

HISPANIC DROPOUTS AND PREGNANCIES IN TEXAS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

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High school dropout and pregnancy rates, particularly among the rapidly growing population of Hispanics in the United States, are of considerable concern to policy makers because of their implications for the future growth of a potentially unskilled segment of the labor force. With data from the Texas Schools Project (TSP) and the U.S. Census, I use discrete choice models to empirically test jointly-determined dropout-pregnancy decisions of a cohort of females in the public high schools of Texas. Utilizing this decision-making structure to model pregnancy-dropout behavior together with individual level data is an innovative addition to this topic's literature. Rejecting the autonomous-individual decision process, this research considers contextual neighborhood and high school influences on those decisions. Accounting for these contextual effects largely reduces the Hispanic-Black difference. The largest "Hispanic effects" tend to be age-dependent, revealing a much higher risk associated with older females. Many of the ethnically- or culturally-related contextual factors continue to suggest a strong Hispanic cultural influence on fertility and education outcomes of young Latinas in Texas. Possible explanations and policy solutions are suggested.