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No. 211, 2006

Hallman, Kelly, Sara Peracca, **Jennifer Catino**, and **Marta Julia Ruiz**. "Multiple disadvantages of Mayan females: The effects of gender, ethnicity, poverty, and residence on education in Guatemala," *Policy Research Division Working Paper* no. 211. New York: Population Council. ([PDF](#))

Abstract

Although access to primary education in Guatemala has increased in recent years, particularly in rural areas, levels of educational attainment and literacy remain among the lowest in Latin America. Problems include late entry, grade repetition, and early dropout. Inequalities in school access and grade attainment linked to ethnicity, gender, poverty, and residence remain. Age trends show that Mayan females are the least likely to ever enroll, and, if they do enroll, to start school the latest and drop out earliest. Mayan females are not a homogeneous group, however. Summary statistics indicate that the one-fourth of Mayan girls who are non-poor have primary school entry rates, school entry age, and grade-for-age levels equal to those of Ladina females, and, conditional upon primary school completion, have secondary school enrollment levels about 80 percent of those of Ladina females. The one-quarter of Mayan girls who are extremely poor, on the other hand, have the worst educational outcomes of all. Multivariate results indicate that being Mayan and female is a barrier to enrollment, particularly among those who are poor. Enrollment rates drop sharply at age 12, and the dropout curve is steepest for Mayan females. While age 12 would be a time of transition from primary to secondary school for children who entered school on time and made regular progress, most nonenrolled children aged 12 and older, especially those who are Mayan, have very low grade attainment and few have completed primary school. The main constraint to Mayan educational achievement therefore appears to be primary school completion. Among nonenrolled young people aged 13–24, household duties and lack of money were the constraints most frequently mentioned by females. Early marriage did not appear to directly affect female enrollment, but related qualitative findings indicate that Mayan parents' expectations of daughters' future roles may reduce parental incentives to invest in education beyond the age of puberty. For adolescent males, regardless of ethnicity, market work was by far the most frequently cited cause for nonenrollment, followed by lack of money. Lack of physical access to school was not a frequently cited constraint for children in any age group. In addition to poverty-reduction programs, mechanisms to encourage poor families to start their children's schooling at age 7 may lead to fewer competing interests with regard to time allocation as children approach puberty and are compelled to assume adult work roles.

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