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Having the Number They Want: Empowerment of Latin American Women

Sydney Hudock

Judith L. Gibbons

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Introduction

- Gender roles are embedded in Latin American culture, promoting values that place women in a subordinate position to men.
- In Latin America, machismo promotes hypermasculinity and men's dominance over women, while marianismo emphasizes that women should be virtuous and self-silencing (Gibbons & Luna, 2015; Stevens, 1973).
- Empowerment is the ability to make strategic life choices. In order to be empowered, the woman must have been previously disempowered (Kabeer 1999).
- International research suggests that women's empowerment and health outcomes are associated, but research in Latin America is lacking. (Upadhyay et al., 2014).

Current Study

- **Research Question:** How does women's empowerment and its' relation to childbearing vary by country?

Method

Participants

Colombia

- $n = 12458$
- $M_{age} = 41.81$ years, $SD = 4.35$ (range = 35-49)

Guatemala

- $n = 7168$
- $M_{age} = 41.39$ years, $SD = 4.27$ (range = 35-49)

Honduras

- $n = 6370$
- $M_{age} = 41.32$ years, $SD = 4.29$ (range = 35-49)

Materials

- Demographic Health Survey (DHS) data from Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras were analyzed.

Data Analysis

- Analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were used to assess between-country patterns across four domains of empowerment: educational, economic, social, and contraceptive.
- Women's number of living children served as the dependent variable (DV) and their ideal number of children served as the covariate (CV). The independent variables (IVs) varied by empowerment domain.

Economic Domain

Colombia

- No significant main effects or interactions

Guatemala

- DM Woman's Earnings: $F(1, 5644) = 13.45, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .002$
- DM Large Purchases: $F(1, 5644) = 11.17, p = .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .002$

Honduras

- Woman's Employment: $F(1,19622.61) = 42.25, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .009$
- DM Large Purchases: $F(1,19622.61) = 27.60, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .006$

Educational Domain

Colombia

- Education level: $F(3, 12344) = 665.99, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .139$

Guatemala

- Education level: $F(3, 7133) = 66.22, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .027$

Honduras

- Education Level: $F(3, 6217) = 279.57, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .119$

Social Domain

Colombia

- Wife-Beating Attitudes: $F(1, 28180.79) = 38.62, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .003$
- DM Health Care: $F(1, 28180.79) = 3.98, p = .046, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .000$
- DM Visiting Relatives: $F(1, 28180.79) = 9.00, p = .003, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$

Guatemala

- DM Health Care: $F(1, 5706) = 8.09, p = .004, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$
- DM Visiting Relatives: $F(1, 5706) = 3.98, p = .046, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$

Honduras

- Wife-Beating Attitudes: $F(1, 19539.99) = 17.34, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .004$
- DM Health Care: $F(1, 19539.99) = 13.75, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .003$

Contraceptive Domain

Colombia

- Method Knowledge: $F(2, 12343) = 10.61, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .002$

Guatemala

- Current Usage: $F(1, 7162) = 3.88, p = .049, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$

Honduras

- Method Knowledge: $F(2, 6217) = 4.27, p = .014, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$

Discussion

- Education emerged as a central route to empowerment for women's childbearing in all three countries.
- Given that Colombia is the wealthiest of the three countries according to the World Bank (2018), perhaps women are not disempowered economically in Colombia, which may be why the ANCOVA was not significant.
- The findings regarding contraception merit further exploration. Scholars have associated contraceptive use with women's empowerment, so it was surprising here that women who were currently using contraception did not report closer to their ideal number of children than their peers not using contraceptives (Cleland, Conde-Agudelo, Peterson, Ross, & 2012)). Although contraceptive use was significant in Guatemalan women, it was in the opposite direction than predicted, suggesting that women may be using contraception reactively rather than preventatively.
- Findings from this study can direct efforts to promote the empowerment of women in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras in country-specific programs that address the unique needs of the women in those cultural contexts.

