

Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 1996

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Household Economic Studies

P70-80

What's in This Report

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL MARITAL PATTERNS

Divorce has increased in recent birth cohorts.

MARITAL INDICATORS: 1996

Most adults have married only once.

Most people who had ever divorced are currently married.

Median age at widowhood is lower for Black and Hispanic women than for White non-Hispanic women.

First marriages which end in divorce last 7 to 8 years, on average.

Half of those who remarry after a divorce from a first marriage do so within about 3 years.

MARITAL EVENTS WITHIN THE LAST YEAR

Thirty-one percent of recently married women live with their own children, ages 1 to 17.

Recently separated and divorced women are more likely to be in poverty than men.

College graduates are more likely to marry and less likely to separate.

PROJECTIONS OF MARITAL EVENTS

Nearly everyone marries.

Nearly half of recent first marriages may end in divorce.

Most people remarry after divorcing from a first marriage.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Evolving patterns of marriage and divorce are at the core of studying changes in family composition and living arrangements. The timing of the age at entry into first marriage often reflects the period when people enter adulthood, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s or the economic prosperity of the post-World War II era. Changing views on the acceptability of cohabitation before marriage, both by the couples and their parents, may delay an eventual marriage or in some cases convince the couple not to marry at all. The likelihood of a couple separating or divorcing may also be influenced by changes in the way they confront and resolve personal issues as well as legislative trends in divorce laws that may make it easier to obtain a divorce than in earlier time periods.

Before any causal analysis can occur, it is first necessary to present basic measures of the incidence of marriage and divorce. The last comprehensive portrait from the Census Bureau of marriage and divorce patterns was published almost 10 years ago.¹ Annual reports on the marital status of people in the United States provide estimates of the numbers of married, separated, divorced, and widowed people,² but do not provide data on basic items such as the number of times people have

¹ Arthur J. Norton and Louisa F. Miller. *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the 1990s*. Current Population Reports, P23-180. U.S. Census Bureau: Washington, DC, 1992.

² Jason Fields. *America's Families and Living Arrangements: March 2000*. Current Population Reports, P20-537. U.S. Census Bureau: Washington, DC, 2001.

Current Population Reports

By Rose M. Kreider and Jason M. Fields

Demographic Programs

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been married and the likelihood of remarriage. These are important in understanding the growing complexity of life cycle transitions in current American society.

In addition, since the suspension of the collection of detailed information on marriage and divorce by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in 1996,³ no comprehensive data have been available annually on the characteristics of people who marry or divorce in the United States (about 2.4 million and 1.2 million couples, respectively, each year). Information on the characteristics of people who had recently been widowed or separated is also lacking, as there is no nationally collected and published information by either the Census Bureau or NCHS on these events.

To address these deficiencies, this report analyzes marriage and divorce patterns in the United States using retrospective marital history information collected in the second interview of the 1996 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).⁴ Data were collected from a nationally representative sample of 37,000 households for people 15 years and over about the number of times they had been married, how their marriages ended, and the month and year of each of these marital events (including date of last separation if divorced), for

³ Detailed data on marriages and divorces was last published by NCHS for 1990. The announcement of the suspension of this data collection was published in the Federal Register Notice, December 15, 1995 (Volume 60, Number 241, pp. 64437-64438).

⁴ Since the data used in this analysis are taken from retrospective surveys, they may not accurately reflect past marital events occurring decades before the interview date due to the respondent's inability to recall events and the subsequent mortality or emigration of people after the event has occurred. These data only reflect the experiences of the people 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 survey population, the estimates have bias.

Key Terms

Marital status. The marital status classification refers to the status at time of interview. "Married, spouse present," applies to husband and wife if both were living in the same household, even though one may be temporarily absent on business, vacation, on a visit, in a hospital, etc. "Married, spouse absent" relates to people who are separated due to marital problems, as well as husbands and wives who are living apart because one or the other was employed elsewhere, on duty with the Armed Forces, or any other reasons. "Divorced" indicates people who report that they have received a legal divorce decree and have not remarried. "Widowed" indicates that a person's last marriage ended in the death of their spouse. The term "never married" applies to those who have never been legally married, as well as to those whose marriages were annulled.

Marital history. A marital history was collected from each person in the household age 15 and over. There were 69,571 people in the sample, from approximately 37,000 households. Respondents answered questions about when they had been married, separated, divorced, and widowed, if they had experienced these events. Dates for the beginning and end of up to three marriages were collected: first marriage, second marriage, and most recent marriage, regardless of whether this was the third or later marriage. Since very few people marry more than three times, few events are missed by using this approach to data collection. Although questions were asked only of people age 15 and over, some people reported marital events as occurring before age 15.

Birth or marriage cohort. A cohort signifies a group of people born or married in a specified time period: for example, people born from 1925 through 1934.

Current age. Age at reference month — the month preceding the interview.

Median. The median is the value which divides a distribution in two equal parts; half of the cases falling below this value and half of the cases exceeding this value.

the first, second, and last marriage. Since less than 1 percent of adults have been married four or more times, few events are missed by using this approach.⁵

The first section of this report shows how generations of men and women born since the 1920s have

⁵ The estimates in this report are based on responses from a sample of the population. As with all surveys, estimates may vary from the actual (population) values because of sampling variation or other factors. All statements made in this report have undergone statistical testing and meet U.S. Census Bureau standards for statistical accuracy.

entered into and dissolved their marriages and how rapidly they have remarried. The second section develops a series of current marital indicators for men and women 15 years and over at the time of the survey in 1996. It provides us with answers to basic questions such as how many people have been married more than once and how long a first marriage lasts. The third section profiles the characteristics of people who experienced a marital event in the year prior to the survey and shows how many people who

have recently married, separated, divorced, or become widowed are employed, living in poverty, and own their homes. In the last section of the report, life table methodology is used to project the proportion of young people in 1996 who may experience particular marital events during their lifetime.

HISTORICAL MARITAL PATTERNS

A higher percentage of men and women in recent birth cohorts have ever divorced.

Because people born in a short, specified period of time (a birth cohort) experience similar historical circumstances as they move through the life cycle, it is useful to compare the marital patterns of different birth cohorts to track trends over time. There have been delays in marriage as well as increases in divorce during the time period covered in this report which starts with the 1925 to 1934 birth cohort who formed the forefront of adults who parented the post-war baby boom of 1946 to 1964.⁶ In Table 1, the 1945 to 1954 and 1955 to 1964 cohorts encompass the baby boom.

Since the youngest of the 1955 to 1964 birth cohort were age 32 in 1996, and most first marriages happen before age 30,⁷ this cohort is the most recent available cohort where delays in marriage are examined. The proportion of men ever married by age 25 dropped from 68 percent for the 1925 to 1934 birth cohort to 49 percent for the 1955 to 1964 birth cohort. For women the corresponding decline was from 84 percent to 63 percent.

⁶ The baby boom encompasses the period 1946 to 1964, characterized by high fertility and early entry into married life.

⁷ Jason Fields. *America's Families and Living Arrangements: March 2000*. Current Population Reports, P20-537. U.S. Census Bureau: Washington, DC, 2001.

There were also pronounced declines in the proportions ever married by age 30 from the 1925 to 1934 birth cohort to the 1955 to 1964 birth cohort: from 85 percent to 69 percent for men and from 92 percent to 79 percent for women. While more men and women are delaying marriage, most will probably marry.

Some members of the 1955 to 1964 cohort have yet to live through the ages in which many divorces and remarriages occur, so comparisons of divorce and remarriage are limited to the early baby boom cohort (1945 to 1954). By age 40, only about 15 percent of men and women born from 1925 to 1934 had been divorced, while among those born from 1945 to 1954, 31 percent of men and 34 percent of women had been divorced.

The rise in divorce also means that a higher percentage of people in more recent cohorts were able to marry twice during their lives. For example, the percentage of men age 40 who have been married twice rose from 11 percent for those born from 1925 to 1934 to 22 percent for men born from 1945 to 1954. The corresponding increase for women married twice by age 40 was from 12 percent and 23 percent. This change coincides with changes in divorce where the proportions ever divorced in the 1945 to 1954 birth cohort were double the corresponding proportions in the 1925 to 1934 birth cohort for both men and women.

Marriages which began later in the twentieth century did not last as long.

How long do marriages last? The retrospective data from the SIPP help track the longevity of marriages that were entered into over

the past several decades.⁸ Table 2 and Figure 1 show that the proportions of both men and women reaching various anniversaries declined from marriages begun in the late 1940s to marriages begun in the early 1980s. These trends are illustrated by comparing the marital histories of women who first married in 1945 to 1949 with later marriage cohorts: 90 percent reached their tenth anniversary compared with only 73 percent of those who first married in 1980 to 1984; 81 percent reached their twentieth anniversary compared with only 56 percent of those who first married in 1970 to 1974; and 70 percent reached their thirtieth anniversary compared with only 55 percent of those who first married in 1950 to 1964. For women, second marriages entered in 1975 through 1984 were less likely to reach their tenth anniversary than were first marriages during the same time period.

