

Marital arrangements in Baja California and its young adults

Arreglos conyugales en Baja California y sus jóvenes adultos

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Abstract

Uniones libres or consensual union formation has increased in Mexico and this is not an exception in its Northern region. Information from the Mexican Population and Household Census of 2010 and the Survey on Reproductive Health of Adolescents in Baja California, 2006 show that *unión libre* as an preferential type of conjugal arrangement is more clearly manifested among the Baja California's youth of both sexes in general and particularly among those residing in Tijuana and Rosarito. Also, *union libre* formation among the Baja California's youth is extensively associated with childbearing what seems to indicate continuity in its traditional role in the Mexican family formation process, but this is happening in higher proportions among the young adults of the new generations.

Keywords: conjugal arrangements, family, cohabitation, Mexican youth.

Resumen

La formación de uniones libres o consensuales ha ido en aumento en México y su región norte no es una excepción. Información del Censo Mexicano de Población y Vivienda de 2010 y de la Encuesta Sobre la Salud Reproductiva de los Adolescentes en Baja California, 2006, indica que la elección de la unión libre como arreglo conyugal se refleja de manera clara entre los y las jóvenes bajacalifornianas adultas en general, pero particularmente entre aquellos y aquellas que residen en Tijuana y Rosarito. Asimismo, la formación de uniones libres entre los y las jóvenes del estado parece estar asociada al papel que tradicionalmente ha tenido la unión libre en el proceso de formación familiar, mediante el nacimiento de hijos. Esto parece indicar una continuidad en la importancia que han tenido las uniones libres o consensuales en el proceso de formación familiar en México, pero ahora en proporciones mayores entre las y los jóvenes de las nuevas generaciones.

Palabras clave: unión libre, unión consensual, familia, jóvenes, nupcialidad.

Introduction

This is a descriptive study of the marital arrangements established among the resident population in the northern state of Baja California. The data used comes from the Population and Household Census of 2010 and the survey on reproductive health of adolescents in Baja California in the year 2006 by the Colegio de la Frontera Norte. The main objective is to examine the structure by marital status of

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the population and their marital arrangements, with special emphasis on young adults and its increasing preference for cohabitation or consensual union. Some variations are examined among the different municipalities of the state. Likewise, it is an attempt to create the first analytical approximation about the phenomenon of consensual union between the young adult population linked to the process of forming a family, through the birth of children, as opposed to being a means to establish a couple relationship without children. The definition of young adult is established in the Survey on Reproductive Health of Adolescents in B.C. 2006 as those men and women that, at the time of the survey, were between 18 and 29 years old. It is considered that this age range allows for the examination of marital unions formed by persons that are officially recognized as adults by the Mexican government and that have the autonomy to choose to create a conjugal couple whether through marriage or a consensual union and also if they wish to have children or not.

Background

The formation of the Mexican families is diverse as it is based on different types of marital arrangements, depending on its condition of legality and sacralization; namely, by means of cohabitation or consensual union, a religious marriage, civil marriage, or of the civil and religious marriage. The election of some of these different types of union is going to depend of the cultural preferences of the person and of its private social circumstances and economic possibilities to settle the associated expenses to the execution of each one of them (Ojeda, 2010). Nevertheless, the dominant marital pattern has been the cultural preference for a both civil and religious marriage as the most valuable, followed by civil marriage and later by the other two types of union (Díaz, 2002). Regarding these last two, it is a fact that until the 1970s, the trend was that consensual unions and religious marriages decreased and civil marriage increased as a result of the country's modernization and the growing secularization; a trend that changed in the eighties with the increase of cohabitation, without affecting the dominant place of the preferred civil and religious marriage amongst the Mexican people.

This hierarchical order in the structure of the marital arrangements will persist until very recently both at the national level and at the interior of each and every one of the northern federal entities of the country. A situation that, nevertheless, is changing upon the observation of the presence of interesting modifications in said order in the conjugal structure at the national level and among some states of the northern region, but not as well in this last one that is considered as a whole. Among the northern states that are experiencing important changes in its conjugal structures, the case of Baja California is emphasized since it has come to position itself as the leader to the interior of the region in both the social process of deinstitutionalization as well as the rapid secularization of the marital arrangements (Ojeda, 2013a), which makes it a very interesting case for analysis.

The widespread increase of cohabitation or consensual union in the northern region is an observable fact among all the states that conform it, although this occurs with various degrees of intensity including those states where the hierarchical order of the marital structures remains (Ojeda, 2013a). This situation suggests the need to consider that not only is the growth of consensual unions, but also the possible changes that might be generated about the social nature of this type of unions. In this sense a central aspect to be analyzed is the possible continuity of cohabitation

as an initial phase in the process of family formation versus the cohabitation as a mean to establish a couple relationship but without the desire of having children and forming a family.

Marital arrangements of the consensual type have a long history in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Rodríguez, 2004) where, just like in Mexico, they form part of the initial phase of the process of formation of an important number of families that remain as such until the dissolution of the conjugal couple or until their union is legalized or sacralized by a civil or religious wedding. This it has been a long-standing widespread practice in Mexico (Quilodrán, 2001; Díaz, 2002); which nevertheless, has recently observed some important changes. On the one hand, we have been able to observe a decrease in the proportion of consensual unions legalized after their formation (Ojeda, 2007) and, on the other hand, the last decade showed a strong increase of consensual unions at the national level (Pérez and Esteve, 2012). This situation suggests the presence of modifications not only of the quantitative type but also probably of the qualitative type regarding the social nature of consensual unions among the youngest generations. On this aspect, in a qualitative study (Ojeda, 2009) carried out among a group of young residents in the border city of Tijuana, Baja California, there were traces of change in the perceptions of adolescents about the comparative advantages perceived between marriage and the consensual unions regarding the future life plans related with partner relationships, education and work. In general, adolescents of both sexes are sceptical about marriage offering clear advantages for women in comparison to a consensual union, but neither seems convinced that the latter option is better than marriage (Ojeda, 2009).

Another aspect is the apparent continuity in the similar reproductive behavior of the married women and the ones that live in a consensual union among the youngest generations, just as it occurred in previous generations. Both groups of women begin the formation of their family of procreation regardless of their current marital arrangement. In this regard, in a study published in the beginning of this millennium, Gomez (2001, p. 237) argued that, at the national level, both groups of young women procreate children but do so with interesting differences between them according to their educational level. These differences refer to the sequence in which they live the events that lead to the union or marriage and the birth of first child; as well as the age when experiencing such events.¹ The orientation for family of both types of marital arrangements is an important theme of analysis to better understand the social nature of the increase of cohabitation in the country. It is with this intention, that this study on the increase of consensual unions amongst the marital arrangements of the young adult population in the specific case of the state of Baja California was developed.

