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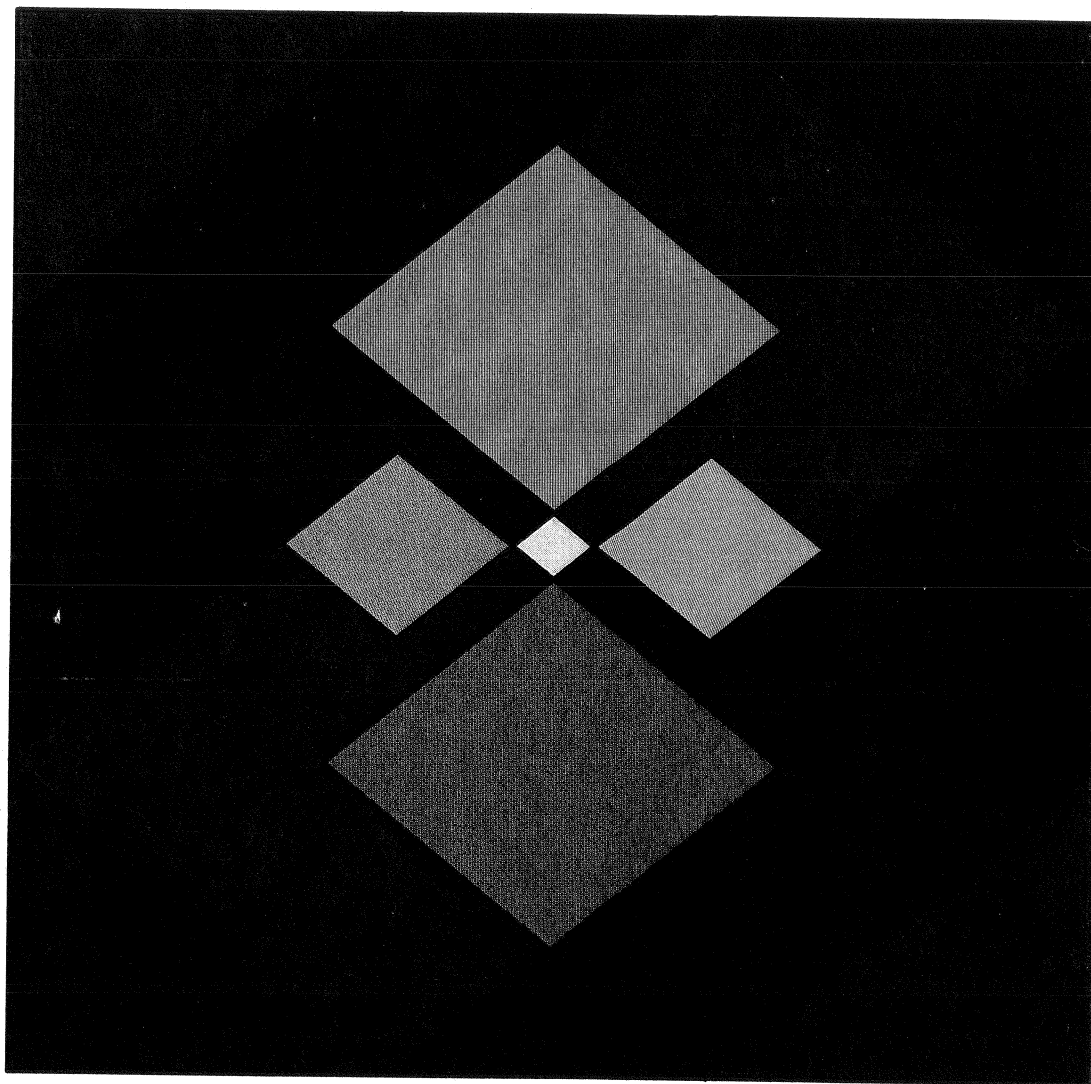
Current Population Reports

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Studies in Marriage and the Family

Singleness in America
Single Parents and Their Children
Married-Couple Families With Children



U.S. Department of Commerce
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

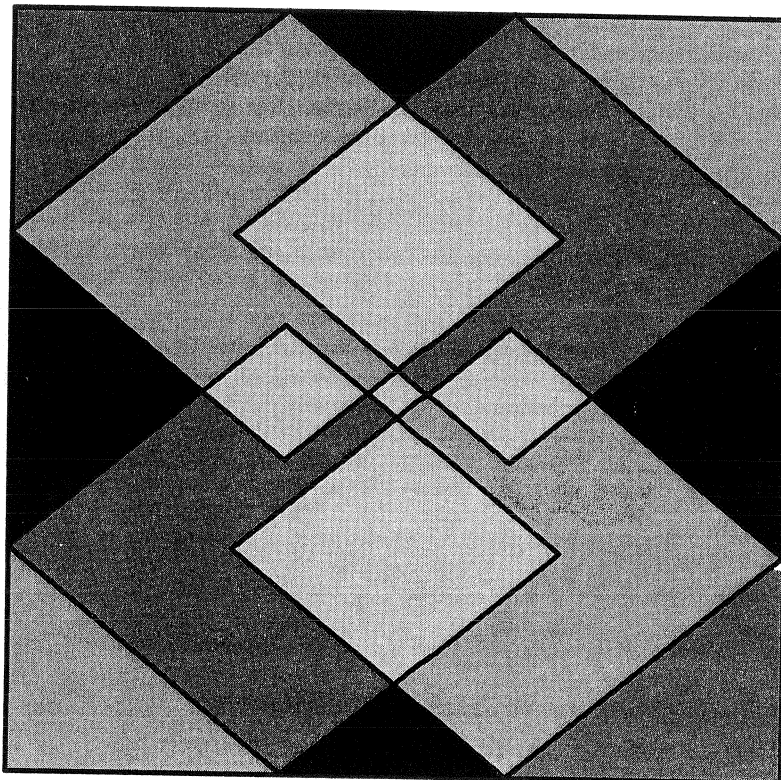
CENSUS



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Issued June 1989



U.S. Department of Commerce
Robert A. Mosbacher, Secretary
Michael R. Darby, Under Secretary
for Economic Affairs

BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

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Preface

Recent years have seen important trends exerting an impressive influence on household and family living in the United States. Increases in divorce, remarriage, age at first marriage, labor force participation of women, and delays and declines in childbearing are among the more notable of these trends. In the span of just one generation, these developments—individually and collectively—have helped to dramatically alter the living arrangements of the American people. Today's individual and family life courses involve many more important transitions as people form, dissolve, and re-form households and families. As compared with 20 years ago, today's families are smaller, more likely to be maintained by a single parent, to have multiple earners, to require child care assistance, or to contain stepchildren.

