

Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*

Fatima Juárez¹ and Cecilia Gayet²

¹Centro de Estudios Demográficos, Urbanos y Ambientales (CEDUA), El Colegio de México, México D.F. 10740; email: fjuarez@colmex.mx

²Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales México (FLACSO MÉXICO), México D.F. 14200; email: cgayet@flacso.edu.mx

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Keywords

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Abstract

The study of transitions to adulthood in developing countries merits a review that considers new developments affecting specific spheres of life. High unemployment rates in certain job markets, new health vulnerabilities, and modified preferences regarding marriage types, all within a framework of poverty, manifest in a world in which fewer certainties result in new ways of experiencing the transition to adulthood. The objective of this article is to review recent literature on interactions among the spheres of school, work, sexuality, family formation, health, political expression, and citizenship of adolescents and young adults in developing countries. Scholars are identifying diverse life paths and observing transitions to adulthood at different ages and modalities within the same society.

INTRODUCTION

The study of transitions to adulthood in the developing world has been growing and deepening in recent decades. Nearly 30 years ago, Hogan & Astone (1986) published a conceptual review of the literature from a demographic perspective specifically for the United States, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century the work coordinated by Cynthia Lloyd, the National Research Council, and the Institute of Medicine represented the consolidation of the research on youth transitions in developing countries (Natl. Res. Counc. et al. 2005). Studies on transitions to adulthood in developed countries focused on the influence that social institutions had on either the overlap or divergence of time periods for each of these transitions among young people, and this timing is influenced by an increasingly globalized world (Gauthier 2007). The focus on developing countries gained significance as scholarship demonstrated that structures of inequality of particular contexts could predict future life paths. Some of this research emphasized understanding how economic and social inequality, institutions, and families of origin have determined the course of young people's transitions to adulthood (Fussell et al. 2010). New sets of circumstances call for a review of this subject, however. Recent changes in job markets with high unemployment and informal occupation rates, new health vulnerabilities, and modified preferences regarding marriage types, all within a framework of poverty, manifest in a world in which fewer certainties result in new ways of experiencing the transition to adulthood (Beguy et al. 2011). An estimated 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10 to 19 currently live in developing countries, which represents almost one-fifth of the world's population (Anderson et al. 2013). This unprecedented number in world history

points to the relevance of studying youth and how they make the transition to adult life.

These transitions have changed over time, from normative and standardized expectations within a country or region to a globalized world that encourages new lifestyles beyond borders. Although globalization might have contributed to a certain homogenization of the transitions on a global scale, instead it resulted in a greater diversification of life paths. There are various and competing life ideals, and today transitions occur at different ages and through different modalities within the same society. Even though institutions (especially in the educational arena) and laws designed to prevent child labor regulate the ages at which these transitions take place, distinct models of economic development may affect the expected homogeneity of the life course (Fussell et al. 2010). The diversification of behavior patterns has led researchers to question the concept of ideal transition ages. In some contexts, one age may prove to be too young to make a deliberate transition; in others, that same age may be too old (Dixon-Mueller 2008).

For this review, we selected aspects of the life course recognized as central to the process by which youths become adults in developing countries. These areas are those where the greatest change has taken place in recent times, such as the interaction between school and work and between sexuality and family formation, as well as in health, political expression, and citizenship. We emphasize the interactions between specific transitions because in some cases a transition in one area of life significantly affects the transition in another.

We also review the literature of different geographical regions. The economic, social, and cultural contexts within Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean are difficult to compare, and the factors that explain how the transitions take place in one region may differ in significance and pertinence from findings in another, and they may not even be the same factors. If, in Africa, research mentions the postcolonial experience with deficient processes of institutionalization, in Latin America

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scholars may highlight social inequality and in Asia cultural and economic factors. However, one commonality is that the life paths of young people are marked by social inequality and poverty. Our objective, then, is to review the empirical evidence regarding transitions to adulthood in the developing world, emphasizing the difficulties that youths face today in securing a safe passage to adulthood.

DEFINITION OF YOUTH IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Although most international organizations have identified an age range from 15 to 24 years to define the youth population, some transitions to adult life may occur within a shorter time frame (UN 2004, Dixon-Mueller 2008). Many countries have defined 18 years as the legal adult age in the political arena, but this age may seem low in considering the transition to marriage. On the contrary, the legally established age of consent to sexual relations is usually lower than the legal age for political participation. Other transitions in the public sphere may occur earlier than the established legal age, such as entrance into the job market. Given the range of ages at which specific transitions take place, researchers have sought uniform criteria for deciding when an individual in a given society has made the transition to adulthood. Scholars have proposed that the transition to adulthood be defined by a change in status within a group of life spheres, among which education, work, residency, and family formation are of particular importance. The most commonly used indicators to identify this transition are the departure from school, entrance into the job market, residential independence, marriage, and the birth of the first child. Adulthood is generally identified not by one single event but rather by participation in a set of adult activities (Aronson 2008). Studies have been conducted to determine at what age a synergy occurs between distinct social transitions, as well as the degree of heterogeneity at specific ages (Grant & Furstenberg 2007, Tomanović 2012). Scholars have identified both standard-

ized life paths and moments when destandardization or individualization of life paths occurs. In other words, the definition of the transition to adult life has been studied in varying contexts to determine which life spheres should be taken into consideration, the time period and speed at which the transition takes place, and the order of events leading to the transition.

