

Dating and Secondary School Completion in Urban Kenya

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Abstract:

Completing secondary school is increasingly viewed as a desirable life goal for young men and women living in urban Kenya. This goal sometimes complements and at other times competes with other important adolescent transitions such as initiating sexual activity, getting married, and having children. The process of dating is directly related to all three of these other life transitions, yet has received little attention in empirical research on schooling in sub-Saharan Africa. Instead, research is often limited to retrospectively reported events such as age at first marriage and first sex. In this paper, we draw on a ten-year retrospective Relationship History Calendar, which gathered detailed monthly information on schooling, employment, migration, and all romantic and sexual partnerships, including marital intentions, sexual behaviors, and pregnancy outcomes. We find that for both men and women it is not simply being sexually active, but rather how many sexual partners they have, that negatively impacts their chances of completing secondary school. Similarly, while pregnancy for women diminishes their chances of graduating from secondary school, it does not fully account for the effects having sexual partners. Lastly, while finding a suitable marriage partner actually *increases* the likelihood of that men finish secondary school, it substantially *reduces* women's completion rates, suggesting that marriage and schooling are viewed as complementary goals for men but competing goals for women.

Introduction:

Over the last 20 years, Kenya has experienced an impressive rise in educational attainment. Over 95% of both boys and girls receive at least some primary school education. The percentage entering and completing secondary school is also rising, particularly in urban centers like Nairobi, Mombassa and Kisumu. In these urban settings, obtaining a secondary school diploma is viewed as an increasingly important step towards securing steady employment, particularly in the formal market. The relatively high costs of secondary school fees—and the willingness of some families to pay these fees—attests to the continued belief that, despite recent shrinkages in the Kenyan economy, the returns to secondary school education are high.

Completing secondary school, however, is only one of several important life objectives for youth in urban Kenya. Other desirable transitions include finding a secure job, setting up an independent household, finding a suitable marriage partner, initiating sexual activity, and beginning to bear and rear children— though not necessarily in that order. Some of these transitions may be considered complementary to one another. For men, completing schooling may increase their chances of finding steady employment and steady employment may enhance their ability to support a wife and children. In other instances, these objectives may be competing or conflicting. Initiating sexual activity, especially for girls, is usually portrayed as being particularly at odds with the goal of completing secondary school (Biddlecom et al. 2007). Being sexually active places girls at risk of becoming pregnant and in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa pregnant girls and mothers are compelled to leave school at least temporarily. Early marriage is also often cited as limiting women's educational attainment. Unlike men, because women are expected to marry earlier they may have to choose between accepting a desirable marriage proposal and staying in school. Recent careful estimates from Kenya and in five countries in western Africa have shown that schoolgirl pregnancy may actually be less likely than early marriage to curtail women's educational achievement (Lloyd and Mensch 2008; Mensch et al. 2001). Interestingly, while some countries like Botswana and South Africa have implemented programs to encourage unwed mothers to return to school, policies which forbid married woman of any age and regardless of whether she has children of enrolling in school have remained in place (Meekers and Ahmed 1999).

In many of these studies, sexual activity, pregnancy, and marriage are often treated as if they occur independently and are rarely viewed in the context of dating and courtship. While forced or non-consensual sex is far from uncommon in countries like Kenya (Erulkar 2004), the majority of sexual activity is voluntary and is often considered an important part of the dating and courtship process (Poulin 2007). Dating¹, in turn, has

¹ Throughout the paper we use the term dating to refer to the formation of different sexual and romantic partnerships among unmarried youths. The term dating, however, may be a bit of a misnomer in this context to the extent that it implies a series of formal outings to public places (i.e. restaurants, movies, or public events). As in many contexts, the behaviors that define different types of relationships are constantly evolving. Dating, however, can be distinguished from other forms of socializing with friends in that it entails romantic and/or sexual feelings.

become a common precursor to marriage as adolescents have become increasingly responsible for finding their own suitable marriage partner. Recent research has shown among youth in urban Kenya the formation of both sexual and romantic partnerships is integrally linked to the marriage process (Clark, Kabiru and Mathur Forthcoming). Dating may increase the likelihood of having sex (and hence pregnancy), but it may also increase the chance of finding a suitable partner (and hence increase the chance of marriage). Apart from both pregnancy and marriage, dating may itself may serve as a distraction from adolescents' studies, and directly compromise their performance in school. Schoolgirls in rural Malawi who are serious about obtaining an education have forsworn all dating, stating that having a boyfriend would "disturb their education" (Poulin 2007).