The three papers presented in this report address some of the causes and consequences of recent changes in patterns of living arrangements. Arlene Saluter explores "Singleness in America," and its impact on all generations; in "Single Parents and Their Children," Steve Rawlings discusses the social and economic circumstances of this important family type; and Louisa Miller and Jeanne Moorman examine the changing characteristics of "Married-Couple Families With Children."

This is the first of a new set of subject-specific analyses to be published by the Census Bureau in the Special Studies Series of Current Population Reports. Future reports will present the research of individuals or teams in areas of current interest. They will be organized by broad subject with individual articles focusing on specific trends. Each will analyze and interpret data beyond that typically provided by other Current Population Reports series. Future reports will delve into aspects of geographic mobility, education, and fertility.

A.J. Norton

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Singleness in America

by Arlene F. Saluter

Introduction

Over the past two decades, substantial changes have occurred in the marital status and living arrangements of Americans. One of the most notable changes has been an increasing single population with associated changes in living arrangements.

While singleness is usually a temporary or transitory status, a growing proportion of adults are spending a larger portion of their lives in a single status. For young men and women today, it is plausible to assume that approximately 10 percent will never marry in their lifetime. For those who do marry, approximately 50 percent will divorce, and the surviving marriages will eventually end in widowhood.

This paper compares the single population in America today with the single population back to 1970 and earlier. Topics include the increasing proportion of persons who have never married, the rising age at first marriage, the dissolution of marriage through divorce and widowhood, and ways in which singleness affects the changing living arrangements of children, young adults, and the elderly.

The population covered in this paper is generally restricted to single (unmarried) adults age 15 years and over. This group includes persons who are divorced, widowed, or never married. Information on children under 18 years are also included to show how adult singleness is related to the living arrangements of children.

The data presented here are based on the March Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the Bureau of the Census, unless otherwise stated. The CPS is a survey of approximately 57,000 interviewed households across the 50 States and the District of Columbia. The CPS data pertain to the civilian noninstitutional population of the United States plus the small number of Armed Forces living off post or with their families on post (952,000 in 1988).

Additional data were obtained from decennial censuses dating back to 1890. Supplemental data on marriage and divorce rates were obtained from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The Rise in Singleness

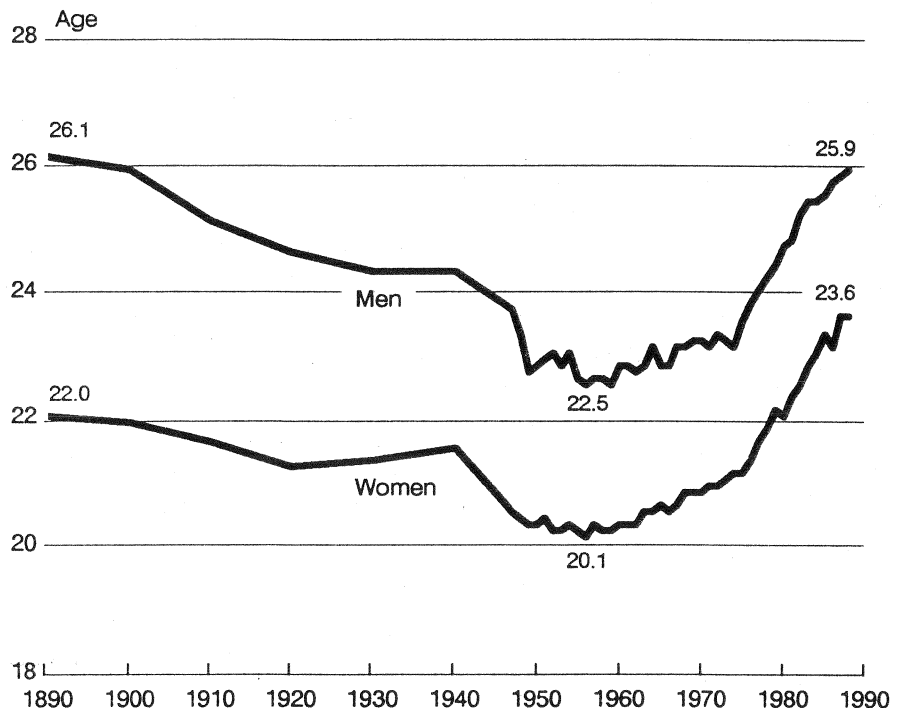
Adults are more likely to be single today than they were in 1970. Young adults are postponing marriage beyond the age at which most persons have married in the past, and young and middle-aged adults are becoming single for the second, third, or fourth time because of divorce. Elderly persons are finding themselves single once more because of the death of their spouse. The single population aged 18 and over rose from 38 million in 1970 (28 percent of all adults) to 66 million in 1988 (37 percent of all adults).

Postponing Marriage

The delay in marriage is reflected in the increase in the proportion of men and women who have not yet married for the first time, the rise in the estimated median age at first marriage, and changes in marriage rates.

Percent never married. The proportion of men and women in their twenties and early thirties who have never married has grown substantially during the past two decades (table A). Six of 10 women and nearly 8 of 10 men aged 20 to 24 had not yet married in 1988, compared with 36 percent and 55 percent, respectively, in 1970. Equally striking is the growth in the proportion of men and women in their late twenties and early thirties who have never married. Between 1970 and 1988, the proportions in the 25–29 age group tripled for women and more than doubled for men. For those in the 30–34 age

Figure 1.
Median Age at First Marriage,
by Sex: 1890 to 1988



group, the proportions tripled for both men and women.

The proportion never married is higher for Blacks than for Whites. Three-fourths (75 percent) of Black women in their early twenties had not married in 1988, compared with 59 percent of White women. Among Black women in their late twenties, one-half (50 percent) had not married, compared with 26 percent of White women. The same is true for men, although the differences between the proportions of never-married Black men and White men are not as large as between Black and White women.

Persons of Hispanic origin also had large proportions never married. The proportions for Hispanics were more similar to Whites than Blacks.

While the high proportions of never-married persons in their late twenties and early thirties suggest that many of these persons are postponing their first marriage as compared with earlier cohorts, they also suggest that a higher proportion may never marry.

Age at first marriage. The postponement of first marriage also is reflected in the estimated median and quartile ages at first marriage. Since the mid-1950's, the estimated median age at first marriage has moved upward gradually, increasing by about 3 years for both men and women (table B). Today, men and women are marrying the first time at ages similar to those seen at the turn of the century. For example, the median age at first marriage for men in 1988 is the same as that for men in 1900 (25.9 years (figure 1)). The median age at first marriage for women (23.6 in 1988) has been higher during the 1980's than at any time for which estimates are available. These recent increases in age at first marriage have been relatively greater for women, so the age differences between brides and grooms is reduced.