Methodology and sources of information

This is a descriptive study of the current state of the conjugal structure of the population of young adults that live in the state of Baja California, with an emphasis

¹ Among married women, the birth of the first son occurs during marriage. There are two groups among the ones in consensual unions. The first group is formed mainly by women of low or medium schooling that establish a consensual union as an alternative to marriage and having a first child confirms such a choice; while the second group are women with more schooling and establish a consensual union that it is legalized as a result of the first pregnancy when they are under the age of twenty.

in the importance of cohabitation or consensual unions. Young adults are those men and women who are between 18 and 29 years old. This concept was adopted based on the characteristics of one of the main sources of information used in the study. The analysis is based on the information provided in a complementary manner by the National Population and Household Census of Mexico 2010 and the Survey on Reproductive Health of Adolescents in Baja California 2006. This last is a probabilistic survey of households with municipal and state representativeness whose target population were men and women of ages 18 to 29 residing in the state at the time of carrying out the survey (Palma and Reding, 2011, p. 84). The sample size is 2 395 women and 1 000 men of these ages.

About the youths in Baja California

Baja California, as well as other northern border states of Mexico, is characterized by its economic success largely based on the development of the maquiladora industry and its very high rates of population growth mainly due to high levels of immigration. Another characteristic is the high spatial concentration of its population having in the year 2010, almost half (49.4%) of its 3 155 000 inhabitants living in (Tijuana) one of its four municipalities (Conapo, 2011, p. 13). Also, the population of the state, and particularly of Tijuana have high proportions of people in productive and reproductive ages due to the strong attraction of migrants in this age range, but mainly in the age ranges considered as part of the young population (15 to 29 years) who, together with the natural population growth, has increased the volume of this important segment of the population. For example, for the year 2000, González (2011, p. 27) indicates that while in 66% of the domestic units of the country some youth resided, in Baja California the proportion was slightly superior with 66.8% and reached 68.4% in Tijuana. On the other hand, the male ratio of B. C. and mainly Tijuana is among the highest in the country (Ojeda, 2013a) since there is a slightly larger number of men per hundred women than at the national level. This last is due, in large part, to the selectivity by sex of the migrants that still persists in the various migratory flows, but particularly among the international flows in its crossing to the northern neighbor and returning to the same country.

The immigration status of persons is an important feature of social differentiation of the population in the state due to the existing marked differences between the immigrants and the native population of the state, particularly among youth. In this regard, González (2011) notes that there are lower levels of schooling, higher rates of employment and lower income levels in the homes of immigrant youth in comparison with native youths of B. C. In another study, Coubès and González (2011) indicate that there are higher proportions of youths in jobs that require of greater education and with better salaries among the natives of B.C. than among the immigrant youths. In turn, Yolanda Palma (2011) refers to the sexuality and reproductive behavior of the young females of 20 to 29 years that live in Tijuana. The author finds that these young females are more precocious than their counterparts in the national level, but makes it clear that the young *tijuanenses* who were born outside of Baja California are especially more precocious than those born in the state. This situation complicates the analysis of the reproductive and sexual behavior of the young population of the state due to, among other reasons, the cultural heterogeneity of Baja California and in particular of Tijuana, given the multiple origins of the migrant population, drawn from all regions of the country. Finally, on the subject of consensual unions, Norma Ojeada (2013a) found out that the probability of establishing a consensual union instead of marrying between the

young tijuaneños is higher among the immigrants from the southern states of the country than between the immigrants from other states and that those born in Baja California. All of these aspects are likely to influence the daily lives of the young population of the state. In the interest of contributing in some way to a better understanding of the demographic behavior of Baja California, below are the findings obtained in the study of the structure of the marital arrangements of the population of young adults of the state.

Results

Marital status and marital arrangements of the population in the northern region of Mexico

The distribution of population by marital status is a basic aspect of the behavior associated with nuptiality in a society. In this regard, it is important to distinguish between the population that has been in some type of union and the population that has never been in an union or is single; the different types of marital arrangements of the people that, at the time of the census, were married or cohabiting; as well as the types of marital dissolution experienced by the population that no longer was in a union at the time of the census. This type of information allows us to identify not only the number for each of these categories of marital status, but also gives us an idea about the underlying social patterns in the conjugal and family structure of that society. It is with this intention that the following data on the Mexican population living in the northern region of the country and particularly in the northern state of Baja California is presented.

The census information of the year 2010, which is presented in table 1, allows us to see that the population aged 12 years and older residing in the northern region of Mexico presents a distribution by marital status virtually equal to that of the country as a whole. While the northern region has a slightly smaller single population than the country as a whole, respectively, 33.5% versus 35.2%, both geographic units have the same proportion of population in an union or married, with around 55% of cases each. Also, the national total and its northern region have the same proportions of separated or widowed, and they differ only by half a percentage point more in the divorced category in the northern region.

These results might lead to think that the population of northern states behave in the same way as the total of the Mexican population. A comparison of the distributions by marital status between the various federal entities that make up the northern region, however, shows us the need to be careful in this regard since there are some important differences between them that might suggest a slightly different social dynamic in the behavior of its various populations and their marital arrangements. Note, for example, in table 1 that in Baja California and Sonora, the proportion of single persons is slightly higher than in the rest of the states in the region. On the other side, the proportions of the population married or in a union among states oscillates between 54.1% and 57.4%, with Sonora and Nuevo Leon located in the respective extreme cases. And the populations of widowers range from the 4.0% to the 4.9% among the different states, with the exception of Baja California where this category gathers only the 3.1% of the total of the population aged 12 years and older.

Table 1. Marital status of the population aged 12 years and older in various northern states of Mexico, 2010 (%)

Place	Total	Single	Marriage			Consensual Union	Separated	Divorced	Widowed
			Civil	Religious	Civil and Religious				
Mexico	100	35.2	13.2	1.7	25.8	14.4	3.8	1.5	4.4
Northern Region	100	33.5	17.2	0.7	24.3	14.2	3.8	2.2	4.4
Baja California	100	34.9	17.7	0.9	16.8	19.3	4.9	2.4	3.1
Sonora	100	34.7	16.7	0.1	21	16.4	4.3	2.1	4.7
Chihuahua	100	33.5	15.3	0.9	22.8	17.3	3.4	2.5	4.2
Tamaulipas	100	33.2	19.6	1	21.4	15.3	3.8	1.7	4
Coahuila	100	32.8	18.7	0.4	27.8	10.5	3.3	2	4.9
Nuevo León	100	33.4	16.5	0.3	31.8	9.1	3.3	1.8	4.1

Source: Own estimates. Mexican Population and Household Census, 2010.

There are also some interesting differences in the proportions of divorced and separated between the northern states. Although in all cases the figures observed indicate that there are more people separated than divorced, following the traditional national pattern (Ojeda, 2010); we have a situation in which, considering the separated and divorced as one category, the state of Nuevo Leon presents the lowest percentage of people with conjugal unions dissolved on a voluntary basis with only 5.1 % of cases, followed by Coahuila, and Tamaulipas with values of 5.3 % and 5.5 % respectively. In turn, Chihuahua and Sonora present values around 6% with Sonora in the lead; while Baja California has the highest value of divorced and separated population with 7.3% of the cases.

