

Post-Millennial Filipinos: Renewed Hope vs Risks

Further Studies of the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study

*Ecological
Determinants
of Early
Marriage
Among
Eastern
Visayan
Youth*



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Pierce S. Docena and Maria Midea M. Kabamalan

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Message from the Executive Director

Since the turn of the century over fifteen years ago, the Philippines has seen the rise of the millennial generation of young Filipinos who are currently shaping the political landscape in late 2016 as they take a committed stand on the issues of the day.

It is appropriate for those concerned with Philippine development work to now start looking at the next generation of Filipinos and the Commission on Population has had a tradition of producing studies concerning young people.

“Post-Millennial Filipinos: Renewed Hope vs Risks” compiles 17 regional papers based on the dataset of the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study. These studies explore and discuss the emerging issues and concerns of the youth that need appropriate policy and program responses.



The latest YAFS comes more than a decade after the 2002 YAFS. The 2002 YAFS showed the concerns of the millennial Filipino much like the latest YAFS of 2013 marks the rise of the Filipinos born around the turn of the century and could foretell the shape of things to come for the 21st century young Filipino.

The post-millennial Filipino is focused on screens (smart phone, tablet and monitor) and the media is full of “hashtag-worthy” statements of 140 words.

The studies we are presenting continue to note and update matters such as sexual risk behaviors, early sexual involvement, teen pregnancy, reproductive health problems including sexually-transmitted infections as well as non-sexual risk behaviors such as smoking, alcohol abuse and drug use as well as suicide ideation and lifestyle.

We invite you to tune in to the latest findings about the post-millennial Filipino. It can only result in a more informed thread of interaction with the shapers of our country’s future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Juan Antonio A. Perez III'.

Juan Antonio A. Perez III, MD, MPH

Executive Director

Commission on Population

Background

The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study is the fourth installment of a series of nationally representative cross-sectional surveys on Filipino youth aged 15-24 (for YAFS 1 and 2 and 15-27 for YAFS 3). The YAFS has yielded valuable information about young people's sexual and non-sexual behavior, education, labor force participation, family relationships, attitudes and values regarding certain issues concerning them, personal characteristics like self-esteem, and adverse conditions like suicidal ideation and depression symptoms, all of which are of pertinence to one's understanding of this significant sector of society. The 2013 YAFS or YAFS 4 in particular was a response to the need of updating information on the situation of today's young people. From YAFS 3 in 2002, there have been many important new developments in the environment where young people are situated that need to be studied as these affect not just their sexual and non-sexual risk taking behaviors but also their total well-being. For instance, the changes in communication and information technology such as the prevalent use of cellular phones and the internet and the new forms of communication that these have produced like social networking were not explored in the previous YAFS. The foregoing expansion in technology is presumed to have resulted to notable changes in the patterns and topographies of courtship, dating and relationships among young people. The upsurge in the incidence of HIV infection primarily among men who have sex with other men (MSMs) requires more recent reliable data on male sexual and non-sexual risk behaviors which is currently not available because regular survey rounds like the National Demographic and Health Surveys conducted every five years does not routinely include men. Moreover, with YAFS 4, core behaviors that have been monitored over time in YAFS 1, 2 and 3 were also updated. Among these are the sexual risky behaviors, such as the prevalence of early sexual involvement, teen pregnancy and reproductive health problems including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as non-sexual risk behavior like smoking, drinking and drug use.

With the wealth of information yielded by the YAFS 4, the Commission on Population (POPCOM) in partnership with the Demographic Research and Development Foundation, Inc. (DRDF) came up with seventeen (17) regional papers (Regions 1-13, 4B, CAR, NCR and ARMM) that explore and discuss the emerging issues and concerns of the young people that need appropriate policy and program responses.

Ecological Determinants of Early Marriage Among Eastern Visayan Youth

Pierce S. Docena¹ and Maria Midea M. Kabamalan²

Abstract

This paper adopted an ecological approach to study early marriage among Eastern Visayan youth aged 15–24 years. Using data from the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study, we examined selected individual characteristics and experiences as well as proximal and distal factors that could be associated with whether the youth have never been in a marital union, lived in before first formal marriage, or did not live in before formal marriage. Bivariate analysis revealed that the respondents' sex, age, attitude toward cohabitation, contraceptive use during premarital sex (PMS), parental living arrangement, primary raiser's strictness, having same-sex friends with PMS experience, poverty, and perception of community acceptance of cohabitation were significantly related to their experience with early marriage. We also found no significant relationship between early marriage and the quality of the family relationship, discussion of sex at home, and education. Using marital union status (whether the youth had ever been married) as a dependent variable, we performed binary logistic regression and came up with three models starting with individual characteristics and experiences only (Model 1) and eventually adding proximal (Model 2) and distal factors (Model 3). Results show that previously significant variables such as attitude toward cohabitation and education turned out non-significant in the second and third models, respectively. We discuss the implications for research on early marriage as well as the need to come up with programs and policies for the youth if formal marriage is to remain the ideal marital setup.

Keywords: early marriage, cohabitation, YAFS4, Eastern Visayas, Filipino youth

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Background and context

Marriage has long been established as an important event and a social institution in the Philippines. It is an affair that binds together not only the two individuals concerned but also their families and friends. It is therefore not surprising that Filipino families spend so much time, energy, and resources in preparing for wedding ceremonies.

Although wedding ceremonies usually last for only a few hours, marriage is not just a one-time event. It leads to important consequences in the life of the married couple and those surrounding them. This is why other institutions such as the government and the church accord rights and privileges specifically to married couples. This is perhaps also the reason why scholars take such a high interest in this phenomenon, judging by the bulk of research on marriage alone. From a developmental perspective, marriage may be seen as the youth's formal initiation into adulthood, especially if the married couple establishes a household separate from their parents (Kabamalan, 2009).

The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study or YAFS4 (Demographic Research and Development Foundation [DRDF] & UP Population Institute [UPPI], 2014) shows that significantly more Filipino youth are single (76.6%) than in union. Of those who are in union, more Filipino youth are living in (13.8%) than formally married (8.5%). The fact that the majority of Filipino youth have never been in union may be expected because of their young age, but it is noteworthy that almost one fourth of them have already been in a marital union either through formal marriage or cohabitation.