Similarly, there has been upward movement for women in the first and third quartile ages at first marriage.¹ Of special note in table C are the first and third quartile ages which have

¹ The median and quartile ages at first marriage shown in this report are estimates derived from tabulations of marital status by age for calendar years and may yield figures that differ somewhat from those based on annual vital statistics or on census questions on age at first marriage.

increased since 1970 by 1.2 years and 4.6 years, respectively. Currently, one-fourth (first quartile) of the women who marry do so by 20.1 years of age, only slightly higher than the 18.9 years of age in 1970. However, the age by which three-fourths (third quartile) of women have married has moved upward considerably, from 23.3 years to 27.9 years. As a result, the inter-quartile range for women increased by 3.4 years since 1970, which means that

Table A. Percent Never Married, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1988, 1980 and 1970

Age	Women			Men		
	1988	1980	1970	1988	1980	1970
All races:						
20 to 24 years	61.1	50.2	35.8	77.7	68.8	54.7
25 to 29 years	29.5	20.9	10.5	43.3	33.1	19.1
30 to 34 years	16.1	9.5	6.2	25.0	15.9	9.4
35 to 39 years	9.0	6.2	5.4	14.0	7.8	7.2
White:						
20 to 24 years	58.5	47.2	34.6	76.1	67.0	54.4
25 to 29 years	26.3	18.3	9.2	41.3	31.4	17.8
30 to 34 years	13.0	8.1	5.5	22.6	14.2	9.2
35 to 39 years	7.5	5.2	4.6	12.8	6.6	6.1
Black:						
20 to 24 years	75.0	68.5	43.5	86.7	79.3	56.1
25 to 29 years	49.6	37.2	18.8	55.0	44.2	28.4
30 to 34 years	36.9	19.0	10.8	42.0	30.0	9.2
35 to 39 years	19.8	12.2	12.1	24.5	18.5	15.8
Hispanic¹:						
20 to 24 years	52.7	42.8	33.4	72.5	61.8	49.9
25 to 29 years	26.9	22.5	13.7	39.3	28.9	19.4
30 to 34 years	16.7	11.2	8.4	27.9	12.1	11.0
35 to 39 years	9.9	6.6	6.9	12.1	5.8	7.6

¹ Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Table B. Median Age at First Marriage, by Sex: 1890 to 1988

Year	Men	Women	Year	Men	Women
1988	25.9	23.6	1955	22.6	20.2
			1950	22.8	20.3
1985	25.5	23.3	1940	24.3	21.5
1980	24.7	22.0	1930	24.3	21.3
1975	23.5	21.1	1920	24.6	21.2
1970	23.2	20.8	1910	25.1	21.6
1965	22.8	20.6	1900	25.9	21.9
1960	22.8	20.3	1890	26.1	22.0

Note: A standard error of 0.1 years is appropriate to measure sampling variability for any of the above median ages at first marriage, based on Current Population Survey data.

marriage is becoming a less age-concentrated event.

Estimated quartile ages at first marriage for White and Black women differ. In 1970 (the first year for which these statistics are available for Blacks), the first and second (median) quartiles for White and Black women were very similar (table C). By 1980, differences between Whites and Blacks in the first quartile were still small, but the median and third quartile ages were rising faster for Black women than for White women. By 1985, the estimated median age at first marriage had reached its highest level for Black women (27.0 years) and then declined to 26.0 years in 1988. The median age for White women, however, has continued a gradual rise to a high of 23.3 years in 1988 — still 3 years below the median age at first marriage for Black women. Third quartile ages reached 27.2 years for White women in 1985, compared with 33.0 years for Black women.

Marriage rates. The total number of marriages in the United States reached an all-time high in 1984 (2,477,192),

but dropped 3 percent in 1985 (2,412,625). The marriage rate based on eligible unmarried females reached a record low level in 1985: 57.0 marriages per 1,000 unmarried females aged 15 and over, compared with the high of 118.1 in 1946.

Most States report detailed marriage statistics such as age and previous marital history. These States make up the Marriage Registration Area (MRA).² Of the 1,858,783 marriages that took place in 1985 in the MRA, about two-thirds were first marriages and one-third were remarriages. Of these first marriages, 10 percent were to women age 30 to 44 years, compared with 6 percent in 1980 and 4 percent in 1970 (NCHS, 1988a).

If age-specific marriage rates remain constant, a never-married woman who is 30 years of age will have a 52-percent chance of marrying by age 65.

² In 1985, the MRA consisted of the District of Columbia, and all States except Arizona, Arkansas, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, and Washington.

For women who have not married by age 40, the probability of marriage by age 65 is 23 percent (Moorman, 1987). Regardless of current marital status, it is estimated that 90 percent of all women will marry at some point in their lives (Norton and Moorman, 1987).

Dissolution of Marriage

Another way in which adults become single is marital dissolution through divorce and widowhood. Divorce is most common among younger and middle-aged adults, while widowhood is most common among elderly women.

Divorce. In 1988, 10.1 percent (14 million) of all adults who had ever been married were divorced; in 1970, the figures were 3.8 percent and 4.3 million. These people had divorced but had not remarried as of the time the survey was conducted. These statistics do not indicate the number of divorces granted in a given year, nor the number of persons who had ever divorced during their lifetime.

The ratio of divorced persons to the number of persons in intact marriages is a useful index for monitoring the increase in divorce (table D). For example, in 1988 there were 13,968,000 divorced persons, compared with 105,226,000 persons married and living with their spouse, yielding a divorce ratio of 133 per 1,000. This ratio is up from 100 per 1,000 in 1980 and 47 per 1,000 in 1970.

Men have lower divorce ratios than women (110 per 1,000 for men, compared with 156 per 1,000 for women in 1988) largely because of the higher incidence of remarriage for divorced men than for divorced women. Blacks have higher ratios than Whites (263 per 1,000 versus 124 per 1,000, respectively), and Hispanics, who may be of any race, had a divorce ratio of 137 per 1,000 in 1988.