Restrictions on realizing specific transitions, or the factors that delay them, have been investigated in developing countries. For example, it has been shown that one's transition to a residence independent of one's parents' may not occur despite having already made the transition to economic independence, marriage, and children (Echarri Canovas & Pérez Amador 2007, Tomanović 2012). This may be due, depending on the context, to shortages in the housing market or to cultural practices different from those in Western countries regarding the establishment of an independent residence. Furthermore, in developing countries some transitions take place at a younger age than in developed countries, and life paths are less standardized in adolescence (Fussell et al. 2010). For example, in developing countries, youths typically enter the job market at a younger age than in developed countries, which implies that in early adolescence there is greater variation in pathways in comparison to the developed world, where most adolescents remain in school. In the developed world, life courses are strongly standardized by institutional demands, which lead adolescents to attend school for longer periods and postpone work and marriage.¹ The heterogeneity in developing countries is also due to unequal living conditions

¹ According to Fussell et al. (2010), the heterogeneity of status combinations at any given age indicates the degree to which the lifetime of young people is standardized within a fixed group of status combinations. In countries with advanced industrialization, as well as in some developing countries, there has been standardization in adolescence (where the majority share the same status) and increasing destandardization among older youth in their transition to adulthood. Destandardization is defined as a dispersion of a wide variety of status combinations in one age in a cohort, where there is no modal combination that describes the majority.

across different strata of a given population, within a framework of development models that do not consider social security policies that would guarantee equality of opportunities. Economic shortcomings force disadvantaged social classes to leave school, migrate, and start work at a young age, which may hasten the transition to marriage and having children.

SCHOOL AND WORK

One of the most studied aspects of the transition to adulthood is the relationship between academic achievement and entrance into the job market. The assumption is that education permits the accumulation of human capital and that educational merits will yield better jobs and higher wages (Pastore 2009). This linear relationship between education and employment has been questioned in many developing countries because the incorporation of young people into the working world does not correspond to a meritocratic system. Instead, social inequality and poverty, which added to the recent global economic crisis, restricts or modifies opportunities for this transition (Pastore 2009, Kessler 2010, Tong 2010).

In general, research points to an unprecedented expansion of school attendance among young people in developing countries, particularly in East Asia. Between 2000 and 2007, the worldwide gross secondary education enrollment rate increased from 60% to 66%, and that of tertiary education increased from 19% to 26%. The secondary education rate in Arab countries rose from 61% to 65%; in East Asia and the Pacific from 65% to 78%; in Latin America and the Caribbean from 83% to 89%, and in Africa from 25% to 34%. In the developing world, the tertiary education rate was greatest in Latin America and the Caribbean, reaching 34% in 2007 (Altbach et al. 2009). Despite these achievements, persistent inequalities remain within school levels attained by specific social groups and are affected by social origin (Mahmud & Amin 2006, Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon 2008,

Pastore 2009, Saraví 2009, Jones & Chant 2009, Filardo 2010), race (Branson & Lam 2010, Lam et al. 2011, Ardington et al. 2011, Marteleto 2012), and gender relations (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon 2008, Arnot et al. 2012). As Pastore (2009, p. 257) affirms, “the educational system does not appear to be able to offer equal educational opportunities to those with unfavorable family backgrounds.”

In rural areas of India, situations of poverty, being orphaned, parental alcoholism, and even lack of secondary school establishments mean that young people attend school only for a few years. In these cases, and different from what occurs in developed countries, leaving school and entering the workforce does not define the transition to adulthood; rather, the indicators of this transition are often diffuse and different for men and women and are related to the accumulative process of social integration into the family and the community (Arnot et al. 2012). In some African countries, where school attendance does not preclude children and young people from working to help support the family, entrance into the job market becomes less important for the transition to adulthood (Jones & Chant 2009). In sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that, for 29 countries with available data, 35% of children younger than 15 work outside the home (Garcia & Fares 2008). We must, therefore, redefine Western assumptions about the transitions to adulthood, as well as their interpretations, in developing countries (Arnot et al. 2012).

