DETERMINANTS OF SINGLENESS AMONG WOMEN AGED 40 AND OVER IN ALGERIA: WHAT RELATION TO THE LABOR MARKET?

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Abstract: The decrease in the average age of marriage and the increase in loneliness among women in Algeria is a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly visible in society. In the coming years, the number of single people will increase. This article analyses the factors leading to increased loneliness among women aged 40 and over in Algeria based on data from the MICS6/2019 survey. The minimum age threshold was chosen because it corresponds to the age after which the probability of first marriage is almost zero based on Algerian statistics. The methodology of this study is stepwise Wald logistic regression. The paper built regression models based on two samples: the first (24,681 women aged 40 and over) and the second (4,329 women aged 50-54). For an empirical study of loneliness among women, it is proposed to analyze the following determinants: type of employment, type of social protection, place of residence, level of education, and age. Based on the results of the research, four main conclusions were formed. First, the odds of being single are 14.1 times and 4.23 times higher among job-seeking and working women, respectively, compared to non-working women. Due to the loss of hope to get married, women choose career development instead of building a family union. Under these conditions, women integrate into the labor market late. Since most of this category is unemployed and not of retirement age, they have low health insurance coverage. Based on this, to create decent living conditions for single women aged 40 and older, it is advisable to launch a program to improve the qualifications of these women, find ways to integrate them into the working environment and provide them with health insurance. Secondly, the long-term trend indicates that loneliness as a psychological phenomenon will increase every year in society, which will, accordingly, contribute to the strengthening of the imbalance in the marriage market. Late marriage and declining fertility are indicators of new patterns of behavior brought about by economic and social change. Thirdly, the level of well-being is also a statistically significant factor influencing the loneliness of women. Middle-class women are 1.27 times more likely to be single than upper-class women. Fourth, the survey revealed significant regional differences. Women in Algeria's north-eastern and north-central regions are more likely to remain single. These results can be further explored through qualitative research.

Keywords: female singleness, permanent singleness, marriage market, labor market, Algeria.

Introduction

The marital status of women is an important factor in the analysis of their socio-economic situation. Marriage represents the elementary foundation of social organization (Bourayou and Belhadri, 2000). It is also considered by the patriarchal society as a form of economic insurance for women, since the division of labor assigns the financial role to men. Marriage is also seen a rewarding social status by society, unlike those who are excluded from the marriage market, through divorce, singless or widowhood (Oudah-Bedidi, 2005).
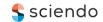
In Algeria, the evolution of society was followed by a transition in nuptiality. By going from an almost universal model characterizing a predominantly rural and illiterate population, whose age at first marriage was early for both men and women, with a difference in favor of men, and therefore a residual rate of permanent celibacy, to several nuptial models due to this transition to a more heterogeneous society, with quite contrasting urbanization and more generalized access to education, unquestionably for women. This transition has in fact **manifested itself** by the rise in age at marriage and the permanent singleness of women, who are increasingly better-educated (Hammouda, 2003; Hammouda, 2009; Oussedik and al, 2012). This has not been accompanied by greater integration into the labor market. Moreover, in recent years we have witnessed stabilization, or even a regression in relative terms, of female employment, the rate of which fluctuates between 13.1% and 13.8% for the period from 2012 to 2019, despite an improvement in female school performance (National office of statistic, 2012; National office of statistic, 2019; The Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey MICS6, 2019). Besides, with the marriage crisis, the status and role of women arise again, but in an even more exacerbated way, their status as "mother" being questioned.

In this work, the objective is to analyze the determinants of singleness among women aged 40 in Algeria, as revealed by the latest the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey MICS6/ 2019 survey. It concerns a tenth of women aged 40 and over. The minimum age threshold was chosen because it corresponds first to the age beyond which the probability of contracting a first marriage is practically nil in the current Algerian context (The Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey MICS6, 2019). There are also the biological characteristics of the age of women after 40, which stigmatize them in society, especially those who have not yet entered the marriage market, since the fertility rate of women decreases after this age (from 135.2‰ for women aged 35-39 to 48.5‰ for women aged 40-44 and 5.4‰ for the age category 44-49) (National office of statistic, 2018). As well as the risks linked to late pregnancies and the risks of illnesses, especially chronic ones, which are on the rise.

1. Singleness among women in Algeria: Literature review

The decline in the average age at marriage and the rise of singleness among women in Algeria is a phenomenon that is becoming more marked in society. The number of single people will increase in the years to come, especially with the arrival of the generations of the demographic boom of the 1970s (Belarbi, 2017). Several works have dealt with the causes of changes in the matrimonial model, which coexists with the traditional regime (Adel, 2013; Amara, 2015). This work shows that the more the level of education of women increases, the more the age at first marriage is delayed. The expansion of women's schooling in fact prolongs the duration of their studies and mechanically delays the moment of entering into a union. More than this effect of mechanical delay, education also leads to a strong desire for emancipation in women who aspire more and more to freely choose their future spouse, and above all to pursue a professional career before getting married (Ouadah- Bedidi, 2005; Haffad, Doudou, 2013). For their part, economic factors influence entry into a first union. Indeed, on the men's side, it is becoming more and more difficult with the housing crisis and finding a job due to unemployment and the decline in the labor market. These economic conditions jeopardize installation projects for a new household. Financial difficulties will increasingly push young people to delay marriage (Ouadah-Bedidi, 2005; Haffad, Doudou, 2013; Belarbi, 2017). In addition to the previous factors, relationships with marriage traditions that no longer correspond to the expectations of young people are also put forward to explain singleness. Singles are looking for new landmarks. They find themselves faced with the difficulty of how to choose the other, where to find the right party and how not to offend the family order (Adel, 2013; Abbas, 2014).

