Cohabitation and Marriage in the Americas: Geo-historical Legacies and New Trends
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To Robert McCaa, for his extraordinary efforts in creating a data utopia for social scientists in IPUMS-International
Preface

Fate would have it that I sat next to Prof. Ron J. Lesthaeghe on the plane from New Orleans to New York the day that the 2008 meeting of the Population Association of America (PAA) closed. At that meeting, Ron received the Laureate award of the International Union for the Scientific Study of the Population (IUSSP) from its president, John Cleland, for his influential contributions to demography, amongst which there is the theory of the second demographic transition (SDT). Mine was a more modest contribution to the meeting. I had presented a poster on the marriage implications of the race and gender gaps in educational attainment in six Latin American countries. During the flight, we had a friendly and non-stop conversation mostly centered on non-academic issues. Well into the last stretch of the trip, I invited Ron to a research stay at the Center for Demographic Studies (CED), Barcelona. He accepted my invitation and, 2 years later, Ron came to the CED with the idea to examine the spatial continuities between the first and second demographic transitions in Belgium and Spain. On a Friday afternoon, I invited Ron to my office, and I showed him a series of regional color maps on the percent of partnered women in cohabitation in Latin America over the last four decades. Shades of blue indicated more marriage than cohabitation. Shades of red indicated more cohabitation than marriage. In the course of 40 years, the blue shades faded completely away and Latin America dramatically reddened. The Latin American Cohabitation Boom had emerged.

I still remember Ron’s enthusiasm about the cohabitation boom. His first words were ‘This is like watching the Mona Lisa for the first time’. It goes without saying that I have nothing to do with Leonardo Da Vinci, but after having co-edited this book and co-authored most of its chapters with him, I can now fully understand his reaction. Our maps were showing the spectacular rise of unmarried cohabitation in Latin America together with a sharp deinstitutionalization of marriage, two of the most salient and expected manifestations of the second demographic transition. I tried to temper Ron’s enthusiasm by arguing that there was controversy about the Latin American fit to the SDT framework because, among other things, cohabitation in Latin America had coexisted with marriage since colonial times and it was historically associated with a pattern of disadvantage. At that moment, Ron and I
committed to exploring the social drivers and geography of the trend to more widespread cohabitation and to investigating to what extent economic and ideational factors were the root causes of the rise in cohabitation. We quickly realized that the presence of cohabitation and marriage in the Americas was diverse across social groups and regions and that geo-historical legacies were of paramount importance. Faced with the impossibility of bringing all the elements that emerged during our research in one or several standard journal articles, we decided to edit a book with the title ‘Cohabitation and Marriage in the Americas: Geo-historical Legacies and New Trends’.

In this book, we document the rise of cohabitation (and decline in marriage) in the Americas during the last four decades. We do it by relying on the vast collection of census microdata available for most countries in the region since the 1970s. The very large sample sizes allows for disaggregation of national trends in to far more detailed spatial, ethnic and educational patterns. This enabled us to adopt a geo-historical view of the rise of cohabitation for an entire continent, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. The order of the chapters does not necessarily reflect the order in which they were started and completed. The first two chapters adopt a cross-national perspective. The first one traces the geography of cohabitation and marriage in the Americas across more than 19,000 local units of 39 countries. The second one offers a general overview of the spectacular rise in cohabitation in Latin America over the last four decades and inspects the ethnic, social and educational differentials in cohabitation. From the third to the penultimate chapters, we follow a geographic order. We begin with Canada and continue with the United States, Mexico, Central America, the Andean Region, Brazil and the South Cone. In the last chapter, number 10, we reflect on both the methodological and substantive nature of this book.

