

THE DEMONSTRATION AND TRANSCURRENCE OF THE COLONIAL

by Carmen Elisa Florez N.
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The Demographic Transition and Women's Life-course in Colombia

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**The Demographic Transition and
Women's Life-course in Colombia**

A demographic transition has, in any society, a direct effect on age distribution in its population. Some developing countries, like most of the industrialized countries, are experiencing the aging of their population structures due to a rapid decline in fertility rates. Such change has important implications at both the micro and macro levels of society. At the micro level, it implies different types of family composition and different processes of family formation. At the macro level, it means, among other things, different types of social demands on the state and pressures on the job market.

The Household, Gender, and Age Project of the United Nations University Programme on Human and Social Development conducted two case-studies – using life-course cohort analysis – in urban and rural areas in Colombia from 1983 to 1987 in order to understand the impact of its demographic transition in the last three decades on the lives of women and their families in different socio-economic strata in different geographical areas. This volume combines and compares the results of both studies and provides analyses of the complex interrelationships among women's education, labour participation, and family formation; socio-economic determinants in women's reproductive behaviour; women's perceptions of their life events; and the use of time and division of labour by gender and age within the household. It also includes discussion of future policy implications.

To my family

PREFACE

This book compiles and summarizes two studies, "The Impact of the Demographic Transition on Households in Bogotá" and "The Meaning of the Demographic Transition on Households of a Colombian Rural Setting," undertaken at the Center of Studies in Economic Development (CEDE) between 1984 and 1987. As such, it is the joint effort of many persons. As director of both studies, it is my privilege to thank Elssy Bonilla and Rafael Echeverri, who collaborated on parts of this volume, as well as others who participated in the research: Leonardo Garcia, Martha Rodriguez, and Diana Medrano. I especially want to thank Bernardo Guerrero, who worked with me on the design and implementation of the Bogotá urban longitudinal survey, and Argemiro Morales, who processed the raw life-history data with great skill.

I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to Nohra Rey de Marulanda, researcher and director of CEDE in 1983, who conceived the original Bogotá urban study. I am also very grateful to Eleonora Masini, General Co-ordinator of the Household, Gender, and Age (HGA) Programme of the United Nations University (UNU), for her suggestions, comments, and encouragement. I wish also to thank HGA-UNU executive officer Kumiko Ishikawa, as well as HGA-UNU's consultant group, namely David Kertzer, Nancy Karweit, and Dennis Hogan, from whom we received support on different stages of the project. We are especially indebted to Nancy Karweit, who made available her Data Base Management Programme for Life History Data (CASA), enormously facilitating the retrieval of the data for the analysis.

The help of two groups of persons was critical to the urban and rural studies: the team of interviewers and the women who kindly responded to the surveys. Without them it would have been impossible to carry out these studies. I am also grateful to Leonel Castillo, who designed the sample for the urban longitudinal survey, and to Rafael Echeverri, one of the collaborators in this volume, who designed the rural sample and was responsible for both the urban and rural field-work.

I am profoundly grateful to the Household, Gender, and Age Programme of the United Nations University, to the Women's Status and Fertility Program of the Rockefeller Foundation for their financial support of the urban and rural projects, and to the National Administrative Department of Statistics in Colombia (DANE) for allowing us to use their computer facilities in processing the Bogotá urban survey. I appreciate the institutional support provided by the Demography Training Program of the University of Chicago, which awarded me a one-year Hewlett Foundation fellowship to revise and publish the urban and rural reports.

I especially want to thank Dennis Hogan, who, from the Population Issues Research Center of Pennsylvania State University, encouraged and supported me with his detailed feedback and suggestions during the revision and completion of this volume. I would also like to thank Douglas Massey, Marta Tienda, Nancy Denton, Robert Willis, Joseph Hotz, and John Craig for their support at the University of Chicago and for their extremely valuable comments on the earlier versions of this volume.

Lastly, a special thank you to Yolanda Butts for her patience in editing the English version of the manuscript.

Carmen Elisa Florez
Chicago, June 1988

INTRODUCTION

The Household, Gender, and Age (HGA) Programme of the United Nations University (UNU) promotes research on the effects at micro and macro levels of important and significant changes in developing societies. As part of that programme, the studies in this volume take the demographic transition in Colombia as the macro-level change and attempt to analyse its micro-level effects, its dynamic process, and its implications. One objective of the HGA-UNU programme is to encourage the use of life-course and time-allocation approaches in research about developing countries. These perspectives are well represented in this Colombian study through complete retrospective life-histories and reconstruction of time use during a normal week.