It is unclear whether dating is similarly antithetical to the educational goals for men. Although to our knowledge, there are no direct studies on the impact of getting a partner pregnant on men's education, it is often presumed that this effect is minimal (Meekers and Ahmed 1999). Similarly, because men generally marry at older ages, even if a man "falls in love" or wishes to marry a particular woman, waiting until he has completed his schooling before marriage might be more acceptable. Yet, just as for women, dating may be equally distracting and may serve as an indicator that young men are not focusing on their studies.

In this study, we carefully examine the relationship between dating and secondary school completion among young men and women in urban Kenya. In particular, we explore how dating (including both romantic and sexual partnerships) may influence the risk of dropping out of school both directly and indirectly via pregnancy and marital intentions. Unlike other studies, which rely on rather imprecise year estimates of the timing of key events (i.e. age of first sex, age of first marriage, and last year of completed schooling), we employ data from a ten-year life history calendar which collects key information on monthly basis. This calendar also contains detailed information about all sexual and romantic partnerships for each respondent during the preceding ten years. As such, we are able to provide a far more nuanced view of some of the determinants of school completion, not only for women, but also for men.

Data and Methods:

This paper draws on life history data from a study conducted in the summer of 2007. The study employed a novel survey instrument called the "Relationship Histories Calendar" (RHC), which is a modification of the well established life history calendar method. The RHC gathered retrospective information on monthly changes in residence, schooling (enrollment and level), employment, and household composition (including the survival status of parents). In addition, the RHC was specifically designed to capture the dynamic processes of youths' romantic and sexual life histories. Respondents provided detailed information about each of their romantic and sexual partnerships over the last ten years, including when (if ever) sexual activity occurred and whether the respondent ever wanted to marry their partner. Ethical approval was granted by all collaborating institutions.

Our sample was drawn by contacting every other household in 45 randomly selected urban enumeration areas. Men and women ages 18 to 24 in the selected households were eligible to be interviewed as index respondents. One index respondent was randomly chosen per household and he or she was randomly assigned to receive either the RHC or a more standard demographic survey. A comparison of the quality of the data gathered by each type of survey instrument found that overall the RHC collected equally consistent and comparable data relative to the standard survey with less social desirability bias found in the reporting of sexual behaviors (Luke, Clark and Zulu 2008). In the present study we only use data from the RHC. In total, 608 index respondents (286 women and 322 men) received the RHC.

We use survival analysis to determine factors associated with completion of secondary school among these youths. In Kenya, the final year of compulsory schooling- corresponding to the completion of secondary education- is known as Form 4. Students who are no longer enrolled in school and who did not complete at least 9 months of Form 4 are considered to have “dropped out” and are coded as “1”. Students who were temporarily not enrolled in school because of school holidays or absences between grades are also not considered to have dropped out. Students who are no longer enrolled but completed at least 9 months of Form 4 are considered to have completed schooling and are coded as “0”. We begin our survival analysis for secondary school completion at age 14. As such we remove 32 respondents who did not attend any school after age 14. An additional 39 respondents are censored because they are still in school at the time of the survey. Slightly less than half of the women in our sample left school before completing Form 4 (46.8%) compared to about a third of men (35.5%).

(insert Table 1 about here)

In our survival models, we include controls for several characteristics that have been shown to be correlated with educational achievement. Our time constant characteristics include respondent age, ethnicity and religious affiliation. Our bivariate results show that for men, belonging to a traditional or African faith is associated with a greater likelihood of dropping out before finishing secondary school. Belonging to an ethnic group other than Luo or Luhya is associated with a higher likelihood of finishing secondary school, although this may be correlated with migration status, as members of other ethnic groups may specifically migrate to Kisumu to continue their post-secondary education. Indeed, we find that for women, more migratory moves are associated with being more likely to complete secondary school.

There is a growing literature on the long-term effects of losing either a mother or a father on child development and well-being (Beegle and Krutikova 2006). Death of a parent could adversely affect the child’s ability to attend school and this effect may differ for mothers and fathers and for sons and daughters. Thus, we include a time-varying dummy variable indicating whether or not respondent’s mother or father has died. In our bivariate results, the death of both a mother and father appear to adversely affect women’s ability to complete secondary school, while only the death of a father reduces men’s schooling attainment.

Conspicuously absent from our models are measures of socio-economic status or wealth. Unfortunately, while respondent's income was retrospectively reported their wealth (measured by household assets) was not. Other studies have used current measures of household assets (Biddlecom et al. 2007). So long as the youth remained in the same household this may prove to be a useful proxy. We intend to explore this option in the future by limiting our sample to youths who have not changed households since the age of 14 and examining the effect of including current wealth measures on the other regression coefficients.