The data described above shows certain heterogeneity in the behavior by marital status of the population in Northern Mexico and it invites to the consideration of other related aspects, as is the case of the conjugal structures of the northern population. About this, table 2 presents the percentage distribution of the different marital arrangements according to the 2010 census for the northern region, the various federal entities that make it up and for the country as a whole. At the national level, we note that the civil and religious marriage continues to be the most common type of marital arrangement with 46.7% of the total of the conjugal unions of the country; followed by consensual unions occupying the second place with a frequency of 26.2%, closely followed by civil marriage only in the third place with 24.0% of the total number of cases; while religious marriage only reaches a 3.1% of the total of the marital arrangements in the country. This structure of marital arrangements at the national level represents an important shift in the Mexican nuptiality since it steers away from the traditional pattern.

Table 2. Conjugal Structure of the population in various northern states of Mexico, 2010 (%)

Place	Total	Marriage			In consensual union
		Civil	Religious	Civil and Religious	
Mexico	100	23.9	3.2	46.7	26.2
Northern Region	100	30.8	0.8	43	25.4
Baja California	100	32.6	0.9	30.9	35.6
Sonora	100	30.6	0.9	38.5	30
Chihuahua	100	27.3	1.2	40.7	30.8
Tamaulipas	100	34.5	1	37.6	26.9
Coahuila	100	32.6	0.8	48.3	18.3
Nuevo León	100	28.6	0.5	55.2	15.7

Source: Own estimates. Mexican Population and Household Census, 2010.

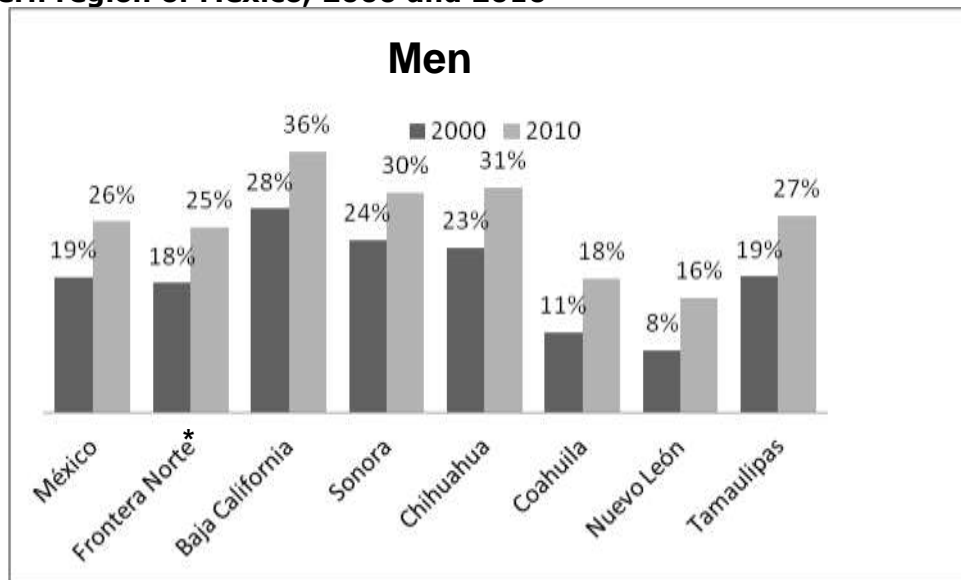
However, upon examining the northern case, we find that such change is not completely similar in the region where, as seen in table 2, the hierarchical order among the different marital arrangements varies among the states. At the regional level, the civil and religious marriage and civil marriage only continue to occupy the first and second places respectively, suggesting a degree of continuity in the traditional pattern of the Mexican conjugal structure with an upward trend of civil marriage in all the states of the northern region. On the other hand, the analysis of the conjugal structure in the interior of the region shows interesting variations among the states that compose it and that aim toward a growing importance of consensual unions and a corresponding descent of marriage.

At the moment of the 2010 census, the conjugal structure of the resident population in the northern region was composed in 43% by civil-religious marriages, almost 31% by only civil marriages, one fourth (25.4%) by consensual unions and a minimal proportion of only religious marriages (0.81%). Four of the five northern states exhibit this same pattern especially Nuevo Leons by having the highest percentage of marriages and the lowest of consensual unions: 55.2% of the people were married in civil and religious marriage, only 28.6 % were in a civil marriage only and 15.7 % in a consensual union, closely followed by Coahuila and Tamaulipas with similar proportions. While in Chihuahua and Sonora the only civil or religious marriage is also the most numerous one, followed by civil marriage, there is also the case of consensual unions reaching a 30.8% and 30.0%, respectively of the population in some kind of union. For its part Baja California, at the opposite end, is characterised by a percentage distribution almost balanced between the two types of marriage and consensual union. In this state, consensual unions are the most numerous type of union with a 35.6% of the total of the population in a conyugal union while the civil marriage reaches 32.6% and the religious and civil marriage nearly 31%.

The growing importance of consensual union in the northern region is reflected in the fact that it represents, with the exception of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon, between approximately 27% and 36% of the total of the marital arrangements, highlighting the state of Baja California where consensual unions represents the most common type of union, both in the interior of the state as in the region, being a third of the total marital arrangements. In a recent study (Ojeda, 2013a) on the same subject, it was observed that the increase of the consensual union is a palpable reality in all and each one of the northern states of the country, even in those where this type of union represents a relatively low percentage as are the cases of Nuevo León and Coahuila. Information coming from the same study is presented in figures 1 and 2 where we can observe the proportions of consensual unions for the populations of men and women, separately, in the years of 2000 and 2010 that shows the national total, the whole of the northern region, and each of the five northern federal entities. In this regard, note how the proportions of the border region as a whole are slightly lower than those of the country in both census, both between the male and female population; a situation that is explained by the fact that the northern states behave in an heterogeneous way, presenting proportions both lower and higher than the national level in each year.

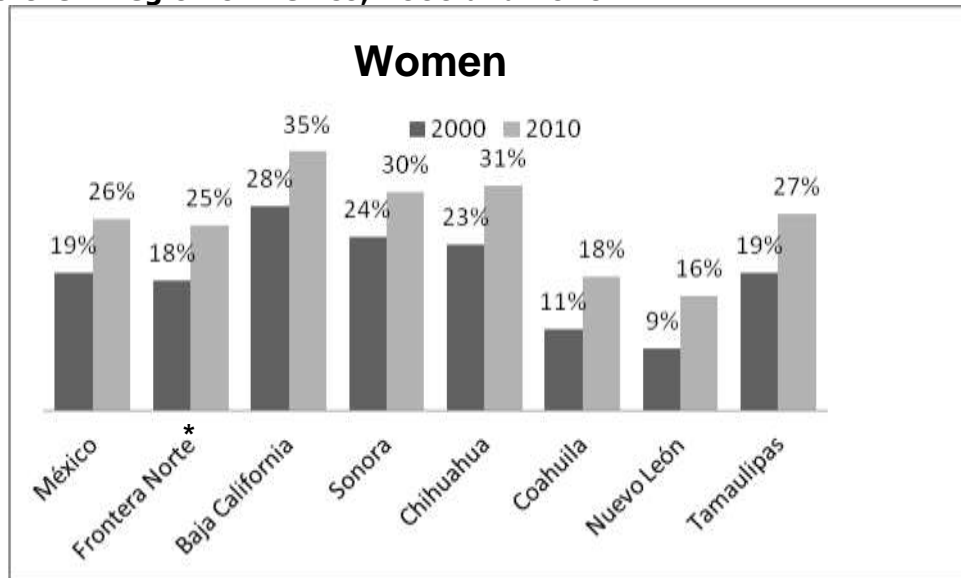
Baja California is confirmed as the northern state that has the highest proportion of consensual unions, while Nuevo León had the lowest rates in both census years suggesting a regional pattern in the frequency and the rising trend of consensual unions that is drawn increasingly in a direction that goes from east to west through the northern border. Also, note that the proportion of consensual unions that Baja California had in the year 2000 was already slightly higher than the shown ten years later for the country as a whole and its northern region, among both men and women. Finally, see that the proportions are very similar between the men and the women for each census year and that the proportions grew in a uniform way among the populations of each sex in each one of the considered geographical units.