Maintaining single status among women becomes more stigmatizing with advancing age, especially after forty. This is related to the biological age characteristics of women after forty and its relation to their reproductive role.

Although Social science work has extensively discussed the factors of female singleness. Nevertheless, the category of women aged 40 and over is less treated in the literature.

2. Methodology

The article is based on data from the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey MICS6/2019, using a household survey. In order to identify the determinants of singleness among this population, as well as permanent singleness, which concerns women who have reached the age of 50 and over without ever having been married, we performed two stepwise WALD logistic regressions.

The first concerns a sample of 24,681 women aged 40 and over, by introducing variables characterizing women that are: *Individual situation, age, areas of territorial programming. Wealth quintile level of education, place of residence, age squared.* As for permanent singleness, the sample is made up of 4,329 women aged between 50 and 54. The variables introduced are: *Individual situation, areas of territorial programming, place of residence, level of education, age squared.*

3. Determinants of single women aged 40 and over and definitive singleness

Singleness concerns, as we have already pointed out above, a tenth of women aged 40 and over. The main results that emerge from the descriptive analysis of data from the MICS6/2019 multiple indicator survey indicate that more than two thirds of single people are under fifty and one third are permanently single (50 years and over). Although single women aged 40 and over are more or less educated. This population also has a low relationship to paid work, since the majority are neither employed nor retired (68.1%). They are also the most affected by informal employment after widows. In addition, this population has less access to health insurance, a third of which do not have a Chronic disease card (CHIFFA).

Table 1. Individual characteristics of women aged 40 and over according to marital status

Marital status	Single	Married	Divorced / separated	Widow	Total
Quinquennal age					
40 – 44	40,90%	20,60%	18,20%	2,40%	19,40%
45 – 49	26,10%	19,00%	17,40%	3,30%	17,00%
50 – 54	17,70%	18,80%	22,60%	8,00%	17,00%
55 – 59	9,20%	14,90%	14,10%	9,20%	13,40%
60 – 64	3,20%	11,50%	12,10%	11,50%	10,70%
65 – 69	1,40%	7,40%	7,00%	13,90%	7,90%
70 – 74	0,50%	4,20%	3,60%	12,40%	5,20%
75 – 79	0,20%	2,10%	2,40%	14,10%	4,00%
80 – 84	0,20%	1,00%	1,50%	12,60%	2,90%
85+	0,70%	0,40%	1,10%	12,60%	2,50%
Educational level					
Primary or less	42,60%	64,00%	53,8	90,30%	65,90%
Way	24,40%	16,30%	21,09	5,00%	15,40%
Secondary	23,60%	14,70%	18,79	3,80%	13,90%
Superior	9,40%	5,00%	6,32	1,00%	4,80%
Individual situation					
Busy	26,30%	5,90%	21,70%	2,50%	8,00%
Retired	5,60%	3,80%	16,30%	20,60%	7,40%
Other	68,10%	90,30%	62,00%	76,80%	84,60%
Social security affiliation					
Affiliate	82,30%	86,20%	86,60%	82,20%	84,80%
Unaffiliated	17,10%	13,70%	13,40%	17,80%	15,00%
DK	0,60%	0,10%	0%	0%	0,30%
Chiffa Card					
Yes individual	48,20%	28,10%	65,60%	81,60%	40,70%
Yes entitled	18,20%	48,60%	5,30%	3,20%	36,10%
NO	33,00%	23,10%	28,80%	15,20%	23,00%
DK	0,50%	0,20%	0,20%	0,10%	0,20%

Source: MICS6/2019 Multiple Indicator Survey.

3.1 Results of the first regression: The determinants of singleness for women aged 40 and over

The relationship this population maintains with work is the first factor that determines singleness among the female population aged 40 and over. The results of the regression show, in fact, that the individual situation is the first variable, which explains the status of single among women aged 40 and over. **The unemployed and employed are more likely to be single than the non working women, ie (5.83) and (4.1) times more respectively.**

An interpretation attempt can be put forward in this sense. In the case of **employed** women, we think that precisely the labor market integration could be the cause and/or the consequence of singleness. Can we say that: women prefer to ensure a certain economic stability to the detriment of a marriage project or that the delay in marriage will accelerate labor market integration?

As for unemployed women aged 40 and over, who seem more likely to maintain the status of single, than employed and non working women. Is this linked to the loss of hope to integrate the marriage market which makes turn toward work rather than marriage as an economic and social alternative to their current situation?

