

Exploring the educational gradient on the timing of the transition to the first child: variation across 52 provinces in Spain

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In this work, we examine the within-country variation in the educational gradient in the timing of fertility in Spain, a country characterized by high levels of childlessness and late entry into motherhood (particularly among highly educated women). Specifically, we assess whether the impact of attaining university education on the delay in the transition to the first child varies across the 52 Spanish provinces and examine whether this variation is associated with the provinces' wealth. We use the 2011 Spanish census microdata to reconstruct the reproductive history of 797,742 women aged 18 to 50, of which 408,500 had become mothers by the time of the census. Using mixture cure models stratified by women's province of birth, we observe significant variation in the effect of education on the timing of the transition to the first child: the difference in the median age at first birth between university and non-university-educated women ranges between 2.4 years in Guipúzcoa and 6.6 years in Lugo. Such variation is mostly due to heterogeneity in the predicted median age of non-university-educated women, while university-educated women behave much more uniformly across provinces. Importantly, the impact of women's education on the timing of the first child in each province is strongly correlated with the provinces' GDPpc ($r = -0.69$). However, this relationship is completely due to the strong association between the median age at birth of non-university educated and the province's wealth ($r = 0.85$), while no association is observed for university-educated women ($r = 0.19$). Overall, while university-educated women postpone their entry into motherhood regardless of the wealth of their province of birth, this is not the case for non-university-educated women. If born in a poor province, they become mothers earlier in life. In turn, non-university-educated women born in wealthier provinces mimic their university-educated counterparts and delay motherhood to a similar extent.