In summary, the general marital pattern for the last half of the twentieth century can be described by both delays in marriage and a period of a rapid increase in the likelihood of divorce (see Table 1). Decreases in the duration of marriages also reflect the rise in divorce rates during the 1970s and 1980s, which leveled off in the 1990s (see Table 2).⁹

⁸ These statistics are computed on the basis of people surviving to the survey date. Thus mortality, which could be considerable for the earlier birth cohorts, has not been taken into consideration. Estimates from Vital Statistics publications suggest that there were about 1.2 million first marriages occurring annually in the 1950s or about 6 million for any 5-year period. SIPP estimates fall short of that number, more so for men than women because of the higher mortality among men. (National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States 1960*, Vol. III—Marriage and Divorce. U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare: Washington, DC, 1964, pp. 1-31).

⁹ Joshua R. Goldstein. "The Leveling of Divorce in the United States," *Demography*, Vol. 36 (1999), p 409-414.

Table 1.
Marital History by Sex for Selected Birth Cohorts, 1925-34 to 1965-74: Fall 1996

Characteristic	1925 to 1934	1935 to 1944	1945 to 1954	1955 to 1964	1965 to 1974
MEN (in thousands)	8,668	11,446	18,094	22,019	18,666
Percent ever married by:					
20 years.....	20.4	25.5	24.8	18.6	11.3
25 years.....	67.7	69.9	62.3	49.1	(X)
30 years.....	84.7	84.7	77.0	69.2	(X)
35 years.....	89.9	88.9	83.9	(X)	(X)
40 years.....	91.9	91.3	87.9	(X)	(X)
45 years.....	93.0	92.9	(X)	(X)	(X)
50 years.....	93.7	94.1	(X)	(X)	(X)
60 years.....	94.5	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
Percent ever divorced by:					
20 years.....	0.7	0.5	1.1	1.3	0.8
25 years.....	3.4	4.9	8.4	8.2	(X)
30 years.....	6.9	11.9	18.2	15.8	(X)
35 years.....	11.1	20.0	25.7	(X)	(X)
40 years.....	15.1	25.7	31.3	(X)	(X)
45 years.....	18.3	29.5	(X)	(X)	(X)
50 years.....	21.3	32.3	(X)	(X)	(X)
60 years.....	24.4	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
Percent married two times or more by:					
25 years.....	1.7	2.1	3.0	2.8	1.5
30 years.....	4.2	6.3	9.9	8.4	(X)
35 years.....	7.2	12.5	17.0	(X)	(X)
40 years.....	10.6	18.4	22.3	(X)	(X)
45 years.....	14.1	22.6	(X)	(X)	(X)
50 years.....	17.7	25.6	(X)	(X)	(X)
60 years.....	22.0	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
WOMEN (in thousands)	10,374	12,157	18,664	22,624	18,955
Percent ever married by:					
20 years.....	50.3	51.9	44.9	33.6	25.2
25 years.....	83.5	82.8	75.4	63.4	(X)
30 years.....	91.5	90.0	84.1	78.8	(X)
35 years.....	93.7	92.5	88.5	(X)	(X)
40 years.....	94.7	94.3	90.9	(X)	(X)
45 years.....	95.2	95.0	(X)	(X)	(X)
50 years.....	95.6	95.3	(X)	(X)	(X)
60 years.....	96.0	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
Percent ever divorced by:					
20 years.....	2.0	2.0	2.4	3.0	2.0
25 years.....	5.0	6.9	11.4	12.0	(X)
30 years.....	8.6	13.2	21.3	19.9	(X)
35 years.....	12.5	20.3	28.6	(X)	(X)
40 years.....	16.0	26.5	33.9	(X)	(X)
45 years.....	19.1	29.6	(X)	(X)	(X)
50 years.....	21.5	32.2	(X)	(X)	(X)
60 years.....	23.7	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
Percent married two times or more by:					
25 years.....	3.2	4.0	5.2	5.5	3.5
30 years.....	6.1	7.7	11.4	12.3	(X)
35 years.....	9.1	12.4	18.0	(X)	(X)
40 years.....	12.1	17.3	22.8	(X)	(X)
45 years.....	14.7	20.9	(X)	(X)	(X)
50 years.....	17.3	23.6	(X)	(X)	(X)
60 years.....	20.4	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)

X Cohort had not lived to stated age at the time of the survey.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

**MARITAL INDICATORS:
1996**

The previous section describes the changing patterns of marriage and divorce experienced by birth cohorts from 1925 to 1934 through 1955 to 1964. This section presents the current marital situation of adults by age in 1996 and provides information on the number of times married and divorced, the ages at which these events occurred, the duration of marriages, and the rapidity of remarriage.

In 1996, 31 percent of men and 24 percent of women age 15 and over had never married (see Table 3). Among teenagers (age 15 to 19), 99 percent of males and 97 percent of females were never married. For people age 50 and over, only a small proportion of men and women had never married, 5 percent or less. An older average age at first marriage for men is reflected in the difference between the percent never married for men and women during the

ages at which most people marry. Among the population 20 to 24 years old, 82 percent of men and 67 percent of women had never married — a difference of 15 percentage points. For 30-to-34 year olds, the difference was 10 percentage points (29 percent as compared with 19 percent). However, for the 40-to-49 year age group, the difference was only 3 percentage points (12 percent compared with 9 percent).

Table 2.
Percent Reaching Stated Anniversary by Marriage Cohort and Sex of Spouse for First and Second Marriages: Fall 1996

(Limited to spouses surviving to the interview date)

Sex and year of marriage	Number of marriages (In thousands)	Anniversary ¹							
		5th	10th	15th	20th	25th	30th	35th	40th
FIRST MARRIAGES									
Men									
1945 to 1949	3,634	94.7	90.8	86.5	82.5	79.3	76.0	72.9	70.8
1950 to 1954	4,009	96.8	90.5	85.2	80.4	76.6	73.5	70.6	67.4
1955 to 1959	4,706	94.2	86.4	78.7	73.6	69.6	65.8	62.9	(NA)
1960 to 1964	5,153	94.4	82.2	74.2	67.4	62.7	58.9	(NA)	(NA)
1965 to 1969	6,538	90.5	76.3	66.1	61.0	56.5	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1970 to 1974	7,332	87.4	71.8	62.8	57.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1975 to 1979	7,196	86.3	71.2	62.3	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1980 to 1984	7,679	86.5	73.9	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1985 to 1989	7,954	87.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Women									
1945 to 1949	5,336	95.0	90.2	86.1	81.2	75.3	70.4	65.2	59.0
1950 to 1954	5,195	94.6	89.2	82.9	77.2	71.9	65.9	61.1	56.1
1955 to 1959	5,293	94.6	87.5	78.7	71.7	66.3	62.3	58.2	(NA)
1960 to 1964	5,657	92.6	82.1	72.0	63.7	58.6	55.1	(NA)	(NA)
1965 to 1969	7,222	90.0	76.1	65.4	59.4	53.8	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1970 to 1974	8,188	86.7	70.7	62.0	55.9	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1975 to 1979	8,006	85.4	69.6	61.4	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1980 to 1984	8,349	86.4	73.0	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1985 to 1989	8,347	86.4	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
SECOND MARRIAGES									
Men									
1975 to 1979	2,178	89.3	68.9	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1980 to 1984	2,800	87.6	69.0	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1985 to 1989	2,669	86.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Women									
1975 to 1979	2,301	82.4	63.8	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1980 to 1984	2,937	84.1	64.2	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1985 to 1989	3,016	83.0	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)

NA Not applicable.

¹Persons reaching stated anniversary for specified marital order.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

Black men and women age 25 to 29 are less likely to be married than White non-Hispanics and Hispanics.

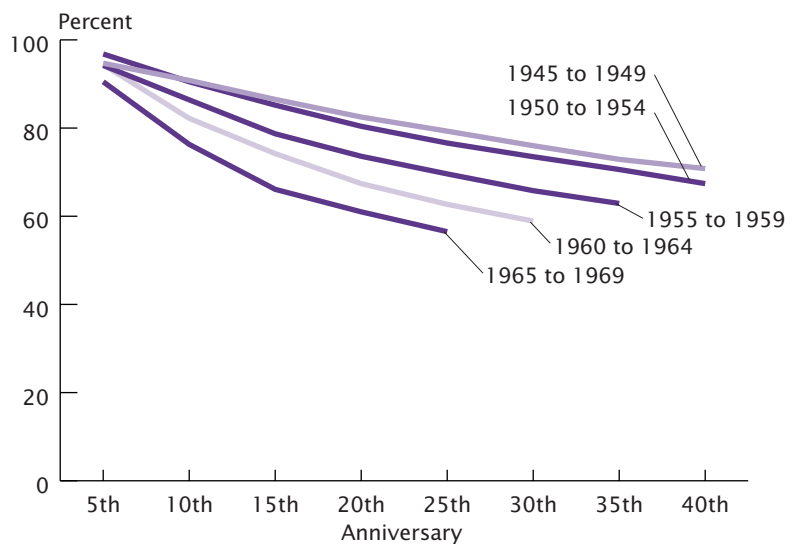
Black men and women age 25 to 29 were more likely to be never married than their White non-Hispanic and Hispanic counterparts (see Figures 2a and 2b).¹⁰ Sixty-two percent of Black men age 25 to 29 in 1996 had never married, compared with about 45 percent of White non-Hispanic and Hispanic men. Among women, 58 percent of Blacks in this age group (25 to 29) were never married, compared with 31 percent of White non-Hispanic and Hispanic women. Among Asians and Pacific Islanders in this age group, a much higher proportion of men than of women were never married, 68 percent and 42 percent, respectively. While about 6 percent or fewer White non-Hispanic and Hispanic men and women and Black women age 55 and over were never married, this figure was 9 percent for Black men of the same age.