Lastly, we are especially interested in how marital aspirations, sexual behavior, pregnancy, and dating are related to whether or not men and women drop out of school. Because several of these factors are closely related to each other, we employ a series of nested models to disentangle the direct and indirect effects. In the first model, we include only measures for "ever had sex" and for "ever wanted to marry a partner". In Model 2, we add pregnancy to determine the extent to which the effect of being sexually active is mediated by pregnancy outcomes. In other words, we explore whether being sexually active is only detrimental to education when it results in pregnancy. In our third and final model, we include the respondent's cumulative number of sexual and romantic partners as a measure of their dating history. This model allows us to assess whether the process of dating and both the number and type of dating partners, is directly related to school outcomes. We note that because we retain the variable "ever had sex", the coefficient for cumulative number of sexual partners should be interpreted as "controlling for whether or not the respondent ever had sex, what is the effect of each additional sexual partner he or she had."

Results:

Model 1 of Table 2 shows our preliminary survival analysis results for secondary school completion for women. Not surprisingly, older individuals experience an increased hazard of dropping out rather than finishing secondary schooling. Women who belong to a traditional or African religion have almost a three fold higher risk of leaving school before completing Form 4. Women whose fathers have died experience more than a two-fold higher risk of dropping out of school, while having a mother die also appears to decrease the chance of completing secondary school, but this effect is not statistically significant. Lastly, we find in Model 1 that girls who find a suitable marriage partner are about two times as likely to drop out of school as girls who never date anyone whom they would like to marry. Consistent with previous findings, we also show that women who have had sex are at a significantly elevated risk of dropping out before completing secondary school.

(insert Table 2 about here)

In Model 2, we include an indicator for whether or not the woman was ever pregnant and find that getting pregnant has a significant and strong negative effect on school completion. Interestingly, while the magnitude of the coefficients on "wanted to marry"

and “had sex” are reduced somewhat, they remain significantly positively associated with dropping out of school, even after controlling for pregnancy. In our final model, we examine the impact of dating on school completion. We find no significant effect of having romantic partners on school completion rates. However, each additional sexual partner a woman has increases her risk of dropping out two-fold. Moreover, after including these measures of dating, the effect of ever having sex and wanting to marry are no longer significant.

(insert Table 3 about here)

Like women, we find that older men who belong to a traditional religious group are more likely to drop out of school. In contrast to women, however, the number of moves men make is positively associated with failure to complete secondary school. The effect of losing a mother appears to have no significant effect, while the death of a father has only a weak detrimental effect, on men’s schooling. Somewhat surprisingly, we find that in all three models men who have found a partner whom they would like to marry are actually more likely to stay in school and complete their secondary degree. Model 2 also shows that being sexually active is positively correlated with dropping out of school for men. Moreover, contrary to previous expectations, we find that men who get their partner’s pregnant are more than twice as likely to drop out of school (although this coefficient is only significant at $p=0.066$). In our final model, we add measures for the number and type of men’s partners. We find that not only is the total number of sexual partners associated with lower school achievement for men, but that after accounting for the total number of sexual partners neither ever having sex nor having a pregnant partner is significantly related to schooling outcomes.

Discussion:

Given that these are preliminary results, we will limit our discussion to only a few potentially interesting findings. First, we find evidence that dating, particularly having multiple sexual partners, adversely affects educational attainment. Specifically, it appears that it is not simply being sexually active, but rather the number of sexual partners that contributes to dropping out of school. Interestingly, spending too much time dating seems to conflict with schooling not only for women, but for men as well. Second, pregnancy has a clear negative effect on women’s schooling and (prior to controlling for the total number of sexual partners) a marginally significant negative effect on men’s schooling. Nonetheless, even after controlling for pregnancy we find that the number of sexual partners remains a significant predictor of dropping out of school. Lastly, we find opposing effects of marital aspirations on the educational attainment of men and women. For women, finding a person whom would be suitable for marriage increases their risk of dropping out of school, while for men it increases their likelihood of completing secondary school. This pronounced gender difference may reflect different implications of secondary school education on the marriage market. For women, secondary school education may be viewed as competing objective to marriage, compelling women to choose either to stay in school or to marry. For men, finishing

secondary school may be seen as a way to enhance their ability to marry their chosen partner after graduation.

In our future analyses, we intend to further explore the relationships between dating, sex, pregnancy, marriage, and schooling by examining the potential effects of schooling on relationship formation (particularly engagement or marriage) and sexual activity. In addition, recognizing the endogeneity between schooling, relationship formation, and sexual behaviors, we plan to employ some descriptive sequence analyses techniques to identify the most common order and timing of these key transitions as well as their implications for making other successful transitions into adulthood.

