age differences	6.11
15-17	Marriage	5 years or less	3.76
15-17	Marriage	6 to 10 years	2.28
15-17	Marriage	11 years or more	10.38
15-17	Non-formalized	5 years or less	15.61
15-17	Non-formalized	6 to 10 years	10.99
15-17	Non-formalized	11 years or more	49.01

Notes: The percentage of cases refers to girls in the 12-17 age group, who are currently in a union
Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

[46] The fact that the age difference with the partner has little effect at the national level does not mean that there may be some states where this variable is more important. However, in this analysis we chose to consider this variable only for the formation of groups of women 15 to 17, as this is the only case where the number of observations in the 2015 Intercensal Survey is enough to disaggregate by these more complex groups and by state.

The percentage of girls in each of these clusters, by state, is listed in Appendix 14. Based on these numbers, we identified the two clusters that had the largest percentage of cases in each state, and formed five groups of states, as listed in Table 3.5. As the unions of girls in the 12 to 14 age range are small in most states, and are dominated by non-formalized unions,[47] we did not take these into account when constructing these groups. The resulting groups are:

☐ Non-formalized unions with relatively small age differences between partners. The most common type of union in these states are non-formalized unions where the partner is at most 5 years older than the woman, while the second is non-formalized unions where the partner is between 6 and 11 years older than the woman. Aguascalientes, Baja California, Baja California South, Campeche, Colima, Chiapas and Chihuahua are all in this group.

☐ Non-formalized unions and marriages with a small age difference between the partners. The most common type of union in these states is a non-formalized union where the partner is at most 5 years older than the woman, while the second is a marriage with the same age difference between partners. Coahuila is the only state in this group.

☐ Non-formalized unions and marriages with a large age difference between the partners. The most common type of union in these states is a non-formalized union where the partner is 11 years, or more, older than the woman, while the second is a marriage with the same age difference between partners. This group includes Durango, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Yucatán.

☐ Non-formalized unions with a large to medium age difference between the partners. The most common type of union in these states is a non-formalized union where the partner is 11 years, or more, older than the woman, while the second is a non-formalized union with an age difference of 6 to 10 years between the partners. This group includes Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Estado de México, Morelos, Nayarit, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Tabasco and Tlaxcala.

☐ Non-formalized unions with either a large or a small age difference between the partners. The most common type of union in these states is a non-formalized union where the partner is 11 years, or more, older than the woman, while the second is a non-formalized union with an age difference between the partners of five years or less. Included in this group are Querétaro, Sinaloa, Veracruz, and Zacatecas.

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[47] The only exception to this is Ciudad de México, where the marriages of women age 12 to 14 are more common than their informal unions (see Appendix 14).

Table 3.5. Two most common types of early unions in each state

	Most common	2nd most common
Ags	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
BC	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
BCS	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Camp	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Coah	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Married, <6 years age diff
Col	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Chis	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Chih	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
CDMX	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Dgo	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Gto	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Gro	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Hgo	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Jal	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Mex	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Mich	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Mor	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Nay	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
NL	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Oax	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Pue	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Qro	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff
QRoo	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
SLP	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Sin	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff
Son	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Tab	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Tamps	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Tlax	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, 6-10 age diff
Ver	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff
Yuc	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Married, >11 age diff
Zac	15-17 Non-formalized, >11 age diff	15-17 Non-formalized, <6 years age diff

Note: The colors of cells in the table identify groups of states, according to the combination of the two most common types of early unions found in Mexico. These are:

☐ Non-formalized unions with a relatively small age difference between the partners.
☐ Non-formalized unions and marriages with a small age difference between the partners.
☐ Non-formalized unions and marriages with a large age difference between the partners.
☐ Non-formalized unions with a large to medium age difference between the partners.
☐ Non-formalized unions with either a large or a small age difference between the partners.

Sources: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

This grouping does not seem to follow any geographic or spatial logic. What it shows, however, is that there are some states where the most important aspect in the determination of early unions is the age difference between the partners. The type of union is less important in these circumstances. These groups include, for example, those states that are shaded in gray, where the two most common types of unions are non-formalized unions and marriages, both characterized by a large age difference between the partners of 11 years or more. In these states one can easily conclude that it is very common for girls who enter a union before age 18, to partner with a man that is much older than them. Coahuila is the only other state where the age difference between partners is more important than the type of union. In this state, marked in pink on Table 3.5, most early unions are among peers, with an age difference of 5 years or less. Table 3.5. also shows that there are some states (those marked in blue, yellow, and orange), where the predominance of non-formalized unions is almost total, and where the difference between states is given by the age difference between partners.