The study was restricted to the Andean region (Bogotá and the rural areas of Cundinamarca and Boyacá states), in view of the existence in Colombia of clearly distinguishable geographic and cultural regions with well-defined demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Conducting a national study of this kind, representing the different geographic regions, would have been of a magnitude almost impossible to handle. Given the sharp social and economic differentials existing in the country, the study is representative of the three broad socio-economic strata, lower, middle, and upper.

The analysis of the meaning of the demographic transition at the micro level is achieved by a comparison of the life-course of two cohorts of women representing the behaviour before and after the sharp and rapid decline in fertility experienced by Colombia at the beginning of the 1960s. Our study focused on women who were 25–29 (25–31) and on those who were 45–49 (40–49) years old in 1984 (1986) when the urban (rural) field-work was done. Hence, the study focuses on the *changes* in the demographic transitions characterizing the family formation process and its socio-economic determinants. A comparison of women's use of time and perceptions on aspects of productive and reproductive behaviours enriches and supports the longitudinal results.

Since we use both quantitative and qualitative methods, the research team

represented a mix of disciplines appropriate to the study: economics and demography, sociology, and public administration. One investigator had considerable experience in field-work.

This volume is organized in six chapters. The first documents the demographic transition process and the socio-economic changes experienced in Colombia during the last decades, and presents the main objectives of the study. Chapter 2 describes the research orientation, the methods of analysis for the life-course study, and the sample design and research instruments used in the urban and rural field-work, and discusses the quality of the collected data. The socio-economic characteristics of the geographic settings and the current socio-demographic characteristics of the women interviewed are analysed in chapter 3. Using the retrospective life-histories, a comparative analysis is made in chapter 4 of the transition processes women followed in forming their families and the socio-economic determinants of the likelihood of those demographic events. The complex relationship between women's work and the family formation process is also considered in chapter 4 through an examination of female participation in productive activities as both influencing and being influenced by female reproductive behaviour. Chapter 5 focuses on the analysis of women's perceptions of their family formation process, as well as on their use of time and the division of labour by gender and age within the household. The major conclusions of the study and their implications for policy in Colombia and for future research are discussed in chapter 6.

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THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IN COLOMBIA

General Trends

Population trends in Colombia indicate that during the last five decades the country has been experiencing a demographic transition, a change from high to low birth and death rates. This process began toward the end of the 1930s when mortality conditions began to improve. Life expectancy¹ increased from 44 years in 1938 to 61 years in 1978, whereas the crude mortality rate decreased from 30.5 to 9 per thousand, and the infant mortality rate from 200.2 to 61 per thousand during the same 50-year period. By the beginning of the 1960s, fertility had started to decline, the total fertility rate² decreasing from 7.04 in 1960–1964 to 4.6 in 1972–1973, and to 3.6 in 1980, a reduction of almost 50 per cent in less than 20 years. The crude birth rate decreased from 45.2 at the end of the 1950s to 28.9 per thousand in 1980. The sharp decline in fertility during this period, especially before 1973 when the most important reductions occurred, has led many authors to characterize the experience of Colombia a “demographic transition without precedent” (Potter, Ordonez, and Meashman, 1976; Mauldin and Berelson, 1978). Figure 1 clearly shows the trends in mortality and fertility rates.

Although the fertility decline began first in the urban areas, and the country areas continue to lag behind, the rural decrease has been equally dramatic. Rural fertility levels in 1980 were as high as those in urban areas in 1968: a total rate of 5.1, but with a fertility pattern clearly affected by birth control. Rural reproductive behaviour has changed, but with a lag of almost 12 years in comparison to urban reproductive behaviour. According to the 1985 census, the total fertility rate was 3.2 for the nation, 2.7 for urban areas and 4.6 for rural areas (Florez, Echeverri, and Mendez, 1987).

During the same decades in which the country has experienced the demographic transition, important structural changes related to the development process have taken place. Without examining in detail the principal aspects of the socio-economic changes, we can mention the most important ones affecting population structure.

