

Trends in Premarital Childbearing

Special Studies

1930 to
1994

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Introduction

One of the most closely watched indicators of fertility over the past 30 years is the proportion of births occurring outside of marriage. Postponement of marriages among never-married women in pursuit of higher education and career development, along with increasing numbers of cohabiting relationships, have exposed women to greater risk of premaritally conceived births than in earlier years.

Premarital childbearing among women has been on the rise not only among teenage women but also among older women for the last two decades, only recently leveling off in the mid-1990s¹. As a result, the issue of premarital childbearing among women of all ages has gained prominence as a national concern not unique to teenagers. Over the past decades, being unmarried and having a baby has undergone changing levels of acceptance by various social institutions, such as families, schools, and public and private organizations. Prenatal and postnatal classes offered to teenage women in schools and the availability of federal welfare programs such as the "Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children" which benefit many unwed pregnant women are a few examples of concerns over out-of-wedlock childbearing and efforts to look at the issue from the viewpoint of mothers' and their children's health and well being.

This report examines trends from 1930 to 1994 in the marital status of U.S. women at the time of their first birth. It presents

historical data on how quickly women marry after having an out-of-wedlock birth and identifies the characteristics associated with the likelihood of premaritally pregnant women marrying before the birth of their first child. First births were chosen for analysis as their timing often sets the tempo of future childbearing in terms of

Definitions and Data Restrictions

Three categories of births are identified in this report: (1) premarital births—births occurring to women before the mother's first marriage, (2) premaritally conceived births—births occurring within 7 months after the mother's first marriage; (3) and post-maritally conceived births—births occurring 8 or more months after the mother's first marriage. Even though premarital births are also premaritally conceived births, they are excluded from the second category which designates those births occurring to women while married. Pregnancy outcomes in this paper refer only to those conceptions ending in live births. Information on conceptions ending in stillbirths, miscarriages, or abortions are not available from these surveys.

Fertility and marital data used to construct these indicators were obtained for all women 15 to 99 years old in 1980 but were collected only for women 15 to 65 years old in the 1995 survey. In order to avoid significant omissions in this analysis of older women through mortality or age restrictions in the different surveys, the data were generally limited to first births occurring after 1930 and to women having their first birth under age 30.

Current Population Reports

By Amara Bachu

¹ S.J. Ventura, J.A. Martin, S.C. Curtin and T.J. Mathews. *Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1996*, Monthly Vital Statistics Report, 46:11, Table 18. Hyattsville, Md: National Center for Health Statistics, 1998.

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numbers of children eventually born. It also signals a fundamental change from nonparent to parent roles and determines much of the social and health circumstances that both mother and child experience for many years, especially among teenage women.

Today, first births constitute almost 6 out of 10 births to women under age 24; regardless of the birth order of the child, a similar proportion of all births to women this age are also born out-of-wedlock.² Three categories of births are used in this report: (1) premarital, (2) premaritally conceived and (3) post-maritally conceived births. Data to produce the historical series on premarital childbearing from the 1930s to the present were obtained from fertility and marital history supplements to the June 1980 and 1995 Current Population Survey (CPS)³. The month and year of births and marital events from these surveys were used to develop the estimates of whether first births occurred before or after first marriage.⁴

² S.J. Ventura, S.C. Curtin and T.J. Mathews. *Teenage Births in the United States: National and State Trends, 1990-96*, National Vital Statistics System. Hyattsville, Md: National Center for Health Statistics, 1998.

³ Since these data are from surveys, they may not accurately reflect past fertility events occurring decades before the interview date due to the respondent's inability to recall events and the subsequent mortality and migration of women after a birth has occurred. These data only reflect the experiences of women who are living at the time of the survey. To the extent that the experiences of the deceased or migrants who left the United States are different from the surveyed population, the estimates are biased. In addition, women who are still in their childbearing years also have incomplete marital histories which would affect the analysis of estimates of eventual marriages to women with out-of-wedlock first births which would occur after the date of the survey.

⁴ To avoid misreading fertility trends because of the inclusion of births to immigrant women which occurred when they lived outside of the United States, first birth data from the June 1995 CPS in this report were limited to women who were living in the United States at the time of their child's birth. See M. O'Connell and L. Miller, "Whose Vital Events are They? The Effect of Immigration on the Estimation of Fertility and Marital History from Retrospective Survey," *Journal of Economic and Social Measurement*, 20(1994):137-158.

Table 1.
Marital Status of Women 15 to 29 Years Old at First Birth, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1930-34 to 1990-1994