Figure 1: Proportion of consensual unions among the male population of the northern region of Mexico, 2000 and 2010



Source: Own estimates. Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2000 and 2010.

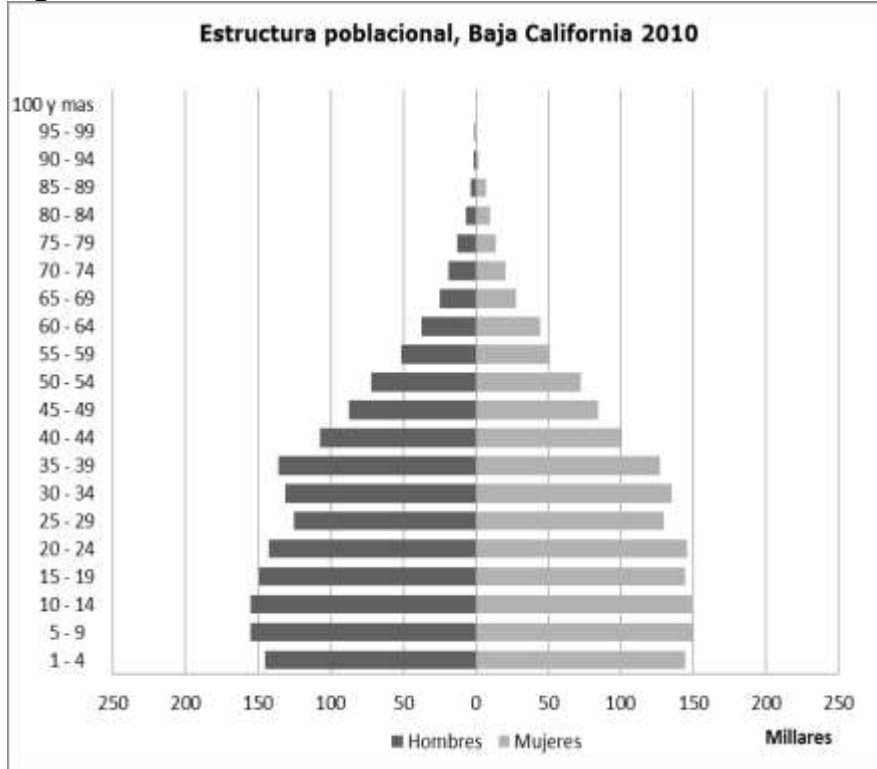
Figure 2: Proportion of consensual unions among the female population in the northern region of Mexico, 2000 and 2010



Source: Own estimates. Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2000 and 2010.

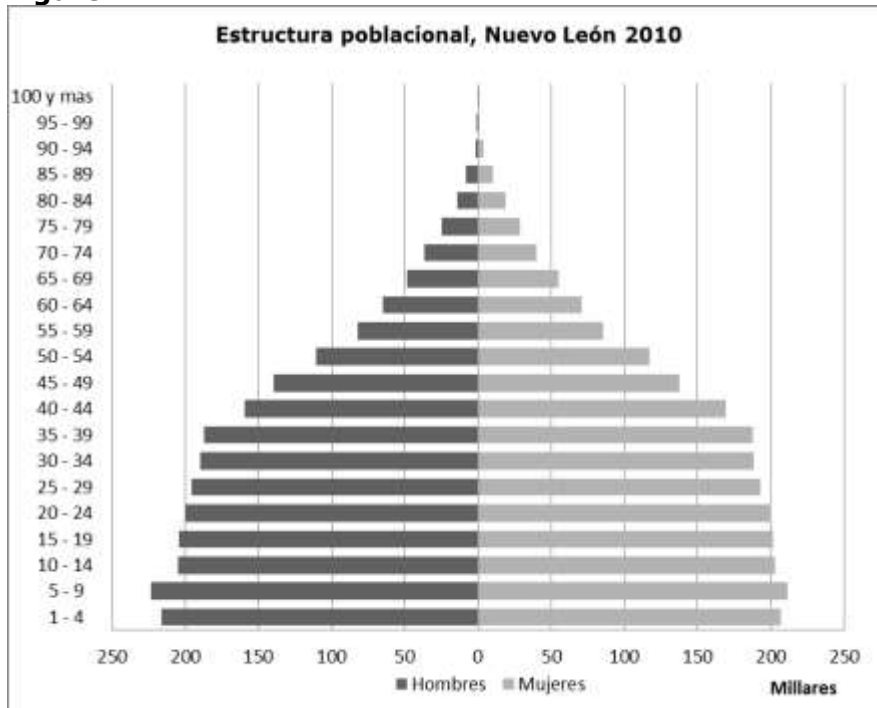
Explaining the differences among the states regarding their proportions of consensual unions requires the consideration of multiple factors whose analysis go beyond the objectives of this study. A factor that, nevertheless, we consider is required here is the structure by sex and age of the states. The information presented on the matter by the census of the year 2010 allows for the observation of the presence of interesting differences in the structures by age among the states (see figures 3-10), a product of multiple factors, migration being an important one. These differences, however, alone could not explain variations in the percentages of consensual unions between states, given the fact that the number of men and women do not indicate significant imbalances between the sexes that could lead to a union instead of marriage. Thus, for example, when comparing the extreme cases of Baja California and Nuevo León that have, respectively, the highest and lowest percentages of consensual unions, we noticed that the latter presents a greater balance in numbers between the sexes at all ages. On the other hand, Baja California presents a light deficit of men of 20-34 years regarding the women of the same ages. While it is possible that this deficit impacts the number of men available for marriage, the same can be said about the men available to unite consensually. This is besides taking into account that the impact of said deficit is softened by the habit of men mostly marrying women of their age or younger. As a result, it would be also necessary to consider the weight of other factors to explain the differences that occur between the different states with regard to the proportion of consensual unions.