Predecessor studies of YAFS have shown different trends for those who are never married, formally married, and living in (DRDF & UPPI, 2014). Specifically, the Filipino youth who are single increased from 83 percent in 1994 to 84 percent in 2002 but dropped considerably to 77 percent in 2013. The percentage of Filipino young adults who are formally married is steadily declining based on 1994, 2002, and 2013 YAFS data (12%, 10%, and 9% respectively). On the other hand, the proportion of Filipino youth who are living in has increased significantly in about two decades. There was a 1 percentage point increase in the number of Filipino youth who were cohabiting from 1994 to 2002 (4.7% to 5.9%), but by 2013, this figure had more than doubled (13.8%). The data seem to suggest that the decrease in the proportion of Filipino youth who are single and formally married was offset by the large increase in those who are living in, a pattern that is also seen from various census data (see Xenos & Kabamalan, 2007).

This paper focuses on the youth's experiences with early marriage. First marital unions mark a significant phase in the lives of married youth because they set in motion a number of changes such as the elevation to adulthood, a signal of independence and maturity,

a different set of social expectations for the married individual, and corresponding benefits of being a person “in union” (Kabamalan, 2009). However, these changes may become problematic if the marital union happens at a time when the youth might not yet be ready to take on the additional responsibilities attached to being married. For example, early marriage can get in the way of the youth’s education or result in pregnancy that the married couple are both physically and psychologically unprepared for.

Early marriage, particularly first marital union, can take on several forms. The couple may decide to live in only, while others may immediately proceed to formal marriage. There may also be others who initially form a union by living in and eventually move to formal marriage. An earlier study by Kabamalan (2004) showed that living in has become part of the marriage process as a temporary arrangement, but a formal marriage remains ideal among the Filipino youth. These different forms of first marital union, together with those who have never been in a marital union, are considered in this paper to get a fuller picture of early marriage.

The topic of early marriage is made more relevant in Region VIII or Eastern Visayas, where despite ranking sixth among 17 regions in terms of the percentage of youth aged 15–24 who have ever been married, the proportion of those who are living in is the second highest compared with other regions (18.9%) while the proportion of youth who are formally married is the third lowest in the country (4.9%). It is also worth noting that Eastern Visayas registered the highest level of cohabitation in the country in 2002. Thus, while national data on the current marital status of Filipino youth reveal a high proportion of those who are living in compared with those who are formally married, this pattern is consistently more pronounced in Eastern Visayas.

Socio-demographic characteristics of Eastern Visayas

The Eastern Visayas Region is composed of the three major islands of Leyte, Samar, and Biliran. It has six provinces (Biliran, Eastern Samar, Leyte, Northern Samar, Southern Leyte, and Samar), seven cities (Tacloban, a highly urbanized city and the regional capital, Borongan, Baybay, Ormoc, Maasin, Calbayog, and Catbalogan), 136 municipalities, and 4,390 barangays. It has a total land area of 23,231.4 square kilometers, which accounts for 6.8 percent of the country’s land area (National Statistical Coordination Board, 2015).

Based on the 2010 Census of Population and Housing, Eastern Visayas registered a total population of 4.1 million. There are about 177 persons per square kilometer in the region. The inhabitants are Warays, but Cebuanos also settle mostly in Ormoc City, Western Leyte, and parts of Southern Leyte (National Statistical Coordination Board, 2015). The region has a young population, and the young adult sector makes up 19.1 percent of the

region's total population and has been expanding at progressively faster rates over the last three decades (DRDF & UPPI, 2015)

In recent years, Eastern Visayas has received a lot of attention from both national and international media because it was one of the hardest-hit areas of Super Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013. In fact, it is now considered the poorest region in the country in the aftermath of Super Typhoon Haiyan, dislodging the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, long considered the area where the poorest Filipinos live (Meniano, 2015). Given their great number, Eastern Visayan youth play a key role in the ongoing rehabilitation and recovery efforts in the region.

Ecological determinants of early marriage

Union formation is a dynamic event because a person can move from one type of union to another (e.g., a couple may decide to cohabit for now but later on decide to marry) as well as reverse and/or repeat the form of union (Kabamalan, 2009). This is particularly true for early marriage, in which the individual who gets married may decide to terminate the union and be single (again) or eventually remarry. Those who form marital unions may choose cohabitation over formal marriage, while others decide to live in first before going to formal marriage. This important feature of marital union necessitates a more holistic approach to understand what affects the youth's patterns of early marriage. Thus, this paper applies an ecological model to understand the factors that determine early marriage among the youth of Eastern Visayas.

Ecological models are concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In a nutshell, ecological models posit that human development does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it happens in a social context, where the individual both influences and is influenced by his or her environment. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio-ecological systems theory, for example, outlines five interacting systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem) that influence the development of the person. To understand development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs.

While the youth's experience with early marriage is shaped by various external systems, individual characteristics and experiences are also at play and thus need to be investigated. Beyond the usual demographic variables like sex and age, the youth's attitudes toward cohabitation and contraceptive use during premarital sex (PMS) are also important factors to consider. A number of studies have explored attitudes toward cohabitation, among other variables, as a significant factor that influences union formation in other cultures such

as Canada (Wu & Balakrishnan, 1992), South Africa (Moore & Govender, 2013), and Sweden (Thomson & Bernhardt, 2010). In the Philippines, attitudes toward cohabitation remain quite conservative among young Filipinos, although men view cohabitation more favorably than do women (Williams, Kabamalan, & Ogena, 2007). Focusing on Eastern Visayas, Deocampo (2008) found in his analysis of the 2002 YAFS data that a positive attitude toward PMS was a significant predictor of cohabitation. Moreover, precursor experiences with PMS and contraceptive use during PMS were the two most important predictors of cohabitation.

Apart from individual characteristics and experiences, proximal factors in the youth's ecology also play a role in early marriage. Proximal factors are those that are nearer to the individual and may thus exert more direct influence on his or her behavior. Examples of proximal factors could be the youth's family (and the dynamics within this unit), peer group, and school setting. In a country where the family is considered the most basic and important social institution, the Filipino youth's experience with early marriage may be influenced by their family in general and parental characteristics in particular. Various local studies have underscored the important role of parents in the socialization (Gastardo-Conaco, Jimenez, & Billedo, 2003; Liwag, de la Cruz, & Macapagal, 1998) and health and development of their children (Cruz, Cruz, Gonzales, & Berja, 2012). Factors such as whether the parents are still living together, parental strictness, quality of family relationship, and whether sensitive topics like sex are discussed at home may have a bearing on whether young adults enter marriage. For example, Thornton (1991) found that in the United States, those whose parents are not living together tend to cohabit more than marry. In the Philippines, anecdotal evidence about the youth running away from home or eloping with a partner is common and usually attributed to the parent's strictness or disapproval of the youth's partner. Interestingly, only about 7 percent of the youth in Eastern Visayas said they ever discussed sex at home (DRDF & UPPI, 2014), a notable finding that might have a bearing on their exploration of sex, which could eventually lead to early marriage.