2 THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IN COLOMBIA

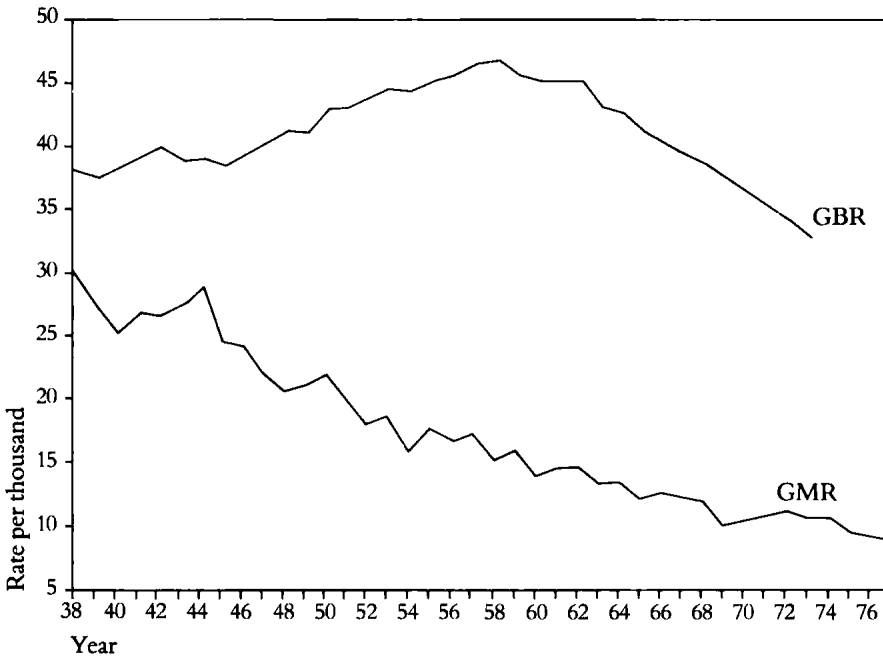


Fig. 1. The demographic transition in Colombia.

First, around 1950 the government began countrywide health campaigns geared toward the prevention of illness. Second, since 1956 there has been a remarkable increase in public expenditure on education, leading to a decrease in illiteracy from 47.7 per cent in 1938 to 20.6 per cent in 1973, and an increase in elementary-school attendance from 56.2 per cent in 1951 to 89.1 per cent in 1973. Third, the increase in public expenditure on education and health during the last 50 years has been nevertheless uneven, favouring urban over rural areas. This circumstance, together with the adoption of policies for the mechanization of agriculture in the 1950s and the stimulation of industry and construction in the 1960s and 1970s, created the conditions for an unprecedented migratory process during the 1960s. Rural-urban migration increased the degree of urbanization from 30.7 per cent in 1937 to 62 per cent in 1973; that is, the percentage of population residing in urban areas doubled in a 35-year period. Fourth, at the end of the 1960s the private sector began providing family planning services. These activities are permitted and tacitly supported by the government, thus accelerating the fertility decrease initiated at the beginning of the decade.

All these changes point to an understanding of how the modernization process and government policies in health and education combined to shape the demographic transition in Colombia. This process is expected to continue until at least

the end of this century, although not with the intensity experienced during the 1960–1978 period. Our analysis suggests that, even after a stabilization phase has been achieved, large differences will persist between urban and rural areas, and between socio-economic sectors.

Objectives of the Study

A demographic transition has, in any population, a direct effect on age distribution, caused mostly by the strong decrease in fertility. Colombia's population structure is becoming older, and the relative proportion of infants is diminishing while the adult and elderly proportion is increasing. This change has important implications at both the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, for example, it implies different types of family composition and different processes of family formation. At the macro level, for the economy as a whole, this means, among other things, different types of social demands on the state and of pressures on the job market. Without a doubt, the demographic transition in Colombia has had an enormous impact on diverse spheres, many of which have not yet been analysed.

The speed with which demographic changes have occurred permits one to examine simultaneously households in which women were at reproductive ages when the total fertility rate reached its maximum level, and households where women were at reproductive ages after the fertility decline. Thus, the principal objective of our study has been to analyse the impact of Colombia's demographic transition at the micro (household) level through a comparison of the life-course of two groups of women: those who were at the peak of their fertility in the period 1960–1964 when fertility was at the maximum level (the 25–29 age-group at that time), and those who were at the peak of their fertility in 1980 (the most recent time at which information on fertility was available), and who were in the 20–24 age-group at that time. The comparison is made by examining changes between the two cohorts³ in the different stages of the process of family formation and expansion, and by documenting the effects of women's status on the different demographic transitions characterizing the family formation process.