Period of first birth	Number of first births (In thousands) (1)	Percent of first births			Percent of premaritally pregnant women marrying before the birth of their first child ¹ (5)
		Premarital birth (2)	Premaritally conceived birth (3)	Post-maritally conceived birth (4)	
ALL WOMEN					
1990-94	6,324	40.5	12.3	47.2	23.3
1985-89	6,364	32.7	10.7	56.5	24.7
1980-84	6,842	29.6	12.3	58.1	29.4
1975-79	6,626	25.7	12.0	62.2	31.8
1970-74	6,438	18.0	17.1	64.8	48.7
1965-69	5,929	15.1	18.0	66.9	54.4
1960-64	5,507	10.3	15.5	74.3	60.0
1955-59	5,173	10.0	10.9	79.1	52.3
1950-54	5,004	7.9	9.3	82.8	53.9
1945-49	4,971	7.6	7.9	84.6	50.9
1940-44	3,982	7.0	7.5	85.5	51.8
1935-39	3,036	8.5	9.0	82.6	51.4
1930-34	2,279	8.2	9.5	82.2	53.6
RACE					
<i>White</i>					
1990-94	4,994	32.4	12.9	54.6	28.5
1985-89	5,089	24.6	12.0	63.4	32.8
1980-84	5,332	21.3	13.7	65.0	39.1
1975-79	5,440	18.3	12.9	68.9	40.1
1970-74	5,376	11.1	17.6	71.4	61.3
1965-69	5,001	8.8	18.0	73.2	67.1
1960-64	4,774	6.8	14.2	79.0	67.6
1955-59	4,494	6.0	10.4	83.6	63.4
1950-54	4,419	5.0	8.6	86.5	63.4
1945-49	4,473	5.1	6.7	88.2	56.6
1940-44	3,592	5.0	6.3	88.6	55.9
1935-39	2,748	5.6	8.7	85.7	60.6
1930-34	2,037	5.9	9.2	84.9	61.0
<i>Black</i>					
1990-94	1,016	76.9	8.7	14.4	10.2
1985-89	1,007	73.3	4.9	21.8	6.3
1980-84	1,072	71.2	5.6	23.2	7.3
1975-79	981	67.4	6.5	26.1	8.8
1970-74	905	59.0	14.5	26.5	19.7
1965-69	815	53.6	18.4	28.0	25.6
1960-64	635	36.1	24.1	39.8	40.1
1955-59	587	40.9	16.0	43.1	28.1
1950-54	516	32.6	14.0	53.5	30.0
1945-49	428	32.2	18.9	48.8	37.0
1940-44	342	27.5	19.0	53.5	40.9
1935-39	261	37.9	11.9	50.2	23.8
1930-34	216	31.0	11.6	57.4	27.2
HISPANIC ORIGIN²					
<i>Hispanic</i>					
1990-94	957	40.2	14.2	45.6	26.1
1985-89	724	36.0	12.0	52.0	25.0
1980-84	632	36.7	9.8	53.5	21.1
1975-79	589	32.6	12.2	55.2	27.2
1970-74	442	29.6	16.1	54.3	35.2
1965-69	293	17.9	10.6	71.5	37.2
<i>Non-Hispanic</i>					
1990-94	5,367	40.5	11.9	47.5	22.7
1985-89	5,640	32.3	10.6	57.1	24.7
1980-84	6,210	28.9	12.6	58.5	30.4
1975-79	6,037	25.1	12.0	62.9	32.3
1970-74	6,055	19.5	14.9	65.6	43.3
1965-69	5,214	17.2	16.9	65.9	49.6

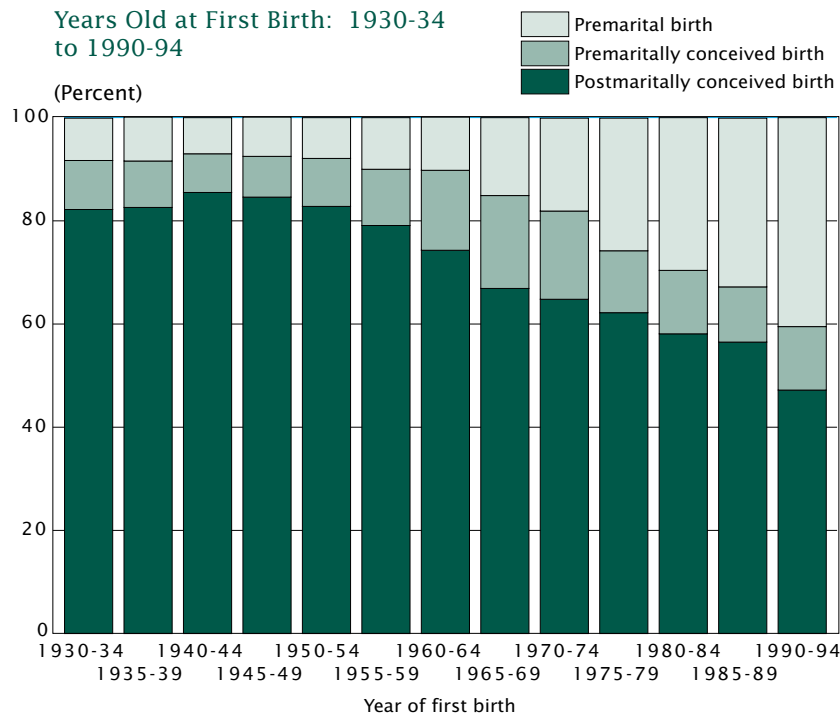
Note: Data for 1975-79 to 1990-94 are based on the June 1995 Current Population Survey and are shown for first births to women residing in the United States at the time of their first child's birth. Data for 1930-34 to 1970-74, are based on the June 1980 Current Population Survey, and are for all women regardless of their place of residence at the time of the first birth. Data for Hispanics are from the June 1995 CPS and are for first births to women residing in the United States at the time of their child's birth.

¹ Column 5=[column 3/(column 2+ column 3)]*100

² People of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 1980 and 1995, Current Population Surveys.

Figure 1.
Marital Status of Women 15 to 29
Years Old at First Birth: 1930-34
to 1990-94



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 1980 and 1995, Current Population Surveys.

