

LIVING TOGETHER, LIVING ALONE:

Families and Living Arrangements, 2000

The great variety of living arrangements that adults choose makes it no longer possible to point to the “typical” American household.

Many businesses are concerned about living arrangements because household composition influences purchasing behavior and service delivery. State and local governments pay attention to households when making decisions about everything from traffic patterns to neighborhood watch programs.

A substantial share of adults live alone, but the majority live with their spouses. Some live with grandparents,

parents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, and other relatives, but some live with people who are not related to them by blood or marriage. However, living arrangements take on even greater significance when children are involved. For instance, the definition of poverty is based on income thresholds that vary by size of family and number of children.

Families dominate American households, but less so today than they did in 1970.

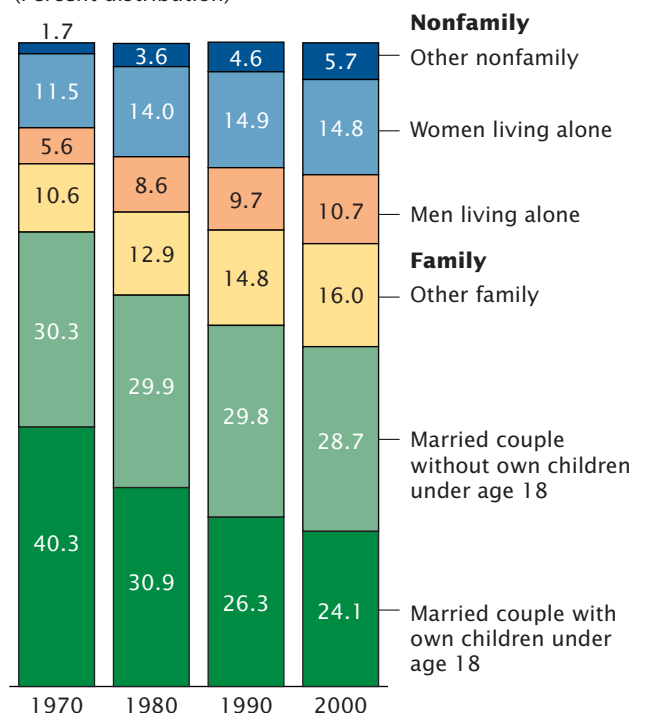
Families represented 81 percent of households in 1970, but only 69 percent of America’s 105 million households in 2000, according to the 2000 Current

Words That Count

- A **household** consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit, regardless of their relationship. A family household has at least two members related by birth, marriage, or adoption, one of whom is related to the householder. A **nonfamily household** can either be a person living alone or a householder who shares the home with nonrelatives only; for example, boarders or roommates.
- **Householder** refers to the person (or one of the people) in whose name a housing unit is owned, rented, or maintained. If the house is owned or rented jointly by a married couple, the householder may be either the husband or the wife.
- **Marital status** includes the following categories: never married, married, separated, widowed, and divorced. For the purpose of this report, the term “unmarried” includes never-married, widowed, and divorced.

Figure 5-1.
Households by Type: 1970 to 2000

(Percent distribution)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March: 1970 to 2000.

Population Survey.¹ The decline in married-couple families with children has been especially evident, falling from 40 percent of all households in 1970 to 24 percent in 2000. At the same time, the share of married couples without children remained relatively stable, accounting for 30 percent of all households in 1970 and 29 percent in 2000. However, the percentage of family households with no spouse present grew significantly, rising from 11 percent to 16 percent.

People living alone swelled from only 17 percent of all households in 1970 to 26 percent in 2000. Women living alone represented 67 percent of these households in 1970, but only 58 percent in 2000. Other nonfamily households, people who live with nonrelatives only, climbed from just 2 percent to nearly 6 percent of all households.

Cohabiting couples, people who lived with unmarried partners, represented almost 4 percent of all households in 2000.² However, this type of household may be classified as a family or a nonfamily household, depending on whether or not someone in the household is related to the householder. Two-fifths of unmarried-couple households included children under 18 years of age.

Households have decreased in size. Between 1970 and 2000, the share of households with five or more people dropped from 21 percent to 10 percent of all households, while those with only one or two members grew from 46 percent to 59 percent. In 2000, the average number of people per household was 2.62, compared with 3.14 in 1970.