All country-specific chapters share several characteristics but they also have their distinctive features. Among the shared characteristics, there is the use of census microdata, the analysis of the social and spatial profiles of cohabiting and married partners and the quest for the historical roots of cohabitation. Among the distinctive features, the Canadian chapter focuses on the differences in cohabitation between Quebec and the rest of Canada. The US chapter examines the social and spatial development of the rise in cohabitation over the last two decades. In the case of Mexico, individual microdata from the 1930 census allow us to better document the phase that preceded the post-1980 cohabitation boom. The chapter on Central America investigates the recent trends in cohabitation in six countries that historically had the highest levels of informal unions in the Americas. In the Andean chapter, we explore in detail the geographic differences within countries and the structuring role of ethnicity, education and religion on the individual and contextual levels of cohabitation. In the Brazilian chapter, we not only document the social and spatial profile of cohabitation but examine the change over time using regression models. Finally, the South Cone chapter combines the analysis of cohabitation with the living arrangements of cohabiting couples.

To make this book possible, many things had to happen before its publication. Hundreds of millions of American citizens had to fill their census questionnaires over the last four decades. Thirty nine statistical offices had to collect, process and
preserve the microdata. The Latin American and Caribbean Center for Demography (CELADE), based in Santiago de Chile, had to organize and maintain an archive of census microdata from most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Integrated Public Use of Microdata international series project (IPUMS-I) had to be funded to preserve, harmonize and disseminate census microdata to the scientific community from all over the world, currently including 23 countries in the Americas. Today, IPUMS-I provides access to the census microdata of over 80 countries, with the number of contributing countries continuing to grow. Our work, as well as that of countless others, would not have been possible without this invaluable resource. Therefore, the authors of this book express their gratitude to all persons and institutions involved in gathering these extraordinary microdata. We especially thank our colleagues in CELADE for providing access to the database needed for documenting the geography of cohabitation. Also special thanks to our colleagues of the Minnesota Population Center for building IPUMS-I, and among them, Steve Ruggles, Robert McCaa and Matt Sobek, who deeply inspired my (Albert) passion for international census microdata.

The European Research Council has provided most of the funding to the researchers that worked on this project, in particular those affiliated to the Center for Demographic Studies (Barcelona). The main funding came through a Starting Grant project granted to Albert Esteve with the title ‘Towards a Unified Analysis of World Population: Family Patterns in a Multilevel Perspective’. The book also benefited from the contribution of distinguished scholars with expertise on marriage and cohabitation in the Americas, whose names appear on the chapters. In the final preparation of the manuscript, the professionalism and efficiency of Teresa Antònia Cusidó was fundamental in ensuring editorial consistency and quality. All figures and graphs were carefully crafted by Anna Turu.

In sum, we are proud to present a comprehensive study of a remarkable phase in the demographic history of the Americas, i.e. the universal rise of cohabitation to unprecedented levels in all strata of the population.

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Contents

1 A Geography of Cohabitation in the Americas, 1970–2010 .......... 1
  Albert Esteve, Antonio López-Gay, Julián López-Colás,
  Iñaki Permanyer, Sheela Kennedy, Benoît Laplante,
  Ron J. Lesthaeghe, Anna Turu, and Teresa Antònia Cusidó

2 The Rise of Cohabitation in Latin America
   and the Caribbean, 1970–2011 ..................................................... 25
  Albert Esteve, Ron J. Lesthaeghe,
  Antonio López-Gay, and Joan García-Román

3 Cohabitation and Marriage in Canada. The Geography,
   Law and Politics of Competing Views on Gender Equality .......... 59
  Benoît Laplante and Ana Laura Fostik

4 The Social Geography of Unmarried
   Cohabitation in the USA, 2007–2011 ........................................ 101
  Ron J. Lesthaeghe, Julián López-Colás,
  and Lisa Neidert

5 The Expansion of Cohabitation in Mexico,
   1930–2010: The Revenge of History? ....................................... 133
  Albert Esteve, Ron J. Lesthaeghe, Julieta Quilodrán,
  Antonio López-Gay, and Julián López-Colás

6 Consensual Unions in Central America:
   Historical Continuities and New Emerging Patterns ............... 157
  Teresa Castro-Martín and Antía Domínguez-Rodríguez

7 The Boom of Cohabitation in Colombia and
   in the Andean Region: Social and Spatial Patterns ................. 187
  Albert Esteve, A. Carolina Saavedra, Julián
  López-Colás, Antonio López-Gay, and Ron J. Lesthaeghe
8 Cohabitation in Brazil: Historical Legacy and Recent Evolution ...... 217
Albert Esteve, Ron J. Lesthaeghe, Julián López-Colás,
Antonio López-Gay, and Maira Covre-Sussai