The peer group is another proximal factor that plays a central role in the lives of young adults because the youth spend considerably more time with them than with their own families. In fact, some scholars have claimed that peers matter more than parents in determining the behavior of the child (Harris, 1998). In this light, it is important to look at factors related to the youth's peer group, which could influence his or her experience with early marriage. For example, it is possible that having friends who have had PMS experience (a strong determinant of early marriage) may affect not only the youth's decision to marry early but also the type of union that he or she will choose.

In her review of the literature on the determinants of marriage, Kabamalan (2009) noted that higher education is consistently attributed to delayed marriage. In Germany, for

example, researchers have found that higher educational attainment results in women's growing economic independence and leads to delayed marriage and motherhood (Blossfeld & Jaenichen, 1992). This is also the case in Southeast and East Asia, where the proportion of women remaining single in their 30s and 40s has climbed sharply, especially in the large cities and among the better educated (Jones, 2005). This pattern of increase in non-marriage is so pronounced in these regions that it prompted Jones to call it the "flight from marriage." Thus, education is an important proximal factor in union formation, particularly early marriage. In the context of the present study, it is worth noting that Eastern Visayas has one of the lowest proportions of youth who are studying (36%) and working (20%) in the country, while the proportion who are idle (13.1%) is the third highest (DRDF & UPPI, 2015).

Because marriage is a social institution, it is bound to be affected by larger institutions and processes in society. Beyond proximal influences such as parental and family characteristics, peer influence, and education, distal factors or processes that are farther away from the person could play a role in the youth's experience with early marriage. Distal factors could include macro-level variables and processes such as poverty and community attitudes or values. The importance of finances in marriage formation is supported by empirical data and mainly due to the need to spend for the wedding, particularly in holding the reception and the procurement of required documents and licenses (Kabamalan, 2011). Thus, young men and women who live in poverty may opt to cohabit instead of formally marry because of financial constraints. Prevailing beliefs about marriage and cohabitation in the community may likewise determine the youth's experience with early marriage. For example, some communities may hold more conservative attitudes toward cohabitation, which could deter the youth from choosing this kind of marital setup for fear of being ostracized.

Thus far, we have introduced the concept of early marriage as a dynamic process that needs to be studied from an ecological perspective. We argued for the importance of looking beyond individual characteristics and considering other external and larger influences (i.e., proximal and distal factors) that could determine the youth's experience with early marital union. The next part of this paper outlines the specific questions that the study wishes to address and the conceptual framework that will guide the analysis of these questions.

Objectives of the study

This study takes a closer look at the ecological determinants of early marriage among young adults aged 15–24 years in Eastern Visayas. Specifically, it aims to do the following:

1. Describe the differential patterns in early marriage among Eastern Visayan youth according to identified ecological variables

2. Explore which ecological variables are significantly associated with early marriage
3. Identify the variables under three ecological systems that significantly predict experience with early marriage

Conceptual framework

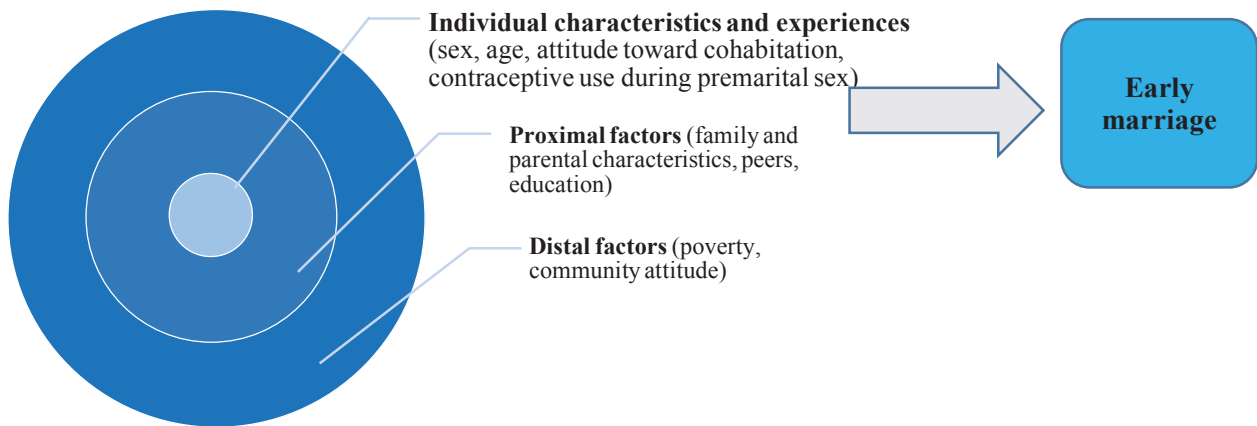


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this paper. The concentric circles emphasize the various ecological determinants of the youth's experience with early marriage. The innermost circle comprises the youth's individual characteristics such as sex, age, attitude toward cohabitation, and contraceptive use during PMS. The next circle takes into consideration proximal factors involving family and parental characteristics such as whether parents are living together, the primary raiser's strictness, the quality of the family relationship, and discussion of sex at home. Other proximal factors considered are the level of education and whether the youth has same-sex friends with PMS.

Finally, the outermost circle includes distal factors such as poverty and perception of their community's acceptance of cohabitation. These ecological factors all influence the youth's experience with early marriage (i.e., whether they have never been in marital union, lived in before first formal marriage, or did not live in before formal marriage).

Data and methods

This paper uses data from the YAFS4. The YAFS is a series of national surveys on the Filipino youth, conducted since 1982 by UPPI and DRDF. Gathering data from Filipino youth ages 15–24, YAFS is one of the primary sources of information on sexual and non-sexual risk behaviors and their determinants in the Philippines at the national and regional

levels. YAFS covers a wide range of topics that are relevant to this age group such as education trajectories, labor force participation, relationships and roles in society, values, and attitudes, in addition to risk behaviors. Findings from the YAFS series have been widely used in education and health and have provided the evidence base for health programs for young people by government and non-government organizations nationwide.

YAFS4 was conducted with face-to-face interviews as the data collection method. A total of 10 survey instruments were employed: community form, household form, and eight variations of the individual questionnaire differentiated by the sex, marital status, and religion of the respondents, thus generating three datasets: the community datafile, the household datafile, and the individual datafile. YAFS4 covered all 17 regions of the country. For Eastern Visayas, a total of 68 barangays, 1,021 households, and 1,122 respondents were covered. For this paper, we use unweighted data from the individual datafile for Eastern Visayas. Data from this region were collected by a team from the University of the Philippines Visayas Tacloban College.