4. ANALYSIS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

Both the national and state-level analysis we have presented so far demonstrate that there is great heterogeneity in the level and characteristics of early unions and that this variation may be related to local factors such as economic conditions, social norms and cultural influences. While our analysis at the state level captures some of this diversity, there are still important disparities within states in the living conditions and local opportunities available to women, which may affect their propensity to enter into an early union. Depicting this range at a lower-scale level is relevant because it provides clues on how local conditions affect young women's futures –and in particular, their behavior regarding the formation of unions. It may also serve as a tool to policymakers, so that they better understand the varying nature of early unions and the needs of the youth in their areas. This may, in turn, help them design and implement more targeted policies.

Next, we present a regional analysis on the level and characteristics of early unions. Data for this analysis, comes from the 2015 Intercensal Survey (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015). For an analysis of the most basic indicators that are derived from a simple manipulation of its frequencies, the 2015 Intercensal Survey provides a municipal-level representation. However, early unions are statistically very rare phenomena and refer to a very specific population (girls in the 12 to 17 age group). Therefore, the sample sizes available in some municipalities for the calculation of the indicators we use were very small [48] and overly responsive to single cases. To solve this problem but still be able to provide a depiction at the local level, we grouped municipalities in regions with similar social, economic and geographic characteristics.

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[48] These are the percentages of girls age 12 to 17, 12 to 14, and 15 to 17 who have ever been in a union; and a further disaggregation of these cases into categories given the characteristics of the union.

The use of meso-regions, groupings of municipalities with similar characteristics, is common practice in economic policy. They are used within this field to study local economic dynamics, to analyze whether there is convergence in economic and social indicators within states, and to provide elements to formulate industrial and economic policies (Gasca Zamora, 2009; Sastré Gutiérrez & Rey, 2008; (Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario, Territorial y Urbano (SEDATU), 2015). Authors in this field have worked extensively on the identification of regions that are formed of contiguous municipalities, internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous. These regions are useful for analyzing and understanding geographic variation. Furthermore, most government development plans at the state level now incorporate a regional perspective to formulate localized policies.

Our objectives for the use of meso-regions are largely similar to those in the field of economic policy. We want our results to be significant to policymakers, so we employ the definition of meso-regions used in the latest state-level development plans. Most of the information we used for the identification of these regions comes from the previous work of Gasca Zamora (2009), who lists the meso-regions used in these documents until 2009. Since then, some new state-level governments and development plans as well as regions, have been redefined. We updated the regions identified by Gasca Zamora (2009) with a review of the most recent state-level local development plans we found online. The resulting regions are listed in Appendix 15.

This regional analysis confirms that the level of early unions varies greatly, even within states. Surprisingly, when analyzing at the regional level, it appears that there are some regions where this behavior is more prevalent than state-level analysis had indicated. This is illustrated in Figure 4.1. The two states with the largest percentage of girls age 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union are Guerrero and Tabasco at approximately 7.8 percent each.[49] When data were disaggregated at the regional level, several areas were found where the percentages of girls 12 to 17 who have ever been in a union are much larger than the maximum found at the state-level ranging from 8.02 to 13.50 percent (see regions marked in red, Figure 4.1). These regions are in 13 of the country's 32 states: Chihuahua, Durango, Nayarit, Tamaulipas, Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatán and Aguascalientes. This is highly indicative of the relevance of early unions throughout the country. While the states where these regions have high concentrations of early unions vary in terms of demographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics, it is possible that the regions share common traits such as being highly marginal, rural, or lacking education and job opportunities for the youth.

We do not explore this further in this report, but we recommend conducting an analysis to support the formulation of policies and programs aimed at eliminating early unions. The analysis should also explore the common characteristics of the regions where early unions are less common.