Most adults have married only once.

In 1996, 69 percent of men and 76 percent of women age 15 and over had been married at least once — 54 percent of men and 60 percent of women had married once, 13 percent of men and women had married twice, and 3 percent had married three or more times (see Table 3). In total, 55 percent of men and 51 percent of women age 15 and over were currently married and in their first or second marriage in 1996.

¹⁰ Because Hispanics may be of any race, data in this report for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black population and for the Asian and Pacific islander population. Based on the adult population surveyed in the SIPP in Wave 2, 1996 Panel, 10.5 percent of the White population, 4.98 percent of the Black population and 3.38 percent of the Asian and Pacific Islander population are also of Hispanic origin. Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native population are not shown in this report because of the small sample size in the SIPP.

Figure 1. **Percent of Women Who Had Celebrated Stated Anniversary by First Marriage Cohort: Fall 1996**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

Figure 3 shows the number of times married for adults age 45 and over, by race and ethnicity. When considering adults age 45 and over, differences among the groups due to the timing of the event are reduced since most marriages occur before age 45. About 5 percent of White non-Hispanics and Asians and Pacific Islanders age 45 and over had never married, compared with 7 percent of Hispanics and 10 percent of Blacks. A majority of adults had been married only once — 74 percent of Hispanics, 70 percent of White non-Hispanics, and 65 percent of Blacks. Asians and Pacific Islanders were the most likely to have been married only once — 84 percent, in part due to lower levels of divorce.

The percentage of Asians and Pacific Islanders who have married more than once corresponds with the relatively high percentage who have married only once. For adults age 45 and over, only 10 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders have

married twice, compared with 16 percent of Hispanics and 20 percent of both White non-Hispanics and Blacks. No more than 6 percent in any race or ethnic group had married three or more times.

Most people who had ever divorced are currently married.

In 1996, 20 percent of men and 22 percent of women age 15 and over had ever been divorced. Less than half were still divorced (8 percent of men and 10 percent of women). The percent ever divorced was highest among men 40 to 59 years old (35 percent) and among women 40 to 49 years old (37 percent). Lower proportions ever divorced among people age 60 and over than among those 40 to 59 are in part a result of the fact that these people represent the cohort which started families during the baby boom period of the 1950s and 1960s when divorce was not as common and divorce laws were

Table 3.
Marital History for People 15 Years Old and Over by Age and Sex: Fall 1996

Characteristic	Total, 15 years and over		15 to 19 years	20 to 24 years	25 to 29 years	30 to 34 years	35 to 39 years	40 to 49 years	50 to 59 years	60 to 69 years	70 years and over
	Estimate	90-percent confidence interval									
MEN											
Total (In thousands)	99,005	98,090 - 99,920	9,680	8,658	9,445	10,568	11,138	19,381	12,157	9,038	8,940
Percent	100.0	-	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Never married	30.6	30.0 - 31.2	99.0	81.7	48.6	28.7	19.2	12.0	5.3	5.2	4.4
Ever married	69.4	68.8 - 70.0	1.0	18.3	51.4	71.3	80.8	88.0	94.7	94.8	95.6
Married once	53.8	53.2 - 54.4	1.0	17.8	48.8	62.2	64.9	63.3	65.5	70.5	73.9
Still married ¹	44.4	43.8 - 45.0	0.8	16.2	41.8	53.0	54.0	51.6	54.5	59.1	55.5
Married twice	12.6	12.2 - 13.0	-	0.5	2.4	8.4	13.8	20.0	22.1	18.7	17.0
Still married ¹	10.1	9.7 - 10.5	-	0.4	2.0	7.1	11.1	16.0	17.5	15.4	12.6
Married three or more times	3.1	2.9 - 3.3	-	-	0.2	0.7	2.1	4.8	7.0	5.6	4.7
Still married ¹	2.3	2.1 - 2.5	-	-	0.2	0.5	1.8	3.8	5.1	4.4	3.2
Ever divorced	20.4	19.9 - 20.9	-	1.3	7.3	16.1	24.3	34.1	35.7	26.8	18.0
Currently divorced	8.2	7.8 - 8.6	-	0.9	5.2	8.1	10.8	13.9	13.1	9.2	4.5
Ever widowed	3.9	3.7 - 4.1	-	-	0.2	0.2	0.3	1.2	3.5	9.2	25.1
Currently widowed	2.6	2.4 - 2.8	-	-	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.6	1.9	5.1	18.6
WOMEN											
Total (In thousands)	106,477	105,562 - 107,392	9,253	8,749	9,725	10,769	11,342	20,029	12,982	10,400	13,228
Percent	100.0	-	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Never married	23.6	23.1 - 24.1	96.6	67.0	35.3	18.7	14.1	8.6	5.0	3.7	4.2
Ever married	76.4	75.9 - 76.9	3.4	33.0	64.7	81.3	85.9	91.4	95.0	96.3	95.8
Married once	59.9	59.3 - 60.5	3.4	31.7	58.8	68.5	66.8	65.8	69.4	74.7	76.2
Still married ¹	42.0	41.4 - 42.6	3.0	27.4	48.9	57.0	53.3	49.2	50.3	48.4	28.1
Married twice	13.4	13.0 - 13.8	-	1.2	5.5	11.4	16.0	20.6	19.3	17.3	16.0
Still married ¹	9.1	8.7 - 9.5	-	1.1	4.6	9.6	12.0	15.5	13.2	10.5	6.0
Married three or more times	3.1	2.9 - 3.3	-	-	0.4	1.4	3.1	5.0	6.3	4.3	3.6
Still married ¹	1.8	1.6 - 2.0	-	-	0.3	1.1	2.3	3.4	3.9	2.4	0.9
Ever divorced	22.2	21.7 - 22.7	-	3.2	12.2	20.8	27.8	37.0	34.6	26.1	16.7
Currently divorced	10.3	9.9 - 10.7	-	2.1	7.1	9.5	12.8	17.2	16.6	11.5	5.6
Ever widowed	12.1	11.7 - 12.5	-	0.2	0.3	0.7	1.8	3.8	10.7	25.5	58.3
Currently widowed	10.5	10.1 - 10.9	-	0.2	0.2	0.3	1.0	2.6	8.2	21.6	54.5

- Represents or rounds to zero.

¹Includes those currently separated.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

more restrictive. Also, this difference for people age 60 and over is in part due to higher mortality rates among divorced people,¹¹ as these

¹¹ Lee Lillard and Linda Waite. "Til Death Do Us Part: Marital Disruptions and Mortality," *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 100 (1995), pp. 1131-1156.

percentages reflect the marital status only of people who have survived to the survey date.

The percent of adults in 1996 who had ever been widowed was higher for women than for men (12 versus 4 percent), reflecting the higher

mortality rates for men.¹² Of the two people in a given married couple, the man is more likely to die first. In addition, since husbands are generally older than their wives,

¹² United States Life Tables, 1998. *Vital Statistics of the U.S.* National Center for Health Statistics. Hyattsville, MD.

there are more likely to be higher proportions of widowed women than widowed men of the same age. Most women age 70 and over in 1996 had been widowed (58 percent), compared with only 25 percent of men age 70 and over. Most people in this age group who had experienced widowhood were currently widowed (19 percent of men and 55 percent of women).

Differences in spousal ages are changing.

