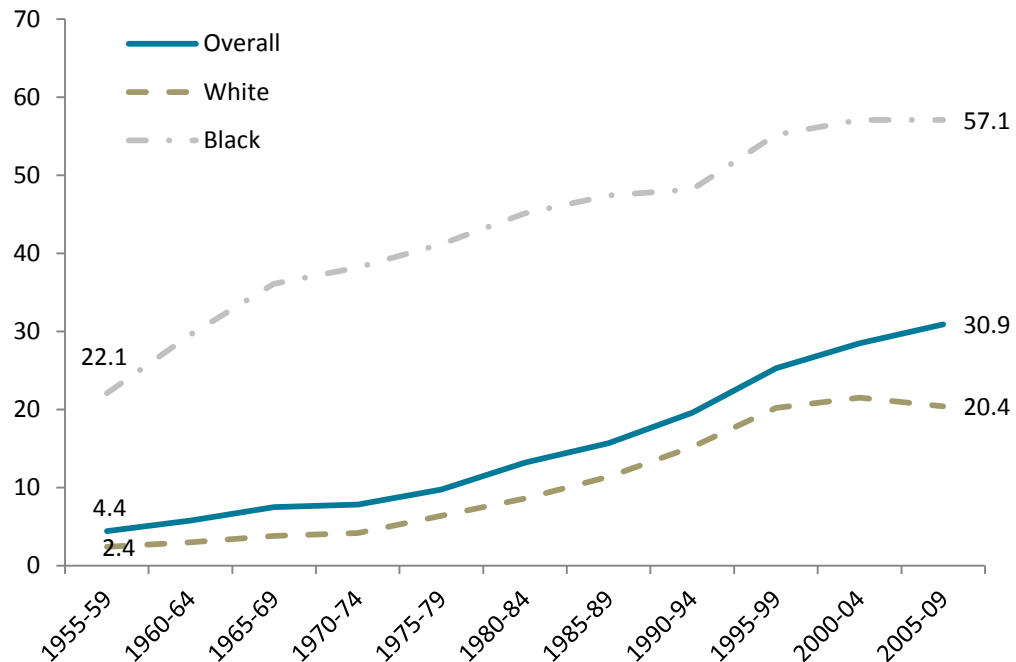


# Trends in Motherhood Before First Marriage

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Family scholars have noted a dramatic increase in births to unmarried women, most of which occur among never-married women (Wu, 2008; [FP-13-06](#)). This increase is linked to the rise in the proportion of unmarried women who are already mothers, and thus increases the chances that a first marriage may result in a step family. This profile examines trends over the past fifty years in women entering first marriage by the presence of children, paying attention to differences by race and education, using a unique dataset known as the Integrated Fertility Survey Series (available at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/IFSS/>).\*

Figure 1. Share of Women in First Marriages Experiencing a Premarital Birth, by Race and Marriage Cohort

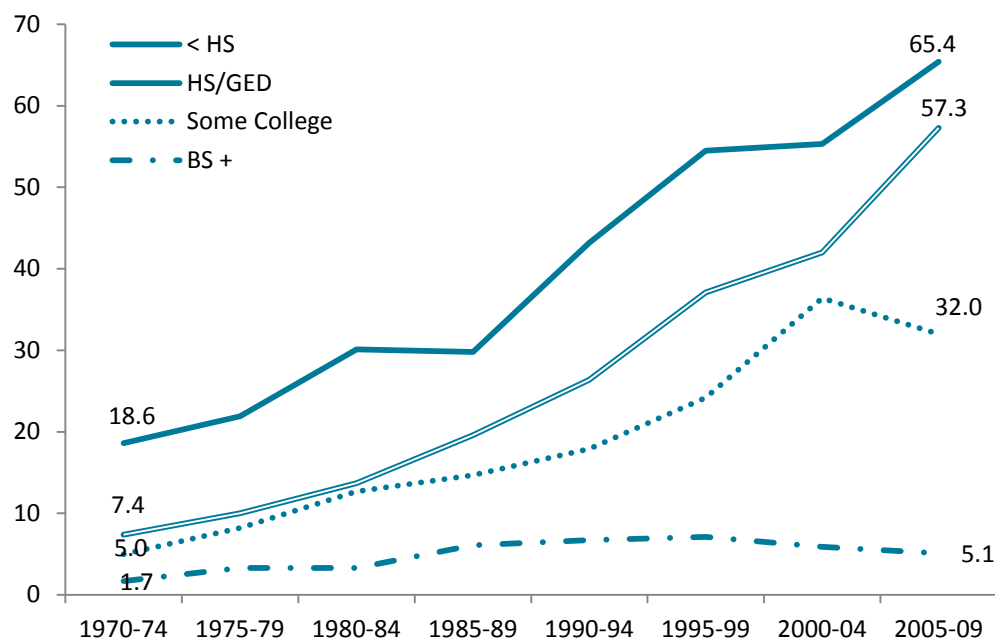


## 50 Years of Black-White Differences in Childbearing Prior to First Marriage

Figure 1 illustrates that the share of women who enter a first marriage with at least one child increased dramatically between 1955 and 2009. Among women married in 1955-59, 4.4% had a child prior to marriage compared to 30.9% in 2005-09, a 600% increase over the course of 50 years.

- Both Black and White wives experienced a considerable increase in premarital fertility. However, premarital fertility remains more common among Black than White wives regardless of marriage cohort.
  - Over half (57.1%) of Black wives had a premarital birth compared to one-fifth (20.4%) of White wives in the most recent marriage cohort.
  - Although premarital fertility has been more common for Black wives compared to White wives across marriage cohorts, White wives experienced a much larger percentage change over time, 700% increase versus 158%.
- Additional analyses (not shown) demonstrate differences in age at marriage for wives with and without premarital births.
  - For the earliest cohort, there are minimal differences in wives' age at marriage by race or parenthood status. The average age at first marriage ranges from 20 to 21.2.
  - However, substantial differences emerge in recent cohorts. Among women married in 2005-09, Black mothers are older at 28.5, and childless White women are younger at 25, on average. Childless Black women and White mothers have the same mean age at marriage, 26.6.

Figure 2. Share of Women in First Marriages Experiencing a Premarital Birth, by Education and Marriage Cohort



### 35 Years of Educational Differences in Wives' Premarital Fertility

Figure 2 reveals a distinct educational gradient in the percentage of wives entering a first marriage with a child. Further, trends in wives' premarital fertility differ substantially by the mother's level of educational attainment (as measured at the time of survey).

- Wives without a high school diploma or GED report the largest share entering their first marriage with a child. This is true for each marriage cohort (ranging from 18.6% to 65.4%).
- Over half of wives in the most recent cohort who reported having a high school diploma or less had a child prior to their first marriage. In contrast, only 5% of college-educated wives had a premarital birth.
- Wives with moderate levels of education (high school/GED or some college) experienced the most dramatic increases in premarital fertility, 674% and 540%, respectively.
- Additional analyses (not shown) highlight variation in mothers' education, parenthood status, and mean age at first marriage.
  - Among earlier marriage cohorts, there were minimal differences in age at first marriage between mothers and childless women with comparable levels of education.
  - In contrast, among recent cohorts, more substantial differences between mothers and childless women are evident among wives.
    - Mothers are 4 years older, on average, than their childless counterparts for those reporting less than high school, high school, and some college.
    - The average age at first marriage did not differ across parenthood status for college educated wives.

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