Figure 3



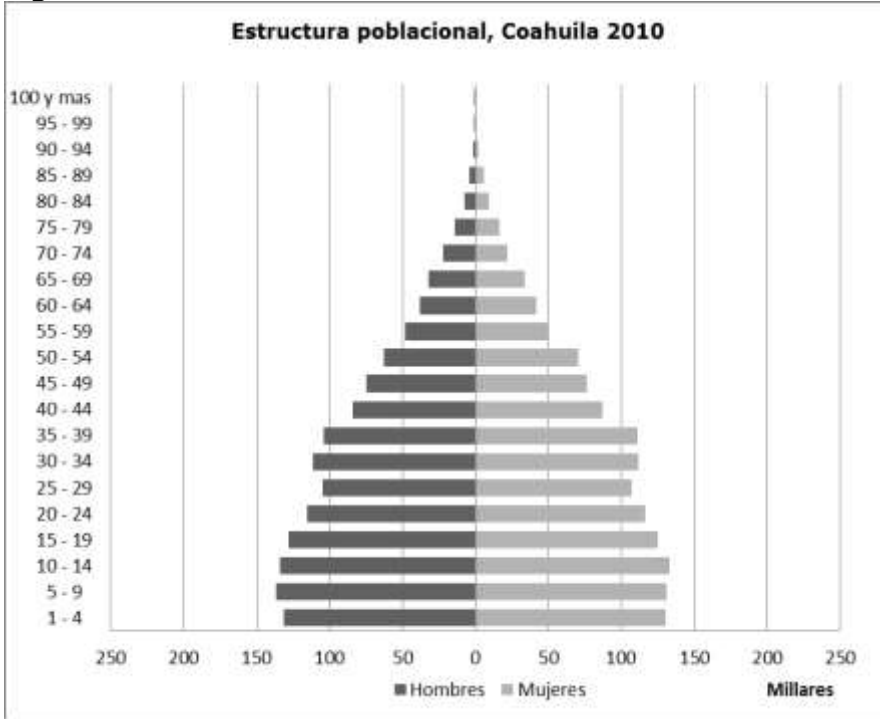
Source: Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

Figure 4



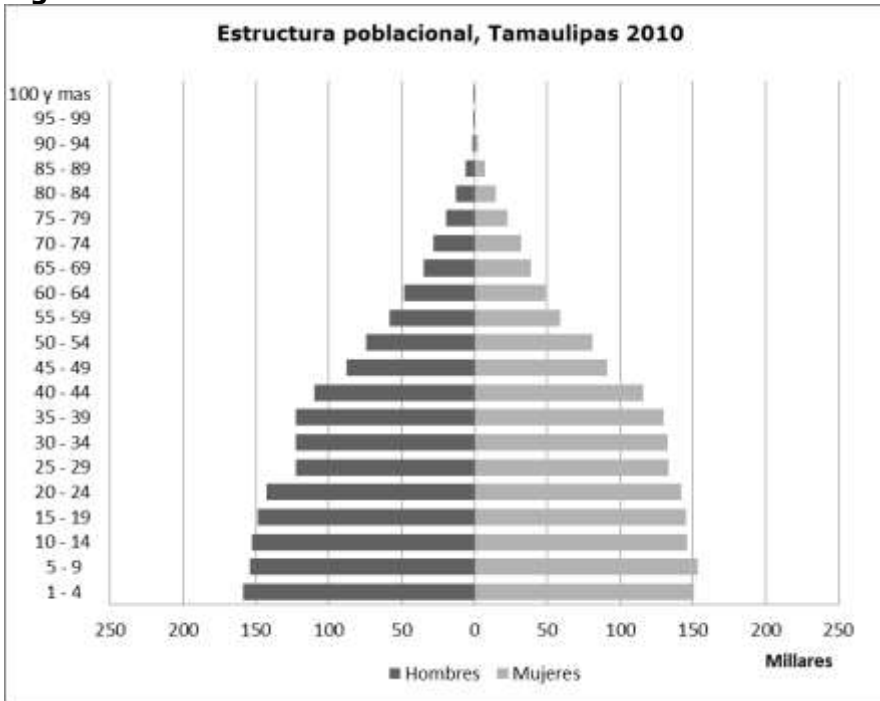
Source: Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

Figure 5



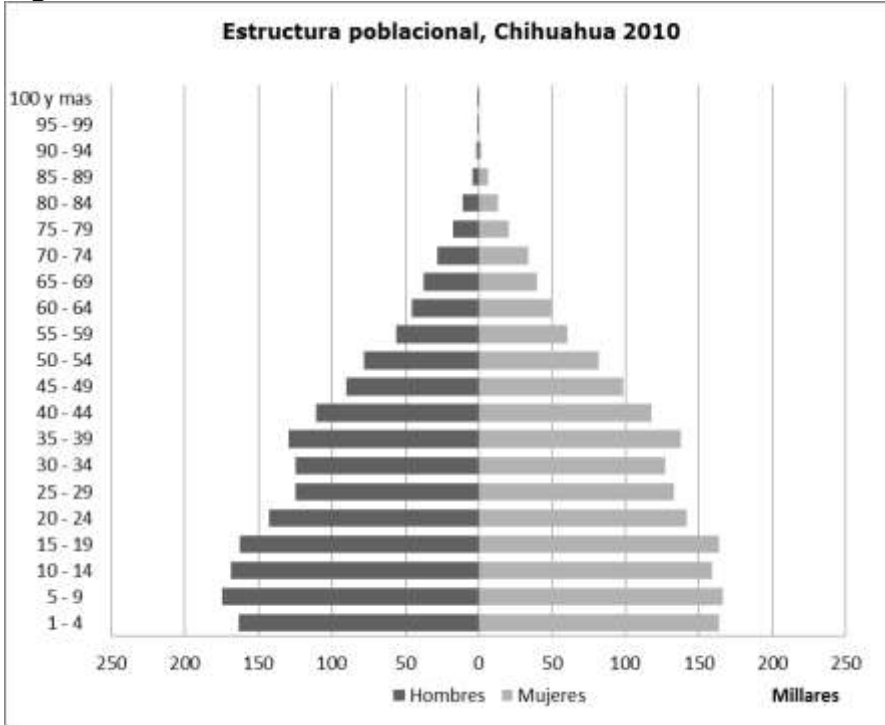
Source: Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

Figure 6



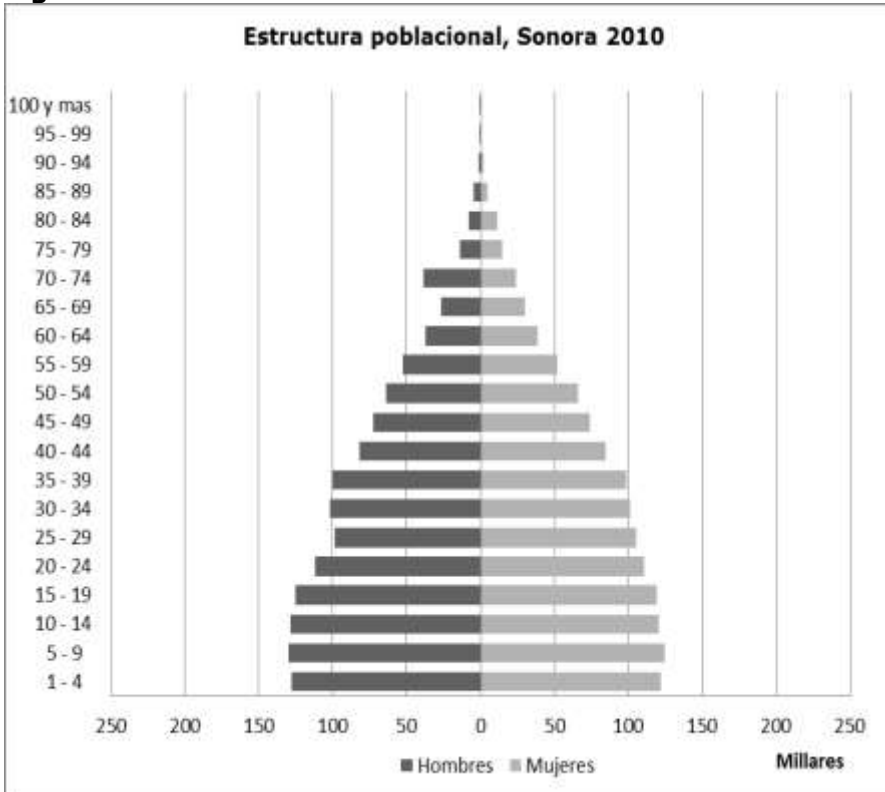
Source: Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

