

**Too poor to marry?:
employment crisis and changing modes of union formation
among young men in Burkina Faso**

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Introduction

As in many African countries, the combination of the economic crisis of the 1990s, structural adjustment measures and the rapid growth of the urban population has profoundly affected urban labor market in Burkina Faso. As part of the public sector reforms, wages were virtually frozen and recruitments severely cut. Restructuring and privatization in the parastatal sector also led to closures and downsizing (Diabré 1998; Sanou 1993). Burkina Faso also witnessed a rapid increase of its urban population, largely fuelled by young migrants moving for economic reasons (Schoumaker et al. 2002), which has exacerbated competition on the urban labor market. The share of the informal urban sector in the country's economy has been on the rise, and as many as 80 percent of the paid jobs in Ouagadougou were outside the modern sector in the early 1990s (Sananikone 1996). The degree of differentiation and the share of precarious jobs within the informal sector are also believed to have risen in Burkina Faso as in other African countries (Charmes 1996; Meagher 1995). Without surprise, reported unemployment in the country's two largest urban centers is consistently high (Lachaud 1994).

Thus, it is in a difficult socioeconomic context that new generations of Burkinabe are entering the urban labor market today. In fact, throughout sub-saharan Africa, young people seem to be have particularly suffered from these labour market changes. In Burkina Faso, recent data have documented sharp increase in the unemployment rate among urban youth. In 2000, up to 40 percent of out-of-school young men were out of the paid labor force in the two major burkinabè cities. The nature of youth employment has also changed significantly, and the share of the informal sector in youth employment has considerably increased over time, especially among educated youth (Calvès and Schoumaker, 2004). These changing employment patterns are likely to affect other aspects of youth life. Indeed, access to employment is a crucial step in the transition to adulthood for young men. A shortage of employment opportunities postpones marriage and access to independent housing and lengthens the period during which young people remain economically dependent on elders (Gérard 1997). Little is known, however, on the consequence of this new market conditions for youth subsequent life transitions such as union formation. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to examine how increasing unemployment and informalization of youth employment in burkinabè cities have affected young men's access to marriage over the last decades. More specifically, based on complete employment and union histories the purpose is to analyze how the effect of urban men's activity on both the timing and nature of first union formation has changed over time in Burkina Faso.

Data and methods

This paper uses data from a unique nationally-representative retrospective survey entitled *Migration Dynamics, Urban Integration and Environment Survey of Burkina Faso* (MDUIE survey) conducted in 2000 in Burkina Faso among 8644 individuals. The analysis focuses on urban young men and only single male respondents living in the two largest urban centers (Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso) at the time of their entry into the labor market are considered. Because data collected among older cohorts are more sensitive to misreporting and omission, we excluded respondents born between 1936 and 1948 from the analysis.

Although the survey, as its name indicates, focuses on migration and urban integration, it is well-suited to analyze the effect of employment trajectories on access to marriage and how it has changed over time. The data includes detailed occupational, residential and marital histories for men aged 15 to 64. More specifically, for each respondent, the section of the questionnaire devoted to economic activity history collected information on all periods of schooling, apprenticeship, economic activity (paid and unpaid employment), and inactivity (unemployed, at home, retired or sick) which lasted more than three months, since the respondent's sixth birthday. For each period of economic activity, additional information was collected including the type of activity (open question), whether the respondent was paid for the work performed, and whether he or she received or gave a pay slip ("fiches de salaire"). In section on marital history respondents were questioned about all their unions. Both marital and cohabitating unions were considered. For each union the timing of cohabitation was collected, and for each marriage the date of religious, traditional, civil celebrations was recorded.

The analysis is divided into two sections: based on descriptive statistics and Kaplan Meier estimates, the first part of the analysis describes the changes that occurred in the timing and nature of first paid employment and entry into union of young urban men over time. Three cohorts of young men are compared : those born between 1969 and 1980, those born between 1959 and 1970 and those born between 1949-1960. The second section examines the effect of employment type on the risk to enter a first union and how it has changed over time using Cox regression models.

Preliminary results

Table 1 presents the timing and sector of activity of first paid employment for men in each. While there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes the informal sector in urban Africa, there is agreement that the informal economy mainly operates outside the sphere of government regulation (Dijkman & Van Dijk 1993; Osirim 1992). Self-employed workers or employees in the informal sector are generally not registered, nor are small-scale informal enterprises. Thus, for practical purposes, we treat public sector employees as well as all those receiving a pay slip as workers in the formal, or modern sector. Employers providing pay slips to their staff are also included in this sector and the formal sector is divided into public and private spheres of activity.