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[49] This can be corroborated in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 4.1 % of girls 12 to 17 years old, who have ever been in a union
Mexico, 2015**
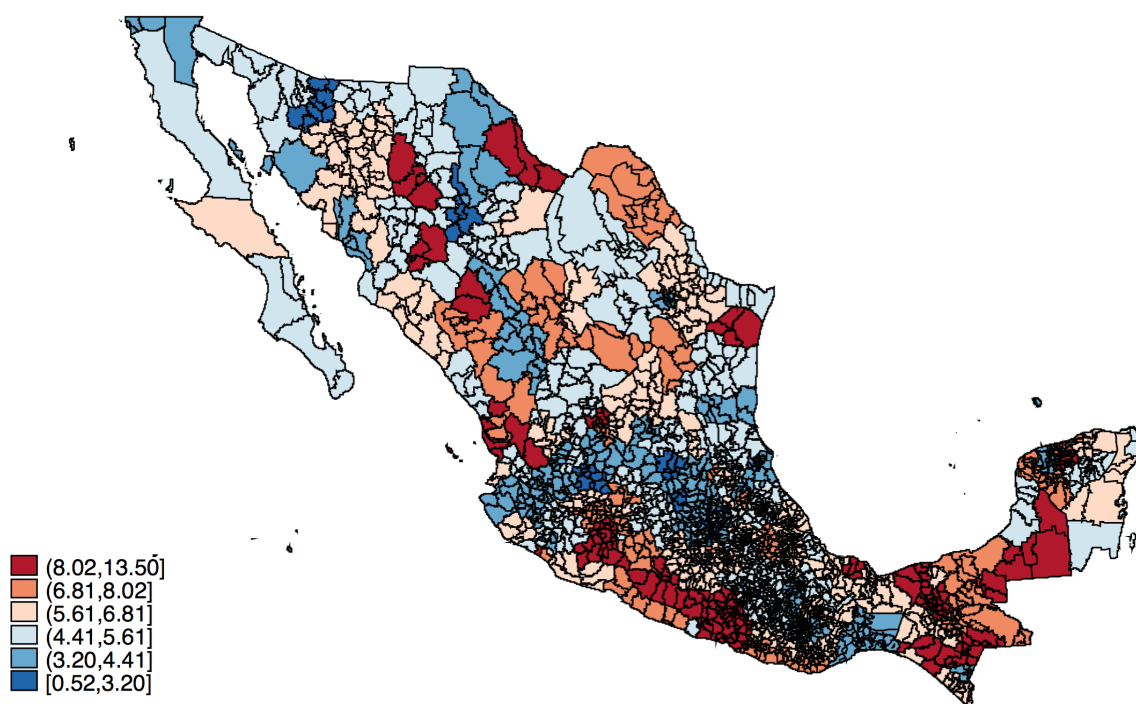
(8.02,13.50]
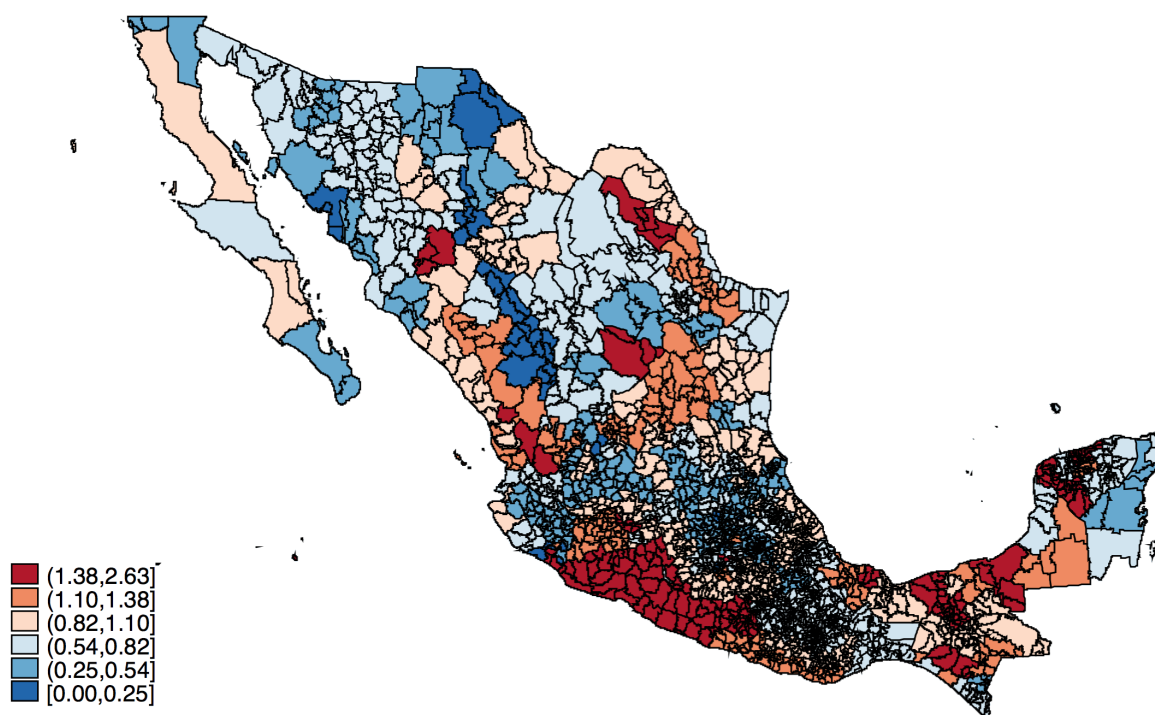(6.81,8.02]
(5.61,6.81]
(4.41,5.61]
(3.20,4.41]
[0.52,3.20]