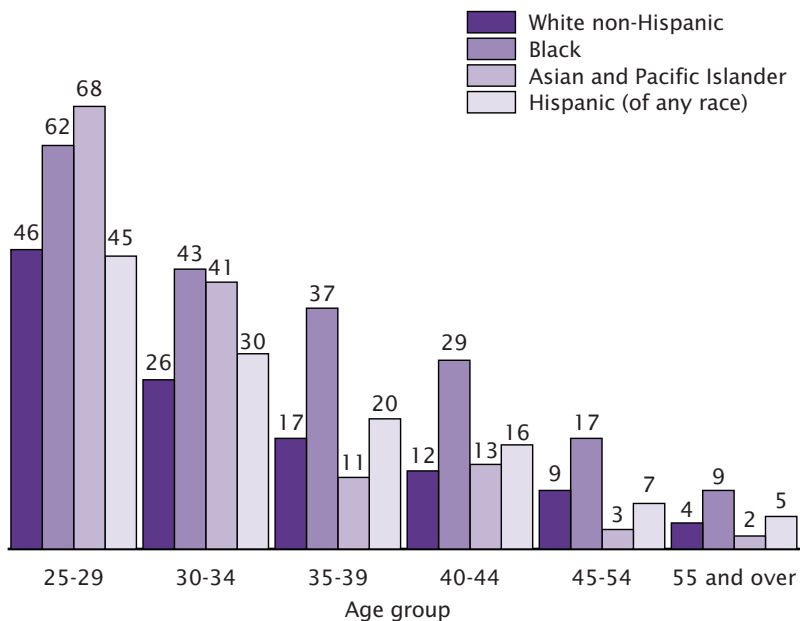
Women are 2.5 years younger than their husbands, on average (see Table 4). For first marriages, an increased percentage of women are the same age or older than the men they marry. About 38 percent of women in their first marriage, who married between 1945 and 1964, were the same age or older than their husbands, compared with 48 percent of currently married women in their first marriage who married between 1970 and 1989 (see Table 4).

For second marriages from 1960 through 1989, both husbands and wives are more likely to be 5 or more years older or younger than their spouse than those in first marriages. Spouses in their second marriages are about twice as likely to have at least a 5-year age gap as people in their first marriage, 40 percent and less than 20 percent respectively.

Median age at widowhood is lower for Black and Hispanic women than for White non-Hispanic women.

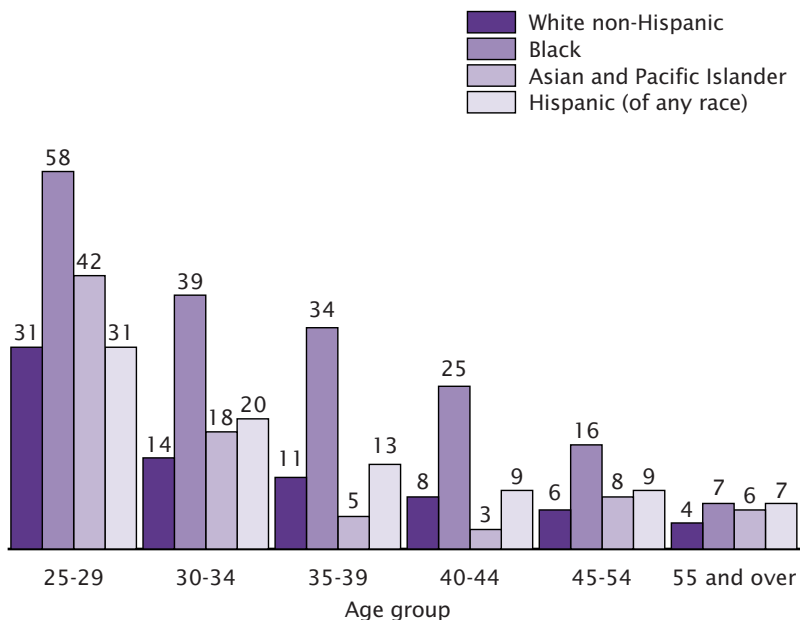
Table 5 shows the median age for marital events associated with first and second marriages for those who have experienced these events. The median age at first marriage was between 21 and 22 for White non-Hispanic, Black, and Hispanic women. Their median age at

Figure 2a.
Percent Never Married by Age, Race, and Ethnicity for Men: Fall 1996



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

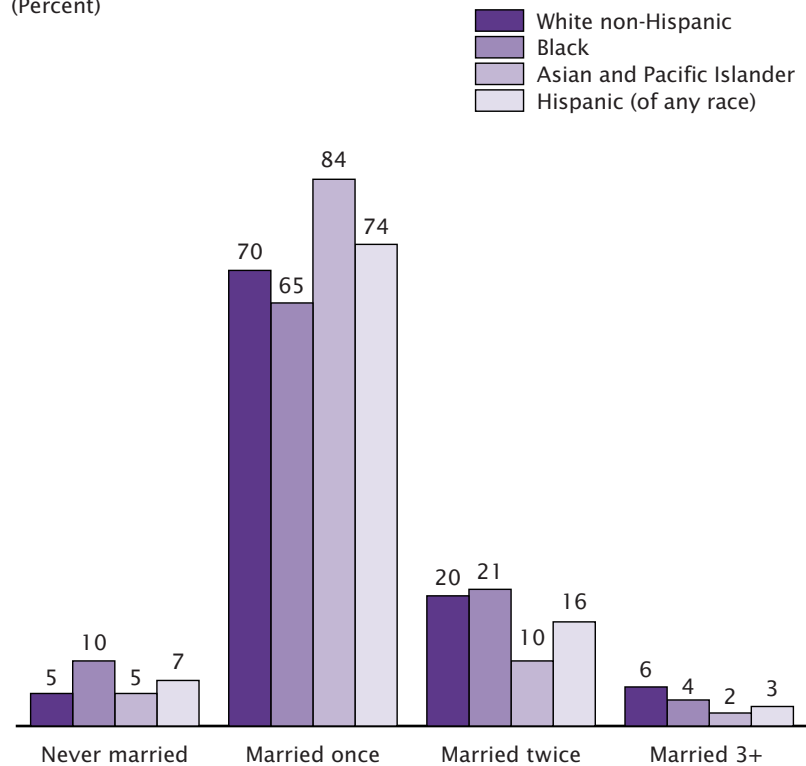
Figure 2b.
Percent Never Married by Age, Race, and Ethnicity for Women: Fall 1996



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

Figure 3.
Number of Times Married for People 45 Years Old and Over by Race and Ethnicity: Fall 1996

(Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

separation from first marriage ranged from 28 to 29 years, and their median age at divorce from first marriage was about 29 years for women (see Table 5). For men in the population overall, median age at first marriage was about 2 years older than for women. On average, men were also about 2 years older than women when they separated and divorced from their first marriage.

The median age at first widowhood for Blacks as compared with White non-Hispanic women differed widely. This difference reflects higher mortality rates for Black men as compared with White non-Hispanic men. While the median age at widowhood from first marriage was 50

years for Black women, it was considerably higher for White non-Hispanic women (60 years). The median age at first marriage for Asian and Pacific Islander men and women was several years higher than for the other race and ethnic groups — 24 years for women and 27 years for men. The median age at separation from first marriage was also higher for Asian and Pacific Islander women than for White non-Hispanic women.

Half of those who remarried after a divorce from a first marriage had done so by their early 30s. Among those who by 1996 had married a second time, the median age at second marriage was 32 years for women and 34 years for men.

These differences may be partly explained by age differences in specific population subgroups in addition to actual variations in age-specific marital behavior. Migration of people from other countries to the United States may also contribute to the variation in median age at marriage since migrants may marry at different ages than the native born, depending on when and why they migrated.

First marriages which end in divorce last 7 to 8 years, on average.

How long do marriages last and how quickly do people remarry? Table 6 shows the median number of years a first marriage lasted which ended in divorce was about 8 years for men and women overall. The median time from marriage to separation was shorter, at about 6.6 years with about 1 year between separation and divorce.

Half of those who remarry after a divorce from a first marriage do so within about 3 years.

Table 6 also shows the median duration of the time between the divorce from a first marriage and a second marriage, for those who remarried. Half of the men and women who remarried after divorcing from their first marriage did so in about 3 years.

The median duration of second marriages that ended in divorce was shorter than for first marriages ending in divorce. The median duration for these marriages was about 7 years for men and women.

Five percent of married couples in 1996 had been married 50 years or more.

While previous sections examined the intervals between different marital events among people who had experienced a marital disruption by

Table 4.
Currently Married Women by Age Relative to Husband's Age: Fall 1996

Year of marriage	Average age at marriages (in years)		Age gap (in years)	Percent distribution by marriage cohort				
	Men	Women		Wife more than 5 years younger than husband	Wife 2 to 5 years younger than husband	Wife within 1 year of husband	Wife 2 to 5 years older than husband	Wife more than 5 years older than husband
FIRST MARRIAGES								
1940 to 1944.....	23.6	21.2	2.3	12.9	44.8	34.6	6.9	0.8
1945 to 1949.....	24.2	21.5	2.7	17.3	44.5	30.5	7.0	0.7
1950 to 1954.....	24.2	21.5	2.6	15.6	45.7	32.4	5.2	1.0
1955 to 1959.....	24.0	21.3	2.7	17.4	45.0	30.2	6.5	1.0
1960 to 1964.....	24.1	21.4	2.5	14.4	45.5	34.5	4.4	1.2
1965 to 1969.....	24.3	21.9	2.4	14.0	43.2	35.4	6.8	0.7
1970 to 1974.....	24.4	22.5	2.3	14.3	36.9	40.9	6.4	1.5
1975 to 1979.....	25.0	23.0	2.2	14.1	37.3	40.6	6.3	1.8
1980 to 1984.....	26.0	24.0	2.3	15.8	37.5	36.2	8.8	1.8
1985 to 1989.....	27.1	24.9	2.1	16.0	34.9	36.5	10.0	2.6
SECOND MARRIAGES								
1960 to 1964.....	33.3	32.8	2.8	29.0	28.0	23.1	11.3	8.5
1965 to 1969.....	32.7	31.0	2.5	30.0	25.3	18.4	19.1	7.1
1970 to 1974.....	36.7	34.4	2.9	29.3	28.4	19.1	14.7	8.5
1975 to 1979.....	37.7	34.8	4.1	35.8	28.2	19.1	11.1	5.8
1980 to 1984.....	37.2	35.0	3.7	34.7	24.9	21.3	13.8	5.2
1985 to 1989.....	38.5	35.7	3.4	32.5	26.5	20.3	13.8	7.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

1996, this section looks at the duration of the most recent marriage for those couples currently married at the time of the survey in 1996. Table 7 shows the proportion of married couples in 1996 who had reached various anniversaries.¹³ In 1996, 82 percent of all currently married couples had achieved at least their fifth anniversary, 52 percent had been married at least 15 years, and 20 percent had passed their thirty-fifth anniversary. A small percentage of currently married couples had passed their golden (fiftieth) anniversary — 5 percent.