The median age at first marriage³ is rising for both men and women.

Changes in fertility, marriage, and divorce have all contributed to declines in the size of the American

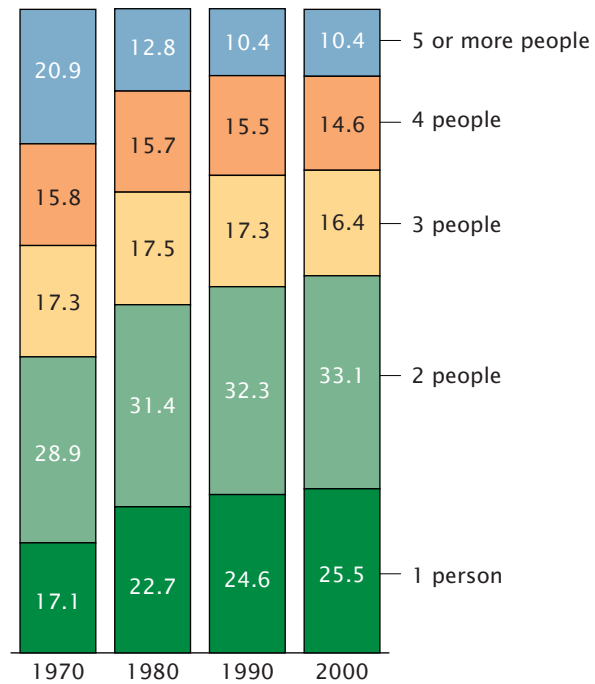
household. Between 1970 and 2000, both the proportion of births to unmarried women and the share of women who remain childless rose. Delayed marriage and increased divorce contributed to smaller household size. Better health status could increase the number of married couples, if both men and women lived longer.

One reason that nonfamily households have increased is postponement in marriage. In 1970, the median age at first marriage was 21 for women and 23 for men. By 2000, the median had risen to 25 for women and 27 for men. Delayed marriage has led to substantial increases in the percentage of young men and women who had never married.

The proportion of never-married women aged 20 to 24 doubled between 1970 and 2000, increasing from 36 percent to 73 percent. Among men this age, the share rose from 55 percent to 84 percent. The share of women aged 30 to 34 who were never married tripled, growing from just 6 percent to 22 percent. And the share of men this age who never married grew

Figure 5-2.
Households by Size: 1970 to 2000

(Percent distribution)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March: 1970 to 2000.

¹ Estimates in this chapter are calculated using sample data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), weighted by population controls based on the 1990 decennial census. The population universe for the March CPS is the civilian noninstitutional population plus armed forces living off base or with their families on post. As a result, these estimates will differ from population estimates computed from either the intercensal estimates program or the 2000 decennial census.

² This number may underrepresent the true number of cohabiting couples, because only householders and their partners are tabulated, not all unmarried couples within the household. Also, respondents may be reluctant to classify themselves as such in a personal interview situation.

³ Median age at first marriage in this report is calculated indirectly by estimating the proportion of young people who will marry during their lifetime, calculating one-half of this proportion, and determining the age (at the time of the survey) by interpolation of people at this half-way mark. It does not represent the actual median age of the population who married during the year.

from 9 percent to 30 percent. However, the vast majority of men and women do marry. By age 35, about 74 percent of men and women had been married. And by 65, 95 percent had been.

Differences in marriage and divorce patterns by age and sex translate into very different living arrangements. In 2000, 56 percent of men aged 18 to 24 lived at home with one or both parents. Although women typically marry at younger ages, a sizable proportion of women this age (43 percent) also lived at home with at least one parent. However, marriage is the modal type of living arrangement for people aged 25 to 34. In 2000, 50 percent of men and 57 percent of women this age were married and living with their spouse.

Interesting differences in living arrangements also occur among older adults. Among people aged 75 and older in 2000, men are more likely to live with a spouse than women, 67 percent compared with 29 percent. Forty-nine percent of women in this age group were living alone, while only 21 percent of men were.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2000* by Jason Fields.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site (www.census.gov). Click on "H" and select "Households" or "M" and select "Marital status."
- Contact the Fertility and Family Statistics Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2465 or e-mail pop@census.gov.
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.