
Subject: Self-reported age of marriage variable
Posted by [crystalUTS](#) on Sun, 02 Oct 2016 07:45:15 GMT
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Hello,

I am working on a project about marriage age in Africa. One of the countries I am analysing is Benin and using all years the standard DHS data sets are available for. The datasets are of the "STATA individual recode data sets".

When I plot the proportion of women who are married/cohabiting before they turn 16 years old (using self-reported age of marriage variable) against their birth year I find a strange pattern in the data. In particular, among women who are very young in a given survey (e.g. age <=20) these proportions are low, but when I use a later survey and look at the women of the same birth year these proportions are twice as large. I have attached the graphs and Stata code used to generate them.

Could you please let me know what could explain this pattern? Is it that very young women tend to under-report their married status, or is it that the very young women who agree to participate in the survey are somehow different (e.g. more emancipated and hence less likely to be married before turning 16 y.o). Or am I just using the data incorrectly? I would very much appreciate your advice.

File Attachments

- 1) [code2.do](#), downloaded 432 times
 - 2) [Figure.docx](#), downloaded 451 times
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Subject: Re: Self-reported age of marriage variable
Posted by [Bridgette-DHS](#) on Wed, 05 Oct 2016 11:29:50 GMT
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Following is a combined response from three of our Senior DHS Specialists:

Quote:From Shea Rutstein: I believe that could be three potential biases: 1. Young women who are in a relationship for a short time may believe that it will last quite a while and therefore give the date of when they started living with him. 2. On the contrary, the young women are not sure that the relationship will last but later on have a baby with the man and therefore later on, say the date when they first met or had sex with the man. 3. For women under age 20, they may not be in a union but when the cohort ages, they choose the heaped age of 18 even though they "married" at a higher age, especially if they are now older and do not remember the age or date well. The strength of each bias may depend on how well age is an important factor in the society, social norms about out of wedlock children and sexual relationships with multiple partners, etc. My suggestions: 1. As was said, track age at first birth for cohorts over the surveys. (Note that age at first union and first birth should include all respondents, not just those ever in union or had a child, otherwise there is a bias). 2. For both age at first union and first birth, check current status report by single year of age to see if there is significant heaping. 3. If there are enough cases, analyze dividing the sample by level of education (none and less than primary complete versus primary

complete or more). I would expect more stability in reporting with more education.

From Kerry MacQuarrie: Marriages among the youngest cohorts are under-reported because they are not necessarily construed as marriages in real-time, but those surviving as marriages are retrospectively reclassified as such, as you explain. This would cause a detectable difference in the % for the same birth year estimated from 2 different surveys (1) among the age groups where marriage is concentrated (i.e. younger ages) and/or (2) among age groups for whom relationships are most likely to experience instability early on (i.e. younger ages). This would suggest that the estimate taken later on is more accurate and perhaps should be weighted more. Or perhaps taking a larger age span rather than single year brackets might smooth over some of the inter-survey variation? I'd also point out that there is a variable corresponding to question 801, which disaggregates not in union, living with a man (as if married), and "actually" (formally) married.

From Tom Pullum: I don't think this is a real inconsistency, that is, a data quality issue. I believe these tend to be unions that did not begin with a formal ceremony. The young women and a partner have living arrangements that can either dissolve or become stable over a period of time. In a sense there is a transition during which the woman's "boy friend" becomes her "spouse". I believe that is what is going on--just an evolving definition of whether a relationship is tentative or confirmed. When it is "confirmed", then the start and status are back-dated. You could compare with a setting in which unions do tend to begin with a formal ceremony. I think the pattern would not be observed there. Also, in Benin, you could look at the reporting of age at first birth. If you see the same pattern for age at first birth in successive surveys, then there could indeed be a data quality issue. Thoughts from other forum users would be welcome.

Subject: Re: Self-reported age of marriage variable
Posted by [crystalUTS](#) on Thu, 13 Oct 2016 04:08:11 GMT
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Hello,

Thank you for all your responses.

I have taken the feedback and attempted to look at the prevalence of all women who had children before the age of 16. I have attached the figures and code for reference.

However, it still seems to have similar trends to my previous results in prevalence of marriage where the proportions are different in each interview year even when the women have the same birth year.

File Attachments

- 1) [code3.do](#), downloaded 449 times
- 2) [Figure_ChildB16.docx](#), downloaded 478 times

Subject: Re: Self-reported age of marriage variable
Posted by [Bridgette-DHS](#) on Fri, 14 Oct 2016 12:02:49 GMT
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Following is a response from Senior DHS Stata Specialist, Tom Pullum:

Quote:Hi Christal--Thanks for sharing this. There's probably a combination of explanations, some of which relate to the quality of the responses. Within the forum, however, the DHS staff cannot go any farther with it. I will share with Kerry MacQuarrie and Shea Rutstein and it is possible that they will get back to you.
