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Volumes

Articles

Special Collections

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Information for Authors

Copyright Information

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Women's changing socioeconomic position and union formation in Spain and Portugal

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Abstract

Economic and sociological theories of marriage have long emphasized the impact of women's education and employment on union formation. In this study, we explore the relevance of the female economic independence hypothesis to explain women's patterns of entry into marriage and cohabitation in Portugal and Spain. In these two Southern European countries, gender equity has improved remarkably in the public sphere, but family relations remain structured along traditional gender roles. We focus on three indicators of women's autonomy: educational attainment, employment status and having lived independently from the family of origin. The analysis is based on the Fertility and Family Surveys and discrete-time multinomial logistic regression models are used to estimate the odds of marrying, cohabiting or remaining single. The results suggest that whereas the effect of female education is consistent with the independence hypothesis, women's labour force participation encourages union formation, particularly among younger cohorts. Living independently from the family of origin reduces the likelihood of entering marriage but increases considerably the odds of cohabiting.

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[\[Back to previous page \]](#)