

# Access to Education and Family Formation: Evidence from University Expansion in Nigeria

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## Abstract

How do greater education opportunities impact family formation? This paper evaluates a rapid expansion in public universities in Nigeria to estimate the impact of increased access to education on family formation in a low-income context. My empirical analysis combines administrative and survey data from Nigeria with a new staggered difference-in-differences estimator that exploits the geographical and time-wise variation in the university expansion. I show that greater higher education opportunities led to increased years of schooling and educational attainment among school-aged women, and delayed the timing of first marriage and childbirth. In addition, university openings reduced the number of births these women had, and increased the likelihood of better health outcomes for their children. I find suggestive evidence that these outcomes are driven by the effects of education on women's knowledge and autonomy - women delay the onset of sexual activity, and there is increased use of contraceptive methods, labor force participation, and intra-household bargaining power.

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