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Table 1. *Respondent characteristics*

Dependent Variable	Women			Men		
	(n=269)			(n=307)		
	Complete	Dropout	Sig	Complete	Dropout	Sig
Dropped out before completing Form 4		46.8			35.5	
Independent Variables						
<i>Time constant</i>						
Current age	20.5	20.5		20.7	20.5	
R ethnicity						*
Luo	69.2	72.2		73.2	85.6	
Luhya	19.6	19.1		10.1	11.0	
Other	11.2	8.7		16.8	6.4	
R Religion						***
Catholic	27.5	23.8		23.2	24.8	
Protestant	44.4	34.9		51.5	33.0	
Pentecostal	20.4	23.0		14.7	16.5	
African/Traditional	4.9	11.9		3.0	17.4	
Muslims/Other/None	2.8	6.4		7.6	8.3	
<i>Time varying</i>						
Mean migrations*	0.4	0.2	***	0.4	0.4	
Father died*	22.1	38.1	**	25.8	37.0	*
Mother died*	9.9	20.2	*	15.7	18.5	
Want to marry partner*	31.5	27.8		47.5	21.1	***
Ever sex*	46.1	42.3		69.1	60.2	
Pregnancy*	10.5	13.5		5.1	7.3	
Mean sexual partners*	0.6	0.7		1.1	1.0	
Mean romantic partners*	0.4	0.2	***	0.5	0.2	***

Sig. *p<=0.05, **p<=0.01,

***p<=0.001

*= reports value in the month before dropping out or completing secondary school

Table 2. Predictors of dropping out before completing secondary school; survival analysis (females, n=243)

	HR	Std. Err	Sig	HR	Std. Err	Sig	HR	Std. Err	Sig
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
Age	1.02	0.01	***	1.02	0.01	**	1.02	0.01	***
Ethnicity									
Luo	0.84	0.30		0.89	0.31		0.82	0.29	
Luhya	0.87	0.34		0.90	0.35		0.83	0.33	
Other (ref)									
Religion									
Catholic (ref)									
Protestant	0.78	0.20		0.75	0.20		0.63	0.17	
Pentecostal	1.25	0.35		1.33	0.38		1.21	0.35	
African/Traditional	2.83	0.99	**	3.01	1.06	**	2.50	0.89	**
Muslims/Other/None	1.56	0.73		1.72	0.81		1.93	0.93	
Cum. Migrations	0.70	0.14	+	0.62	0.13	*	0.62	0.13	*
Father died	2.14	0.47	**	2.23	0.50	***	2.11	0.47	***
Mother died	1.54	0.44		1.45	0.42		1.62	0.48	
Wanted to marry	1.98	0.52	**	1.77	0.48	*	1.45	0.42	
Had sex	2.24	0.55	**	1.92	0.51	*	0.76	0.27	
Had pregnancy				2.85	0.92	**	2.82	0.93	**
Cum. Sexual partners							2.14	0.42	***
Cum. Romantic partners							0.71	0.20	

Sig. +<=0.10, *p<=0.05, **p<=0.01, ***p<=0.001

Table 3. Predictors of dropping out before completing secondary school; survival analysis (males, n=276)

	HR	Std. Err	Sig	HR	Std. Err	Sig	HR	Std. Err	Sig
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
Age	1.02	0.01	***	1.02	0.01	***	1.02	0.01	***
Ethnicity									
Luo	2.06	0.92		2.08	0.92	+	1.95	0.87	
Luhya	2.30	1.20		2.30	1.20		2.17	1.14	
Other (ref)									
Religion									
Catholic (ref)									
Protestant	0.85	0.25		0.87	0.26		0.97	0.29	
Pentecostal	1.74	0.62		1.84	0.66	+	1.91	0.69	
African/Traditional	2.71	0.95	**	2.86	1.02	**	3.20	1.15	***
Muslims/Other/None	1.58	0.77		1.54	0.75		1.65	0.81	
Cum. Migrations	1.42	0.21	*	1.36	0.21	*	1.33	0.21	
Father died	1.58	0.40	+	1.59	0.41	+	1.51	0.39	
Mother died	0.85	0.27		0.80	0.26		0.91	0.30	
Wanted to marry	0.55	0.16	*	0.50	0.15	*	0.47	0.14	*
Had sex	2.04	0.52	**	1.96	0.50	**	1.45	0.43	
Had pregnancy				2.23	0.97	+	1.73	0.78	
Cum. Sexual partners							1.25	0.12	*
Cum. Romantic partners							0.85	0.19	

Sig. +<=0.10, *p<=0.05, **p<=0.01, ***p<=0.001