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Interdependence between sexual debut and church attendance in Italy

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Abstract

The influence of religion on an individual's life-course in general – and on sexual behaviour in particular – has long been recognised by social scientists, although few studies have explored the reciprocal causal interdependence between religiosity and sexual debut, mainly in an overwhelmingly Catholic European context. In this paper, we study the dynamic bi-directional effect between first coital experience and discontinuance of church attendance among a representative sample of Italian students. Both effects work, contrasting the results of other authors regarding the USA, where only the effect of religion on sex has been detected. The present results do not change when the two processes are considered simultaneously and unobserved heterogeneity is taken into account. Some possible explanations are discussed.

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