Furthermore, other paths followed by socially disadvantaged youths must be taken into consideration, such as leaving school without entering into the job market for a long time, as well as school grade repetition (Filardo 2010, Lam et al. 2011, UNESCO-UIS 2012). Grade repetition alters normative ages and may impact educational achievements in the long run. In sub-Saharan Africa, the highest proportion of repetition occurs in primary school (Garcia & Fares 2008, UNESCO-UIS 2012), which is also seen in other developing regions (Filardo 2010, UNESCO-UIS 2012). In South America

(specifically Uruguay), it has been estimated that the repetition of one year at the primary level significantly affects the completion of the intermediate level (Filardo 2010). Some countries have shown a return to school after a period of disenrollment following short work experiences (Cardozo 2012, Pugatch 2012), albeit with less frequency among poorer sectors of the population (Cunningham & Bustos Salvagno 2011). In other cases, scholars have observed that young people take part-time jobs that do not preclude the continuation of their studies (Garcia & Fares 2008, Jones & Chant 2009, Pastore 2009).

In certain developing countries, researchers find that education is not a guaranteed step toward securing a job (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon 2008, Angel-Urdinola & Semlali 2010, Egel & Salehi-Isfahani 2010, Kessler 2010). Youth unemployment rates have been particularly high in recent years, and in 2009 they reached an annual peak of 12.7%, which represents 75.8 million unemployed young people worldwide (ILO 2011). Unemployment statistics are often underestimated because they do not always include young people with precarious work, those who are currently inactive but continue to search for better jobs, or those who are so poor that they work regardless of the amount they are paid, downplaying the gravity of the unemployment situation in the context of this vital transition (Garcia & Fares 2008, Pastore 2009). It is expected that education would facilitate the transition to the workforce, but in recent years this has not been the case in many Middle Eastern countries (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon 2008). In some African countries, a higher schooling level does not necessarily reduce unemployment, as exemplified by high unemployment rates among those with higher levels of schooling, sometimes even surpassing unemployment rates among those with a low schooling level (Garcia & Fares 2008). It has been affirmed that in times of employment crisis, such as occurred after the financial crisis of 2007–2008, young people are the first to lose their jobs and the last to find work once sta-

bility is restored (Tong 2010). In addition to experiencing high unemployment rates, people may remain unemployed for a prolonged period measured not in months, as in developed countries, but in years (Branson & Wittenberg 2007, Garcia & Fares 2008, Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon 2008). For example, in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, young people wait an average of three to seven years after leaving school before entering the job market (Garcia & Fares 2008).

Another central aspect of the transition from school to the working world is the type or quality of employment into which young people move. In some contexts—given the lack of institutions such as unemployment insurance—there is a prevailing tendency toward informal employment with less productivity, lower wages, and fewer social benefits, where those who have less schooling and are from lower social strata are overrepresented (Kogan 2011). The high employment instability among young people is partly due to the fact that they are contracted for short periods, which leads them to change jobs more frequently compared with adults (Cunningham & Bustos Salvagno 2011). Even in countries where schooling levels have increased, resulting in a greater proportion of young people studying in universities, such as in Egypt, restrictions within the job market have led to an elevated unemployment rate or the acceptance of employment in the informal sector, thus negating the investments in education (Angel-Urdinola & Semlali 2010). In South America, it is reported that youths perceive secondary education and higher as an expansion of rights, whereas the labor market is distinguished by vulnerability and an absence of citizenship, wherein young people imagine their future to be worse than the stable working situation of their parents (Kessler 2010). However, although higher schooling does not guarantee finding a job, education has not been discouraged. School diplomas are seen as necessary, not for the merit they represent but rather for building networks of contacts to secure employment in a stratified and unequal society (Kessler 2010). In some contexts, having

studied in a university may lead to incomes that are 85% higher than those of people with only an obligatory education level. However, those with a secondary school level have more difficulty finding work than those with either a basic or higher education level (Pastore 2009). And although those with more schooling may start out working jobs similar to those with less schooling, in time they obtain better jobs, reinforcing occupational mobility (Garcia & Fares 2008).

Additionally, studies have been done on how the lack of employment affects other transitions such as marriage. In the case of Iran, young people who do not find work within two years of graduating have fewer opportunities to marry by age 30, and the type of work they do find (stable or unstable) determines the probability of marriage (Egel & Salehi-Isfahani 2010). Similar results were found in the case of Egypt (Assaad et al. 2010a).

From the perspective of gender, studies have been conducted on how domestic labor of young girls affects their educational achievement, usually leading them to not enroll in school or to drop out within a few years (Assaad et al. 2010b). A significant portion of young people who fall into the category of “not studying or working” are women who work in the home and have abandoned their studies early (Filardo 2010). In Latin American countries, even when women achieve levels of schooling higher than those of men, their wages remain lower than men’s (Filardo 2010). In some African countries, unemployment is greater among young women and their wages much lower than men’s, regardless of the type of work (Jones & Chant 2009). In contrast, in countries such as Mongolia, among children and young people with little or no schooling, boys are at a disadvantage because their parents prefer them to perform agricultural activities (Pastore 2009). Furthermore, in some African countries men have experienced a more gradual increase in schooling level than their female counterparts (Lloyd & Hewett 2009). In those countries with strongly patriarchal gender systems (such as Ghana and India), analyses

have been made on how schooling allows for changes in gender relations regarding decision-making abilities, which in turn affects domestic transitions (household work and family formation) and female integration into the workforce (Arnot et al. 2012). Other studies show that transitions from school to work and to marriage carry different consequences for men and women. In Iran, although finding a good job accelerates the transition to marriage for men, having a higher schooling level and a better job delays marriage age for women (Egel & Salehi-Isfahani 2010).