The percent reaching particular anniversaries was generally lower for Black and Hispanic women than for White non-Hispanic women. Higher rates of divorce for Blacks

¹³ Data for currently married couples are shown by race and ethnicity of the wife. Only data for women are shown because these are currently married couples, and men and women have the same duration of marriage.

and the more youthful age distribution for Hispanics contribute to this difference.

MARITAL EVENTS WITHIN THE LAST YEAR

With the reduction in published data on marriage and divorce statistics by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), basic information on the age, race, and educational attainment level of people experiencing marital events each year has been lost since 1990.¹⁴ This section of the report attempts to fill this gap by showing the characteristics of men and women who had a marital

¹⁴ In addition, NCHS has recently stopped the publication of annual estimates of divorces. "Aggregated one-month and cumulative divorce numbers and rates as well as the 12-month number have been dropped because of their very limited usefulness when based on less than the full complement of States." "Births, Marriages, Divorces and Deaths: Provisional Data for 1999," *National Vital Statistics Reports*. Vol. 48, Number 19, February 22, 2001.

event in the 12-month period prior to the survey in fall 1996.

Estimates of the number of marriages and divorces in the last year from the SIPP are reasonably close to those shown in the Vital Statistics reports published by NCHS. For 1996, NCHS estimated the total number of marriages at 2,319,000. Using survey questions on the dates of prior marital events, SIPP data yield 2,252,000 marriages for men and 2,284,000 marriages for women. These numbers are 97 and 98 percent, respectively, of the total estimated by NCHS. While the SIPP estimate of the number of marriages is quite close, it underestimates the number of divorces. NCHS estimated the total number of divorces at 1,154,000 for 1996. In comparison, SIPP data estimated 969,000 divorces for men and 1,058,000 divorces for women, a short fall of approximately 96,000

Table 5.
Median Age at Marital Event for People 15 Years Old and Over by Sex and Race and Ethnicity: Fall 1996

(Median age in years for those who experienced the specified event)

Characteristic	Total	White	White non-Hispanic	Black	Asian and Pacific Islander	Hispanic (of any race)
MEN						
Total	40.0	41.5	40.7	36.6	37.5	33.8
First Marriage						
Age when married	23.5	23.4	23.3	24.2	26.7	23.8
Age when separated ¹	29.3	29.2	29.2	30.3	30.5	29.6
Age when divorced	30.5	30.3	30.3	32.3	31.6	31.0
Age when widowed	59.6	60.3	60.8	54.0	(B)	49.7
Second Marriage						
Age when married	34.0	33.9	33.9	36.1	36.7	33.9
Age when separated ¹	37.2	37.2	37.2	39.3	(B)	36.0
Age when divorced	39.3	39.0	39.1	42.5	(B)	37.7
Age when widowed	62.3	62.8	63.1	(B)	(B)	(B)
WOMEN						
Total	41.3	43.3	42.3	37.8	38.7	35.0
First Marriage						
Age when married	21.3	21.3	21.2	21.8	24.1	21.4
Age when separated ¹	27.8	27.5	27.5	28.8	30.0	27.8
Age when divorced	29.0	28.8	28.7	30.8	31.3	29.1
Age when widowed	57.8	59.3	59.7	50.3	53.8	51.7
Second Marriage						
Age when married	32.0	31.7	31.8	34.9	34.3	31.8
Age when separated ¹	35.2	34.9	34.8	37.2	(B)	36.3
Age when divorced	37.0	36.8	36.7	40.3	(B)	39.0
Age when widowed	59.0	59.4	59.5	56.5	(B)	(B)

B Base less than 100,000. Median not calculated.

¹For those who divorced.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

to 185,000 divorces, or 8 to 16 percent of the Vital Statistics total.

Although NCHS data may provide a more complete picture of the aggregate estimates of marriages and divorces, the strength of SIPP data is in its provision of age-specific marital transition rates and other characteristics of the people experiencing these events. In addition, there is no vital registration system recording the characteristics of people whose marriage ended in widowhood nor for people who had a marital separation.

Developing a profile of people with recent marital events can provide a glimpse of the living situation of people after their transition from

one marital status to another. For example, what is the housing situation of newlyweds, the proportion of separated people who continue to live with their children, or the economic situation of recently divorced or widowed people? These statistics can more clearly define the issues and needs of the 10 million people in 1996 who experienced a marital transition.

When considering differences among those who had a recent marriage, separation, or divorce as compared with those who were widowed, it is helpful to keep in mind that the majority of men and women recently widowed are older than most of the men and women who had other marital events. Age

is especially important when looking at employment status, tenure, and family status.

Thirty-one percent of recently married women live with their own children, ages 1 to 17.

Over 80 percent of recently married men and women are age 15 to 44 (see Table 8). Most work full time, and half rent their homes. While 19 percent of recently married men live with own children whose birth preceded the most recent marriage (age 1 to 17), 31 percent of recently married women live with own children age 1 to 17. When step children are included, the percentage of recently married men and women who live with own children age 1 to 17 is the same — about 30 percent.

Table 6.
Median Duration of Marriages for People 15 Years Old and Over by Sex and Race and Ethnicity: Fall 1996

(Duration in years)

Subject	Total	White	White non-Hispanic	Black	Asian and Pacific Islander	Hispanic (of any race)
Duration of first marriage for those whose first marriage ended in divorce						
Men	7.8	7.8	7.8	8.3	7.8	7.6
Women	7.9	7.8	7.8	8.3	8.0	8.0
Duration between first marriage and first separation for those who separated						
Men	6.6	6.6	6.6	6.7	6.1	6.2
Women	6.6	6.6	6.6	6.5	7.0	6.4
Duration between first separation and first divorce for those who divorced						
Men	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.9
Women	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.8	0.9
Duration between first divorce and remarriage for those whose first marriages ended in divorce and who had remarried						
Men	3.3	3.2	3.2	4.1	3.5	3.4
Women	3.1	3.1	3.0	4.1	3.4	3.3
Duration of second marriage for those whose second marriage ended in divorce						
Men	7.3	7.2	7.2	9.8	(B)	7.5
Women	6.8	6.6	6.6	8.3	(B)	(B)

B Base less than 100,000. Median duration not shown.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2.

Table 7.
Currently Married Women Who Had Celebrated Selected Anniversaries by Race and Ethnicity: Fall 1996

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Anniversary					
	5th	10th	15th	25th	35th	50th
Total	45,996	36,751	29,360	18,571	11,031	2,731
White	40,691	32,752	26,360	16,957	10,186	2,561
Non-Hispanic	37,077	30,192	24,443	15,918	9,741	2,520
Black	3,125	2,340	1,758	979	522	115
Asian and Pacific Islander	1,814	1,355	1,019	520	257	38
Hispanic (of any race)	3,911	2,792	2,083	1,099	480	51
Percent						
Total	81.6	65.2	52.1	33.0	19.6	4.8
White	82.1	66.1	53.2	34.2	20.5	5.2
Non-Hispanic	82.6	67.3	54.5	35.5	21.7	5.6
Black	76.9	57.6	43.2	24.1	12.8	2.8
Asian and Pacific Islander	81.7	61.0	45.9	23.4	11.6	1.7
Hispanic (of any race)	76.8	54.8	40.9	21.6	9.4	1.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

Table 8.
Characteristics of People 15 Years Old and Over With a Marital Event Within the Last Year: Fall 1996

(Data include first and higher order events)