With the aim of complementing the quantitative longitudinal results, we examine family organization, and women's expectations and perceptions that are related to and determine the family formation process. Because of the large differences in income existing in the country, we stratify the sample into three socio-economic strata both in the urban and rural areas.

Given the magnitude of the study and the well-known differences in the urban and rural demographic transition process, two studies were conducted: one for an urban area, Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, and one for a rural area in the same geographical region (the Central Andean region). The necessary information for these studies was collected through a retrospective longitudinal survey (life-histories on residence, education, occupation, nuptiality, fertility, family plan-

ning, and co-residence), and case-studies on time allocation and perceptions and attitudes toward variables that determine women's productive and reproductive behaviour.

Study Design

The study of family formation as a dynamic process over life has not been approached in Colombia. In spite of the well-known decline in fertility experienced by the country during the last decades, all analyses have focused on cumulated and cross-section measures and interrelationships. Our approach, the life-course portrayed through retrospective data, provides interpretive richness and a better understanding of the changes and causes of the transition processes characterizing family formation. The methodology we use is not just a statistical method, but a general approach and research strategy beginning with data collection and continuing through data analysis.

Retrospective information is obtained from cohorts of women separated by an average of 20 years. In this way, the demographic events recorded reflect a range of historical and contextual experiences. The major problem with this type of design (that the experience of the most recent cohort examined is substantially incomplete right censoring) is dealt with by using life-table methods which do not assume that all those who will experience an event have already done so by the time of the data collection. Ethnomethodological and time-allocation in-depth studies complement the life-course analysis. This combination of quantitative with qualitative methods further enriches the analyses, and broadens the substantive interpretation we are able to give them.

Women are the primary unit of analysis for this study. The household, defined as a co-residential unit whose members share at least one of the three daily meals, is approached through the woman. A woman's behaviour and her perceptions with respect to the household and relevant variables are the core of the analysis.

To organize the analysis of urban and rural projects, we divided each into two parts: a longitudinal study and a qualitative and time-allocation study. In the longitudinal study we collected, for women from each cohort, two sets of information, one on the woman and her household's characteristics at the time of the interview, and another on her life-history of residence (migration), education, housework activities, occupation, nuptiality, fertility, family planning, and co-residence. The life-history information provides the basis for a multivariate analysis of women's reproductive and productive behaviour over time. In the qualitative and time-allocation study, we collect information on women's perceptions and roles, as well as on the division of labour within the household. This part of the study is done with a subsample of women from the longitudinal study because the in-depth interview needed for the case-studies was too time-consuming.

METHODS AND DATA

Research Orientation: The Life-course Approach

Most discussions of the demographic transition relate the decrease in fertility and mortality to changes in socio-economic and cultural variables associated with the modernization process (Coale, 1973; Freedman, 1979; Ryder, 1965; Caldwell, 1982). As such, it provides the general framework for this study. Within this broad framework, our main orientation is given by the perspective of life-history on human development (Elder, 1975, 1978, 1981; Featherman, 1983). This approach makes it possible to have a long-term historical perspective which produces a more dynamic analysis of demographic changes than the one used in conventional demographic studies.

Within the perspective of life-history we can see women's behaviour as conduct that develops continually throughout their lives as they grow and age in their social environment. This environment is characterized by the experiences and opportunities associated with the community, economic status, status within the family, and the normative and biological restrictions on sexual and age behaviour (Riley, 1973). The characteristics or status of women (education, marriage, participation in the labour force, occupational status, and income) define the context of their life-history in which demographic transitions occur. More specifically, this life-course perspective enables us to look at the influence of a woman's life-history (her status at each specific point in time) on the occurrence of the demographic events related to her family formation process (marriage, bearing of the first child, and so on). Thus, rather than analysing a cumulative process, like children ever born, as is commonly done, we are able to analyse the likelihood of occurrence of single events (transitions) affecting reproduction (marriage, fertility), as well as factors affecting their occurrence (transitions) over the life-span. It is possible here to examine the determinants of transitions between statuses here because of the retrospective longitudinal data we have obtained. Without such data we cannot study the factors affecting transitions.