Figure 7



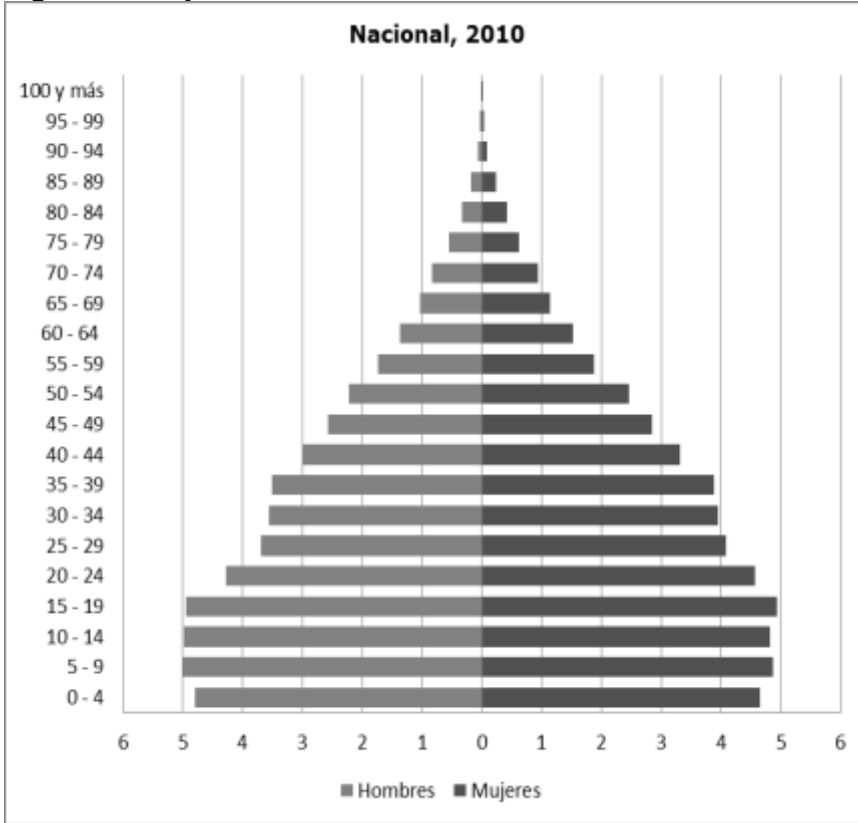
Source: Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

Figure 8



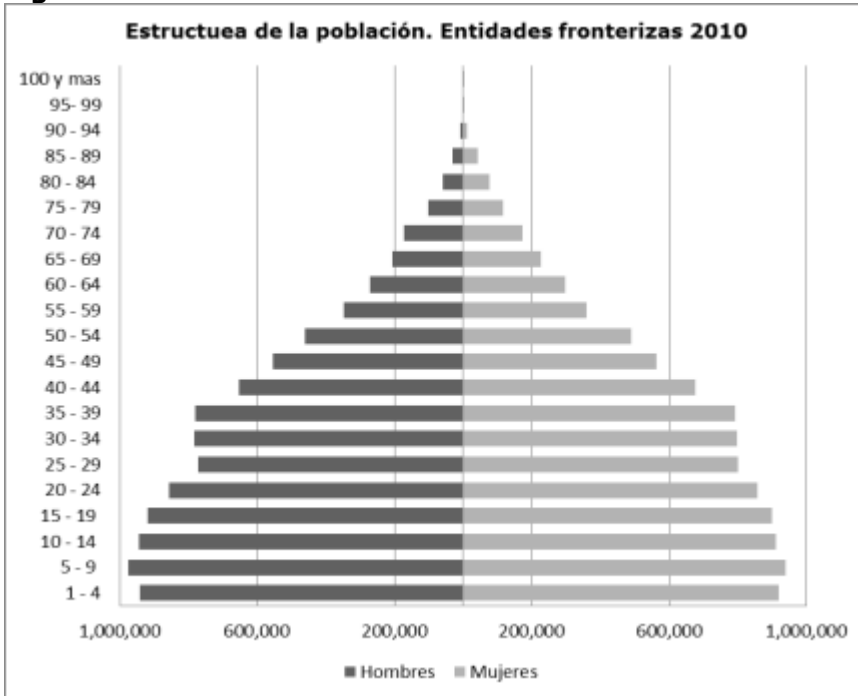
Source: Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

Figure 9. Population structure



Source: Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

Figure 10



Source: Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

Marital status and conjugal structure of the population in Baja California

With the purpose of deepening in the case of Baja California below is shown the distribution of the population depending on their marital status in the five municipalities of the state. It should be noted that the proportion of the single population is virtually the same in all the municipalities, in a range between 32% and 35% of the total population aged 12 years and older in each one of them. Likewise, the population that, during the census, declared to be married or united represents little more than half of the total population of these ages in all the municipalities, ranging between 52% and 56%, with Tecate and Rosarito in the lead with the highest percentage of married or united population (56.0% in both) and, in the other side Mexicali with the lowest percentage (52.0%). In turn, the divorced and separated population in the different municipalities represents between 7% and 8%, and widows between 3% and 4%. Overall these figures indicate a very uniform distribution by marital status in Baja California with only slight variations between the municipalities.

Table 3. Marital status of the population aged 12 years and older in different municipalities of Baja California (%)

Marital Status	Baja California	Ensenada	Mexicali	Tecate	Tijuana	Rosarito
Lives with couple in consensual union	19	19	16	19	20	21
Separated	5	5	4	4	5	6
Divorced	3	3	3	3	2	2
Widowed	4	4	4	3	3	3
Civil marriage only	17	16	17	16	17	16
Religious marriage only	1	1	1	1	1	1
Civil and religious marriage	17	17	19	20	16	18
Single	34	35	36	34	36	33
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Own estimates. Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico, 2010.