Premarital childbearing since the 1930s

One in six first births to women 15 to 29 years old in 1930-34 was either premaritally born or conceived.⁵ This proportion increased to one in two births in 1990-94 (Table 1). The principal component of the increase in this proportion was the increase in the proportion of premarital births. In the early 1930s, the proportion of births which were either premaritally born or premaritally conceived births were not significantly different from each other. A sharp increase in the proportion of first births born premaritally occurred between the early 1930s and the early 1990s (8 percent to 41 percent). A comparatively smaller increase in the premaritally conceived component (from 10 percent to 12 percent) was recorded for this entire period.

⁵ The statistics shown for 5-year periods in this report represent the average for the entire specified period. For example, the proportion for the period 1930-34 includes all calendar years from 1930 through 1934.

Figure 1 clearly shows the changing family circumstances experienced by first-born children in the United States since the 1930s. During the Great Depression, most of these first-born children were conceived postmaritally (about 82 percent) compared to 47 percent of first births in the 1990s.

What do these statistics tell us about the changing likelihood that premaritally pregnant women will marry before the birth of their first child? The last column in Table 1 tracks the propensity of couples to marry before the birth of a premaritally conceived child. It shows that between the 1930s and 1960s, about 50 percent to 60 percent of women with a premaritally conceived birth married before their child was born. Because some cohabiting couples may have planned to marry even before the child was conceived, not all of these marriages were "forced or hurried" by a premarital conception.

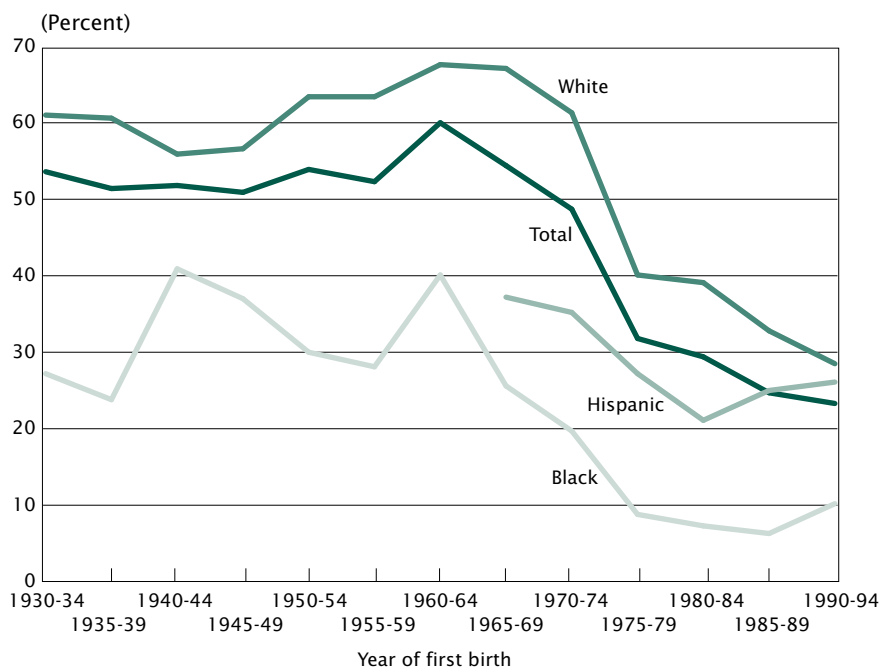
A major decline in this statistic occurred between 1960-64 and 1980-84—a period of great social change among young people in the United States. During this period, the availability of very effective birth control measures increased, educational attainment improved, and the abortion laws were relaxed.⁶ Despite these changes which one would associate with declines in out-of-wedlock childbearing, these decades were also characterized by delays in first marriage and increases in the sexual activity of single women, especially teenagers.⁷

Over this 20-year period, the proportion of premaritally pregnant women marrying before the child's birth fell by half from 60 percent in the early 1960s to 29 percent in the early 1980s. Declines in the propensity to marry to avoid an out-of-wedlock birth by this generation of women may also reflect the questionable stability of a forced marriage, especially if the father of the child may not be able to maintain the family after the marriage. The declines noted in the proportion of women marrying before the birth of their premaritally conceived child may also reflect the opinion of some women that they may be better off in the long run by relying more on the support of their parents and relatives for financial and emotional assistance than by entering a

⁶ Current estimates prepared by Alan Guttmacher Institute indicate that about one-half of abortions obtained by women 15 to 44 years old in 1994-95 were to unmarried women. It is not known, however, what proportion of unmarried women having an abortion would have married before their child's birth in the absence of legal provisions for an abortion. See S. Henshaw and K. Kost, "Abortion Patients in 1994-95: Characteristics and Contraceptive Use," *Family Planning Perspectives*, 28(1996): 140-147.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 450, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1990*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1991, Table B; S. L. Hofferth, J. R. Kahn and W. Baldwin, "Premarital Sexual Activity Among U.S. Teenage Women Over the Past Three Decades," *Family Planning Perspectives*, 19(1987):46-53.

Figure 2.
Premaritally Pregnant Women 15 to 29 Years
Old Marrying Before the Birth of Their First
Child, by Race: 1930-34 to 1990-94



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 1980 and 1995, Current Population Surveys.

potentially unstable marriage undertaken solely to prevent an out-of-wedlock birth.