SEXUALITY AND FAMILY FORMATION

Transition to Sexuality

The transition to sexual life occurs differently within distinct regions of the developing world, in different social strata, and for men and women. In many cases, the beginning of sexuality is linked to marriage, but there is an increasing separation between these transitions. Furthermore, the timing is different from country to country. There is an increasing gap between the age of sexual initiation and the age of marriage, especially owing to increasing marriage ages (Blanc et al. 2009). Furthermore, various researchers have shown that a large percentage of young people do not have access to contraceptives or methods of preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Kostrzewa 2008, WHO 2012). This can lead to unplanned, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, which in turn affect education, work, and health trajectories.

According to the classic studies on the transition to adulthood, the beginning of sexuality was not considered to be a relevant event, perhaps because it was inseparably identified with the beginning of marriage. However, one of the most obvious changes in recent decades has been the separation of these events. There is an increasing trend of young people becoming sexually active long before marriage. The percentage of sexually active young people differs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

A recent review of a sample taken from 30 developing countries reports that regardless of marital status, the proportion of men 15 to 19 years who have had sexual relations ranges from 8% in Ethiopia to 69% in Mozambique, and the proportion of women in the same age group ranges from 10% in Guatemala to 73% in Mozambique (Anderson et al. 2013). Taking into account only never-married people, the number of men ranges from 6% in Ethiopia to 63% in Mozambique, and the number of women ranges from 2% in Ethiopia to 30% in Mozambique (Anderson et al. 2013). The distance between the age at first sexual relation and the age of marriage for those who have experienced both events is also highly variable in different countries. Among women aged 20 to 24 years, this time period ranges from negative numbers in India and Nepal, which reflects a traditional cultural practice of postponing sexual relations and cohabitation for months after marriage, to 3.8 years in Colombia (Anderson et al. 2013). For men aged 25 to 29, the gap ranges from 0.4 years in Bangladesh and India to 7.6 years in the Dominican Republic (Anderson et al. 2013). In Mexico, it is estimated that the period between first sexual relation and first marriage has been widening over time for women, currently standing at around 3 years, and even more so for women with higher schooling levels or for those living in more developed regions, where this interval has doubled (Juárez et al. 2010, Gayet & Szasz 2014). In India, some studies that have documented factors associated with sexual initiation out of wedlock indicate that most cases occur in a context of romantic partners, without the use of protection, and, while rare, instances of forced sexual activity have been reported even with the same romantic partner (Santhya et al. 2011). Among these factors are changes in family norms regarding control of young people and changes in the norms of these same young people who increasingly accept sexual activity out of wedlock as legitimate, though in a context where there is not yet sufficient knowledge of contraceptive methods or where myths about pregnancy and STIs

prevail (Hindin & Hindin 2009, Santhya et al. 2011).

In societies with regulations that penalize sexual activity out of wedlock, sexual initiation under these conditions—if performed without protection—can affect other transitions to adulthood. An unplanned pregnancy at a young age can lead to dropping out of school, unstable future marriages, and single parenthood. A study in four African countries shows that youths aged 12 to 19 years who have begun their sexual life are more likely to drop out of school than are those who have not had premarital sexual relations (Biddlecom et al. 2008). Furthermore, the lack of protection can lead these young people to contract HIV/AIDS, which in turn affects their very survival.

Residential Independence

Another event that can signify the transition to an independent life is the departure from the family home and the establishment of an autonomous residence, although this has been less well studied in developing countries than in developed countries (Beguy et al. 2011). The departure from the family home may happen because of continued studies (moving into a dormitory), migration, an expression of emancipation, or, as is most often the case, starting a marriage. Financial independence is often studied as well, given that the degree of autonomy afforded by independent residence is related to the financial burden of maintaining a new home (Tomanović 2012). In some cases, parents or other family members continue to provide the means for this process of residential separation. In other cases, young people find jobs that allow them a greater degree of autonomy in order to take charge of the costs of independence. In certain contexts, a delay in the age of departure from the home has been recorded, generally related to an increase in years of schooling (Salehi-Isfahani & Egel 2007, Ciganda & Gagnon 2010), but also to fewer employment opportunities, which delays the possibility of financial independence (Beguy et al. 2011). In other contexts, especially in rural locations,

the age of departure from the family home appears to be dropping, in particular owing to labor-related migration, and women depart at an earlier age than men (Echarri Canovas & Pérez Amador 2007). Similarly, in some Asian cities such as Shanghai, the age of departure from the family home is occurring at younger ages than in the past, but in other cities such as Hanoi, this continues to be a rare event (Zabin et al. 2009). However, even though independent residence is a habitual marker in studies on transitions to adulthood, in some societies partners commonly begin their marriage residing with parents, as is the case in Mexico, India, and Kenya (Desai & Andrist 2010, Beguy et al. 2011, Giorguli 2011).