Characteristic at time of interview	Marital events within the last year							
	Men				Women			
	Marriage	Separation	Divorce	Widowhood	Marriage	Separation	Divorce	Widowhood
Total (in thousands)	2,252	931	969	432	2,284	1,055	1,058	1,038
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Race and Ethnicity								
White	86.6	83.5	86.8	87.2	86.6	82.5	82.4	82.4
Non-Hispanic	77.8	75.7	78.8	84.2	76.5	73.5	74.5	77.5
Black	8.7	13.7	10.5	8.9	9.5	14.3	13.1	13.4
Asian and Pacific Islander	3.3	1.5	2.3	2.3	3.3	2.2	2.7	3.5
Hispanic (of any race)	10.3	8.2	9.1	3.6	11.3	9.3	9.1	6.1
Age								
15 to 24 years old	20.6	8.2	4.2	0.5	32.6	13.6	7.3	0.5
25 to 44 years old	64.3	65.2	66.8	7.1	56.9	66.4	70.8	5.6
45 to 64 years old	13.4	24.9	26.8	27.2	9.5	17.8	19.8	27.4
65 years and over	1.7	1.7	2.2	65.2	1.0	2.2	2.1	66.5
Educational Attainment								
Less than high school	14.2	16.4	11.0	34.5	13.3	14.6	11.9	37.6
High school graduate	32.4	36.2	38.2	32.4	29.0	36.2	34.3	41.6
Some college	28.1	32.6	33.4	21.8	36.3	38.6	39.9	15.1
Bachelor's degree or more	25.3	14.8	17.4	11.3	21.4	10.6	14.0	5.7
Employment Status¹								
Worked full-time last month	84.2	83.4	84.9	22.9	60.7	59.0	70.4	15.0
Worked part-time last month	4.8	2.7	3.8	7.3	12.1	11.6	9.8	7.2
Did not work last month	10.9	13.9	11.3	69.8	27.2	29.4	19.8	77.8
Occupation²								
Managerial-professional	22.2	16.6	17.3	20.8	28.8	23.4	29.2	12.4
Technical, sales, and administrative	19.5	19.0	19.5	16.7	42.0	41.6	39.9	36.7
Service occupations	8.0	10.1	8.3	8.1	15.0	17.7	14.4	28.9
Other	50.4	54.3	55.0	54.3	14.2	17.3	16.5	22.0
Poverty Level								
Below poverty level	10.1	12.2	9.1	13.1	11.9	29.3	20.7	20.8
100-199 percent of poverty level	17.3	18.9	15.5	23.3	18.0	29.7	26.7	35.0
200+ percent of poverty level	72.1	67.1	72.7	62.3	69.8	39.5	52.1	43.5
Income not reported	0.6	1.8	2.7	1.3	0.3	1.5	0.5	0.8
Tenure								
Owns home	46.6	52.2	52.9	74.5	46.2	45.7	47.8	78.7
Rents home	50.6	45.0	44.4	23.4	51.1	51.8	50.5	19.3
Occupies without cash payment	2.8	2.9	2.6	2.1	2.7	2.5	1.7	2.0
Family Status³								
Not living with own children under 18	75.4	82.1	82.4	94.1	63.9	36.4	43.2	95.0
Currently living with own children under 18	24.6	17.9	17.6	5.9	36.1	63.6	56.8	5.0
Currently living with own children 1-17	18.5	17.3	16.1	5.9	31.0	62.5	56.2	5.0
Currently living with own children under 1	7.3	0.8	1.8	-	8.0	3.3	1.7	-

- Represents or rounds to zero.

¹Full time includes those who usually work 35 or more hours per week; part time includes those who usually work 1-34 hours per week; those who did not work last month include individuals who are unemployed or are not in the labor force.

²Excludes those who work in the Armed Forces and those who did not work last month.

³For the purpose of this table only, own children refers to biological or adopted children. The table excludes step children.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

Table 9.
Marriage, Separation, Divorce, and Widowhood Rates by Age, Sex, and Educational Attainment for Population Age 15 and Over: Fall 1996

(Events in the last year per 1,000 people at risk)

Characteristic	Men				Women			
	Less than high school	High school	Some college	Bachelor's degree or higher	Less than high school	High school	Some college	Bachelor's degree or higher
Marriage								
Total, 15 and over	19.7	42.0	41.8	57.7	17.5	34.6	41.3	50.5
15 to 24	12.2	55.1	52.4	61.5	22.8	83.3	65.4	93.9
25 to 44	54.3	58.6	55.9	91.5	45.5	51.2	57.0	82.5
45 to 64	14.6	16.0	18.2	22.1	6.1	10.9	17.9	7.8
65 and over.....	9.3	2.7	5.1	10.2	4.2	0.7	1.4	-
Separation								
Total, 15 and over	15.0	18.8	19.2	8.9	16.0	18.5	22.7	8.7
15 to 24	71.2	49.4	41.8	-	60.1	53.6	43.6	-
25 to 44	27.7	27.6	27.6	9.0	24.6	27.4	30.2	9.8
45 to 64	12.3	11.8	9.9	11.2	7.8	8.8	12.4	8.4
65 and over.....	1.7	-	3.7	1.5	3.6	3.0	-	3.3
Divorce								
Total, 15 and over	11.2	22.5	21.9	11.2	13.5	21.2	30.1	9.9
15 to 24	40.7	55.2	31.9	-	27.7	34.5	65.0	-
25 to 44	20.8	33.1	32.5	15.6	28.6	30.2	34.6	15.0
45 to 64	10.2	13.7	11.9	9.3	6.8	8.4	13.2	9.4
65 and over.....	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.5	2.0	1.5	-	-
Widowhood								
Total, 15 and over	14.6	7.8	6.0	3.2	40.5	20.9	8.7	4.6
15 to 24	-	-	4.0	-	-	2.7	1.9	-
25 to 44	0.3	2.1	0.6	0.8	5.8	1.6	1.7	0.9
45 to 64	7.8	6.8	7.6	1.8	24.0	19.7	8.8	4.9
65 and over.....	34.6	27.9	25.1	16.0	116.9	81.7	52.3	36.4

- Represents zero or rounds to zero.

Note: The numbers of marriages and divorces have been weighted to adjust SIPP data to the total number of marriages and divorces estimated by NCHS for 1996, as well as to the NCHS age distribution for these events.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

Recently separated and divorced women are more likely to be in poverty than men.

The majority of recently separated and divorced men and women are age 25 to 44. While most of these women live with their own children under age 18 (64 percent of separated and 57 percent of divorced women), only about 18 percent of recently separated and divorced men live with their own children under age 18. Separations and divorces are often followed by sharp reductions in income due to the loss of a spouse. While 12 percent of recently separated men

were below poverty, 29 percent of recently separated women were below poverty. Among recently divorced men and women, fewer men (9 percent) than women (21 percent) were living below the poverty line. At the other economic extreme, 73 percent of recently divorced men had incomes at least twice the poverty level compared with 52 percent of recently divorced women. The data suggest that marital disruption results in much poorer economic circumstances for women than for men.

Most recently widowed men and women are age 65 and over and do

not work. Since most of these people completed their educations prior to widespread expansion in educational opportunities, most have a high school degree or less. Recently widowed women are less likely than recently widowed men to be at or above 200 percent of the poverty level, 44 percent compared with 62 percent.

College graduates are more likely to marry and less likely to separate.

Table 9 presents marriage, divorce, separation, and widowhood rates for men and women by their

Table 10.
Distribution of Time Spent in a Particular Marital Status by Age and Sex

(Average years spent in each state for specific age interval)

Sex and marital state	Total, 15 to 85 years	15 to 19 years	20 to 29 years	30 to 39 years	40 to 49 years	50 to 59 years	60 to 69 years	70 to 85 years
MEN								
Total number of years	70.0	5.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	15.0
Never married	17.8	4.9	7.0	2.6	1.5	0.9	0.6	0.4
Married	26.3	-	2.5	5.7	5.6	5.2	4.1	3.2
Widowed	1.9	-	-	-	0.1	0.2	0.5	1.0
Divorced	8.0	-	0.2	1.2	1.9	2.0	1.6	1.1
Death	15.9	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.9	1.7	3.2	9.3
WOMEN								
Total number of years	70.0	5.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	15.0
Never married	16.8	4.8	6.0	2.2	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.8
Married	26.7	0.1	3.5	6.2	6.0	5.2	3.6	2.2
Widowed	6.2	-	-	0.1	0.3	0.7	1.7	3.4
Divorced	10.3	-	0.3	1.4	2.1	2.3	2.1	2.2
Death	10.0	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.9	1.8	6.4

- Represents zero or rounds to zero.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

educational attainment and age.¹⁵ Men and women with at least a bachelor's degree were more likely to marry in the last year and less likely to separate in the last year than those who had a high school degree or less. Men and women who did not graduate from high school and those with at least a bachelor's degree had a lower divorce rate in 1996 than those with a high school degree or with some college. Women who have some college were more likely to divorce in the last year than those who have a high school degree.