This paper focuses on early marriage among Eastern Visayan youth. In the YAFS4, those who are formally married (i.e., married through church, civil, or tribal ceremony) and those who are in a living-in relationship are both considered married. Respondents who have been married were asked for information about their current and first marriage. We note that since the singulate mean ages at marriage among men and women in 2010 were 26.9 and 24.2 years, respectively, those who had been in a marital union among this youth group of ages 15–24 could be considered “early marriers.” Moreover, even if the first marital union ends up in marital dissolution, it is still bound to affect the life of the youth and therefore merits our attention.

Furthermore, we examine the form of first marital union, which is operationally defined as the youth’s answer to the question “In your first union, did you live in or were you formally married?” The youth’s experience with marriage was categorized into three: never been in a marital union, lived in before first formal marriage (which includes those who are currently living in), and did not live in before formal marriage. Although this paper focuses on early marriage, specifically on first marital union, it is important to include in the analysis those who have never been in a marital union to get a fuller picture of the youth’s experience with early marriage.

To examine factors that could be related to early marriage, the independent variables were grouped into three kinds of ecological variables influencing early marriage: individual characteristics and experiences, proximal factors, and distal factors (see Figure 1). The youth’s individual characteristics include sex (male or female) and age (15–17 years, 18–21 years, and 22–24 years). The classification of age categories is based on the fact that in the

Philippines, those who are below 18 years old cannot yet legally marry. Those aged 18–21 are ideally in college, while those aged 22–24 are possibly working or at least looking for employment, developmental features that could influence one's decisions regarding marital union.

The youth's attitude toward cohabitation and contraceptive use during PMS were also factored in under individual characteristics and experiences. Attitude toward cohabitation was determined through the respondents' extent of agreement or disagreement with the statement "It is alright for unmarried people to live together even if they have no plans to marry." Responses of *strongly agree* and *agree* were considered to indicate a positive attitude toward cohabitation, *neither agree nor disagree* was coded as undecided, while *disagree* and *strongly disagree* were taken as negative attitudes toward cohabitation. Contraceptive use during PMS was categorized into whether they did not use contraceptives during PMS, used contraceptives during PMS, or did not have any PMS experience.

Parental characteristics were explored as part of the proximal factors that determine the youth's experience with early marriage. The variable "parents living together" was classified as parents living together, parents not living together, or at least one parent dead. The primary raiser's strictness was determined by counting the number of times he or she disapproved of eight activities by the youth, such as going out of town with friends, staying out late, and having a romantic relationship before age 18. The primary raiser was considered strict if he or she disapproved of four or more of the eight items.

Apart from parental characteristics, the conceptual framework included the quality of the family relationship as another proximal factor. Respondents were asked to rate how frequently (from 1 = *almost never* to 5 = *almost always*) each of the six events or characteristics happened within their family. Sample items included "Family members are supportive of each other" and "Family members eat together at least one meal a day." The quality of family relationships was categorized into good (average score of 3 and above) and fair (average score below 3). Another family characteristic that was looked into was the discussion of sensitive topics (such as sex) at home. To this end, respondents were asked "Have you ever discussed sex at home as you were growing up?"

Bearing in mind the importance of peer group influence in the life of the youth, a variable under proximal factors was created to determine whether the respondent had a same-sex friend who had already engaged in PMS. This variable was based on the question of whether the male or female respondent had a same-sex friend who engaged in sexual activity (when he or she was still single for those already in a marital union). Also considered a proximal variable, the respondent's current educational attainment was categorized into less than high school graduate, high school graduate or vocational, and college or higher.

Inasmuch as education is influenced by a host of other factors outside the individual (e.g., curriculum, teachers, classmates, school environment, type of school), we decided to use current educational attainment as a proxy variable for what goes on in the youth's school life (the school being considered "outside" of the individual and thus a proximal variable).

Finally, distal factors that influence the youth's early marriage included macro-level characteristics such as poverty (poor vs. non-poor) and perception of community acceptance of cohabitation (accepted vs. not accepted). The former is a measure of the socio-economic status of the household to which the respondent belongs, while the latter was determined through respondents' answer to the question "Do you think people in your community would accept two unmarried persons who are living in?"

In line with the first objective of this paper, univariate analysis was done to examine the profile of the youth in Eastern Visayas as well as the differential patterns of the youth's experience with early marriage. Chi-square tests for independence were also conducted to determine which ecological factors showed significant distributions among those who have never been in a marital union, those who lived in before their first formal marriage, and those who did not live in before formal marriage. Finally, we performed binary logistic regression using marital union status (never married vs. ever married) as a dependent variable and came up with three models: (a) individual characteristics and experiences only, (b) individual characteristics and experiences together with proximal factors, and (c) individual characteristics and experiences including both proximal and distal factors.

Results

Who are the Eastern Visayan Youth?

As shown in Table 1, almost three quarters of the youth in Eastern Visayas have never been in a marital union, while almost a quarter have lived in (i.e., either currently living in or have lived in before they formally married). A small percentage (1.5%) are formally married and did not live in before that.

Table 1. Profile of the Eastern Visayan youth

Characteristics	Percent	Number of cases ^a
<i>Marital Union</i>		
Marital union status		
Never been in a marital union	74.1	831
Lived in before first formal marriage	24.4	274
Did not live in before formal marriage	1.5	17
<i>Individual Characteristics and Experiences</i>		
Sex		
Male	50.4	566
Female	49.6	556
Age		
15–17	40.4	453
18–21	37.3	419
22–24	22.3	250
Attitude toward cohabitation		
Positive	10.1	113
Undecided	45.6	511
Negative	44.3	497
Contraceptive use during premarital sex		
No premarital sex	77.1	827
Without contraceptive	18.8	202
With contraceptive	4.1	44

Table 1. Profile of the Eastern Visayan youth (con't)

Characteristics	Percent	Number of cases ^a
<i>Proximal Factors</i>		
Parents living together		
Parents living together	71.6	803
Parents not living together	11.5	129
At least one parent dead	16.9	189
Primary raiser's strictness		
Strict	72.5	804
Not strict	27.5	305
Quality of family relationship		
Good	82.9	930
Fair	17.1	192
Discussion of sex at home		
Yes	8.2	91
No	91.8	1,015
Has same-sex friends with premarital sex experience		
Has same-sex friends with premarital sex	49.3	550
No same-sex friends with premarital sex	50.7	566
Education		
Less than high school graduate	65.7	737
High school graduate/vocational	18.5	208
College or higher	15.8	177
<i>Distal Factors</i>		
Poverty		
Poor	40.6	456
Non-poor	59.4	666
Perception of community acceptance of cohabitation		
Accepted	65.9	739
Not accepted	34.1	383
Total	100.0	1,122

^aSome may not add up to the total due to missing cases.