Transition to Marriage

The literature on transitions has generally emphasized marriage as a key event in the passage to adulthood. Most countries regulate the minimum age at which a person can marry.² Nevertheless, in some developing countries there are ways of entering into a union without legal recognition under the minimum age, and still in others child marriage practices persist. Consensual unions exist in some regions as an ancestral form of union, and not simply as a novel practice, as it is seen in developed countries (Zavala de Cosío 1992, Quilodrán 2011); in African countries, the practice of polygamist marriage is also present (Fenske 2011). The general tendency in developing countries over the last decade has been an increase in the marriage age of women, which could mean that they are better prepared when they do marry, with higher levels of schooling and greater decision-making power. For women aged 20 to 24 in Africa, the median age at marriage varies from

17.4 in Ethiopia to 22.3 in Rwanda, in South and Southeast Asia from 17.4 in India to 22.1 in the Philippines, and in Latin America and the Caribbean from 18.5 in the Dominican Republic to 22 in Peru (Anderson et al. 2013). The greatest difference observed in the age at first marriage and the percentage of women who remain never-married is in Asia. As Jones (2010) indicates, in the space of half a century there has been a tendency toward a greater percentage of women who remain never-married until the age of 40 as well as an increase in age at marriage. Indonesia, for example, has seen a rise in age at marriage of 4.1 years, Malaysia and the Philippines of between 2 and 3 years; even in Bangladesh marriage age rose almost two years between 1975 and 2000. For men, increases were also observed, although in some countries less noticeably than for women (Jones 2010). The percentage of women who remain never-married varies according to education level, with greater proportions among women with higher schooling level. For men, it is reversed; those with less schooling have a lower probability of marrying (Jones 2010). To counteract this disadvantage, men with low schooling levels in the richest Asian countries marry women from the poorest countries via marriage agencies. Furthermore, differences can be seen within countries. For example, in India women tend to marry later in the south and earlier in the north, a discrepancy that has been explained by the autonomy of the women in specific contexts (Jones 2010). In Latin America, just as in Asia, there has been an increase in marriage age as well as in the proportion of those who choose to remain never-married (Quilodrán 2011). In this region, the form of marriage has changed the most. There are increasingly fewer legal unions and more consensual unions (Esteve et al. 2012). An inverse relationship has been observed between cohabitation and schooling, where women with higher levels of schooling tend to have fewer instances of cohabitation and more legal marriages (Esteve et al. 2012).

Despite increases in marriage age, a high percentage of women marry before age 18, which is the definition of child marriage.

²Although most research reports the transition to marriage of heterosexual couples, the recent legal recognition of same-sex couples should be noted. Many developing countries have modified their laws recently to allow for same-sex marriage, including South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, as well as Mexico City. There remains insufficient information to analyze the duration and intensity of these transitions.

Child marriages have been a concern to researchers and policy makers because of their effects on further economic development and because of increased vulnerability for women (Walker 2012). Marriage before age 18 reduces children's period of growth, learning, and identity formation (UNFPA 2012). A recent report on young women identifies 41 developing countries, most which are located in sub-Saharan Africa, where the prevalence of child marriage is at least 30% (UNFPA 2012). Child marriage may also lead to school dropouts. A study conducted in 20 sub-Saharan African countries on the effect of marriage and fertility on school dropouts shows that young women aged 20 to 24 who left secondary school before finishing—between 2% in Benin, the Ivory Coast, and Togo and 28% in Chad—did so because of marriage (Lloyd & Mensch 2008). Evidence in India indicates that women who marry after the age of 18 as compared with those who marry before have greater decision-making capabilities, are more able to avoid being beaten, use contraceptives more often to delay their first pregnancy, and are more likely to give birth to their first child in a healthcare center (Santhya et al. 2010).

Transition to the First Child

Having a child and being responsible for its growth and development implies a clear transition to adult life. The completion of other transitions such as the culmination of one's studies and entrance into the workforce makes one better prepared to fulfill the role of a parent (Natl. Res. Council et al. 2005). In general, the age of women having their first child has been increasing, which is related to the increase in age at marriage. There is little information regarding these indicators for men. For women 20 to 24 years old, their median age at first birth varies in Africa from 18.6 in Mozambique to 22.9 in Egypt and Rwanda, in Southeast Asia from 19.0 in Bangladesh to 23.1 in the Philippines, and in Latin America from 20.0 in Honduras to 22.3 in Peru (Anderson et al. 2013). Data from two countries in Latin

America and the Caribbean show that among men aged 25 to 29, their median age at first birth was between 22.0 in Bolivia and 22.5 in the Dominican Republic (Bozon et al. 2009).