In addition to lower separation and divorce rates, educational attainment seems to have a protective effect in terms of widowhood. Men who have at least a bachelor's degree have lower widowhood rates than men with a high school degree or less. For women, the relationship between additional education and widowhood is even

stronger. Women who have some college and those who have at least a bachelor's degree have lower widowhood rates than women with a high school degree, while women with a high school degree have significantly lower rates than women who did not graduate. This relationship reflects the fact that more educated people, on average, have higher incomes, and so have access to better health care, as well as being more likely to be in occupations which have few physical hazards.¹⁶

PROJECTIONS OF MARITAL EVENTS

What proportion of adults in the United States will marry or divorce during their lifetimes? This question, along with others, is addressed in this section. The average number of years people may be expected to spend in various marital states throughout their

lives, as well as the proportion of adults who may ever marry, divorce, or remarry during their lives are presented. These projections are values generated from life tables based on the retrospective marital history data collected in the SIPP.

Table 10 presents the average number of years lived in various marital states during particular age intervals and represents the average experience of the population as a whole. While women 15 to 29 years old are projected to spend most of their years in these ages never married, women in their thirties, forties, and fifties are projected to spend the majority of their time married. For women in their sixties, the largest proportion of time they will spend is still projected to be spent married (3.6 years), but for ages 70 to 85, more time is projected to be spent widowed (3.4 years) or lost to mortality (6.4 years).

Men are also projected to be never married for most of the years between age 15 and 29 (4.9 years from 15 to 19 years old and 7.0

¹⁵ A multivariate analysis which also considered race and ethnic differences in the population was performed, producing results consistent with the bivariate analysis shown in this section.

¹⁶ Hummer, Robert A., Richard G. Rogers, and Isaac W. Eberstein. "Sociodemographic Differentials in Adult Mortality: A Review of Analytic Approaches," *Population and Development Review*. Vol. 24:3 (1998), pp. 553-578.

Table 11.
Lifetime Projected Experience of Marital Events

(Percent who have ever experienced or may ever experience specified marital event)

Sex and current age	Ever married			Ever divorced from first marriage			Ever remarried after divorce from first marriage		
	Percent ever married by 1996	Probability of first marriage for never married of 1.0000	Lifetime projected percent ever married	Percent ever divorced from first marriage by 1996	Probability of future divorce from first marriage of 1.0000	Lifetime projected percent divorced from first marriage	Percent ever remarried after first divorce by 1996	Probability of future remarriage after first divorce of 1.0000	Lifetime projected percent remarried after first divorce
MEN									
15 years	-	0.8556	86	-	-	(X)	-	-	(X)
20 years	3.5	0.8550	86	-	-	(X)	-	-	(X)
25 years	31.8	0.8099	87	4.6	0.5099	53	55.5	0.6928	86
30 years	65.4	0.7028	90	16.7	0.4023	50	35.6	0.5538	71
35 years	77.4	0.5333	89	26.9	0.3038	49	60.7	0.3719	75
40 years	80.9	0.4071	89	34.0	0.2327	49	66.4	0.2587	75
45 years	87.3	0.3250	91	41.1	0.1372	49	71.6	0.1921	77
50 years	93.2	0.2462	95	39.8	0.0792	45	78.3	0.1324	81
55 years	94.5	0.1903	96	38.2	0.0401	41	79.0	0.0951	81
60 years	96.6	0.1556	97	34.3	0.0242	36	86.9	0.0712	88
WOMEN									
15 years	-	0.8936	89	-	-	(X)	-	-	(X)
20 years	10.3	0.8890	90	-	-	(X)	-	-	(X)
25 years	50.0	0.8378	92	12.2	0.4517	52	44.0	0.6919	83
30 years	71.1	0.7165	92	17.2	0.3571	47	49.7	0.4881	74
35 years	84.1	0.5246	92	26.4	0.2417	44	65.1	0.3208	76
40 years	85.2	0.4080	91	36.5	0.1814	48	67.6	0.2237	75
45 years	89.6	0.2880	93	41.6	0.1028	48	68.1	0.1399	73
50 years	91.3	0.1940	93	42.4	0.0568	46	68.9	0.0805	71
55 years	95.3	0.1568	96	38.0	0.0311	40	64.1	0.0486	66
60 years	94.9	0.1440	96	30.7	0.0198	32	64.7	0.0247	66

- Represents zero or rounds to zero.

X Population at risk too small to calculate projection.

Note: See sample calculation box for an example of the calculations of projected lifetime percentages. Percent who may ever have the specified marital event was derived from life table estimates based on the events in the 3 years prior to the survey date for persons age 15 and over.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

years from 20 to 29 years old). Unlike women, men may spend the majority of their time during each of the other age intervals married until ages 70 to 85, where men spend 3.2 years married, but lose 9.3 years to mortality. The higher average number of years married reflects higher male mortality rates among men age 60 and over who spend fewer years widowed than women on average.

Nearly everyone marries.

Table 11 shows the percent of men and women who had already experienced the particular event (for example, first marriage, divorce

from first marriage) by 1996 and the total percentage projected to ever experience the event based on life table calculations (see sample calculation box). Figure 4 shows the probability that adults who are never married at the specified age will eventually marry. This probability, based on life table calculations, is multiplied by the remaining percentage of men or women who have not yet experienced the event, and then added to the percentage who have already experienced the event in order to obtain the percentage projected to experience this event during their lifetime. Projections presented in this table

are more accurate at older ages, since actual marital experience represents the majority of the projection relative to the component developed from life table calculations. However, selective mortality by marital status may yield a larger proportion of people married at the time of the survey than actually recorded for this age cohort because of higher mortality rates among never-married people.

Between 80 and 90 percent of men and women age 15 in 1996 are projected to marry by the end of their lives. Among men age 30 years old in 1996, 65 percent had already

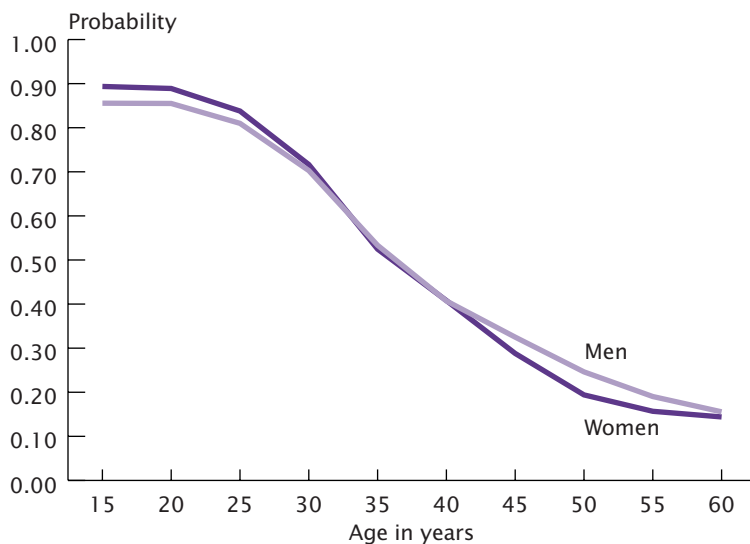
Sample calculation for the projected future experiences shown in Table 11.

Lifetime *projected percent ever married* among *WOMEN* 30 years old:

1. Percent of 30 year old women who had *ever married* by the interview date in 1996.
71.1%
2. Calculation of the percent of 30 year old women *never married* by the interview in 1996.
 $100\% - 71.1\% = 28.9\%$
3. Life table probability of first marriage among never-married women age 30 in 1996. Generated with cross-sectional event rates, assuming a stable population. Probabilities are from each age to the end of the life table (i.e. death).
0.7165 out of 1.0000
4. Percent of women who are likely to marry in their life times. The proportion at risk (never married at age 30) times the probability that they will marry equals the percent of women who may first marry from age 30 to death given that they were never married at age 30.
 $(0.7165 * 28.9\%) = 20.7\%$
5. Total projected percent of women 30 years old at the interview in 1996 who have married or who *MAY* marry by the end their lives.
 $71.1\% + 20.7\% = 91.8\%$

married, and another 24 percent may marry by the end of their lives for a total of about 90 percent ever marrying. Seventy-one percent of women age 30 in 1996 had already married, and an additional 20 percent may marry based on these rates, resulting in a total of about 90 percent who may ever marry. This total percentage is not significantly different from either the projected total for women age 30 or from the projected totals for men and women age 15. The percent of men and women who may ever marry is highest among older ages; 97 percent of men and 95 percent of women age 60 in 1996 may ever marry by the end of their lives. These older cohorts represent the people entering adulthood during the postwar baby boom period when more people married and at earlier ages than succeeding cohorts. It seems reasonable to conclude that in the next few decades a somewhat lower percentage of men and women — about 90 percent — will marry by the end of their lives, as compared with those who in 1996 had already passed through the ages at which most adults marry, given the less rapid entry into married life as previously noted in Table 1.