The two sexes are almost evenly distributed among Eastern Visayan youth; four out of ten (40.4%) are aged 15–17 years, followed by those aged 18–21 years (37.3%), while a small percentage (22.3%) are aged 22–24 years. Most of the respondents hold either an undecided (45.6%) or negative (44.3%) attitude toward cohabitation, while only a small number (10.1%) hold a positive attitude toward couples who are living in. More than three fourths of Eastern Visayan youth have no PMS experience. Among those with PMS experience, on the other hand, 18.8 percent said they did not use any contraceptive during PMS, while 4.1 percent reported using contraceptives during PMS.

In terms of parental characteristics, almost three fourths (71.6%) of the respondents have parents who are living together; the rest either have at least one parent dead (16.9%) or have parents who are no longer living together (11.5%). While almost three quarters of Eastern Visayan youth perceived their primary raiser to be strict (72.5%), most of them viewed the quality of their family relationship as good (82.9%). However, an overwhelming majority said they never discussed sex at home (91.8%).

Looking at other proximal factors, the data show that about half (49.3%) of the youth in Eastern Visayas have same-sex friends who have had PMS. The majority have low educational attainment, with about 65.7 percent of respondents not having completed high school. Finally, an examination of distal factors reveals that there are more youth from non-poor than poor households (59.4% vs. 40.6%) and that the majority (65.9%) of Eastern Visayan youth perceive their communities to be accepting of couples who are living in.

Which ecological variables are significantly associated with early marriage?

Table 2 shows the percentage of Eastern Visayan youth by type of early marriage experience and by selected ecological factors identified in the conceptual framework of this study. While we retain the column for those who formally married without living in in the table for completeness, caution is exercised in analyzing this column, since the number of cases is very small ($n = 17$). The table shows that significantly more males (86.9%) than females (61.0%) have never been in a marital union. More females than males have experienced living in before their first formal marriage.

An overwhelming majority (96.2%) of those who have never been in a marital union are aged 15–17 years, followed by those aged 18–21 years (71.4%) and those aged 22–24 years (38.4%). This age pattern is reversed when the respondents enter marriage, with significantly more 22–24-year-olds living in before their first formal marriage compared with the two younger age groups.

Table 2. Percentage of Eastern Visayan youth by type of early marriage experience by selected characteristics

Characteristics	Never been in a marital union	Lived in before first formal marriage ^a	Did not live in before formal marriage	Number of cases ^b
<i>Individual Characteristics and Experiences</i>				
Sex**				
Male	86.9	12.7	0.4	566
Female	61.0	36.3	2.7	556
Age**				
15–17	96.2	3.8	0.0	453
18–21	71.4	27.7	1.0	419
22–24	38.4	56.4	5.2	250
Attitude toward cohabitation**				
Positive				
Undecided	75.2	24.8	0.0	113
Negative	69.9	29.2	1.0	511
	78.1	19.5	2.4	497
Contraceptive use during premarital sex**				
No premarital sex	83.8	15.1	1.1	827
Without contraceptive	54.0	44.6	1.5	202
With contraceptive	65.9	34.1	0.0	44
<i>Proximal Factors</i>				
Parents living together**				
Parents living together	78.0	20.4	1.6	803
Parents not living together	66.7	31.8	1.6	129
At least one parent dead	62.4	36.5	1.1	189
Primary raiser's strictness**				
Strict	71.4	26.6	2.0	804
Not strict	80.3	19.3	0.3	305

^aIncludes those who lived in before formal marriage and those who are currently living in.

^bSome may not add up to the total due to missing cases.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Percentage of Eastern Visayan youth by type of early marriage experience by selected characteristics (con't)

Characteristics	Never been in a marital union	Lived in before first formal marriage ^a	Did not live in before formal marriage	Number of cases ^b
Discussion of sex at home				
Yes	69.2	27.5	3.3	91
No	74.6	24.1	1.3	1,015
Has same-sex friends with premarital sex experience*				
Has same-sex friends w/ premarital sex	70.2	28.4	1.5	550
No same-sex friends w/ premarital sex	77.7	20.7	1.6	566
Education				
Less than high school graduate				
High school grad/vocational	74.9	23.7	1.4	737
College or higher	68.3	29.3	2.4	208
	77.4	21.5	1.1	177
<i>Distal Factors</i>				
Poverty**				
Poor	62.9	34.4	2.6	456
Non-poor	81.7	17.6	0.8	666
Perception of community acceptance of cohabitation*				
Accepted	72.4	26.5	1.1	739
Not accepted	77.3	20.4	2.3	383
Total	831	274	17	1,122

^aIncludes those who lived in before formal marriage and those who are currently living in.

^bSome may not add up to the total due to missing cases.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

With regard to attitude toward cohabitation, most of those who have never been married hold a negative attitude toward unmarried couples (78.1%), followed closely by those who hold a positive attitude (75.2%) and those who are undecided (69.9%). Again, this pattern changes when respondents enter marriage; specifically, a more undecided attitude is now held by those who lived in before their first formal marriage (29.2%), followed by a positive attitude (24.8%) and finally by a negative attitude (19.5%). On the other hand, more respondents who did not live in before formal marriage hold a negative rather than an undecided (2.4% vs. 1%) attitude toward cohabitation.

Significantly more never-married Eastern Visayan youth have no PMS experience (83.8%) compared with those who have had PMS with contraception (65.9%) or PMS without contraception (54.0%). However, most of those who cohabited before their first formal marriage have engaged in unprotected PMS (44.6%), followed by those who used contraceptives during PMS (34.1%) and those without PMS experience (15.1%). Finally, slightly more youth who did not live in before formal marriage did not use contraceptives during PMS (1.5%) compared with those without PMS experience (1.1%).

An examination of the differential patterns of proximal factors, specifically parental characteristics, reveals that more respondents whose parents are still living together have never been in a marital union (78.0%) compared with those whose parents are no longer living together (66.7%) or those who have at least one parent dead (62.4%). This pattern is reversed for those who lived in before first formal marriage, with most of them having at least one parent dead (36.5%), followed by those whose parents are not living together (31.8%) and those whose parents are still living together (20.4%).