Table 1 shows that access to first paid employment has been delayed across generation of men. Working men from the younger generation entered the paid labour force on average one year later (at 19,3) than their oldest counterparts (men born 1949-1950). Changes in the type of first employment are also striking. Table 1 confirms that the formal sector, its public component in particular, is no longer a significant first employment location for urban youth. In fact, while almost a third of urban young men from the oldest generation found their first paid employment in the formal sector, only twenty one percent of men from the 1959-70 cohort and eighteen percent of those from the 1969-80 cohort did. Young urban men are clearly more likely to start working in the informal sector today than they were in the past.

Table 1. Timing and sector of activity for male first paid job, by birth cohort, weighted sample

	Cohort		
	1969-80	1959-70	1949-60
Median age at first paid job	19.3	18.9	18.5
Sector of activity of first paid job			
Formal sector	17.9	21.2	31.6
<i>Public</i>	05.9	11.1	17.5
<i>Private</i>	12.0	10.1	14.1
Informal sector	82.1	78.8	68.1
N = 776	271	283	222

Source: Migration Dynamics, Urban Integration and Environment Survey of Burkina Faso (MDUIE), 2000

Not only are young urban men entering the labour market at later age than previous generation but also they form their first union later. Table 2 shows the timing of first union and the median duration between first job and first union for each cohort of men. As seen in Table 2 younger generation of men enter in union significantly later than men from older generation and if 38% of men born between 1949 and 1960 were already in union by age 25 they were only 28% in that situation among men born between 1969-1980.

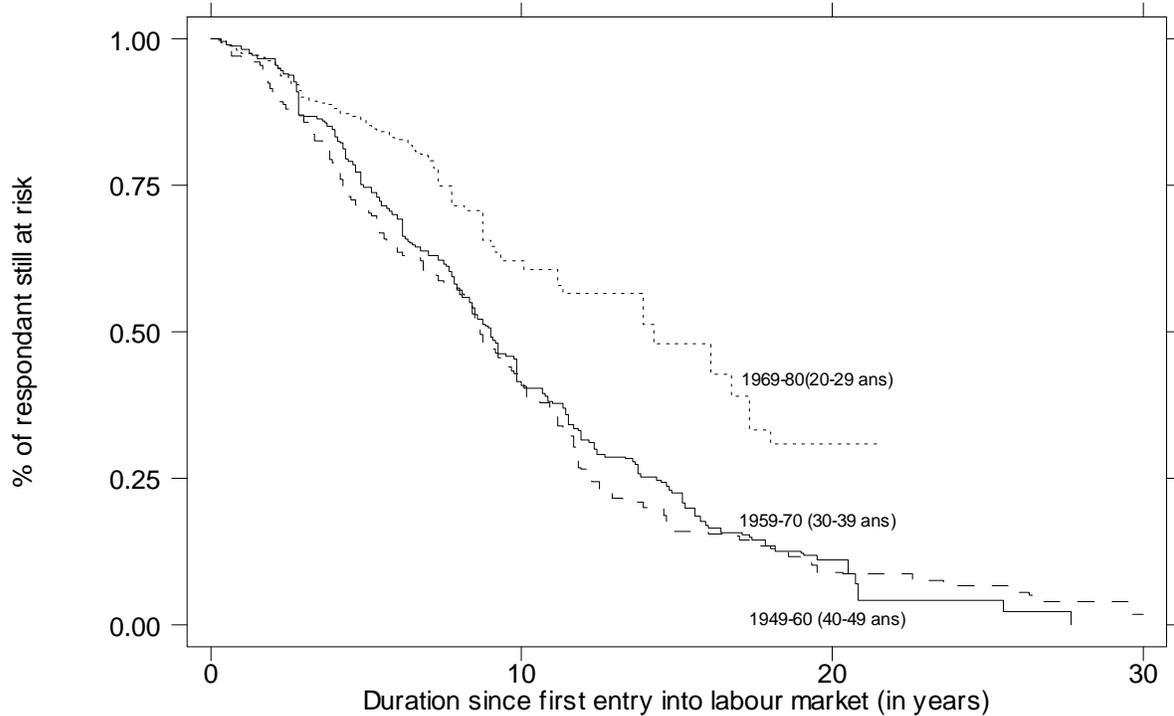
Preliminary results provide support for the idea that later age at marriage among younger generation of urban males is the results of both later entry into the labor market and longer duration between first employment and access to union. In fact, as seen in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 1, urban men in Burkina Faso have to work longer today than they used to before entering a union: 14 years on average for the youngest generation compared to 8 years for older generation.

Table 2. From first job to union : Timing of first union and median duration between first job and first union, by birth cohort, weighted sample

	Cohort		
	1969-80	1959-70	1949-60
% of respondents who were in union at :			
Age 20	04.4	05.4	07.9
Age 25	27.7	29.3	38.0
Age 30	41.1	56.6	59.1
Median age at first union	28.8	28.0	27.0
Median duration between first job and first union	13.9	8.5	8.0
Cox test for significance	***		
N = 776			

Source: see Table 1

Figure 1. Survival curve of first union among urban men who entered the labour market, by birth cohort



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