9 The Rise of Cohabitation in the Southern Cone ......................... 247
Georgina Binstock, Wanda Cabella, Viviana Salinas,
and Julián López-Colás

10 Cohabitation: The Pan-America View ........................................ 269
Ron J. Lesthaeghe and Albert Esteve
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List of Figures

Fig. 1.1  Patterns in the increase in the percent of cohabitation among partnered women 25–29 in regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, various census rounds, 1970–2010 ................................................ 13

Fig. 1.2  Regional distributions of the proportions of consensual unions among all 25–29-year-old women in a union by country, based on census data from the 2000 and 2010 census rounds ........................................... 18

Fig. 1.3  Share of consensual unions by municipality’s altitude (in meters) among all 25-to-29-year-old women in a union based on the 2000 census round for the Andean countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) .... 21

Fig. 2.1  Age distributions of the share of cohabitation for all women in a union and corresponding cohort profiles (C.). Brazil and Mexico, 1960–2010 ........................................... 36

Fig. 2.2  Share of cohabitation among all unions of women 25–29 by level of completed education, country and census round .......................................................... 38

Fig. 3.1  Percent of women living in a consensual union among women aged 15–49 living in a marital union ......................... 69

Fig. 3.2a Percent of women living in a consensual union among women aged 20–24 living in a marital union by level of education ........................................... 70

Fig. 3.2b Percent of women living in a consensual union among women aged 25–29 living in a marital union by level of education ........................................... 71

Fig. 3.2c Percent of women living in a consensual union among women aged 30–34 living in a marital union by level of education .................................................. 72
Fig. 3.2d  Percent of women living in a consensual union among women aged 35–39 living in a marital union by level of education............................................................. 73
Fig. 3.2e  Percent of women living in a consensual union among women aged 40–44 living in a marital union by level of education............................................................. 74
Fig. 3.2f  Percent of women living in a consensual union among women aged 45–49 living in a marital union by level of education....................................................................... 75
Fig. 3.3  Median market income according to age and sex, men and women aged 20–24 and 25–34. Canada, 1976–2011 (Thousands of Canadian 2011 constant dollars)........... 76
Fig. 4.1  Percent cohabiting among women in a union, 2007–2011, ages 20–49, by education................................................................. 107
Fig. 5.1  Percent partnered Mexican women currently cohabiting by age and in the censuses from 1930 to 2010 ................................................................. 137
Fig. 5.2  Percent cohabiting among women 25–29 in a union, Mexican states 1930–2010...................................................................................... 140
Fig. 5.3  Percent cohabiting among partnered women 25–29 by level of education, Mexico 1960–2010................................................................. 144
Fig. 5.4  Share of cohabitation among partnered women by birth cohort and level of education, Mexico ................................................................. 145
Fig. 5.5  Estimated odds ratios of cohabitation for partnered women 25–29 according to the individual (Y) and the contextual levels (X) of education combined, Mexico 2000 and 2010 (university completed and Q1: OR = 1)................................................................. 152
Fig. 6.1  Percent distribution of women aged 25–29 by conjugal status...................................................................................... 164
Fig. 6.2  Trends in the percentage of consensual unions among total unions. 1960–2011. Women 15–49........................................................................... 168
Fig. 6.3  Trends in the percentage of consensual unions among total unions. 1960–2011. Women 25–29........................................................................... 169
Fig. 6.4  Percent cohabiting among partnered women by age group and year...................................................................................... 171
Fig. 6.5  Percent cohabiting among partnered women aged 25–29 by completed educational level and year ......................................................... 174
Fig. 7.1  Percentage of partnered Colombian women currently cohabiting by age and selected birth cohorts in the censuses from 1973 to 2005................................................................. 191
Fig. 7.2  Percentage cohabiting among partnered women aged 25–29 by years of schooling. Colombia, 1973–2005 ......................................................... 193
Fig. 7.3  Percentage cohabiting among partnered women aged 25–29 by ethnic background. Colombia, 2005 ......................................................... 194
Fig. 8.1  Plot of the meso-region effects of the model with all individual-level variables against those of the “empty” model .......................................................... 231
Fig. 8.2  Percent cohabiting among partnered women 25–29 by education, Brazil 1970–2010 .......................................................... 235
Fig. 8.3  Birth-cohort profiles of the share of cohabitation among partnered women up till age 50 by level of education. Brazilian cohorts born between 1910 and 1995 ....................... 236
Fig. 8.4  Increase in the percentages cohabiting among all partnered women 25–29 in Brazilian meso-regions: 1980 (bottom), 1990, 2000 and 2010 (top) ........................................ 237
Fig. 9.1  Proportion of women aged 20–29 years in a conjugal union, 1970–2010 .......................................................... 254
Fig. 9.2  Proportion of women aged 20–29 years in a conjugal union by education, 1970–2010 ..................................................... 255
Fig. 9.3  Share of cohabitation as a proportion of women who are in a conjugal union ..................................................... 256
Fig. 9.4  Share of cohabitation by education, aged 20–29 years, 1970–2010 .......................................................... 258
Fig. 10.1 Percentages of population 18+ of the opinion that homosexuality is never justified, by education and period .......... 282
Fig. 10.2 Percentages of population 18+ of the opinion that euthanasia is never justified, by education and period .......... 282
List of Maps