Table 2 also shows that significantly more never-married Eastern Visayan youth consider their primary raiser as not strict (80.3%). A different pattern for the primary raiser's strictness is noted for respondents who lived in before their first formal marriage (26.6% strict vs. 19.3% not strict) or did not live in before formal marriage (2% strict vs. 0.3% not strict).

Although the majority of respondents across the three marital union categories claimed to have good family relationships, this pattern was not significant. More never-married respondents said they did not discuss sex at home (74.6%), but this pattern is reversed for those who have lived in before their first formal marriage and those who have not lived in before formal marriage. Like the distribution for the quality of the family relationship, however, the distribution for the discussion of sex at home was also non-significant.

When it comes to peer influence, significantly more never-married respondents have no same-sex friends with PMS experience, but more youth who lived in before their first formal marriage have friends with PMS experience. Among those who did not live in before marriage, the percentages are about the same for those who have friends with or without PMS experience.

Patterns for education did not turn out significant. However, it is worth noting that there were more never-married youth who have a college education or higher (77.4%) than those who have less than a high school diploma (74.9%) or those who are high school or vocational graduates (68.3%). Among those who lived in before their first formal marriage, high school or vocational graduates were higher in number compared with those with less than a high school diploma or those with college education or higher.

Finally, differential patterns among distal factors show that significantly more respondents who have never been in a marital union are not poor (81.7%), while significantly more respondents who cohabited before their first formal marriage are poor (34.4%). Also, the percentage of never-married Eastern Visayan youth who perceived their communities to hold a non-accepting attitude toward cohabiting couples (77.3%) was higher than the percentage of those who perceived their communities to be more accepting (72.4%). A similar pattern is shown for those who have had a formal marriage only. However, among those who lived in before their first formal marriage, more respondents perceived their community as more accepting of cohabitation (26.5%) than otherwise (20.4%).

Which ecological variables significantly predict experience with early marriage?

Using marital union status (never married vs. ever married) as the dependent variable, we performed binary logistic regression analysis and came up with three models. The first model includes all four variables under individual characteristics and experiences (see Table 3). Holding all other values constant, this model shows that females are seven times more likely to marry early than males. Eastern Visayan youth aged 18–21 and 22–24 are also more likely to marry early than their 15–17-year-old counterparts, with the odds of getting married early increasing as one gets older (8 times for 18–21-year-olds and 28.5 times for 22–24-year-olds). In terms of attitude toward cohabitation, those with an undecided attitude are almost two times more likely to marry early than those with a negative attitude toward couples who are living in. Those with a positive attitude toward cohabitation are not significantly different from those with a negative attitude. Focusing on contraceptive use during PMS, those who had unprotected PMS are three times more likely to marry early than those who do not have PMS experience, while those who engaged in protected PMS are almost two times more likely to marry early than those who did not engage in PMS.

When proximal factors are included in the second model, the significance of sex, age, and contraceptive use during PMS are maintained and become even stronger but not for attitude toward cohabitation. Specifically, female youth are now 7.8 times more likely to marry early than male youth, those aged 18–21 are 13.2 times more likely to marry early than those aged 15–17, and 22–24-year-olds are 55.1 times more likely to marry early than 15–17-year-olds. Eastern Visayan youth who had PMS without contraceptives are now 3.6 times more likely to marry early than those without PMS experience, while those who had PMS with contraceptives are 2.7 times more likely to marry early than those who have not had PMS. Interestingly, attitude toward cohabitation is no longer a significant predictor in the second model.

Table 3. Odds ratios resulting from binary logistic regression modeling early marriage

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Male (reference)	...	...	...
Female	7.1*	7.8*	8.1*
15–17 years (reference)	...	...	...
18–21 years	8.0*	13.2*	13.6*
22–24 years	28.5*	55.1*	53.9*
Negative attitude toward cohabitation (reference)	...	...	...
Undecided attitude toward cohabitation	1.6*	1.3	1.3
Positive attitude toward cohabitation	1.3	1.0	1.0
No premarital sex (reference)	...	...	...
No contraceptive during premarital sex	3.1*	3.6*	4.2*
With contraceptive during premarital sex	1.8*	2.7*	3.5*
Parents living together (reference)		...	...
Parents not living together		2.0*	1.8
At least one parent dead		1.8*	1.8*
Non-strict primary raiser (reference)		...	...
Strict primary raiser		1.6*	1.9*
Fair family relationship (reference)	Not	...	...
Good family relationship	included	1.0	1.0
Sex not discussed at home (reference)	in	...	...
Sex is discussed at home	the	1.0	1.1
Has no same-sex friends with premarital sex experience (reference)	model	...	...
Has same-sex friends with premarital sex experience		1.0	1.0
Less than high school graduate (reference)		...	...
High school graduate/vocational		0.5*	0.7
College graduate or higher		0.2*	0.3*
Non-poor (reference)		Not	...
Poor		included	4.0*
Cohabitation not accepted in community (reference)		in	...
Cohabitation accepted in community		the	1.4*
		model	
-2 Log likelihood	773.9	696.4	651.1

* $p < .05$.

Looking at the proximal factors in Model 2, Eastern Visayan youth with parents who were not living together or with at least one parent dead are both more likely to marry early (odds ratios of 2.0 and 1.8, respectively) than those whose parents were still living together. Results further show that respondents who perceived their primary raiser to be strict are 1.6 times more likely to marry early than those who said their primary raiser was not strict. Higher educational attainment is also associated with a lower likelihood of getting married, with high school or vocational graduates being 50 percent less likely to marry early than those with less than high school education. The same is true for those with college education or higher, who are 80 percent less likely to marry early than those with less than high school education. The other proximal variables such as the quality of the family relationship, discussion of sex at home, and having same-sex friends with PMS experience all turned out to be non-significant predictors in the second model.

The third and final model incorporates the distal factors of poverty and perceived community acceptance of cohabitation together with the individual and proximal factors from the first two models. As shown in Table 3, the respondents' sex, age, and contraceptive use during PMS remain significant predictors of early marriage, while attitude toward cohabitation remains non-significant. Holding all other values constant, females are now eight times more likely to marry early than males, 18–21-year-olds are 13.6 times more likely to marry early than 15–17-year-olds, and those aged 22–24 are about 54 times more likely to marry early than those in the 15–17 age group. Eastern Visayan youth who had no contraception during PMS are now 4.2 times more likely to marry early than those without PMS experience, while those who did use contraception during PMS are 3.5 times more likely to marry early than those who have not had PMS.

