

**Family Structure and Human
Capital Production
in Jamaica**

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(ABSTRACT)

In the last 30 years the Jamaican government has invested substantially in education at the primary and secondary levels by providing a large number of inputs, including trained teachers. Still, many children are illiterate after completing primary school, and a large number of teenagers leave secondary school without acquiring a skill. The educational attainment of Jamaican children is low in absolute terms, and in comparison to other Caribbean nations. This breakdown in the uptake of education cannot be explained by lack of physical inputs. This dissertation focuses on the dynamics of the household by posing the question: Is the educational achievement of children with unmarried mothers different than that of children with married mothers? This is a potentially important question for Jamaica, since 80% of children are born out of wedlock and the probability of having married parents at age 15 is just 50 percent. It was found that children whose mothers are unmarried had lower cognitive achievement than children with married mothers, that in certain cases the disparity accentuates over time, and that children with unmarried mothers are also less likely to be attending high school.

A large number of women in Jamaica complete most or all of their fertility out of wedlock. Yet, many of these women enter marriages at a late age (between 35 and 50 years old). These marriages sometimes evolve from current domiciliary relationships, but quite often they do not. In this study, one possible motivation for these late marriages is explored. It is proposed that women with smart children enter late marriages as a way of securing funds to invest in the education of these children. They are motivated to do so because, in the absence of old-age protection in Jamaica, smart children are a good way to store consumption for one's old age. In this study, it was found that women with smarter children had a higher probability of entering a late marriage than women with less smart children.

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