Premarital childbearing by race and Hispanic origin⁸

Significant differences between White women (45 percent) and Black women (86 percent) in the early 1990s are found in the proportion of first births either premaritally born or conceived. Hispanic women were intermediate in terms of the proportion of first births either premaritally born or conceived (54 percent) during the same period. For Black women 15 to 29 years old, the percentage of first births either born or conceived before first marriage doubled from 43 percent during the 1930-34 period to 86 percent

⁸ Hispanics may be of any race. Because the characteristics of race and Hispanic origin are not mutually exclusive, comparisons of estimates for racial categories with estimates for Hispanics are not recommended.

during the 1990-94 period (Table 1). Only 1 in 10 Black women who had a premaritally conceived birth in 1990-94 was married by the time of the child's birth compared with one-quarter of Black women with premaritally conceived first births in the 1930s (Figure 2). Since the 1950s, the proportion of premaritally pregnant Black women who married before their child's birth peaked around 40 percent in the early 1960s with sharp drops occurring in the ensuing periods.

The proportion of White women under age 30 who had either a premarital or premaritally conceived first birth tripled from 15 percent in the early 1930s to 45 percent in the early 1990s (Table 1). Between the periods 1930-34 and 1990-94, the premarital birth component increased from 6 percent to 32 percent while the premaritally conceived birth component also increased but only from 9 percent to 13 percent.

Unlike Black women who consistently had more premarital than premaritally conceived births, a transitional period in marriage propensities is noted for White women. After a long period of marriage propensities recorded at the 60 percent level, declines began to occur during the 1970s, falling to 29 percent by 1990-94. Figure 2 illustrates that for all periods under study, the proportion of women with a premaritally conceived first birth who married before their child was born was consistently less for Black women than for White women.

The percent of first births either premaritally born or conceived by Hispanic women also increased — from 29 percent in 1965-69 to 54 percent in 1990-94 (Table 1). Twenty-six percent of Hispanic women who had premaritally conceived first births in 1990-94 married before their child was born, a rate which was not statistically different from the proportion observed for non-Hispanic women.⁹

Cohabitation status of the woman at the time of her pregnancy may affect differences in marriage propensities by race and ethnic origin. Analysis of data from two surveys, the National Survey of Families and Households and the New York Fertility, Employment, and Migration Survey, found that cohabitation hastened the transition to marriage among premaritally pregnant White women, had no effect among Black women, and had a strong negative effect among Puerto Rican women.¹⁰

⁹ Data for Hispanics are shown from the June 1995 CPS only for periods from the mid-1960s. Since a significant proportion of births to Hispanics living in the United States at the time of the survey may have occurred when they lived outside the United States, data in this report are shown only for Hispanics who had their first birth in the United States immigration data were not available from the June 1980 CPS.

¹⁰ W. Manning and N. Landale. "Racial and Ethnic Differences in the Role of Cohabitation in Premarital Childbearing," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58(1996):63-67.

Table 2.
Marital Status of Women 15 to 19 Years Old at First Birth, by Race:
1930-34 to 1990-94

Period of first birth	Number of first births (In thousands) (1)	Percent of first births			Percent of premaritally pregnant women marrying before the birth of their first child ¹ (5)
		Premarital birth (2)	Premaritally conceived birth (3)	Post-maritally conceived birth (4)	
ALL WOMEN					
1990-94	1,873	75.2	13.8	11.0	15.5
1985-89	1,750	65.7	18.1	16.2	21.6
1980-84	2,046	56.5	19.2	24.3	25.4
1975-79	2,142	47.9	22.0	30.1	31.5
1970-74	2,224	34.8	30.6	34.6	46.8
1965-69	2,022	29.2	27.5	43.3	48.6
1960-64	1,881	18.3	26.7	55.0	59.3
1955-59	1,644	18.5	20.0	61.6	51.9
1950-54	1,441	16.0	19.1	64.9	54.3
1945-49	1,217	16.3	15.5	68.2	48.8
1940-44	1,041	15.1	13.2	71.8	46.6
1935-39	861	17.4	15.3	67.2	46.8
1930-34	754	14.5	13.8	71.8	48.8
RACE					
<i>White</i>					
1990-94	1,305	68.9	16.5	14.6	19.3
1985-89	1,220	55.6	24.0	20.4	30.2
1980-84	1,466	45.4	25.1	29.5	35.6
1975-79	1,564	36.6	26.9	36.5	42.4
1970-74	1,678	22.8	36.1	41.2	61.3
1965-69	1,519	17.5	30.1	52.4	63.2
1960-64	1,530	11.6	26.3	62.1	69.4
1955-59	1,327	10.0	21.0	69.0	67.7
1950-54	1,194	10.1	19.2	70.6	65.5
1945-49	981	10.1	13.8	76.1	57.7
1940-44	842	10.5	11.2	78.3	51.6
1935-39	720	11.2	15.5	73.2	58.1
1930-34	622	9.9	14.6	75.4	59.6
<i>Black</i>					
1990-94	466	91.8	6.6	1.6	6.7
1985-89	460	92.0	3.6	4.4	3.8
1980-84	516	86.0	3.2	10.8	3.6
1975-79	503	85.1	6.5	8.4	7.1
1970-74	510	74.2	13.4	12.3	15.3
1965-69	474	67.2	19.8	13.0	22.8
1960-64	331	49.1	27.6	23.2	36.0
1955-59	293	57.1	15.8	27.1	21.7
1950-54	226	46.9	16.3	36.8	25.8
1945-49	210	44.6	23.5	31.9	34.5
1940-44	181	35.9	20.7	43.4	36.6
1935-39	131	51.9	13.9	34.2	21.1
1930-34	126	37.0	10.3	52.7	21.8
HISPANIC ORIGIN²					
<i>Hispanic</i>					
1990-94	311	66.6	14.3	19.1	17.7
1985-89	264	58.8	17.4	23.7	22.8
1980-84	226	65.2	8.7	26.0	11.8
1975-79	236	41.3	19.3	39.4	31.8
1970-74	170	41.4	24.8	33.8	37.5
1965-69	113	26.2	8.1	65.7	23.6
<i>Non-Hispanic</i>					
1990-94	1,562	76.9	13.7	9.4	15.1
1985-89	1,486	66.9	18.3	14.9	21.5
1980-84	1,820	55.4	20.5	24.1	27.0
1975-79	1,906	48.7	22.3	28.9	31.4
1970-74	1,964	38.2	27.8	34.0	42.1
1965-69	1,786	34.0	28.2	37.7	45.3