However, developing countries still present numerous cases of adolescent motherhood, which can have damaging effects on the health of the mother as well as of the child. Among women 15 to 19 years old, the percentage who have become mothers is high in Mozambique (34%), Zambia (22%), Bangladesh (27%), and Guatemala (17%) (Anderson et al. 2013). For men, although few data have been collected, the proportion who have become fathers or gotten someone pregnant during adolescence is much lower. In Kenya, one study reported that by the age of 18, 16% of women had had a child, compared with just 2% of men; and by age 22 the proportion was 60% for women and 13% for men (Beguy et al. 2011).

One of the consequences of early maternity is school dropout. This is observed in sub-Saharan Africa, where the percentage of women who drop out of secondary school before finishing due to pregnancy may be as high as 17% in Zambia and 15% in the Central African Republic (Lloyd & Mensch 2008). Another study indicates that those who exhibited poor academic performance and grade repetition had a higher probability of becoming pregnant during adolescence and dropping out of school upon giving birth (Marteletto et al. 2008). It is important to note that many of these adolescent pregnancies were not planned. The levels vary among different countries and regions. For example, in Ghana 56% of births among married women aged 15 to 19 were not planned, 30% in the Philippines, 24% in Nepal, and 62% in Bolivia (Anderson et al. 2013). In general, these percentages are even higher for never-married women aged 15 to 19, and may be as high as 75% in Kenya (Anderson et al. 2013).

One way of delaying the transition to the birth of one's first child is through the correct use of contraceptives. A characteristic of developing countries is the lack of adequate contraception services, especially for young people. The use of contraceptives among

young people, and especially for those who are never-married, is limited in many countries. Two recent reviews based on surveys taken between 2000 and 2011 show increases in the use of contraceptives over time by young women (Khan & Mishra 2008, Anderson et al. 2013). The percentage of sexually active, never-married women aged 15 to 19 that use some modern method of contraception is low in many African countries, with less than 20% in Senegal, Rwanda, Kenya, and the Congo. The percentage is middle range in most Latin American countries (between 30% and 40%) (Anderson et al. 2013). An investigation conducted in three Asian cities (Shanghai, Taipei, and Hanoi) showed that during their first sexual experience, of women aged 15 to 19, the use of some method of contraception was high (53% in Shanghai, 72% in Taipei, and 75% in Hanoi) (Zabin et al. 2009). Among young married women, the use of contraceptives was lower in some regions, given the strong association between marriage and motherhood (Anderson et al. 2013). However, even when one wants to have a child directly after marriage, the use of contraceptives becomes necessary for the spacing of subsequent children (Pillsbury et al. 2000). Among married women 15 to 19 years old, the number that currently use a modern method of contraception in Africa ranges from 2% in Nigeria to 29% in Rwanda; in Asia, from 4% in Pakistan to 46% in Indonesia; and in Latin America and the Caribbean, from 25% in Bolivia to 55% in Colombia (Anderson et al. 2013).

Different factors associated with the low use of contraceptives in sexual relations between young people have been discussed, such as the lack of knowledge and of specific health services related to the prevention of pregnancy and STIs (Biddlecom et al. 2007, Bankole & Malarcher 2010). Regarding knowledge of contraceptive methods, the most significant problem is that even when they have heard of them, young people lack precise information on how to use them (Williamson et al. 2009). The lack of appropriate health services for adolescents and other young people has been a recurrent theme in the

literature, attributed partly to the fact that sexuality among the young never-married remains taboo (Dehne & Riedner 2005, Chikovore et al. 2013, Lebesse et al. 2013). Furthermore, there is a low use of contraceptives associated with forced sexual situations (Jejeebhoy et al. 2005).

Another way of resolving undesired motherhood is through induced abortions. There are no precise numbers on abortions per age group or marital status, but we do know that this phenomenon occurs on a large scale. In countries with restrictive laws, abortions are carried out under insecure and unsafe conditions. An estimated 22.3 million unsafe abortions occur per year worldwide, most taking place in developing countries (in Africa 97% of abortions are unsafe, in Latin America 95%, and in Asia 40%) (Sedgh et al. 2012).

HEALTH AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

For the different transitions to adulthood to occur optimally, young people must remain in a state of good health. Although adolescence may be considered the healthiest time of life, certain circumstances unique to this time period put adolescents at risk. In developing countries, these risks accumulate, and the health of young people is comparatively worse than in developed countries (Natl. Res. Council et al. 2005, Patton et al. 2012). The transition to sexuality brings with it the risk of STIs, in particular HIV/AIDS. The transition to sexuality also carries the risk of maternal death related to childbirth among young girls. Other markers of the transition to adult life, such as participation in armed forces, puts young people at risk of serious wounds and death. Transportation accidents represent an important cause of death for young people. In terms of mental health risks, addictions to alcohol and drugs are notable, which are considered among some young people to be markers of adulthood. Furthermore, depression, suicide attempts, and other mental illnesses threaten a safe passage into adult life. Other mental health problems such as eating