Note: The distinction between the different groups in this map was determined using standard deviations from the media
Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

Figure 4.2. depicts the variation of very early unions throughout the territory. In this case, we also find some regions where the percentage of girls age 12 to 14 who have ever been in a union is much higher than what was found in the state-level analysis in the previous section. When we analyzed the data at the state level, the highest percentage of girls age 12 to 14 who have ever been in a union is in Guerrero, with 1.4 percent. Figure 4.2. shows that there are several regions where this percentage is very close or surpasses the indicator in Guerrero. These regions, marked in red, are in Coahuila, Chihuahua, Nayarit, Zacatecas, Colima, Michoacán, Guerrero, Veracruz, Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Oaxaca and Yucatán.

A comparison of this list with that produced for Figure 4.1. shows that only Coahuila, Zacatecas and Colima are new to this figure. In Chihuahua, Nayarit, Michoacán, Guerrero, Veracruz, Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Oaxaca and Yucatán one can find regions where both the overall level of unions of girls 12 to 17 and those of girls age 12 to 14 are relatively high. In Coahuila, Zacatecas, and Colima, the overall level of early unions of girls age 12 to 17 is not particularly high, but in some regions, very early unions, those of girls age 12 to 14, are especially elevated.

**Figure 4.2 % of girls 12 to 14 years old, who have ever been in a union
Mexico, 2015**

(1.38,2.63]
(1.10,1.38]
(0.82,1.10]
(0.54,0.82]
(0.25,0.54]
[0.00,0.25]

Note: The distinction between the different groups in this map was determined using standard deviations from the media
Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

In addition to having different levels of early and very early unions, regions exhibit variation in the most prevalent types of unions, and in their characteristics (even if they are within the same state). Figure 4.3. illustrates this variation. The four types of regions identified in this figure were constructed after conducting an analysis of the two types of unions (as defined in Table 3.4) most prevalent in each region. This analysis yielded thirteen different types of combinations of unions. In some regions, the two most prevalent types of unions were defined by the age difference between the partners, while in others they were defined by the type of union (non-formalized or marriage). The four groups that we identified, and which are depicted in Figure 4.2. are formed as follows:

◼ Regions where the two most prevalent types of unions are between partners with an age difference of five years or less. These include regions where the most prevalent type of unions are non-formalized unions with an age difference of five years or less, and the second most prevalent type of unions are marriages with a similar age difference; as well as regions where the most prevalent type of unions are marriages with an age difference between partners of 5 years or less, and the second most prevalent type of unions are non-formalized unions with a similar age difference. This type of union, which occurs between peers, is most common in

Coahuila, in the central part of Chihuahua, in Mulegé (in Baja California Sur) and in some parts of Chiapas and Campeche.

🟦   Regions where the two most prevalent types of unions are between partners with an age difference of more than ten years. These include regions where the most prevalent type of unions are non-formalized unions with an age difference of more than ten years, and the second most prevalent type of unions are marriages with a similar age difference; as well as regions where the most prevalent type of unions are marriages with an age difference between partners of 11 years or more, and the second most prevalent type of unions are non-formalized unions with a similar age difference. This type of union, which may indicate an important preference of older men for younger women, is common in some states in the northern part of the country such as Sonora, Nuevo León, Zacatecas, Durango, as well as in the eastern part (Colima, Jalisco), some parts of Guerrero and Oaxaca, and in Quintana Roo.