Note: Data for 1975-79 to 1990-94 are based on the June 1995 Current Population Survey and are shown for first births to women residing in the United States at the time of their first child's birth. Data for 1930-34 to 1970-74 are based on June 1980 Current Population Survey and are for all women regardless of their place of residence at the time of the first birth. Data for Hispanics are from the June 1995 CPS and are for first births to women residing in the United States at the time of their child's birth.

¹ Column 5=[Column 3/(column 2 + column 3)]*100

² Hispanics may be of any race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 1980 and 1995 Current Population Surveys.

Premarital childbearing among teenagers

Premarital childbearing among teenagers has always been of concern to policy makers because of the emotional and economic vulnerability of young women and the resulting consequences for their infant children. The total proportion of first births which were either premaritally born or premaritally conceived to women 15 to 19 years old increased from 28 percent in the early 1930s to 89 percent in the early 1990s (Table 2). The proportion of premaritally conceived teen births which occurred within marriage peaked at about 59 percent in 1960-64. By 1990-94, only 16 percent of premaritally pregnant teen women married before their first birth.

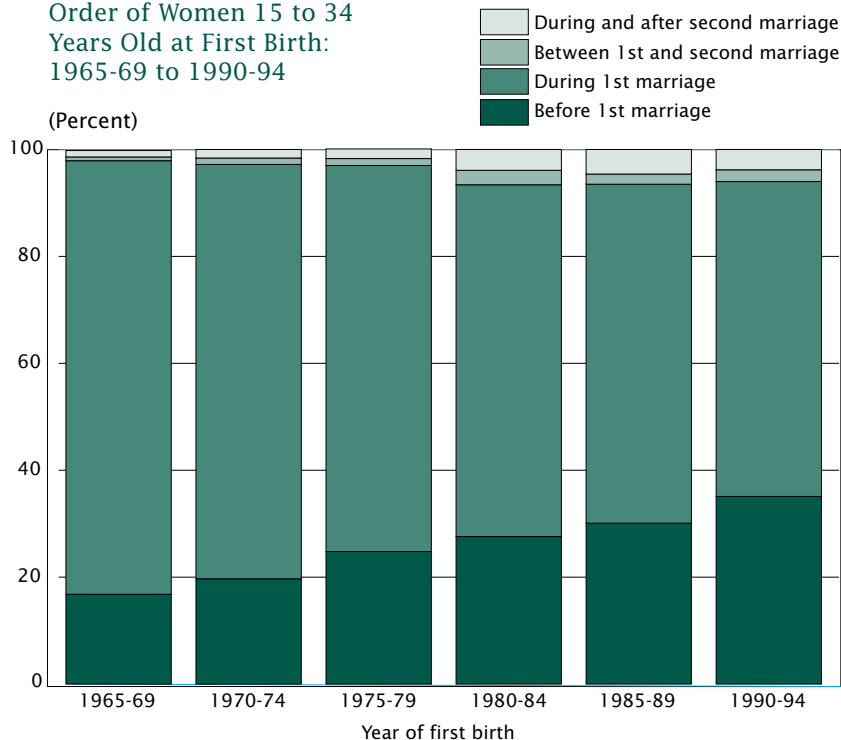
In 1990-94, about 85 percent of all first births to White women age 15 to 19 were either premaritally born or premaritally conceived, compared with 25 percent during 1930-34. About one in five premaritally pregnant White teens married before their child's birth in 1990-94 compared with about three in five in 1930-34. In the early 1990s, 98 percent of all first births to Black teenage women were either premaritally born or premaritally conceived, double the proportion (47 percent) in 1930-34. Only 1 out of every 15 premaritally pregnant Black teens married before their first birth.

For Hispanic teenage women in 1990-94, about 81 percent of first births were either premaritally born or premaritally conceived, compared with 34 percent in 1965-69. About 18 percent of premaritally pregnant Hispanic teenagers married before their child's birth.

Fertility before and after first marriage

Changes in the age at first marriage, the likelihood of marital dissolution, and remarriage have

Figure 3.
Marital Status and Marriage
Order of Women 15 to 34
Years Old at First Birth:
1965-69 to 1990-94



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 1995 Current Population Survey.

altered the potential periods in a woman's life when she is likely to experience a first birth. Postponements in first marriages, delays in childbearing within first marriage, and increased marital dissolution increase the likelihood that more births will occur outside the woman's first marriage.