Map 1.1  Share of consensual unions among all 25-to-29-year-old women in a union based on census data from the 2000 census ...... 9
Map 1.2  Share of consensual unions among all 25-to-29-year-old women in a union based on census data from the 2010 census ...... 10
Map 1.3  Evolution of the regional share of consensual unions among all 25-to-29-year-old women in a union based on 1970–2010 census data .................................... 16
Map 1.4  Evolution of the regional share of consensual unions among all 25-to-29-year-old women in a union based on 1970–2010 census data. Cartogram Map (administrative units are weighted by population in 2000) ............. 17
Map 1.5  Standard deviations (z–scores) from each country’s mean of the rate of cohabitation among all 25-to-29-year-old women in a union. Based on census data from the last census available for Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia............................................................... 20

Map 4.1  Share of cohabitation for all women 25–29 in a union, 2000–2011, by state. Cartogram 2007–2011................................. 110
Map 4.2  Share of cohabitation among women 25–29 in a union, 2007–2011, by state and race .......................................................... 111
Map 4.3  Share of cohabitation among women 25–29 in a union, 2007–2011, by state and education............................................... 113
Map 4.4  Share of cohabitation among partnered women 25–29, 2007–2011, by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA)................ 114
Map 4.5  Share of cohabitation among partnered women 25–29, 2007–2011, along the Northern Atlantic conurbation by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA)........................................... 116
Map 4.6  Share of cohabitation among partnered women 25–29, 2007–2011, in the larger New York area by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA)................................................................. 117
Map 4.7  Share of cohabitation among partnered women 25–29, 2007–2011, in the greater Los Angeles area by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) ................................................................. 117

Map 4.8  Share of cohabitation among partnered women 25–29, 2007–2011, along Lake Michigan by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) ................................................................. 118

Map 5.1  The share of cohabitation in all unions of women 25–29 in Mexican states, 1930–2010 ................................................................. 141

Map 5.2  Percent currently cohabiting women among all partnered women 25–29, Mexican municipalities, 1990, 2000 and 2010 ...... 147

Map 6.1  Share of consensual unions among women 25–29 in union by municipalities. 2000 Census round......................... 165

Map 7.1  Percentage cohabiting among partnered women aged 25–29 by Colombian municipalities. 1973–1985 .......................................... 196

Map 7.2  LISA cluster maps of unmarried cohabitation in Colombia, 1973–2005 ................................................................. 198

Map 7.3  Percentage cohabiting among partnered women aged 25–29. Bolivia, 2001; Ecuador, 2010; and Peru, 2007 .............. 205

Map 8.1  Proportions cohabiting among women 25–29 in a union; Brazilian meso-regions 2000 ................................................................. 224