On the other hand, the structure of the marital arrangements of the municipalities is far from being uniform. This is considering all the people aged 12 years and older that, at the moment of the 2010 census, were already married or united. Information from an earlier study (Ojeda, 2013b), presented in table 4, allows us to see interesting differences between the marital structures of the various municipalities of Baja California. Notice how in three of the five municipalities little more than a third of the total of the united population lives in consensual union representing the most common type of marital arrangement. See also how only in Mexicali and Tecate the civil and religious marriage remains at the head of the conjugal structure, but not by far, especially in the case of Tecate, where marriage has only half a point of advantage over consensual unions (35.1% versus 34.6%, respectively). While Tijuana and Rosarito have the highest percentage of consensual unions with 37.4% and 37.1% of its population united in a consensual way respectively, Ensenada is close with 36.3% in this same situation. Also, note that in Tijuana even civil

marriages are now more numerous than the civil-religious marriages pushing these to the third place in the conjugal structure of the municipality just like at the level of the state as a whole. Finally, it is noteworthy that purely religious marriage is virtually extinct having percentages ranging between 1% and 1.8% amongst the five municipalities.

Table 4. Conjugal Structure of the population aged 12 years and older in various municipalities of Baja California, 2010 (%)

Municipality	Total	Marriage			Consensual union
		Civil	Religious	Civil and Religious	
Baja California	100	32.6	0.9	30.9	35.6
Ensenada	100	30	1.6	32.1	36.3
Mexicali	100	32.7	0.9	35.8	30.6
Tecate	100	29.4	0.9	35.1	34.6
Tijuana	100	32.3	0.9	29.3	37.5
Rosarito	100	28.3	1.8	32.8	37.1

Source: Own Estimates. Mexican Population and Household Census, Mexico 2010.

The growing importance of consensual unions in Baja California and in other parts of Mexico, particularly in its Northern region could be due in part to an increasing preference for this type of marital settlement between the young people who have united for the first time. Unfortunately the census information does not allow us to examine this aspect because the declaration of marital status does not specify the order of marriages or unions and, for the same reason; we cannot differentiate between the first union or marriage and subsequent unions or marriages. On the other hand, some demographic surveys permit us to do this type of analysis as it is the case of the Survey on Reproductive Health of Adolescents in Baja California, a statewide survey carried out by the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in the year 2006. Based on this information, the marital status and marital arrangements of the young population of Baja California is analyzed below. *Young population* refers to those who were between the ages of 18 and 29 at the moment of the census.

Tables 5 and 6 present the percentage distributions of the female and male populations from 18 to 29 years of age according to their marital status for the five municipalities of Baja California in the year 2006. With regard to the young females, table 5 shows that at that time little more than half of them were single at the time of the interview, representing approximately 53% of the total female population of these ages in the state. Mexicali was the municipality with the higher percentage of single women (61.6%), followed by Ensenada and Tecate with 56.9% and 57.4% respectively; while Tijuana had the smaller percentage of single woman with 47.4%, followed very closely by Rosarito with 48.5%. On the other side, the married or united young females from 18 to 29 years of age in the state represent 41.4% of the total of the female population of these ages, with Tijuana in the lead with the highest percentage of young women married or united (47.2%), followed by Rosarito with a

43.3%; while Mexicali and Ensenada have the lowest percentage of married or united young females.

Table 5. Marital status of the female population from 18 to 29 years of age in Baja California 2006 (%)

Marital Status	Municipality					Total
	Ensenada	Mexicali	Tecate	Tijuana	Rosarito	
Consensual union	17.2	13.2	20.4	24.4	21.7	20.3
Married	18.4	19.1	19.6	22.8	21.6	21.1
Widowed	0.3	0.2		0.2		0.2
Divorced	1.5	1.4		0.4		0.8
Separated after marriage	2.3	1	1.6	1.2		1.3
Separated after consensual union	3	3.5	1.5	3.6	8.2	3.6
Single	57.3	61.6	56.9	47.4	48.5	52.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Own Estimates. Survey on Reproductive Health of Adolescents, Baja California. 2006.

Table 6. Marital status of the male population from 18 to 29 years of age in Baja California 2006 (%)

Marital Status	Municipality					Total
	Ensenada	Mexicali	Tecate	Tijuana	Rosarito	
Consensual union	14.3	17	10.6	20.4	33.9	18.7
Married	12.3	16.1	14.9	17		15.6
Divorced	0.4			0.2		0.2
Separated after marriage	0.7	1.5		1.5		1.3
Separated after consensual union	1.9	1		1.4	7.8	1.5
Single	70.4	64.4	74.5	59.5	58.3	62.7
Total	100.0	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Own Estimates. Survey on Reproductive Health of Adolescents, Baja California. 2006.

Upon comparing among the sexes it is interesting to see that in table 6, as was expected and continuing the traditional pattern of nuptiality in Mexico, there are more single men than single women of these ages. At state level, approximately 63% of men and 53% women are single. A highest number of single men is repeated in each of the municipalities. Tecate and Ensenada have percentages that go up to ten points above Mexicali in the percentage of single young men, especially in the

case of Tecate where almost 75% of the male population between 18 and 29 years fit into this category; while in Tijuana and Rosarito, just like the female population of the same ages, have the lowest percentage of young single men: 59.5% and 58.3%, respectively.

Reciprocally, the proportion of married or united men is smaller than that of married or united women. Only a little more than one third of the total male population from 18 to 29 years of age in Baja California was married or united at the moment of the survey (34.3%) in comparison to 41.4% of the female population. Tecate is the municipality with the lowest proportion of married or united men between 18 to 29 years of age and Tijuana is the municipality with the highest percentage of young people in this conjugal situation.

The traditional practice of Mexican women marrying at younger ages than men makes it simpler to understand the fact that there are more single men than women between the ages 18 and 29 but it does not help to understand the differences among the sexes on the relative number of the married youth against the youth in cohabitation or a consensual union. On this subject, the comparison of tables 5 and 6 helps to identify some interesting aspects. At the state level there are more married young females than in an union, while more men declared that they lived in a consensual union with 3% over the married ones. Note that three of the five municipalities have higher percentages of young women living in a consensual union than married. In this sense, Tijuana presents the highest percentages of young women living in consensual union (24.4%), followed very closely by Rosarito and Tecate with 21.7% and 20.4% respectively. In turn, Ensenada and Mexicali have more married young women than in a consensual union but barely, especially in the case of Ensenada where the differences is smaller than one percent in favor of the married.

In the case of the young male population, it is interesting to observe that according to the data of the table 6, with the exception of Tecate, all the municipalities present greater percentages of youths living in consensual unions than in marriages. The most extreme case is in Rosarito, where all of them declared that they lived in consensual union and none married. This situation deserves attention because the percentages of young women, married or united, in the municipality are practically equal.

On the youth population with dissolved conjugal unions, none of the male declared to be a widower and only a very small number of the females declared to be widows (0.2 %), which is understandable since it is a very young population. In turn, the population with unions dissolved by divorce or separation of marriage is of 2.1% among the females and of 1.5% among the male, while the separation of consensual unions are a little higher among the females (3.6%) and practically the same among the men (1.5%). The observable differences between the sexes in these categories of marital status could be explained to a large extent by the well documented fact in other studies that men, especially the young ones, tend to remarry or unite after the dissolution of their first marriage or union. Even though there are some differences between the various municipalities, it is noteworthy that Rosarito has the highest percentage of separation of consensual union among both youth groups: 8.2% for the females and 7.8% for the males.