The proximal factors of parental setup, primary raiser's strictness, and education remain significant predictors as well, but this time, only those with at least one parent dead are more likely to marry early than those whose parents were living together, and only those with college education or higher are less likely to marry early than those with less than high school education. Those with parents who were not living together are no longer significantly different from those whose parents were still living together. Similarly, the youth who graduated with a high school or vocational degree are no longer significantly different from those with less than high school education.

The two identified distal factors both turned out to be significant predictors of early marriage. Poor respondents are four times more likely to marry early than non-poor respondents, while Eastern Visayan youth who perceived their community to be accepting of cohabiting couples are 1.4 times more likely to marry early than those who perceived their community to be non-accepting of cohabitation.

Discussion

Which ecological variables are significantly associated with early marriage among Eastern Visayan youth? More specifically, which factors significantly predict whether the youth will marry early? The answers to these questions reveal both interesting and important findings.

First, sex and age appear to be consistently strong determinants of early marriage. There were more never-married males than females, but once they enter marriage, females significantly outnumber males both for those who lived in before their first formal marriage and those who did not live in before formal marriage. It is possible that more young men than young women of Eastern Visayas are preoccupied with school, which could deter them from getting married at an early age. On the other hand, the finding that there are more women who cohabit before their first formal marriage or go directly to formal marriage could be due to PMS (especially unprotected PMS that could result in pregnancy), a factor previously reported to be a strong determinant of cohabitation among Eastern Visayan youth (Deocampo, 2008) and a strong predictor of early marriage, as shown by the results of our current study (see Table 3).

There was also a significant relationship between age and early marriage. Expectedly, almost all the 15–17-year-old respondents have never been in a marital union because Philippine laws do not allow those below 18 to formally marry. For those who are of legal age, it is noteworthy that significantly more 18–21- and 22–24-year-olds have lived in before their first formal marriage compared with those who did not. This regional finding is consistent with the national data for YAFS4 showing that increasingly more Filipino youth are living in than formally married (DRDF & UPPI, 2014).

Results about attitude toward cohabitation appear inconsistent. This variable was significantly related to early marriage in the bivariate analysis but turned out to be non-significant when modeled with the proximal and distal variables in the binary logistic regression. Negative attitude toward living in was highest among those who have never been in a marital union but not among those who cohabited before their first formal marriage. In fact, more cohabiting youth held an undecided than a positive or negative attitude toward cohabitation. Significantly more youth who did not live in before formal marriage also held a negative rather than an undecided attitude toward cohabitation. These results do not necessarily mean that holding negative views about cohabitation leads to non-cohabitation, because, as Kabamalan (2004) argued, respondents' positive attitude toward cohabitation may simply be a justification for their current marital status. Thus, those who are never married may tend to have a more negative attitude toward living in while those who are cohabiting may express a more positive attitude toward living in to reflect their current

marital union status. It is also possible that those who are living in could not expressly say that they are against cohabitation because that would negate their current marital setup; on the other hand, they could also not explicitly favor cohabitation because they may still be hoping for a formal marriage in the future.

Contraceptive use during PMS was a consistently significant predictor of early marriage across all three models of the regression analysis. Those who have had PMS were more likely to marry early than those who did not have PMS experience, with the odds of getting married early higher for those who had unprotected PMS compared with those who used contraceptives during PMS. It is highly likely that PMS among the Eastern Visayan youth, especially if unprotected, leads to pregnancy and could then push the couple to resort to early marriage. In fact, YAFS4 data for Region VIII show that 14.8 percent of the youth who resorted to formal marriage without cohabitation and 6.4 percent of those who decided to live in rather than formally marry cited getting pregnant or getting their female partner pregnant as one of the reasons for marrying early.

In terms of proximal variables, parental living arrangement and the primary raiser's strictness play a role in delaying the formation of a marital union (i.e., either a formal marriage or cohabitation before formal marriage). Those whose parents were no longer living together or who had at least one parent dead were more likely to marry early than those whose parents were still living together, which suggests that having two parents around to supervise the youth could serve as a deterrent to early marriage. While this type of parental living arrangement does not say anything about the quality of the relationship between parents and between the youth and their parents, it is nonetheless encouraging to note that an intact couple influences their child's decision not to marry early.

The primary raiser's strictness was also a significant predictor of early marriage; that is, respondents who had strict primary raisers were more likely to get married early than those who said their primary raiser was not strict. It is possible that parental strictness leads to a difficult relationship between the youth and their parents, which could then drive them to marry early, specifically to choose cohabitation, to get away from parental strictness. This finding points to the important role that discipline plays in the relationship between parents and their children and in the latter's decision to marry early.

Two family characteristics, namely the quality of the family relationship and discussion of sex at home, did not show a significant relationship with early marriage. This could be due to the fact that the distributions for these variables were skewed toward good family relationships (82.9%) and non-discussion of sex at home (91.8%). While it is hypothesized that the dynamics within the youth's family (including the discussion of

sensitive topics like sex) would have a bearing on the youth's experience with early marriage, the data did not have enough variability to produce significant results.

By itself, peer influence is significantly associated with the youth's experience with early marriage. However, it loses explanatory power when it interacts with other variables in the two succeeding models of the logistic regression analysis. This could mean that the effect of having a same-sex friend with PMS experience is mediated by other factors, such as whether the youth actually engages in PMS, an event that has been established as a precursor for cohabitation among Eastern Visayan youth in a previous analysis of YAFS data (Deocampo, 2008).

The results about education appear inconsistent. Contrary to previous studies, our bivariate analysis revealed that education was not significantly related to early marriage among Eastern Visayan youth. However, when modeled together with other variables, education turned out to be a significant predictor of early marriage; that is, the higher educated were less likely to marry early than those with lower education. This finding is most likely due to the respondents' age rather than their education. As shown in Table 1, about three in every four respondents (77.7%) are aged 15–21 and most likely still attending school at this time. Studies that have linked education to delayed marriage, however, focused on respondents who have completed higher education (i.e., college or higher) and thus on older populations. For example, Jones' (2005) study on the “flight from marriage” focused on Southeast and East Asian women who were at least 30 years old. Since educational attainment is directly proportional to age, it is possible that the pattern among Eastern Visayan youth's education vis-à-vis their experience with early marriage would significantly change if they were surveyed at a later stage in their life. It is also likely that this is related to their poverty situation, since education and poverty status were found to be significantly associated such that more youth from poorer households have lower educational attainment.