disorders also affect adolescents and have short- and long-term consequences.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in young people aged 15 to 24 years decreased by 50% between 2001 and 2011 in South and Southeast Asia and by 35% in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean (UNAIDS 2012b). However, the epidemic continues to be one of the principal causes of the global burden of disease (Gore et al. 2011), affecting 1.3% of men and 3.1% of women aged 15 to 24 in sub-Saharan Africa and 0.3% of men and 0.6% of women in the Caribbean (UNAIDS 2012a). Other STIs are also prevalent in developing countries, especially among sexually active adolescents (Berman & Ellen 2008). Estimations in South Africa report that approximately 3–4% of women aged 15 to 24 and of men aged 20 to 24 were infected with gonorrhea; the prevalence of syphilis estimated in women 15 to 19 years of age in other African countries ranges from 2% to 5%; and the prevalence of herpes type 2 among women aged 15 to 19 has been estimated at 9% in Benin, 14% in Cameroon, 42% in Zambia, and 39% in Kenya (Berman & Ellen 2008). Among young people aged 15 to 24, the risk of unprotected sexual activity has been considered to account for a 5% of years of health life lost, adjusted for disability (known as DALYs, disability-adjusted life years) (Gore et al. 2011). Deaths by maternal causes in young people, though rare in developed countries, are more prevalent in the developing world. On a global scale, this accounts for 15% of the deaths of women 10 to 24 years old, but in Africa it accounts for 26% (Patton et al. 2009). In Latin America it has been documented that pregnancies among women less than 15 years of age are four times more likely to result in maternal death than in women 20 to 24 years old (Conde-Agudelo et al. 2005).

Mortality caused by violence and accidents especially affects young men in developing countries (Patton et al. 2009). In Southeast Asia, these factors represent 43% of the deaths of young men, particularly when it comes to traffic accidents and self-inflicted injuries. Traf-

fic accidents are one of the principal causes of death worldwide and the primary cause of death globally for the age group 15–29. The risk of dying as a result of wounds caused by traffic accidents for the general population is highest in Africa (24.1 out of every 100,000 inhabitants), but considering just the young population, Thailand takes first place at a rate of 36.6 for every 100,000 inhabitants (Waiselfisz 2008, WHO 2013). Worldwide, young men aged 15 to 29 are at the highest risk of becoming a victim of homicide, at a rate of 21.2 out of 100,000, decreasing significantly with age presumably because during this stage in life young men are involved more often in illicit activities like street crimes, gangs, drug consumption, gun possession, street fights, and other violent activities (UNODC 2011). Among young men aged 15 to 24, the Latin American region as a whole presented the highest rate of homicide-related deaths, at 36.6 out of 100,000 inhabitants, with an emphasis on countries such as El Salvador and Colombia, with rates of 92.3 and 73.4 out of 100,000 inhabitants, respectively (Waiselfisz 2008). A UN report affirms that the insecurity of young men in Central America is dramatic, given that the probability that a young man in this region will fall victim to a homicide is 30 times higher than for a young man in Europe (PNUD 2009). Another form of violent death is in the context of wars and armed conflicts; in one decade, 2 million young people died in armed conflicts and another 5 million were disabled, and by 2003 it was estimated that some 300,000 young soldiers fought in armed conflicts (UN 2004).

During youth, mental health is affected by mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder, anxieties such as phobias or post-traumatic stress, and disorders related to substance abuse and dependency (Benjet et al. 2009). Suicidal conduct (from idea, to plan, to attempt) and completed suicide are also important problems among young people in developing countries (Borges et al. 2010, Pitman et al. 2012). Studies in low- and medium-income countries have reported

a prevalence of mental health problems in adolescence ranging from 1.8% to 39.4% (Kieling et al. 2011). A comparative study on alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and cocaine use in 17 countries shows that in most countries the mean age at which people begin consuming alcohol and tobacco is between 16 and 19, except in South Africa where the average age of alcohol initiation is 20 years and in Nigeria and China where the age of initiation of tobacco-smoking is 21 and 20, respectively. The average age for starting to smoke marijuana is between 18 and 19 (except Nigeria at 22 and Lebanon at 21), whereas the mean age for starting to consume cocaine was slightly higher, between 22 and 24 (Degenhardt et al. 2008). Among young people aged 22 to 29, the use of alcohol by age 15 was estimated to be between 40% and 63% in East Asia and Africa, less than in many developed countries. The percentage of those who use tobacco by age 15 for this age group was estimated to be less than in developed countries as well, ranging from 7% in Nigeria to 21% in Mexico. In Asia and Africa, there was almost no consumption of cannabis at this age, whereas in Colombia the consumption of cocaine by age 15 in this cohort was estimated at 3% (Degenhardt et al. 2008).