Figure 3 illustrates the changing distribution of first births from the late 1960s to the early 1990s by marital status and marriage order. For comparative purposes and to include as many births as possible, data have been limited to women having their first birth between ages 15 and 34 in the United States.¹¹ First births are categorized by whether the birth occurred: (1) before the first marriage (premarital birth); (2) during the

first marriage (up to and including the month of termination of the marriage by divorce or widowhood); (3) between the first and second marriage (if a second marriage occurred); (4) during the second marriage; or (5) after the second marriage ended. Births, then, are defined not by any legal status but by the marital interval in which the birth occurred.¹²

In the early 1990s, 35 percent of all first births occurred before first marriage, up from 17 percent in the late 1960s (Table 3). Although the majority of first births in the 1990s (59 percent) still occurred during the woman's first marriage, this proportion was still significantly lower than it was in the

¹² For example, divorced women who conceived a child within marriage but gave birth after their divorce date are classified as having a "marital" birth on her child's birth certificate. Data in Table 2, however, only illustrate the timing of the birth within a woman's marital career.

late 1960s (81 percent). Childbearing between first and second marriages accounted for only 2 percent of all first births occurring in the early 1990s compared with 1 percent for the late 1960s. About 4 percent of first births in 1990-94 occurred during or after the woman's second marriage—up from 1 percent in 1965-69.

While most first births continue to occur before or during first marriage, an increase has occurred since the late 1960s— from 1.9 percent in 1965-69 to 6 percent in 1990-94— in childbearing after first marriage. This increase in first births after first marriage occurred among both White women and Black women.

Marriage after an out-of-wedlock birth

After having an out-of-wedlock birth, how rapidly do women marry? Within a year of their first birth, 13 percent of women who had a premarital birth in the period 1985-89 were married compared with 16 percent in the period 1965-69; however, these differences are not significant (Figure 4). Within 5 years of their first birth, 39 percent of the women in the late 1980s premarital birth cohort had married, compared with 56 percent of the women in the late 1960s premarital birth cohort. These data suggest that today, not only are women less likely to marry when premaritally pregnant, they are also less likely to marry even after the birth of their child.

Recent data from the National Survey of Families and Households indicate that children born out of wedlock do not necessarily grow up in a single-parent family. Manning estimates that the proportion of children born out-of-wedlock but who are born into cohabiting families has increased

¹¹ Vital Statistics data for 1996 indicate that 94 percent of first births occurred to women under 35 years old. See Table 2 of the source cited in footnote 1.

Table 3.
Marital Status and Marriage Order of Women 15 to 34
Years Old at First Birth, by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin:
1965-69 to 1990-94

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Period of first birth					
	1990-94	1985-89	1980-84	1975-79	1970-74	1965-69
ALL WOMEN						
15 to 34 Years						
Number of births	7,484	7,234	7,559	7,033	6,797	5,689
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Before first marriage	35.1	30.1	27.6	24.8	19.7	16.8
During first marriage	58.9	63.4	65.8	72.2	77.5	81.1
Between first and second marriage	2.2	1.9	2.7	1.3	1.2	0.7
During second marriage	3.7	4.5	3.9	1.7	1.5	1.2
After second marriage	0.1	0.1	-	0.1	0.1	-
RACE						
<i>White</i>						
15 to 34 years						
Number of births	5,999	5,868	6,132	5,790	5,755	4,809
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Before first marriage	27.6	22.5	19.8	17.4	13.9	10.8
During first marriage	65.7	70.2	72.8	79.3	83.2	87.0
Between first and second marriage	2.2	1.9	2.8	1.1	1.1	0.8
During second marriage	4.4	5.3	4.6	2.0	1.7	1.4
After second marriage	0.1	0.1	-	0.1	0.1	0.1
<i>Black</i>						
15 to 34 years						
Number of births	1,090	1,069	1,146	1,024	862	743
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Before first marriage	73.5	71.7	68.8	66.4	56.0	55.8
During first marriage	23.1	25.0	28.2	31.3	41.5	43.5
Between first and second marriage	2.6	2.6	2.1	2.2	2.0	0.1
During second marriage	0.7	0.5	0.9	0.1	0.5	0.6
After second marriage	-	0.2	-	-	-	-
HISPANIC ORIGIN¹						
<i>Hispanic</i>						
15 to 34 years						
Number of births	1,040	753	685	621	472	305
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Before first marriage	37.6	34.8	36.7	32.0	29.8	17.7
During first marriage	57.7	61.6	60.9	66.0	69.0	79.2
Between first and second marriage	3.1	1.3	2.0	1.9	1.3	2.2
During second marriage	1.6	2.4	0.4	-	-	-
After second marriage	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Non-Hispanic</i>						
15 to 34 years						
Number of births	6,444	6,481	6,874	6,412	6,326	5,383
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Before first marriage	34.6	29.6	26.7	24.0	18.9	16.8
During first marriage	59.1	63.6	66.3	72.7	78.1	81.2
Between first and second marriage	2.1	2.0	2.8	1.3	1.2	0.7
During second marriage	4.0	4.8	4.3	1.9	1.6	1.3
After second marriage	0.1	0.1	-	0.1	0.1	-

Note: Limited to women residing in the United States at the time of their first child's birth.