🟧   Regions where the two most prevalent types of unions are non-formalized. In all these regions, the two most common patterns are non-formalized unions, and the age difference between the partners is five to ten years, or 11 or more years. These regions, which are found in Durango and Zacatecas (two very conservative states both in terms of their social and political preferences and in their gender norms), not only show an implicit predilection of older men for younger women, but also a preference to keep these unions non-formal.

🟥   Regions where the two most prevalent types of unions are marriages. In all these regions, the two most common patterns are marriages, independent of the age difference between the partners. There are some regions in this group where the age difference between partners is ten years or less, others where it is five years or more, and still others where it is a combination of both small and large age differences (5 years or less, and 11 years or more). The key in all these regions, which is present through most of the country, is a tendency to formalize early unions. This result may seem inconsistent with our argument that about 80 percent of early unions in the country are non-formalized, but it is explained by the fact that the most frequent regions are those where the age difference between partners is 11 years or more and that the regions with the highest percentage of girls 12 to 17 years old are not characterized by a high prevalence of marriage. Still, the fact that there are so many regions where marriage is important, and that these are geographically scattered in the country, highlights the importance of increasing the minimum legal age at marriage everywhere and ensuring that this regulation is properly enforced.

The analysis of Figure 4.3. is important and compliments those results shown previously because, as we have been arguing through this report, early unions are present throughout the country, even if its frequency varies from one place to the other. Figure 4.3. implies that it is not only the level of early unions that varies, but also the characteristics of these unions (and the cultural and social norms that may

be behind them). In order to eventually eradicate early unions, policy makers need to take these variations into account.

Figure 4.3 Most common type of early unions
Mexico, 2015
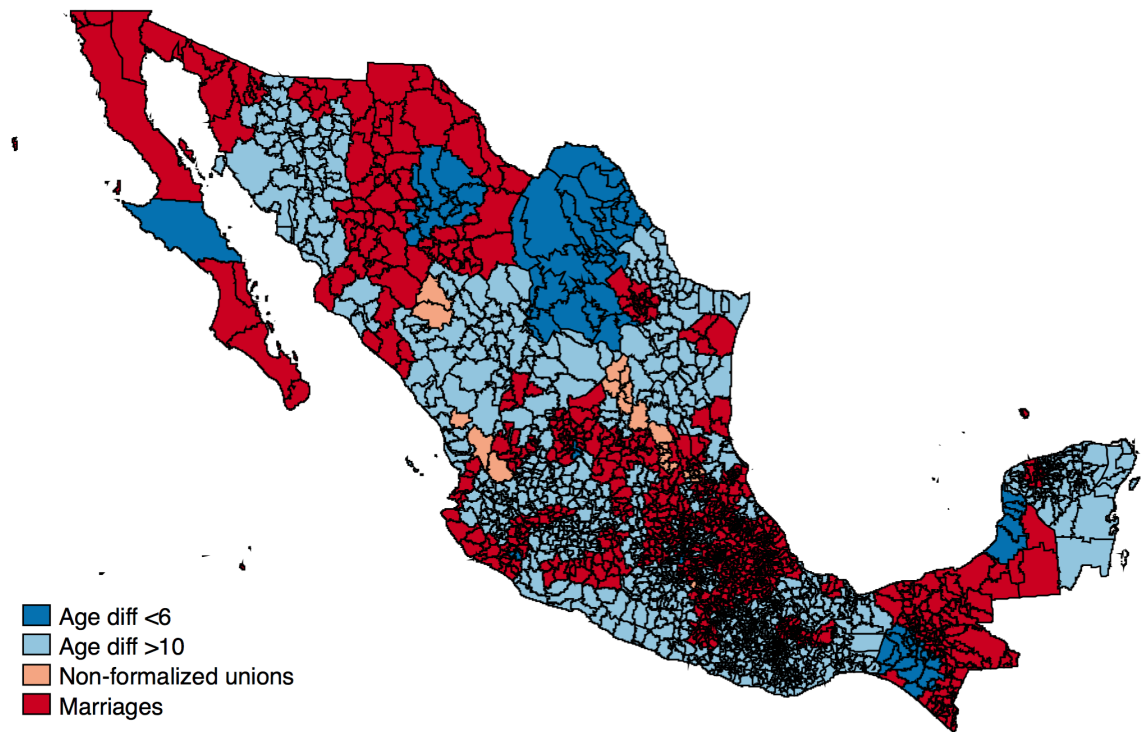
Note: The distinction between the different groups in this map was determined by analyzing the two most common patterns of unions in each state, as defined by the clusters used in the national and state-level analysis. Further information about how these groups were determined can be found in the text.
Source: Intercesal Survey 2015, own estimations, weighted data