The divorce ratio is affected by the incidence of both divorce and remarriage. For instance, in 1985 there were 1,190,000 divorces granted, adding about 2.4 million to the count of cur-

Table C. **Quartile Ages at First Marriage for Women, by Race: 1970 to 1988**

Year	Quartiles			Interquartile range
	First	Second (median)	Third	
All women:				
1988	20.1	23.6	27.9	7.8
1985	20.0	23.3	27.2	7.2
1980	19.4	22.0	26.2	6.8
1975	19.0	21.1	24.4	5.4
1970	18.9	20.8	23.3	4.4
White women:				
1988	20.0	23.3	27.2	7.2
1985	19.8	22.8	26.8	7.0
1980	19.2	21.6	25.7	6.5
1975	18.9	21.1	23.9	5.0
1970	18.8	21.1	23.1	4.3
Black women:				
1988	21.0	26.0	(NA)	(NA)
1985	21.4	27.0	33.0	11.6
1980	20.5	24.7	29.7	9.2
1975	19.4	21.3	27.1	7.7
1970	19.1	21.3	25.4	6.3

NA Not available.

rently divorced persons. However, in that same year about 1.2 million divorced persons remarried. (About 31 percent of the brides in 1985 were previously divorced; this was virtually the same proportion as that for grooms.) (NCHS, 1988a) Thus, the 1.2 million persons who remarried during the year are subtracted from the 2.4 million who divorced during the year, resulting in a net increase of 1,228,000 divorced persons in 1985. The divorce ratio has continued to increase during recent years, because the total number of divorced persons has continued to increase more rapidly than the total number of married persons. It is estimated that between 70 and 75 percent of divorced persons will remarry. For those who remarry, the median interval between divorce and remarriage is about 2 years (Norton and Moorman, 1987).

The annual divorce rate published by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) differs from the divorce ratio in that the divorce rate is the number of divorces that are granted in a given year per 1,000 population. In 1985, the divorce rate was 5.0 per 1,000 total population, compared with 3.5 per 1,000 in 1970. The rate per 1,000 married women, which represents the population at risk of divorce, was 21.7, meaning that more than 2 percent of American wives divorced in 1985. In 1970, the divorce rate for married women was 14.9. The record high divorce rate for married women was in 1979, when the rate reached 22.8. After 1979, the rate declined until 1983 and has since been rising again. If current divorce levels persist, approximately one-half of all recent marriages (marriages occurring within the past 15 to 20 years) will eventually end in divorce (Norton, 1982).

Divorce increased greatly during the 1960's and 1970's. By 1985, 23 percent of the ever-married population in the United States had experienced a divorce. This includes not only the young adults who most commonly experience divorce, but also the elderly

Table D. Divorced Persons per 1,000 Married Persons With Spouse Present, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1988, 1980, 1970, and 1960

Year and sex	Total	White	Black	Hispanic ¹
Both sexes:				
1988	133	124	263	137
1980	100	92	203	98
1970	47	44	83	61
1960	35	33	62	(NA)
Male:				
1988	110	102	216	106
1980	79	74	149	64
1970	35	32	62	40
1960	28	27	45	(NA)
Female:				
1988	156	146	311	167
1980	120	110	258	132
1970	60	56	104	81
1960	42	38	78	(NA)

NA Not available.

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source of 1970 data for Hispanic: 1970 Census of Population, Vol. II, 1C, *Persons of Spanish Origin*.
Source of 1960 data for Black: 1960 Census of Population, Vol. II, 1C, *Nonwhite Population by Race*.

whose marriage survived many years. Among ever-married women aged 40 to 44 in 1985, 32 percent had been divorced at some time, compared with a much smaller 18 percent in 1970. The mean age at divorce in 1985 was 33.7 years old for the wife and 34.4 years old for the husband (NCHS, 1987).

Teenage marriages have the highest risk of divorce (table E). Among women who married before age 20, 32 percent had divorced as of 1985, up from 20 percent in 1970. Women who married at later ages have more stable marriages, although the proportion who had divorced has also risen. Between 1970 and 1985, the proportion who had divorced by the survey date rose from 11 to 18 percent for women married at age 20 to 24 years, from 9 to 14 percent for women married at age 25 to 29 years, and from 9 to 12 percent for women married at age 30 or older (Norton and Moorman, 1987).

Widowhood. Widowhood is the single status experienced most often by elderly women and is more likely to be a permanent one for women than for men. In 1988, there were 11.2 million

widows and 2.3 million widowers in the United States (excluding persons in nursing homes and other institutions); 72 percent of them were 65 years old or over. However, of all men age 65 years and over, 14 percent were currently widowed as compared with 49 percent of women.

Data from the 1985 June CPS Marital History Supplement show that among ever-married women age 65 or older at the time of the survey, 51 percent had been widowed after their first marriage, compared with 19 percent for men. Only 18 percent of these widowed women had remarried by the survey

Table E. Percent of Women Divorced After First Marriage, by Age at First Marriage: 1970 and 1985

Age at first marriage	1985	1970
Total	23.2	14.2
Under 20 years	32.4	19.6
20 to 24 years	18.2	10.9
25 to 29 years	13.6	9.2
30 years and over	11.8	9.1

date, compared with 41 percent for men. While widowhood is less common to persons under age 65, the chance of remarriage is greater, particularly for men. Among ever-married persons under 65 years old in 1985, only 2 percent of the men and 6 percent of the women had been widowed after their first marriage. Of these, 59 percent of the men had remarried, compared with 33 percent of the women.

Women tend to live longer than men. The estimated average length of life in the United States as of 1986 was 71.3 years for men and 78.3 years for women (NCHS, 1988d). Among men who survive to at least age 65, most are married, while women surviving to that age are more likely to be widowed (49 percent were widowed and 41 percent were married in 1988). Thus, the ratio of single men to single women in the older age group is very low, making chances of remarriage for older women correspondingly low.

Ratio of men to women. The ratio of unmarried men to unmarried women, by age, suggests that the marriage prospects are better for younger women than for older women (figure 2). Overall, in 1988 there were about 4 unmarried men for every 5 unmarried women. However, the ratio was much lower for persons 40 years of age and

older than it was for persons under 40 years of age. In fact, the largest ratio of unmarried men to unmarried women was for the age groups 25 to 29 and 30 to 34 years (127 and 121 unmarried men for every 100 unmarried women, respectively).

Singleness and the Living Arrangements of Children, Young Adults, and the Elderly

The rise in singleness in America has affected the living arrangements of all age groups, but in different ways. For example, the effects upon young children differ from those of young adults, and middle-aged divorcees are affected differently than elderly widows.

Children

Children are not included among the single population. They are, however, greatly affected by the rise in adult singleness and are, therefore, included in this analysis. As increases occur in divorce and in the proportion of never-married adults who bear children, a smaller proportion of children are living with two parents. The proportion living with a single parent has doubled since 1970.