Education level comes second. All other things being equal, non-academics are more likely to be single than academics. It is (1.89) times more for women with a middle school level; (1.65) times more for those with a secondary school level and (1.54) times more for those with a primary school level or less.

The level of wealth variable is the third explanatory variable for singleness among women aged 40 and plus. It is significant only for the average level. Middle-class women are (1.27) times more likely to be single than upper-class women.

Social capital is an explanatory factor for the two previous variables. The higher the level of education and the level of wealth, the more the social environment is endowed with relational resources that could facilitate access to the marriage market (Lin Nan, 1995).

The place of residence also influences singleness. The probability of being single is higher in the northern regions and second in the highlands than in the south. It is indeed (2.43) times more in the North East; (2.14) times more in the North Center; (1.86) times more in the North-West and (1.09) times more in the highlands. The explanation of singleness according to regional disparities requires a deeper and finer study, which analyzes each region as a socially constructed territory, different from other territories.

Age is the last variable that explains singleness among the female population aged 40 and over. This is more of a generation effect: the long-term trend indicates that permanent singleness is increasing significantly, and that this trend will be exacerbated due to the imbalance in the marriage market. Those arriving on the marriage market are much more numerous than older singles.

Table 2. Results of the first regression

	Sig.	Exp(B)
Individual situation(Ref non working)	0,000	
Employed	0,000	4,068
Unemployed	0,000	5,817
Education level(University ref)	0,000	
Primary or less	0,000	1,540
Middle school	0,000	1,891
Secondary	0,000	1,650
Wealth level (Ref well-off)	0,000	
Destitute	0,112	1,121
Middle class	0,000	1,275
Place of residence (1)	0,001	1,205

Table 2 (cont.). Results of the first regression

	Sig.	Exp(B)
EPT (Ref south)	0,000	
North-Center	0,000	2,145
Northeast	0,000	2,428
North West	0,000	1,857
the Highlands	0,426	1,092
age_2	0,001	1,001
Age	0,000	0,857
Constant	0,000	96,799
Dependent variable	Single 1 No Single 0	

Source: MICS6/2019 Multiple Indicator Survey.

3.2 Results of the second regression: The determinants of permanent singleness

As for definitive singleness, the regression notes the effect of the individual situation of women aged 50-54 as the first variable, which explains the singleness of this population. **Women looking for a job are (14.1 times) more likely to be single, and employed women are (4.23 times) more than non working women.** This result could confirm previous comments on the relationship between work and singleness, observed among the female population aged 40 and over. In particular, in the case of unemployed women aged 50-54, which is the most striking result. Losing hope to enter the marriage market is an economic insurance to ensure their future when they get old, which could lead them to prefer work rather than marriage. The level of education explains that singleness worsens for women with an average academic level. Women aged 50-54 with an average school level are (1.64) times more likely to remain single than women. This is probably related to the role of social capital in access to relational resources, which increases with the level of education. As for the place of residence, it intervenes as the third explanatory variable of permanent singleness. Women in the northern regions are more likely to remain single than women in the southern regions. The Center East comes first by (3.08 times) more, followed by the North-Center and the North-West respectively by (1.68 times) more and (2.65 times) more. Age squared is the last explanatory variable for singleness. Insofar as age did not emerge in the analysis, no explanation can be advanced. We remind that this is only the 50-54 age group, that is to say the 1964-1969 generations. These are therefore the generations that were affected by the reform of the education system in the 1970s. Their entry into the labor market took place in the mid-1980s at a time that was economically difficult and would last for more than a decade.

Table 3. Results of the first regression

	Sig.	Exp(B)
Individual situation(Ref non working)	0,000	
employed	0,000	4,234
Unemployed	0,000	14,101
Education level (University ref)	0,002	
primary or less	0,876	1,036
Middle School	0,035	1,636
Secondary	0,085	1,476
Place of residence (1)	0,000	1,700
EPT (Ref south)	0,000	
North -Center	0,000	2,679
Northeast	0,000	3,083
North West	0,000	2,647
the Highlands	0,708	1,114
age_2	0,023	0,999
Constant	0,346	2,592
Dependent variable	Single 1 No Single 0	

Source: MICS6/2019 Multiple Indicator Survey.

Conclusion

The empirical study of the determinants of singleness among the female population aged 40 and over and permanent singleness, reveals three main results:

First, the loss of hope to enter the marriage market leaves these women less likely to seek marriage and try to enter the labor market late, as an economic solution to ensure their old age. Since the largest part of this category are neither retired nor employed. They are also the least covered by health insurance. Additionally, there is a need to reflect on an appropriate training and professional integration policy and to expand health insurance for single women aged 40 and over, in order to ensure them a more decent life.

Secondly, the long-term trend indicates that permanent singleness is on the rise and that this trend will be exacerbated due to the imbalance in the marriage market. The raising age at marriage and the decline in fertility (moreover closely correlated) are indices of new behavioral structures induced by economic and social changes whose logic is not always updated.

Third, the survey highlights remarkable regional disparities. Women in the North-East and North-Central regions are more likely to remain single. These results could be deepened by qualitative studies.
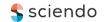
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