Figure 4.
Probability of Future Marriage by Age for Men and Women



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

Nearly half of recent first marriages may end in divorce.¹⁷

Projecting the actions of future marriage cohorts is very difficult as they are subject to changes in norms toward family life and fluctuations in

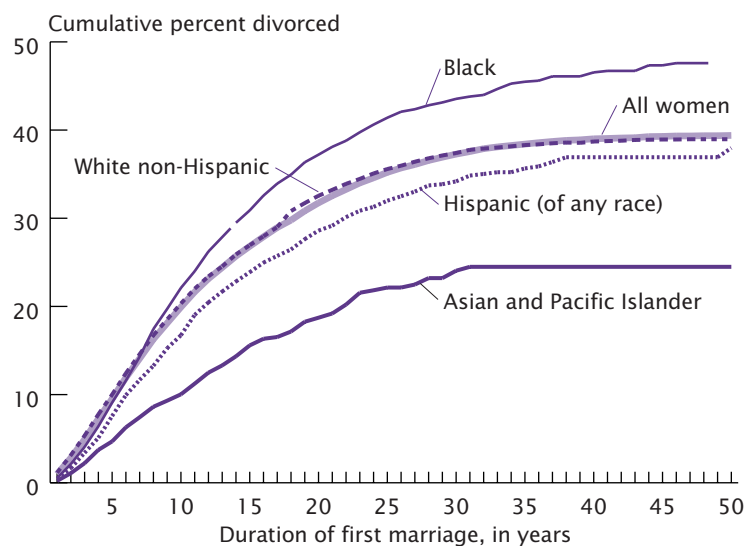
¹⁷ The National Center for Health Statistics recently released a report which found that 43 percent of first marriages end in separation or divorce within 15 years. The study is based on the National Survey of Family Growth, a nationally representative sample of women age 15 to 44 in 1995. Bramlett, Matthew and William Mosher. "First marriage dissolution, divorce, and remarriage: United States," *Advance Data From Vital and Health Statistics*; No.323. Hyattsville MD: National Center for Health Statistics: 2001. Data in the Census report were collected from both men and women, age 15 and over, and a different methodology was used than in the NCHS report.

the economy which may influence the entry into or stability of marriages. The projections in Table 11, then, reflect only current rates of marital transitions which are assumed not to change for the period under examination — this is one of the basic assumptions of this type of life table. In other words, the projections in this report only reflect what will occur in the future if marriage and divorce patterns remain constant over time. In order to quantify what proportion of first marriages will end in divorce, a separate life table is constructed only for those in their first marriage, using only divorce and widowhood rates from first marriage.

About 50 percent of first marriages for men under age 45 may end in divorce, and between 44 and 52 percent of women's first marriages may end in divorce for these age groups. The likelihood of a divorce is lowest for men and women age 60, for whom 36 percent of men and 32 percent of women may divorce from their first marriage by the end of their lives. A similar statistical exercise was performed in 1975 using marital history data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Projections based on those data implied that about one-third of married persons who were 25 to 35 years old in 1975 would end their first marriage in divorce.¹⁸ This cohort of people, who in 1996 were about 45 to 55 years old, had already exceeded these projections as about 40 percent of men and women in these ages had divorced from their first marriage. Current projections now indicate that the proportion could be as high as 50 percent for persons now in their early forties.

¹⁸ Paul C. Glick and Arthur J. Norton, "Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces in the United States: June 1975," Current Population Reports, P20-247. U.S. Census Bureau: Washington, DC, 1976.

Figure 5.
Cumulative Percent Divorced From First Marriage by Race and Ethnicity for Ever-Married Women: Fall 1996



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

From SIPP 1996 data on first marriages, Figure 5 graphs the cumulative proportion divorced from first marriage, by race and ethnicity for women. The graph shows the result of combining all first marriages, regardless of when they occurred, and thus represents the average experience of all ever-married women as of 1996.

Marriages are most susceptible to divorce in the early years of marriage. After 5 years, approximately 10 percent of marriages are expected to end in divorce — another 10 percent (or 20 percent cumulatively) are divorced by about the tenth year after marriage. However, the 30-percent level is not reached until about the 18th year after marriage while the 40 percent level is only approached by the 50th year after marriage.

Data for specific ages are not presented in Table 11 by race and ethnic groups due to small sample size; however, by combining all first

marriages, regardless of when they occurred, single decrement life table methodology makes it possible to look at divorce from first marriage across several race and ethnic groups (see Figure 5). While 40 percent of ever-married White non-Hispanic women and Hispanic women had divorced from their first marriage by 1996, the corresponding percentages are 48 percent for Black women and 24 percent for Asian and Pacific Islander women. No data currently available show a historical marriage cohort where the percent divorced from first marriage was as high as 50 percent, although it has approached this level.¹⁹

¹⁹ Robert Schoen and Nicola Standish. "The Footprints of Cohabitation: Results from Marital Status Life Tables for the U.S., 1995," Pennsylvania State University Population Research Institute Working Paper 00-12, 2000.

Most people remarry after divorcing from a first marriage.

As previously noted in Table 1, increasing proportions of people have been remarrying among cohorts born since the 1920s. Many people divorce, but the majority remarry. One consequence of divorcing at relatively earlier ages is that people potentially have more years of life remaining to experience a second marriage. Most men and women may remarry after divorcing from a first marriage (see Table 11). Because such a high percentage of divorced people are projected to remarry, the majority of people's lives are still expected to be spent in a married state, especially among men.

SUMMARY

This report has detailed marital patterns for adults in the United States born since the 1920s. The first part of this report showed increasing delays in the age at marriage during the last half of the twentieth century, as well as increasing proportions of people ever divorced. However, the SIPP data document that the majority of adults have married only once, and more than 70 percent of them are still married to their first spouse.

The second part highlighted differences in the marital patterns of various racial and ethnic groups — namely, the lower likelihood of marrying among Blacks than among White non-Hispanics and Hispanics. The median duration of marriages ending in divorce is almost 8 years, with 6.6 years the median length of the time between marriage and separation, before couples divorced.

Selected characteristics of adults who experienced four different types of marital transitions in the last year were examined in the third part of the report — information

which is not available from any other data source at the national level. SIPP data document the more negative economic aspects of marital disruptions for women than for men as much larger proportions of women experiencing these disruptions lived in poverty during the first year after separation or divorce.

Finally, this report presents for the first time since the mid-1970s from the Census Bureau, projections of today's young adults who may experience various marital transitions during their lifetime. The results indicate that the percentage of adults under 45 years old who may ever marry may be around the 90-percent level, while the percentage of first marriages ending in divorce may be as high as 50 percent. This projected proportion is up from an estimate of one-third of marriages made by demographers in 1976. However, most people who divorce are projected to remarry (about 75 percent). Periodic collection of marital histories in SIPP will allow us to update this report and track marital patterns in the United States by providing supplemental data not normally available in ongoing reports published by either the Census Bureau or other statistical agencies.

SOURCE OF DATA

The estimates in this report come from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), and are based on data collected from August through November of 1996 by the U.S. Census Bureau. The data highlighted in this report come primarily from the core and the marital history topical module in the second interview (wave) of the 1996 SIPP panel. The SIPP is a longitudinal survey conducted at 4-month intervals. Although the main focus of the SIPP is information on

labor force participation, jobs, income, and participation in federal assistance programs, information on other topics is also collected in topical modules on a rotating basis.

ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

All statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling error and non-sampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and meet the Census Bureau's standards for statistical significance. Nonsampling error 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 SIPP 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.

Please contact Jeffrey Stratton of the Demographic Statistical Methods Division via Internet e-mail at dsmd_s&a@census.gov for

information on the source of the data, the accuracy of the estimates, the use of standard errors, and the computation of standard errors.

Life Table Projections of Future Marital Events

In this report, projections of the hypothetical future marital experience of the population are made using life tables (mathematical models). These life tables assume that a population will age and continue to experience a specific set of transition rates between different marital statuses (never married, married, divorced, and widowed) in addition to the risk of death. Another necessary assumption in this analysis is that no one will enter the table by migration from outside the United States, and that no one will leave the table except by death.

Readers should *use caution with these results*. These results only project what *may happen* given the model's assumptions and transition rates based on the Survey of Income and Program Participation which are adjusted to the level and age distribution of marriages and divorces reported in Vital Statistics data by the National Center for

Health Statistics. Marital transition rates are constructed using the events and population at risk for the 3 years prior to the interview. Separate rates for men and women are calculated and used as input data for the life tables. Marital status specific death rates for 1995 were used in the preparation of the life tables.²⁰ The derived rates include first and second marriages as well as divorces and widowhood from those marriages.²¹

MORE INFORMATION

The report as well as a detailed table are also available on the Internet (www.census.gov); search for this report by clicking on the letter M in the "Subjects A-Z" section of the Web page and selecting "Marriage and Divorce."

²⁰ We gratefully acknowledge Nicola Standish and Robert Schoen at Pennsylvania State University for these mortality rates.

²¹ Not allowing subsequent marriages and divorces increases the time the population spends in the divorced state and reduces the transition rates somewhat for both remarriage and divorce. Direct estimation of discrepancies between marital event rates derived from SIPP and vital statistics age specific rates are not possible since rates after 1989 are no longer available from NCHS.

CONTACTS

For additional marriage or divorce information, you may contact the authors of this report in the Fertility and Family Statistics Branch, on 301-457-2465. You may also contact the authors of this report by e-mail.

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USER COMMENTS

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

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