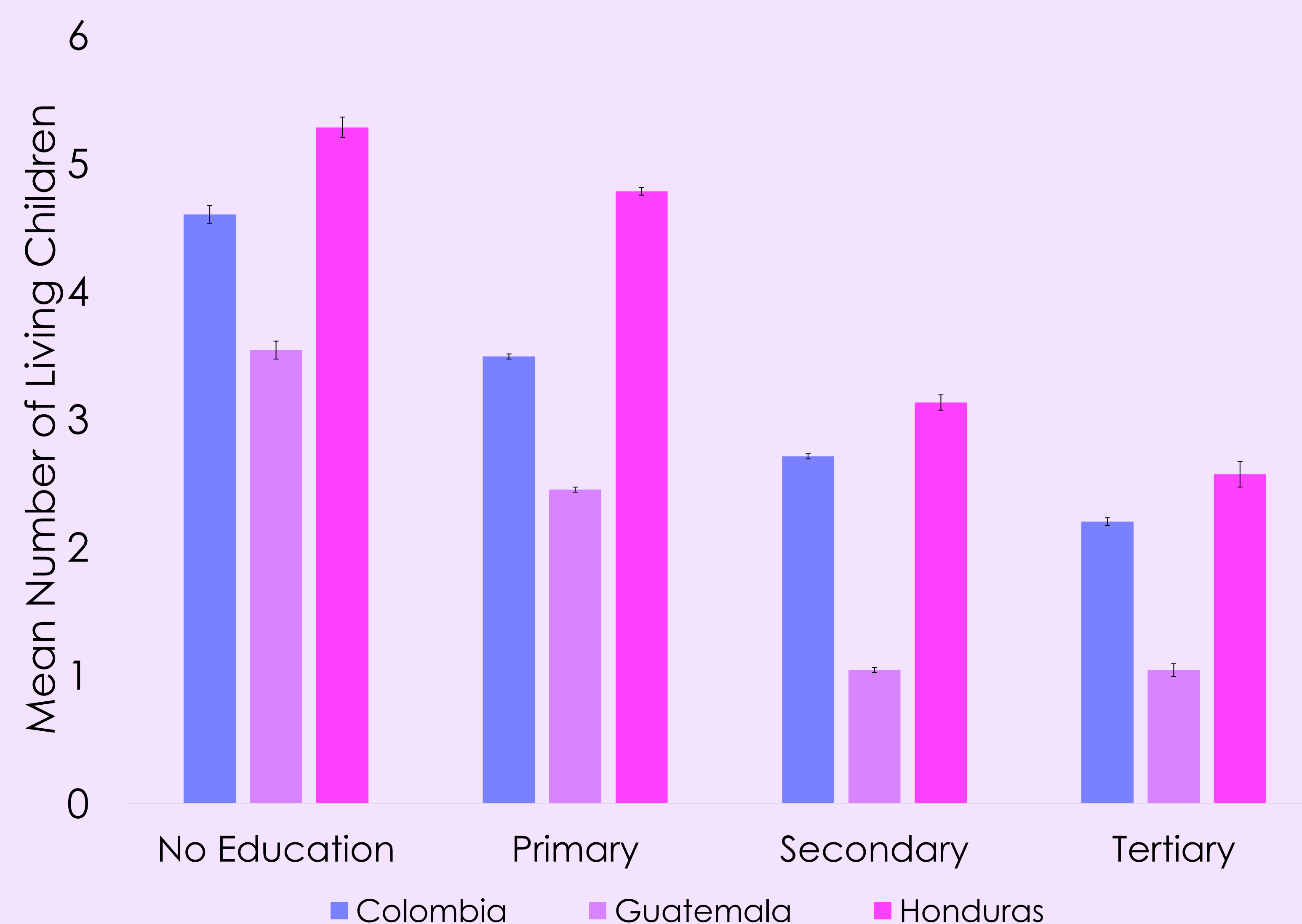


Figure 1. Main Effect of Education Levels across Countries