Finally, both distal factors of poverty and perceived community acceptance of cohabitation were significantly related to early marriage. The finding that poor respondents were more likely to marry early than those who were not poor validates earlier studies that financial constraints push people to choose cohabitation over formal marriage as their type of first marital union (Kabamalan, 2011). Lacking resources to finance the wedding ceremony and reception, some respondents most likely choose to live in while saving up for formal marriage. Interestingly, results on the perception of community acceptance of cohabitation seem to mirror the respondents' own attitude toward cohabitation. Results show that significantly more never-married respondents perceive their communities to be non-accepting of cohabiting couples. However, the reverse is true for respondents who lived in before their first formal marriage—most of them see their communities as more accepting of cohabitation. Those who claim that cohabitation is accepted in their community were also

found to be more likely to marry early than those who perceive their community to be non-accepting of cohabitation. Like one's own attitude toward cohabitation, it is also possible that these self-reports about their community's attitude toward cohabitation serve as a justification for the youth's current marital setup.

Summary and recommendations

This study took a closer look at the ecological determinants of early marriage among Eastern Visayan youth aged 15–24 years. Specifically, it sought to describe the differential patterns in early marriage (for those who have never been in a marital union, those who lived in before their first formal marriage, or those who did not live in before formal marriage) according to various ecological variables influencing the lives of the youth. These ecological variables were categorized into individual characteristics and experiences, proximal factors, and distal factors, which were hypothesized to play a role in early marriage among the youth.

Bivariate analysis revealed that the following ecological determinants were significantly related to the respondents' experience with early marriage: sex, age, attitude toward cohabitation, contraceptive use during PMS, parental living arrangement, primary raiser's strictness, having same-sex friends with PMS experience, poverty, and perception of community acceptance of cohabitation. However, there was no significant relationship between early marriage and the quality of the family relationship, discussion of sex at home, and education.

Logistic regression analysis, on the other hand, revealed that education, attitude toward cohabitation, the quality of the family relationship, discussion of sex at home, and having same-sex friends with PMS experience lose their predictive value when they interact with other variables in the regression models. The variables of sex, age, contraceptive use during PMS, parental living arrangement, primary raiser's strictness, poverty, and perception of community acceptance of cohabitation remained significant predictors of early marriage across all three models of the regression analysis.

Recommendations for research

The results have to be interpreted within the limits of this study, specifically the cross-sectional nature of its data and the kinds of analysis employed. The bivariate and regression analyses should not be taken to imply that the identified ecological variables cause the patterns of early marriage among Eastern Visayan youth. Findings about self-reported attitudes (e.g., individual or community attitude toward cohabitation) should also be

interpreted with caution, as these may simply be a reflection of social desirability or justification for the individual's actions or decisions in life.

Future researchers may want to further explore family variables to see which aspects of family life significantly influence early marriage among the youth. In this study, the quality of the family relationship and discussion of sex at home were not significantly related to early marriage because of their skewed distributions, but future researchers may also focus on how well the respondent gets along with his or her parents, parenting style, and parental involvement in the youth's social and academic life, among other family variables.

In view of the present study's mixed findings about the relationship of education with early marriage, future researchers might wish to do follow-up studies on the youth when they are in their 30s and 40s to see if their level of education indeed predicts their pattern of marital union. It may also be interesting to consider whether the youth's experience with employment has a bearing on their experience with early marriage. Other researchers may look into the possible interaction between attitude toward cohabitation and education, as these two variables both lost predictive value when included in the same model of our regression analysis.

The perceived acceptance of couples living in without a formal marriage by the community is telling. In Eastern Visayas, several cultural practices contribute to the number of couples who live in (see Kabamalan, 2011); this points to the importance of correct information about when they can marry and what the eligibility requirements for formal marriage are.

Recommendations for programs and policy

Although the series of YAFS studies have consistently shown an increasing trend in cohabitation among the Filipino youth, Kabamalan (2004) noted that most Filipinos still view formal marriage as the ideal marital setup. After all, the church, government, and society in general accord rights and privileges to formally married couples that are not readily available to those who are "just living in." If formal marriage is to remain the ideal, the government needs to come up with programs and policies that will discourage the youth from marrying early or from choosing cohabitation as their type of marital union.

Based on the findings of this study, programs for youth development may specifically target those who have an undecided attitude toward cohabitation, because they are more likely to marry early than those with a negative attitude toward cohabitation. Significantly more youth who have lived in before first formal marriage also hold an undecided attitude toward living in. The undecided group can be considered the "movable middle" and may thus

be encouraged to view cohabitation as the least attractive option among the different types of marital union. Correspondingly, campaigns that frame “not being in marital union” as the most beneficial marital status for young men and women should be put in place. Such messages should highlight the advantages of not marrying early compared with cohabitation and even early formal marriage.

Based on the finding that contraceptive use during PMS is a strong predictor of early marriage, we recommend that concerned government agencies beef up their programs either to discourage PMS among the youth or to make contraceptives readily available for those who engage in PMS. As shown in Table 3, Eastern Visayan youth who have PMS are more likely to marry early than those without PMS experience; this is even more pronounced for those who engage in unprotected sex, most likely because of the possibility of getting pregnant or getting one’s female partner pregnant.

In a society where the family plays a central role in people’s lives, policies geared toward improving family conditions and relationships are essential to ensuring the well-being of the youth. The majority of respondents whose parents are still living together are in the never-married category, but their number dwindles in the “lived in before first formal marriage” group. This hints at the importance of good relationships between couples who, when they remain together, are able to jointly guide their children and possibly deter them from marrying early. In light of the finding that the primary raiser’s strictness is significantly related to early marriage, parents should be encouraged to come up with better ways of dealing with and disciplining their children. Parenting is a skill that does not automatically come with being a parent. Thus, programs aimed at teaching parents better strategies in dealing with young people would be most beneficial. This could include practical skills such as opening channels of communication, imposing limits, pointing out consequences of risky behaviors, setting compromises, and discussing sensitive topics like sex and sexuality, among others.

Finally, the government should further intensify its programs to educate the youth on sex, sexuality, and reproductive health issues. The finding that having higher education is related to a lower likelihood of early marriage should encourage us not only to keep our youth in school, but also to use the school setting as an avenue for teaching them about the consequences of both sexual and non-sexual risk behaviors. It may also be beneficial to come up with a peer educators program where young men and women are recruited and trained to teach their friends important sexuality and reproductive health issues such as the consequences of unprotected PMS. Because the friends of young men and women exert great influence on their lives, there is wisdom in harnessing the power of peer influence to educate the youth on making informed and better choices, especially when it comes to early marriage.

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