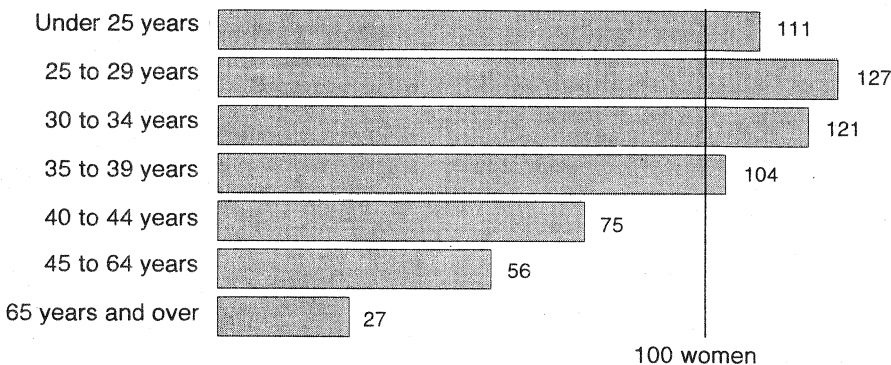
Presence of parents. Out of 63.2 million children under age 18 in 1988, 15.3 million (24 percent) lived with a single parent, compared with 8.2 million (12 percent) in 1970. Black children had the highest proportion living with a single parent in 1988, 54 percent versus 19 percent for White children and 30 percent for Hispanic children. Divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing are the main reasons that children live in single-parent situations. In 1988, 5.9 million children were living with a divorced parent and 4.7 million with a parent who had never married. These statistics reflect the child's current living arrangement and do not include the children who previously lived with one parent but whose parent has since (re)married. An estimated 60 percent of children born this year will spend some portion of their childhood in a one-parent situation (Norton and Glick, 1986).

Parental divorce. The number of children currently living with a divorced parent rose from 2.5 million in 1970 to 5.9 million in 1988. They account for the largest proportion of children in a one-parent situation (38 percent in 1988). Among White children, one-half of those living with one parent lived with a divorced parent compared with 17 percent for Black children, and 30 percent for Hispanic children.

About one-half (53 percent in 1985) of all divorces involve one or more children. In each year since 1972, over 1 million children have been involved in divorce. The highest figure recorded was in 1979 (1,181,000 children), and the number has fluctuated toward a slightly lower figure since then. In 1985, the estimated number of children involved in divorces and annulments was 1,091,000, or an average of 0.92 children per decree (NCHS, 1987).

Premarital childbearing. In 1988, 4.7 million children lived with a parent who had never married, up from 557,000 in 1970. To be sure, this is a striking increase over a relatively short span of years. Most of this increase occurred

Figure 2.
Ratio of Unmarried Men per 100
Unmarried Women: 1988



during the 1980's, and may have resulted in part from a procedural change in the Census Bureau's data collection and processing scheme in 1982-83. This procedural change helped to identify parent-child subfamilies that might otherwise have been overlooked.³ Nevertheless, the percentage of children living with a never-married parent was increasing both prior to and following the procedural change. (See table F.) The proportion rose from 7 percent to 15 percent between 1970 and 1981, then to 24 percent by 1983 (reflecting both actual increase and increase from procedural change), and to 31 percent by 1988. At least two-thirds of the measured increase between 1981 and 1983 resulted from the improvement in data collection and processing.

Table F. Proportion of Children in Single-Parent Situations: 1970, 1975, and 1980-88

Year	Children living with a—	
	Divorced parent	Never-married parent
1970	30.2	6.8
1975	35.9	10.7
1980	42.4	14.6
1981	43.8	15.2
1982 *	42.0	21.0
1983 **	42.0	24.0
1984	41.9	24.0
1985	41.2	25.7
1986	41.6	26.6
1987	40.7	28.5
1988	38.3	30.5

* Partial implementation of processing change.
** Full implementation of processing change.

Among never-married women aged 18 to 24 in 1987, 14 percent had borne a child. (The proportion for all women in that age group was 28 percent.) Of those who had not completed high

³ For a more detailed discussion of the procedural change, see Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 399, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1984*, pg. 8.

Table G. Living Arrangements of 18- to 24-Year-Olds, by Sex: 1988, 1980, and 1970

(Numbers in thousands)

Living arrangement	1988	1980	1970	Percent distribution		
				1988	1980	1970
Total	26,061	29,122	22,357	100.0	100.0	100.0
Child of householder*	14,190	14,091	10,582	54.4	48.4	47.3
Family householder or spouse	6,009	8,408	8,470	23.1	28.9	37.9
Nonfamily householder	2,275	2,776	1,066	8.7	9.5	4.8
Other	3,587	3,848	2,239	13.8	13.2	10.0
Male	12,835	14,278	10,398	100.0	100.0	100.0
Child of householder*	7,792	7,755	5,641	60.7	54.3	54.3
Family householder or spouse	1,976	3,041	3,119	15.4	21.3	30.0
Nonfamily householder	1,253	1,581	563	9.8	11.1	5.4
Other	1,814	1,902	1,075	14.1	13.3	10.3
Female	13,226	14,844	11,959	100.0	100.0	100.0
Child of householder*	6,398	6,336	4,941	48.4	42.7	41.3
Family householder or spouse	4,033	5,367	5,351	30.5	36.2	44.7
Nonfamily householder	1,022	1,195	503	7.7	8.1	4.2
Other	1,773	1,946	1,164	13.4	13.1	9.7

* Child of householder includes unmarried college students living in dormitories (1.9 million in 1988). Source of 1970 and 1980 data: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population, PC80-2-4B, *Living Arrangements of Children and Adults*, table 4; 1970 Census of Population, PC(2)-4B, *Persons by Family Characteristics*, table 2, excluding inmates of institutions and military in barracks.

school, 34 percent had borne a child (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988).

Childbearing among unmarried women has reached the highest levels ever recorded in the United States. Births to unmarried mothers totaled 878,477 in 1986, or a rate of 34.3 births per 1,000 unmarried women age 15 to 44 years. The rate for Black women is substantially higher than that for White women (80.9 per 1,000 versus 23.2 per 1,000, respectively). However, the rate has been increasing faster for White women than for Black women in recent years (NCHS, 1988c).