The importance of consensual unions among young people of Baja California is convincing given that the marital arrangements are divided almost equally between unions of this type and marriages. This type of conjugal arrangement even surpasses half of the population from 18 to 29 years of age that, at the moment of the survey, declared to be living in a conjugal union for the cases of Tijuana and Rosarito.

Types of marital arrangements and birth of children

In relation to the social nature of consensual unions, it is important to distinguish between at least two modalities that are: Consensual union as the first stage to form a family according to the Mexican tradition and consensual union as a lifestyle for young couples without an explicit need to procreate and start a family. With the objective of approaching this matter in some way, even superficially, table 7 presents information on the percentage of the youth population of Baja California that, at the moment the survey, declared to have at least one child and the average number of children, according to their marital status and the type of marital arrangement between those who have been in a union before.

Table 7. Percentage of young people aged 18-29 years in Baja California according to their sex, marital status, with at least one child and average number of children, 2006 (%)

Marital status	Women		Men	
	At least one child (%)	Children	At least one child (%)	Children
Total	44.4	1.7	33.4	1.6
Consensual union	80.2	1.8	74.2	1.6
Married	87.8	1.8	85.7	1.6
Divorced	55.1	2.1	31.4	1
Separated after marriage	77.8	1.8	77.1	1.5
Separated after consensual union	81.9	1.6	72.3	1.3
Single	9.7	1.6	6.3	1.2
Widowed	77.1	1.7		

Source: Survey on Reproductive Health of Adolescents, Baja California, 2006.

In table 7 we can see that 44.4% of the females and 33.4% of the males from 18 to 29 declared to have at least a born alive child and an average of 1.7 and 1.6 children, respectively. As it was to be expected, the proportion of single men and women with children is notably lower than that of the various subgroups in both sexes of the population that has been in a union: 9.7 % of the females and 6.3 % of the males. On the other hand, the percentage of the young population in a consensual with at least one child oscillates between 55.1% and 87.8% for females and between 31.4% and 77.1% for males. Now, upon comparing only the populations that are married and in consensual union, it is noticeable that the percentage with at least one child is superior between the married than the ones in a consensual union and, even though the differences between the two types of marital

arrangements are clear, both cases show high numbers. In such a way that 80.2 % of the females and 74.2 % of the males who live in consensual union have at least one child, and the average number of children is 1.8 and 1.6, respectively. Further, note that the average number of children in the two types of conjugal arrangements are the same among females and males. These figures suggest that the great majority of youth in Baja California who live in consensual union are building their families of procreation just like the married youth. Only a fifth of females and a third of males, who at the time of the survey lived in consensual unions, kept a couple relationship free of the commitment acquired with the birth of children with their current couple or of a previous relationship.

Finally, it is important to consider the educational level of the young population of Baja California. This is in order to get an idea about the human capital that the young males and females can count on to confront the social responsibilities that involves establishing a conjugal relationship of any of the two types, but mainly the formation of a family through the birth of children. In this regard we note in table 8 that at the level of the state as a whole, there are virtually no differences between the sexes regarding the maximum educational level of young people aged 18-29 years. The differences between the sexes are evident when we consider their marital status. It was found that among the single population, females have a slightly higher level of schooling than men; in such a way that while 60% of young men have at least high school studies, 69% of the young women have the same educational level. However, this female superiority in schooling is not present in the various subgroups of the population who have been in a consensual union, with the exception of the group who are separated from a consensual union who considerably surpass the men's education. In all the other groups, males have higher levels of education than women, especially among those divorced and separated after a marriage.

Upon comparing only the married and consensual union groups, two important aspects were revealed. The first is that the male superiority in schooling is superior between the men and women in consensual unions than the married ones. In the first group the difference among male and female is of 8.7 percentage points in favor of men; while in the second group the difference is of only 3.4% also in favor of men. The second aspect is that, in both sexes, the married population has higher levels of education than the population in a consensual union and the differences between the two groups are not negligible, especially in the case of the females. While more than 9% of married men than men in a consensual union have at least high school studies, 14.3% more married women have this same level of schooling than women in a consensual union.

These data allows us to deduce that the young population living in a consensual union are in a position of disadvantage to face the responsibilities of establishing a conjugal relationship and to form a family in comparison to the married population. This is based on the implications that a lower level of education of the first group has in their search of job opportunities in the globalized, technical and competitive economy that requires higher levels of education. And on the other hand, it could be inferred that both the married women as well as the ones living in a consensual union face more disadvantageous conditions than men, especially those in cohabitation or consensual union.

Table 8. Education in youths from 18 to 29 years of age in Baja California by sex and marital status, according to the ESRABC, 2006 (%)

Marital status		Education (%)		
		Without middle school	Middle school	High school and higher
Total	Men	12.1	36.6	51.3
	Women	12.8	36.1	51.2
Consensual union	Men	17	50.6	32.4
	Women	23.8	52.5	23.7
Married	Men	11.9	46.8	41.4
	Women	15.5	46.5	38
Divorced	Men		31.4	68.6
	Women	12.6	46.9	40.5
Separated after marriage	Men	23	21.6	55.4
	Women	13.8	55.9	30.3
Separated after consensual union	Men	65.4	21.4	13.2
	Women	13.1	59.7	28.1
Single	Men	9.4	30.6	60
	Women	7.4	23.6	69
Widowed		49.9	50.1	

Source: Own Estimates. Survey on Reproductive Health of Adolescents, B.C., 2006.

Conclusion

The results obtained in this study confirm that Baja California is the state with the highest proportion of consensual unions in the northern region of the country, as well as having a conjugal structure where the traditional hierarchical order among the different types of conjugal arrangements has been completely reverted. This set consensual union at the head of the conjugal structure in the state for the population aged 12 and older, closely followed by civil marriage, while the civil and religious marriage was moved to the third place, only ahead of the religious marriage which is almost extinct. In the interior of the state, this same conjugal structure is presented only in the municipality of Tijuana reflecting the weight that its population has in the conjugal dynamics of the whole state, It is also clear that the consensual union is becoming more frequent in the majority of municipalities in Baja California, being the most common type of conjugal union in Rosarito and Ensenada and the second most common in the municipality of Tecate.

The choice of consensual union as a marital arrangement is clearly reflected among the youth of Baja California at the state level, but particularly among those who reside in the municipalities of Tijuana and Rosarito, followed closely by those who

live in Tecate and, to a lesser extent, by Ensenada and Mexicali, respectively. However, it appears that the widespread practice of cohabitation or consensual unions among the youth is associated with the process of forming their families of procreation due to the high percentage of men and women claiming to have at least one born child. In this sense, they behave almost the same as the married men and women and also, the born children average is practically the same one in both groups of youths: married and united. This situation makes us think of a possible continuity in the traditional importance that consensual unions have had in the process of family formation in Mexico, but now in larger proportions among the young people. The verification of this, nevertheless, requires of future deeper studies, considering particularly the legalization and consecration of consensual unions in more advanced phases in the course of the conjugal life. Likewise, it is advisable to carry out studies about the motivations that could lead men and women to establish a consensual union instead of a marriages, as well as the social meanings assigned to this type of conjugal union among the young generations as opposed to the motivations and social meanings assigned by the older generations in the distant and recent past. Such studies are pending.

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