Map 8.2  Proportions in various religious groups, women 25–29; Brazilian meso-regions 2000 ......................................................... 225

Map 8.3  Proportions in various racial categories, women 25–29; Brazilian meso-regions 2000 ......................................................... 227

Map 8.4  Proportions in three education categories, women 25–29; Brazilian meso-regions, 2000 ......................................................... 228

Map 8.5  The four types of meso-regions distinguished according to their relative risk of cohabitation for partnered women 25–29, 2000 regions ................................................................. 234

Map 8.6  Percent cohabiting among all partnered women 25–29 in Brazilian municipalities, 2000 and 2010 ............................. 238
**List of Tables**

| Table 1.1 | Summary of the census data, boundary files and geographic details used to analyze the prevalence of consensual unions in the Americas in the 2000 and 2010 census rounds | 5 |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Table 1.2 | Changes in the percent of cohabitation among partnered women 25–29 in the 25 regions with the lowest and the highest initial levels of cohabitation in 1970 | 15 |
| Table 2.1 | Distribution of 51 ethnic populations according to selected characteristics of their marriages and sexual unions | 28 |
| Table 2.2 | Percent cohabiting among all persons in a union (married + cohabiting), 25–34, by sex and census round, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1970–2010 | 34 |
| Table 2.3 | Percentages of women 25–29 with completed primary and completed secondary education by country and census round | 40 |
| Table 2.4 | Attitudinal changes in ethical issues in three Latin American countries, by age and sex, 1990–2006 | 45 |
| Table 2.5 | Attitudinal changes regarding religion and secularization in three Latin American countries, by age and sex, 1990–2006 | 47 |
| Table 2.6 | Attitudinal changes in issues regarding family and gender in three Latin American countries, by age and sex, 1990–2006 | 48 |
| Table 2.7 | Percentage of women 25–29 living in extended/composite households by type of union, Latin American Countries, latest available census data | 50 |
| Table 2.8 | Sample characteristics, numbers of cases and numbers of regions within the 24 Latin American countries | 53 |
| Table 3.1 | Percent of Canadian women cohabiting among women aged 15–49 living in a marital union by province and census year | 60 |
Table 3.2   Estimated odds ratios from a logistic regression model of living in consensual union among women aged 15–49 in marital union by age, social and economic characteristics, Canadian provinces and territories in 2006........... 80

Table 3.3   Predicted probabilities of living in a consensual union among women aged 15–49 in marital union (estimated from the logistic regression model specified in Table 3.2), Canadian provinces and territories in 2006.............. 83

Table 3.4   Estimated odds ratios from a logistic regression model of living in consensual union among women and men aged 20–49 in marital union by age, social and economic characteristics, Canadian selected provinces in 2012 ............................................. 85

Table 3.5   Number of Canadian men and women aged 15–49 living in a marital union according to level of autonomy by sociolinguistic group and sex .............................................. 92

Table 3.6   Percent distribution of autonomy index among Canadian men and women aged 15–49 living in a marital union according by sociolinguistic group and sex ........... 92

Table 3.7   Percent of people living in consensual union rather than being married among Canadian men and women aged 15–49 living in a marital union according to level of autonomy by sociolinguistic group and sex .......... 92

Table 3.8   Estimated odds ratios from a logistic model of living in consensual union among women and men aged 15–49 in marital union by age, presence of children and economic characteristics, English Canada and French Quebec................................................................. 93

Table 4.1   Percent cohabiting among women 25–29 in union, 1990–2011, by race and education ......................................................... 106

Table 4.2   Percent cohabiting among women in union, 2007–2011, by education and 5-year age groups .............................................. 106

Table 4.3   Percent cohabiting among women 25–29 in union, 2007–2011, by race/ethnicity ................................................................. 108

Table 4.4   Estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression of unmarried cohabitation by individual and contextual level variables, women 25–29, 2007–2011 ............ 120

Table 4.5   Estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression of unmarried cohabitation by individual and contextual level variables, women 25–29, 2007–2011 .................................... 122