Income by presence of parents. Children living with a single parent tend to have lower family incomes than children living with married parents. Children living with their single mother have lower family incomes than children living with their single father. The average family income in 1988 for children under 18 living with their mother only was \$11,989, compared with \$23,919 for those living with their father only,

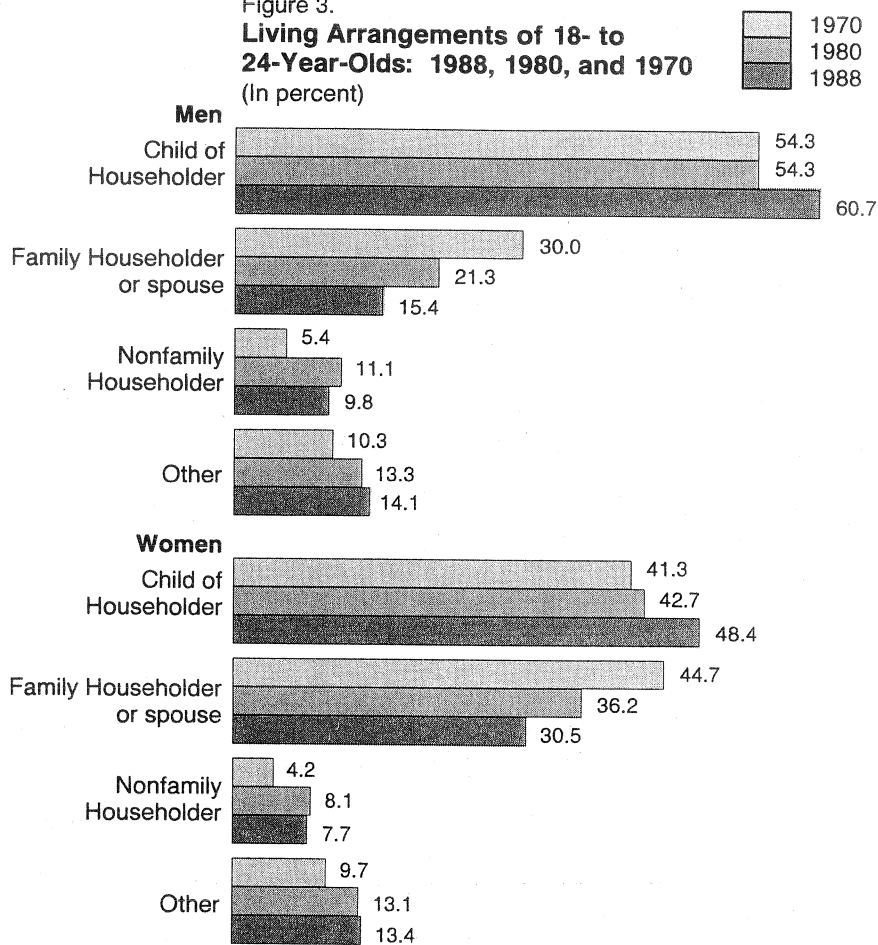
and \$40,067 for those living with both parents. That is, the average family income among children living with only their mother was about half that among children who lived only with their father and about 30 percent that of children living with both parents.

Based on statistics collected in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) between January and April 1985, about 4.0 million women received child support with the average level of payment reported to be approximately \$2,550. The child support payment represented about 11 percent of the family income of these women (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988b).

Young Adults

The rise in singleness among young adults is associated with various demographic and economic factors such as education, income, and housing costs. In some cases, these factors may cause young adults to live with their parents, as opposed to maintaining their own separate households.

Figure 3.
Living Arrangements of 18- to 24-Year-Olds: 1988, 1980, and 1970
 (In percent)



Living with their parents. Young adults aged 18 to 24 in 1988 were less likely than young adults in 1970 to be maintaining homes of their own and more likely to be living in the homes of their parents. Most of this change has occurred during the 1980's (table G and figure 3) and largely illustrates the shift away from maintaining a family of one's own at a young age rather than a shift away from living independently of parents. The proportion of young adults that were maintaining their own homes dropped from 43 percent in 1970 to 32 percent in 1988. The proportion living with their parents remained relatively

constant between 1970 and 1980 (47 and 48 percent, respectively), but then increased to 54 percent by 1988.

Postponement of first marriage is a major factor in the increase in the proportion of young adults living at home. The estimated median age at first marriage is higher for men than for women, and this coincides with the higher proportion of men than of women who live with their parents (61 and 48 percent, respectively). Based on data from the June 1985 CPS, around 70 percent of never-married persons aged 18 to 24 lived in the home of their parents, compared with about 3 percent of currently

married persons. Among those whose marriage had been disrupted, about 31 percent had returned to the home of their parents (Bianchi, 1987).

Young adults' pursuit of advanced education may add to the desirability of living with parents, because living expenses while in school may be paid by the parents. For the purpose of this analysis, college students living in dormitories were considered to be living with their parents on the assumption that parents were providing most of the economic support for these students.

Changes in college enrollment for women appear to be more closely related to changes in the proportion living with their parents than are changes in college enrollment for men. For civilian women aged 18 to 24, college enrollment rose from 20 to 25 percent between 1970 and 1980, and then to 28 percent in 1986 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988d). The comparable proportions of all women living with their parents were 41, 43, and 47 percent, respectively. The proportion of civilian males aged 18 to 24 enrolled in college declined from 32 percent in 1970 to 26 percent in 1980, while the proportion living with their parents remained unchanged at 54 percent in 1970 and 1980. By 1986, college enrollment among men had risen 2 percentage points to 28 percent, while the proportion living with parents rose 5 percentage points to 59 percent. Of the 14.2 million men and women 18 to 24 years old who lived with their parents in 1988, only 1.9 million were actually living in college dorms (unpublished data from the October supplement to the CPS).

Another factor that may account for the rise in the proportion of young adults living with their parents is the increase in housing costs (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989c) relative to the increase in before-tax income (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989b). (See table H.) In

1980, the average monthly income⁴ of 18- to 24-year-olds with income was \$539. At that time, monthly median gross rent was \$241—45 percent of the average income, and median owner housing cost was \$367—or 68 percent of the average income.

Table H. Mean Income of 18- to 24-Year-Olds, by Marital Status and Housing Costs: 1980, 1985, and 1987

Characteristic	1987	1985	1980
MEAN INCOME			
Total annual	\$8,327	\$7,670	\$6,467
Never married	7,718	7,046	5,821
Married	10,324	9,407	7,909
Widowed	(*)	(*)	(*)
Divorced	9,492	8,812	7,622
Total monthly ¹	\$694	\$639	\$539
Never married	643	587	485
Married	860	784	659
Widowed	(*)	(*)	(*)
Divorced	791	734	635
HOUSING COSTS			
Gross rent**	(NA)	\$365	\$243
Gross owner costs***	(NA)	566	366

NA Not available.

* Numbers were too small to calculate a mean.

** Specified renter-occupied housing units.

*** Specified owner-occupied housing units with a mortgage.

¹Annual income divided by 12.

By 1985, the average monthly income had risen to \$639, but this increase did not keep pace with the increase in housing costs. The 1985 median gross rent (the most recent year for which housing costs are available) was equal to 57 percent of 1985 income, and the owner costs were equal to 89 percent.

The income of persons 18 to 24 is lowest for those who have never married; in 1987, the average monthly income for never-married 18- to 24-year-olds with income was \$643, compared with \$860 for married persons, and \$791 for divorced persons of the same age

⁴ Average monthly income, shown here, is average annual income divided by 12 months.

group. Only 29 percent of the never-married civilian income recipients are year-round, full-time workers (which may account for the low income figures), compared with 45 percent for married persons and 38 percent for divorced persons. When only year-round, full-time workers are considered, the average monthly income jumps to \$1,166 for never-married persons, \$1,298 for married persons, and \$1,180 for divorced persons.⁵ Thus, the gap between the marital status categories is substantially smaller for full-time workers.