- Represents zero or rounds to zero.

¹ Hispanics may be of any race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 1995 Current Population Survey.

from 27 percent in the early 1980s to 41 percent in the 1990s.¹³ This suggests that the levels of single parenthood are dramatically

¹³ W. Manning, "Race and Ethnic Differences in Childbearing Among Cohabitators and Union Stability." Paper presented at the Research Conference on the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth, October 13-14, 1998, Hyattsville, Maryland.

reduced when cohabitation is taken into account. About 65 percent of Hispanic children born outside marriage are born into two-parent cohabiting unions, compared with 57 percent for White women and 26 percent for Black women. Increases in the proportion of women having premarital births and delays in first marriage after

their first birth indicate that although many women experience a considerable portion of their early years of childbearing as unmarried mothers, they do not necessarily live apart from the father of their child.

Who marries before the birth of a premaritally conceived child?

The previous sections have shown that an important factor in understanding recent increases in the proportion of first births that are premaritally born is the likelihood of a premaritally pregnant woman marrying before her child's birth, once the decision has been made to carry the pregnancy to term.

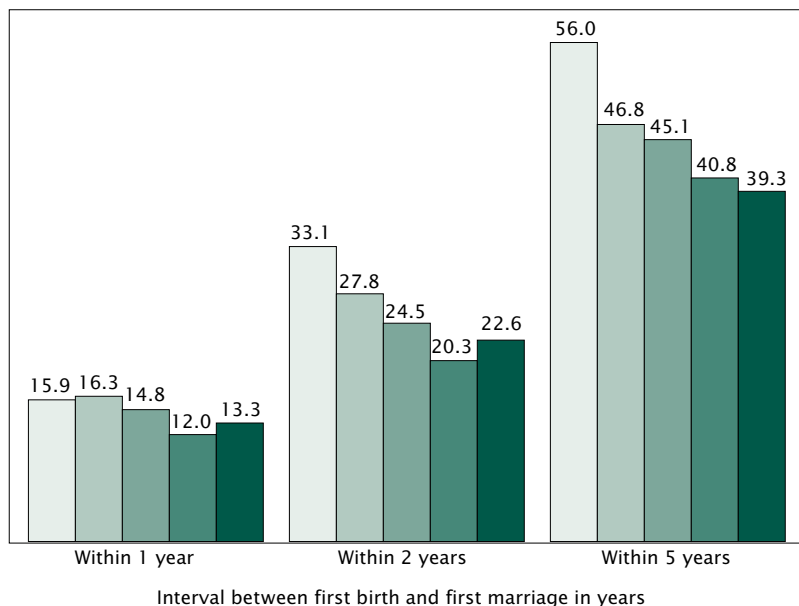
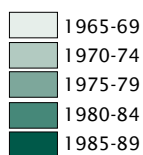
Which premaritally pregnant women are more likely to have married before their child's birth? Table 4 presents a demographic profile of women 15 to 44 years who had their first birth in the most recent period, 1990-94, by the various nonmarital and marital outcomes of these births. Because the June 1995 CPS contains information about the women only at the time of the survey, fertility distributions are not analyzed for births in earlier time periods, as current socioeconomic characteristics may not accurately represent the circumstances of these women at the time of their first birth.¹⁴

Also shown in Table 4 is the result of a logistic regression which investigates the extent to which the listed explanatory variables are associated with the likelihood of a premaritally pregnant woman having married before the birth of

¹⁴ Basic economic characteristics such as family income and labor force characteristics are not shown, as these factors are likely to be heavily influenced by the birth outcome (e.g., married couples generally have higher incomes than single parent families) and therefore have a dubious causative influence on the analysis. Other characteristics, such as educational attainment, may also be temporarily affected by periods of childbearing, but do not reverse their levels once attained.

Figure 4.
Cumulative Percent of Women 15 to 34
Years Old Who Subsequently Married After
Having Their First Birth Out-of-Wedlock

(Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 1995 Current Population Survey.

her child. This supporting analysis was used to better clarify these relationships as many of the variables in the table are related to each other and may mask each other's independent associations with the likelihood of having married. Column (6) labeled "odds ratio" simply shows the odds of having married before a premaritally conceived child is born relative to some other reference category or characteristic.¹⁵

Overall, about one-quarter of all women 15 to 44 years old who had a premaritally conceived birth in 1990-94 married before their child was born. Teenage women who were premaritally pregnant were less likely than older women to marry before the birth of their

child. Both the simple proportion and logistic regression results confirm that, compared to women in their early twenties, women in their early thirties were most likely to marry. It is possible that these older women may have been cohabiting with their partner with the intention of marrying their partner or perhaps have more established and stable relationships which are more likely to lead to marriage when pregnancy occurs. Since cohabitation questions are not used in CPS supplements, it cannot be said if the pregnancy is the precipitating event of a marriage or the planned prelude.

Non-Hispanic Black women are significantly less likely to marry when premaritally pregnant than non-Hispanic White women.¹⁶

¹⁵ An odds ratio of 1.0 for a characteristic means that a woman with this characteristic is as likely to marry as a woman with the specified reference characteristic. Ratios under or over 1.0 indicate that a woman is less likely or more likely to marry, respectively. The estimated logistic regression is available on request.

¹⁶ The race groups and Hispanic groups in Table 4 are mutually exclusive in order to perform the logistic regression. Race and Hispanic groups in previous tables and figures are not mutually exclusive, that is, Hispanics may be of any race.