Another prevalent health problem among adolescents and young people is eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and food addictions that lead to obesity (Gearhardt et al. 2011, Smink et al. 2012). Although these problems were once considered to be unique to developed societies, imitation of body stereotypes as a result of globalization has led to an increasing occurrence among the young in non-Western countries (Forbes et al. 2012). The prevalence of excess weight and obesity in children and adolescents in developing countries has increased dramatically owing to dietary changes and sedentary lifestyles. The prevalence in minors aged 5 to 19 in developing countries is estimated to be greater than 15% and as high as 41.8% in Mexico and 22% in Brazil (Gupta et al. 2012). From a life-course perspective, it is fundamental to recognize that the health of adolescents and young people responds to social

and biological experiences during this particular life stage and has consequences not only on their health later in life but also for other vital transitions (Sawyer et al. 2012).

POLITICAL EXPRESSION AND CITIZENSHIP

Another aspect that defines the transition to adult life is political participation. In different countries there are legal ages at which certain adult rights and responsibilities are granted, such as the voting age, the age at which young people may be drafted into the armed forces, the age of legal responsibilities for crimes, and the driving age. From a legal perspective, most countries consider 18 to be the minimum voting age. In some Latin American countries the minimum age is younger, such as in Argentina, Brazil, and Nicaragua (16 years old). In Africa, exceptions include the Ivory Coast, Gabon, and Sierra Leone, where the minimum voting age is 21, and in Southeast Asia the exceptions are Malaysia (21) and Indonesia (17). Paradoxically, the age of legal responsibility is younger in most countries, starting at 7 years old (Natl. Res. Council. et al. 2005).

Aside from legal aspects, in this stage of life young people begin to express their political positions, which are often critical, and organize in order to be heard. Previous reviews have investigated these issues (Natl. Res. Council. et al. 2005, Flanagan & Christens 2011) and have highlighted information from developed countries, showing just how incipient these studies are in developing countries. Among the political expression of young people from a citizenship perspective, large political protests on various continents are of great importance. One interpretation of the multiplication of youth movements in recent years is that, on the one hand, these movements are afforded to young people with skills, knowledge, and access to new information technologies (Internet, cellular telephones, etc.), yet on the other hand youths' employment has lost relevance to their lives, and young people find themselves in unstable jobs, experiencing unemployment and job

insecurity, leading them to become principal actors in social outbursts. In the process of transitioning to citizenship, young people are living in frustrating contexts, which can lead to violent forms of expression (Arnot & Swartz 2012). Examples include the protests in Egypt starting in 2010 that led to the fall of the government and a call for new elections;³ the protests in Chile since 2011, starting with student movements that eventually led to a questioning of the economic and social model; and the protests in Mexico in 2012, where university students organized to protest the lack of democratic ideals in the presidential election, as well as the role of the media in promoting the candidates (Alonso 2013, Natanson 2013, Arteaga-Botello & Arzuaga-Magnoni 2014). These new political movements share certain elements, such as the predominant role of young people, the absence of political parties as organizers, and the use of social networks as instruments of political action (Valenzuela et al. 2012). The problem becomes worse in countries with extreme poverty, where young people, who once were able to experience the advantages of citizenship, must negotiate the structural violence associated with daily life, according to Arnot & Swartz (2012). The processes of social change brought on by globalization ultimately create new means of social exclusion for young people (Arnot & Swartz 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

This review of research on youth transitions to adulthood in developing countries has demonstrated a vast diversity of situations in different regions of the world. Tensions arising from globalization, which leads to both imitation of Western lifestyles and circumstances of social inequality, poverty, and exclusion unique to

the developing world, influence the time frame and manner in which these transitions occur. Recent studies show that it is necessary to redefine certain usual markers in the literature on transitions to adult life. Young people of poor strata transit to labor at an early age, while they are still children; some manage to study while they work. Thus, initiation of work is not always an indicator of a transition. Temporary breaks from school and repetition of grades change the age at which young people are expected to conclude their studies, and the transition to their first job is delayed by the current market crisis, leading young people to spend long periods unemployed. Social origins determine educational achievements as well as one's success or failure at entering the job market. Although the age for transition to marriage is increasing, it occurs at a young age in certain contexts, as does the experience of giving birth to one's first child. In general, the gap between marriage and the birth of the first child has not widened much. Residential independence turns out not to be a common cultural marker of transition, given that in certain contexts young people continue sharing residency with their parents after getting married and having their first child. Sexual initiation opens the door to infections, including HIV/AIDS, as well as to unplanned pregnancies. The use of modern contraceptives is limited by lack of adequate health services for young people. To avoid early motherhood, unsafe abortions are often performed in many countries, leading to the risk of maternal death. Early marriages may lead young people to drop out of school or to accept uncertain employment. Problems related to violence, accidents, and mental health are increasing in countries with high rates of poverty. Differentiated opportunities have led young people on various continents to participate in political protests, indicating dissatisfaction with global trends. Transitions to adulthood have been affected by failed economies, lack of jobs, and social inequality (Arnot & Swartz 2012); they have become more complex, placing young people in developing countries in positions of vulnerability and insecurity.

³In the 2008 World Values Survey, 87% of young people in Egypt aged 15 to 29 said that they would never participate in peaceful protests. These responses must be analyzed according to the degrees of freedom present in the political contexts where the responses were given.

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