About 95 percent of young adults living at home have never married (based on the 1980 census), and many presumably have no income or low income, and work only part-time. The percentage of the civilian non-institutional population aged 18 to 24 who were employed in 1987 was 63.0 percent; not different from the 1980 percentage of 63.2.

Living on their own. Young adults who do not live with their parents may have one of several different types of living arrangements: they may maintain their own family household (with or without a spouse), they may live alone, or they may share a household with a person or persons not related to them.

In 1988, 6 million 18- to 24-year-olds maintained families as either the householder (one of the persons in whose name the home is owned or rented) or the householder's spouse. This represented 23 percent of all persons in the age group, down significantly from 1980 (29 percent) and 1970 (38 percent). Of the 2.9 million families in 1988 maintained by a person 18 to 24 years old, 62 percent were married-couple families, of whom about half had children present. The remaining 38 percent of families were maintained by someone with no spouse pre-

⁵ There was no significant difference between the average monthly income of never-married and divorced full-time, year-round workers.

sent, and roughly three-fourths had children living in the household.⁶

Young adults who lived alone or who shared their household with an unrelated adult numbered 2.3 million in 1988, or 9 percent of persons 18 to 24 years old. This proportion has not changed since 1980 (9 percent), but it did increase during the 1970's (from 4 percent to 9 percent).

One of the living arrangements that has increased in recent years is the number of unmarried-couple households (table I). Between 1970 and 1988, the total number of such households rose from 523,000 to 2,588,000. The Census Bureau defines an unmarried-couple household as one comprising two unrelated adults of the opposite sex, with or without children under 15 years old living in the household.⁷ About 7 of 10 unmarried-couple households had no children present in 1988.

This alternative living arrangement is used by singles of all ages. In 1988, one-fourth of the adults in unmarried-couple households were under 25 years of age, 43 percent were 25 to 34 years old, and 17 percent were 35 to 44 years of age. The majority (53 percent) of partners had never been married, 34 percent were divorced, 5 percent widowed, and 7 percent were separated from their spouse.

Some of the increase in unmarried-couple households may be related to the Baby Boom reaching their twenties and thirties, as well as to the increase in

⁶ A family contains two or more persons (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption. Therefore, the one-third of families with no spouse or child present had another relative present, such as a brother, parent, niece, etc.

⁷ Although the unmarried-couple household figure is intended mainly to identify cohabitating couples, and presumably does in most cases, it also may include those with a tenant or employee living in the household. The estimate, in turn, misses other cohabitating couples who have additional adults present in the household.

Table I. Unmarried-Couple Households, by Presence of Children: 1970 to 1988

(Numbers in thousands)

Year	Total	Without children under 15 years	With children under 15 years
1988	2,588	1,786	802
1980	1,589	1,159	431
1970	523	327	196

Source of 1970 data: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970 Census of Population, PC(2)-4B, *Persons by Family Characteristics*, table 11.

sexual freedom among adolescents and unmarried adults. It is estimated that about 60 percent of cohabitating couples eventually marry, but recent research suggests these marriages are less stable than marriages formed with no prior cohabitation (Bumpass). Of the couples who do not marry, the average duration of the relationship is about 18 months (Tanfer, 1987). Cohabitation does not appear to be a replacement for marriage, but it can act to prolong the single status.

The Elderly

In 1987, there were 29.8 million persons 65 years and older in the United States (based on the July 1 estimate which includes institutional population); the majority of them were women (59 percent). The elderly population has been increasing over the years and is projected to continue to increase as the Baby Boom ages and as life expectancy increases. Most singleness among the elderly is due to widowhood.

Growing elderly population. The population 65 years and over has been steadily increasing in number and in proportion to the total population. Between 1970 and 1987 the number rose from 20.1 million to 29.8 million, and the proportion increased from 10 percent of the total population to 12 percent. Projections to the year 2080 suggest that the elderly may reach 72 mil-

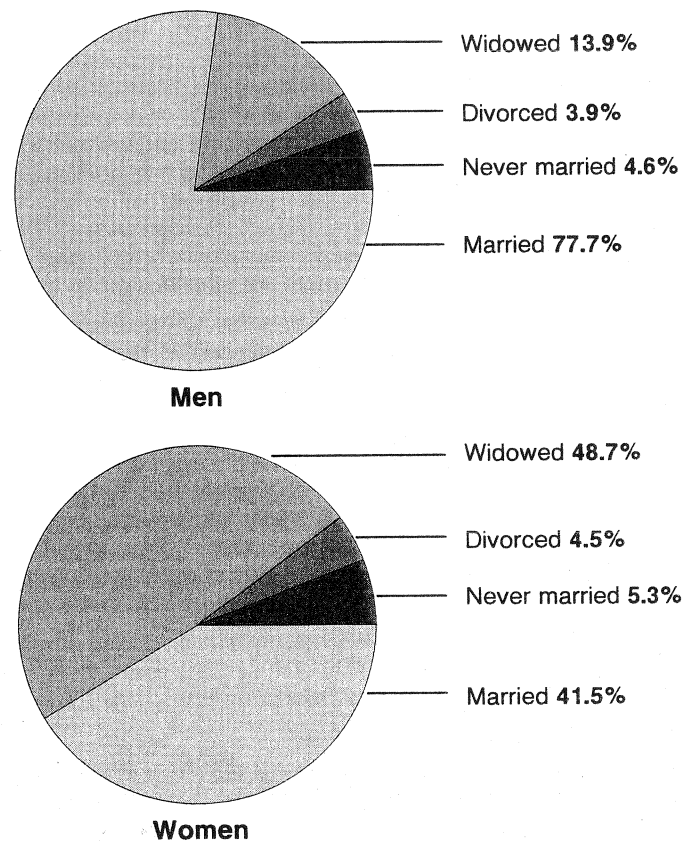
lion and account for 25 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989d). A smaller portion of the Black than of the White population is elderly. In 1987, 8 percent of all Blacks were 65 and over, compared with 13 percent of all Whites.

Life expectancy has risen for both sexes, but on average, women continue to live longer than men. The estimated average length of life for men rose from 67.1 years in 1970 to 71.3 years in 1986. For women, the corresponding increase was from 74.7 to 78.3 years. The average life expectancy for Blacks is lower than that for Whites: for Black men in 1986 it was

65.2, compared with 72.0 for White men, and the averages for women were 73.5 and 78.8, respectively. (NCHS, 1988d).