Table 4.6   Share of cohabitation among all unions of partnered women 25–29, 1990–2011, by State, based on “relation to householder” question................................................. 129
| Table | Description |
|-------|-------------|
| 5.1   | Percent in each type of marriage and in cohabitation, partnered women 15–59, Mexican censuses 1930–2010 |
| 5.2   | Percent cohabiting among partnered women age 25–29 in Mexican states, 1930–2010 |
| 5.3   | Percent cohabiting among all women in a union, selected Mexican indigenous population, 1930–2010 |
| 5.4   | Percent distribution of women 25–29 by level of education, Mexico 1970–2010 |
| 5.5   | Percent cohabiting among women 25–29 in a union, Mexico 1970–2010 |
| 5.6   | Estimated odds ratios of cohabiting as opposed to being married for Mexican women 25–29 in a union, results for the individual level variables, Mexico 2000 and 2010 |
| 5.7   | Estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation by contextual characteristics at the municipality, women 25–29 in a union, Mexico 2000 and 2010 (complete model) |
| 5.8   | Estimated odds ratios of cohabitation for partnered women 25–29 according to the individual and contextual levels of education combined, Mexico 2000 and 2010 |
| 6.1   | Central America: selected demographic, economic and social indicators |
| 6.2   | Percent of women in consensual union among women aged 15–49 and 25–29 in conjugal union. Most recent data source |
| 6.3   | Percentage of consensual unions among total unions, 1960–2011 |
| 6.4   | Socio-demographic profile of women aged 25–29 in marital and consensual unions based on the most recent census |
| 7.1   | Distribution of women aged 25–29 by years of schooling and union characteristics. Colombia, 1973–2005 |
| 7.2   | Characteristics of the individual and contextual variables included in the multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation, women aged 25–29. Colombia, 2005 |
| 7.3   | Estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation by individual and contextual characteristics, women aged 25–29. Colombia, 2005 |
Table 7.4   Averaged residuals at the municipality level from Model 2. Municipalities classified according to their contextual characteristics and the cultural complex to which they belong. Colombia, 2005 ................................................................. 204

Table 7.5   Sample characteristics and estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation among partnered women aged 25–29 by selected individual and contextual level characteristics. Bolivia 2001 ................................................................. 206

Table 7.6   Sample characteristics and estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation among partnered women aged 25–29 by selected individual and contextual level characteristics. Ecuador, 2010 ................. 209

Table 7.7   Sample characteristics and estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation among partnered women aged 25–29 by selected individual and contextual level characteristics. Peru, 2007 ................................................................. 211

Table 8.1   Distribution of characteristics of 137 Brazilian meso-regions, measured for women 25–29 as of 2000 ............... 222

Table 8.2   Proportions cohabiting among Brazilian women 25–29 in a union by social characteristics, 2000 ......................... 223

Table 8.3   Estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation among partnered women 25–29 by social characteristics, Brazil 2000 ................ 230

Table 8.4   Estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation among partnered women 25–29, Brazil multilevel logistic regression results for proportions cohabiting among women 25–29 in a union by type of meso-region, Brazil 2000 233

Table 8.5   Prediction of the increase in cohabitation among partnered women 25–29 in the meso-regions of Brazil, period 1980–2010: standardized regression coefficients and R squared (OLS) ......................................................... 239

Table 8.6   Percent cohabiting among partnered women 25–29 in Brazil and Brazilian States, 1960–2010 censuses (IPUMS samples) .................................................................................. 241

Table 8.7   Estimated odds ratios from a multilevel logistic regression model of unmarried cohabitation among partnered women 25–29 by social characteristics and types of meso-regions, Brazil 2000 .............................. 242
Table 8.8 Full OLS regression results of the three models predicting the change in percentages cohabiting among partnered women between 1980 and 2010 in 136 Brazilian meso-regions .......................... 243

Table 9.1 Women in conjugal unions aged 20–29 years ................................. 259
Table 9.2 Women in conjugal unions aged 20–29 years ................................. 262
Table 9.3 Women in conjugal unions aged 20–29 years ................................. 264