CONCLUSIONS

The project "Furthering understanding and knowledge regarding the determining factors and consequences of early unions for Mexican women" had the objectives of characterizing nuptiality and reproductive behaviors of young Mexican women at the national, state and municipal level; analyzing the relationship between nuptiality and reproductive behaviors at different levels of aggregation; and identifying hot spots and target populations for interventions to decrease both child marriage and teenage pregnancy and support child brides and teenage mothers. We pursued these objectives with an analysis of the 2015 Intercensal Survey (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), 2015), with in-depth interviews with women and girls who had been in an early union in Estado de México, Nayarit and Tabasco, and with interviews with key informants in these three states as well as Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca.

Our findings confirm what Amador and Rosana Hernández (2015) had already indicated: that early unions in Mexico are not rare and that there is important variation in this phenomena throughout the country. Indeed, one of the most important and consistent findings of this study is that the level and nature of early unions varies significantly across both states and regions within states. Our national estimates indicate that about one in every twenty girls age 12 to 17 in 2015 have been in a union. However, when these numbers are disaggregated at the regional level, one finds some places where one in ten or 13 percent of girls in that age group have been in a union. Something similar happens when analyzing the types of unions. Eight in every ten unions of girls age 12 to 17 are non-formalized, but the analysis at the state and regional levels show that this too is not homogeneous. In Quintana Roo, about 90 percent of early unions are non-formalized while in Guerrero, this percentage is less than 65 percent. The analysis of this behavior at the regional level shows that there are some areas, scattered across the country, where marriages are more frequent than non-formalized unions.

Early unions are commonly associated both in the popular mind and in policy terms with teenage pregnancies. Our study shows that this relation is not completely erroneous since the great majority of girls 12 to 17 who have ever had a child are also in a union. Nevertheless, about half of girls in this age range who are in a union have never had a child. This is important in policy terms for two reasons. It indicates that not all early unions are due to a pregnancy, although in some cases the two are linked. It also shows that young women who are in a union may need different reproductive and sexual health services. Some may want to delay their pregnancies or limit their fertility. Others need services for their children. Providers need to consider this range of needs.

Two important and surprising findings of our study were that three of every four young women in a union have a partner who is at least six years older than they are and that about half of young women in a union live with their in-laws. Like

everything else we explored in this report, these two behaviors vary across states and regions. Nevertheless, it is important to have these results in mind when designing policies aimed at decreasing early unions because they reveal the motivations and social and cultural norms that shape the practice. The qualitative component of our study indicated that girls may have different reasons for entering into an early union. An unplanned pregnancy is one of them, but other reasons include the need to escape a violent or hostile environment at home, the desire to experiment sexually without incurring social sanctions and a lack of opportunities to continue education or work. In addition, social norms may indicate to young people that starting a family of their own is key to gaining status in their community and transitioning into other adult roles. Culturally, men seem to want to be linked to much younger women and this may also play a role in encouraging early unions.

Our qualitative study also showed that young women who live with their in-laws are more vulnerable to discrimination and neighborhood gossip. Girls who lived with their parents had better emotional, social and economic support to deal with the changes that come from starting a union and any problems that may arise either with the couple's relationship or after a break up. Ending early unions is a priority but, until that goal is achieved, it is important to emphasize the essential role family support plays in helping young women cope with any situational challenges.

In sum, our study contributes to the understanding of early unions in Mexico and provides elements to formulate social policies and programs aimed at eradicating this practice. We show that while early unions in Mexico are relatively commonplace, the relevancy of this custom varies across regions. The unions themselves are diverse in nature and dependent on a variety of factors including social norms regarding adult behavior, gender expectations and even place of residence. Not acknowledging this heterogeneity or the importance of cultural influences may lead to one-size-fits-all policies that prove inadequate and irrelevant.

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