Marital status. Of the 11.8 million men 65 years and over in 1988, over three-fourths (78 percent) were currently married, 14 percent were widowed, 4 percent divorced, and 5 percent had never married (figure 4). Of the 16.7 million women, only 41 percent were currently married, 49 percent were widowed, 5 percent divorced, and 5 percent never-married. The ratio of unmarried men to unmarried women in this age group was 27 men per 100 women.

Figure 4.
Marital Status of Persons 65 Years and Over, by Sex: 1988



Men are less likely to be widowed but are far more likely to have remarried after widowhood than their female counterparts. Of the ever-married men 65 years and over in 1985, 19 percent had been widowed after their first marriage, compared with 51 percent for women. As of the survey date, 41 percent of these widowed men had remarried, compared with only 18 percent of the widowed women. Of all persons who married during 1985, only 1 percent of the women and 2 percent of the men were age 65 or older. Of all persons who were marrying for the second time or more in 1985, 3 percent of the women and 5 percent of the men were 65 years or older (NCHS, 1988a).

Income and poverty status. The median income of the elderly has been rising. Between 1980 and 1987 the median income (in 1987 dollars) of persons 65 years and over with income rose from \$10,127 to \$11,854 for men and from \$5,829 to \$6,734 for women (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989b). The median income of the single elderly is lower than that for the married elderly. In 1987, the median income of married persons 65 years and over was \$9,200, compared with \$7,911 for

Table J. Economic Characteristics of the Elderly, by Sex and Marital Status: 1987

(Persons 65 years and over)

Characteristic	Men	Women
MEDIAN INCOME		
Total	\$11,854	\$6,734
Married, spouse present. . . .	12,666	5,485
Married, spouse absent	9,010	6,271
Never married.	9,436	8,261
Widowed.	9,509	7,432
Divorced.	8,422	7,567
POVERTY RATE		
Total	8.5	14.9
Married, spouse present. . . .	5.9	5.7
Married, spouse absent	17.1	35.2
Never married.	17.7	23.3
Widowed.	14.6	20.0
Divorced.	19.1	23.9

Table K. Living Arrangements of the Elderly: 1988, 1980, and 1970

(Noninstitutional population. Numbers in thousands)

Living arrangement and age	1988			1980	1970	Percent distribution		
	Total	Men	Women			1988	1980	1970
65 years and over	28,527	11,837	16,691	24,194	19,061	100.0	100.0	100.0
Living:								
Alone	8,684	1,913	6,770	7,328	5,071	30.4	30.3	26.6
With spouse	15,543	8,891	6,653	12,965	9,738	54.5	53.6	51.1
With other relatives.	3,652	788	2,865	3,402	3,606	12.8	14.1	18.9
With nonrelatives only. . . .	648	245	403	499	646	2.3	2.1	3.4
65 to 74 years.	17,472	7,736	9,736	15,293	12,093	100.0	100.0	100.0
Living:								
Alone	4,243	1,014	3,229	3,851	2,815	24.3	25.2	23.3
With spouse	11,161	6,152	5,010	9,474	7,086	63.9	61.9	58.6
With other relatives.	1,747	412	1,334	1,661	1,780	10.0	10.9	14.7
With nonrelatives only. . . .	321	158	163	307	412	1.8	2.0	3.4
75 years and over.	11,055	4,101	6,955	8,901	6,968	100.0	100.0	100.0
Living:								
Alone	4,441	899	3,541	3,477	2,256	40.2	39.1	32.4
With spouse	4,382	2,739	1,643	3,491	2,652	39.6	39.2	38.1
With other relatives.	1,905	376	1,531	1,741	1,826	17.2	19.6	26.2
With nonrelatives only. . . .	327	87	240	192	234	3.0	2.2	3.4

divorced persons and \$7,731 for widowed persons.⁸ Elderly women, by marital status, had lower personal income than elderly men, although the income of divorced women was not significantly lower than that for divorced men (table J). Married women had the lowest median income, but were likely to benefit from the income of their spouse.

The proportion of elderly persons with incomes below the poverty level declined from 15.7 in 1980 to 12.2 in 1987 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989e). The poverty rate for the single elderly was higher than for the married elderly (19.9 compared to 6.6 in 1986), and the rates for single elderly women, by marital status, were higher than for their male counterparts.

Living arrangements. Living arrangements of the elderly noninstitutional population vary by age and by sex (ta-

ble K). For persons 65 to 74 years of age in 1988, the majority (64 percent) of persons were married and living with their spouse, one-fourth lived alone, and 10 percent lived with other relatives. For persons 75 years and older, one-half were widowed, thus, a larger proportion lived alone (40 percent) or with other relatives (17 percent).

The living arrangements of men vary only slightly across the two elderly age groups, while significant differences exist for women. Among elderly men in 1988, the majority lived with their wives (80 percent for 65- to 74-year-olds and 67 percent for those 75 and over), and the next largest proportion lived alone (13 and 22 percent, respectively). Elderly women, in contrast, are less likely to be living with their spouses, because of their longer life expectancy and the lower rates of remarriage after they are widowed. As a result, they are more likely to live alone or with another relative. One-half of women 65 to 74 years old lived with their husbands in 1988; by age 75 or older, the proportion declined to one-fourth. The proportion who lived alone

⁸ There is no significant difference between the median income of married elderly (\$9,200) and never-married elderly (\$8,667).

in 1988 was 33 percent for women 65 to 74 and 51 percent for women 75 years or older, and the proportions who lived with another relative was 14 percent and 22 percent, respectively.

Based on the 1980 decennial census, 2 percent of persons 65 to 74 and 10 percent of persons 75 years and over lived in nursing homes. In the 65-74 age group, similar proportions of men and women lived in nursing homes (1.4 and 1.7 percent). However, for those 75 and over, the proportion for women rose to 12 percent, nearly double the proportion for men (7 percent). (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984a) Older people who live alone are more likely to

live subsequently in an institution than are persons who live with others. Apparently, persons who maintain active social lives are more likely to stay healthier and live longer than those who do not (NCHS, 1988b).

Conclusion

Although most persons eventually marry (some more than once), singleness is playing a larger part in our adult lives than in the past. People are delaying marriage, and divorce is continuing at high levels. The average life expectancy is increasing, but on average, women continue to live longer than

men. All of these factors have led to an increase in the single population.

Singleness, in most instances, is a temporary state—about 90 percent of people will marry and, of those who divorce, about 70 percent will remarry. But while they are single, people have a set of unique needs for public and private sector services. Issues involving child care and economic equity for single parents, education and work opportunities for young adults, and housing and health care for the elderly, all in some way are associated with trends toward greater singleness in our society.

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