Premaritally pregnant women who are not high school graduates are less likely to marry, compared with women who were high school graduates. Results from the regression analysis also indicate that women who live in the Midwest were less likely to have married than women in the South when premaritally pregnant.

Summary

The marital status of American women at the time of their first births has significantly changed since the 1930s. In the early 1930s, one in six first births to women under age 30 was conceived or born before marriage, compared with one in two births in the early 1990s. The proportion of first births among teenage women resulting from premarital conceptions tripled from 28 percent in 1930-34 to 89 percent in 1990-94. This proportion increased more as a result of an increase in the proportion of births that were premaritally born than an increase in the proportion of births that were premaritally conceived.

Today, a smaller proportion of women marry after having a first birth out-of-wedlock than in the 1960s. Among women who had a birth in the late 1980s, about 39 percent married within 5 years of the child's birth, compared with 56 percent of women who had a premarital first birth in the late 1960s.

Teenage women, non-Hispanic Black women, women with less than high school education, and women who live in the Midwest are less likely to marry when premaritally pregnant with their first births than are other women. However, premarital childbearing today is not an isolated phenomenon but occurs and has increased throughout all sociodemographic segments of women in the United States.

Table 4.
Marital Status of Women 15 to 44 Years Old at First Birth, by Selected Characteristics: 1990-94
 (Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Number of first birth (In thousands) (1)	Percent of first births			Percent of premaritally pregnant women marrying before the birth of their first child ¹ (5)	Odds ratio ² (6)
		Premarital birth (2)	Premaritally conceived birth (3)	Post-maritally conceived (4)		
ALL WOMEN	7,859	33.6	11.0	55.3	24.7	(X)
<i>Age At First Birth</i>						
15 to 19 years	1,873	75.2	13.8	11.0	15.5	0.518 *
20 to 24 years	2,492	36.9	15.1	48.0	29.0	...
25 to 29 years	1,959	11.8	7.2	81.0	37.9	1.562
30 to 34 years	1,159	5.6	7.0	87.4	55.6	2.995 *
35 to 44 years	376	5.2	2.5	92.3	32.5	0.944
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i> ³						
Non-Hispanic White	5,420	24.8	10.9	64.3	30.5	...
Non-Hispanic Black	1,104	71.9	8.2	19.9	10.2	0.247 *
Non-Hispanic Other races	39	72.2	12.4	15.4	14.7	0.486
Hispanic	1,296	36.7	14.1	49.3	27.8	0.956
<i>Years Of School Completed</i>						
Not a high school graduate	1,304	63.6	10.5	25.9	14.2	0.535 *
High school graduate (includes GED)	2,612	38.9	14.0	47.1	26.5	...
Some college, no degree, or associate degree	2,192	30.8	12.2	56.9	28.4	1.031
Bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree	1,751	7.0	5.6	87.4	44.4	1.539
<i>Citizenship Status</i>						
Native born	6,954	34.3	10.9	54.9	24.1	...
Naturalized citizen	168	25.3	7.6	67.1	23.1	0.838
Not a U.S. citizen	738	29.5	13.5	57.0	31.4	1.541
<i>Metropolitan Residence</i>						
In central cities	2,521	42.5	10.7	46.8	20.1	0.876
Outside central cities	3,904	27.3	10.6	62.1	28.0	...
Nonmetropolitan	1,434	35.3	12.8	51.9	26.6	1.216
<i>Region Of Residence</i>						
Northeast	1,476	31.9	10.4	57.7	24.6	0.643
Midwest	1,632	35.8	9.6	54.6	21.1	0.556 *
South	2,823	34.4	11.7	53.9	25.4	...
West	1,928	32.0	11.8	56.2	26.9	0.660
<i>Regression Results</i>						
Number of observations (unweighted)						1708
Chi-square						207.737
Degrees of freedom						17

Note: Limited to women residing in the United States at the time of their first child's birth.

(X) Not applicable.

... Reference category.

* Statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level.

¹ Column 5=[column 3/(column 2 + column 3)]*100.

² Odds of marrying relative to the reference category.

³ Categories for race and Hispanic origin are mutually exclusive in this table.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 1995 Current Population Survey.

Source of the Data

Most estimates in this report come from data obtained in June 1980 and 1995 Current Population Surveys (CPS). The Census Bureau conducts the CPS every month, although this report uses only data from the June surveys.

Accuracy and Reliability of the Data

Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and meet Census Bureau standards for statistical significance. Nonsampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents

interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately answers are coded and classified. The Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process—including the overall design of surveys, testing the wording of questions, review of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports.

The CPS employs ratio estimation, whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but how it affects different variables in the survey is not precisely known. Moreover, biases may also be present when people who are missed in the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than the categories used in weighting (age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin). All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

For further information on statistical standards and the computation and use of standard errors, contact Martha L. Jones, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, at 301-457-4214 or on the Internet at Martha.L.Jones@ccmail.census.gov.

More Information

More information on the fertility characteristics of American women is available on the Internet (<http://www.census.gov>); search for fertility data by selecting "F" under the "Subjects A to Z" section on the home page, and then selecting "Fertility."

Definitions and explanations for the various concepts and characteristics shown in this report from the Current Population Survey are now available to users on the Internet.

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User Comments

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of users of its data and reports. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to:

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pop@census.gov

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