

Women’s Union Status at First Birth

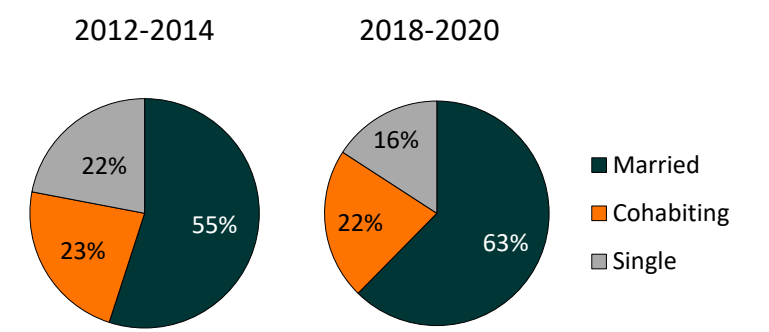
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Both the share of women who have ever married and the share who have ever had a birth has declined ([FP-22-19](#)), while those who do marry and/or have a birth are increasingly delaying these events to later ages ([FP-21-12](#), [FP-20-06](#)). The marital context in which women have births varies by educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and age ([FP-22-13](#)). This profile expands beyond marital status by including cohabitation (union status) and relies on recent data from the 2014 and 2020 June Fertility Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) to identify recent trends in women’s union status at first birth. Using data from the 2020 supplement to focus just on first births occurring between 2018 and 2020, we further consider union status by educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and age at first birth. Only women who were aged 44 or younger at first birth are included in the analyses. In this profile, “single” refers to those who are not married nor living with a partner.

Recent Trends in Union Status at First Birth

- The majority of first births in both 2012-2014 and 2018-2020 occurred to married women; this share increased from 55% to 63% over the six-year period.
- The share of first births to cohabiting women remained relatively stable, accounting for slightly less than a quarter of first births.
- The share of first births to single women decreased from 22% in 2012-2014 to 16% in 2018-2020.
- A growing percentage of unmarried mothers were cohabiting at the time of their first birth, increasing from 51% in 2012-2014 to 58% in 2018-2020.

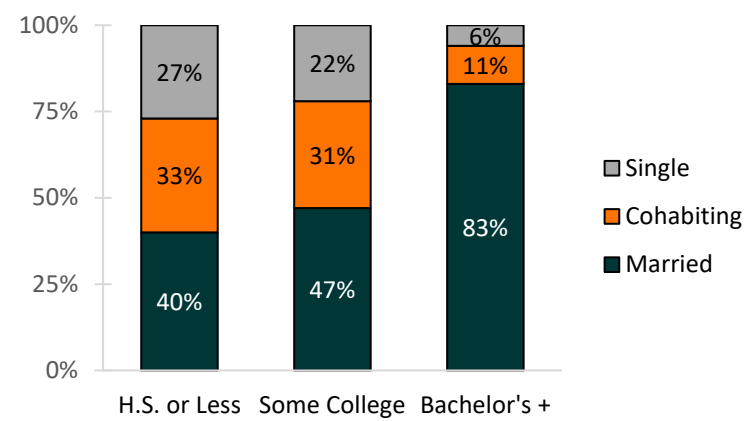
Figure 1. Union Status at First Birth Among Women with a First Birth in 2012-2014 & 2018-2020



Source: NCFMR analyses of IPUMS-CPS, 2014 & 2020 CPS Fertility Supplement, University of Minnesota

Union Status of Recent First Births by Educational Attainment

Figure 2. Union Status at First Birth by Educational Attainment, 2018-2020



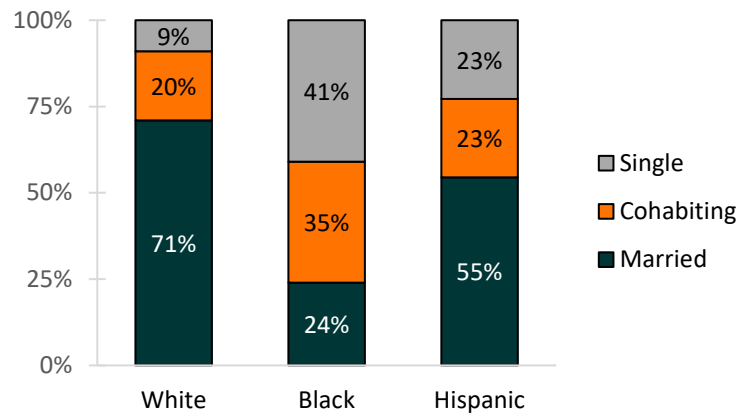
Source: NCFMR analyses of IPUMS-CPS, 2020 CPS Fertility Supplement, University of Minnesota

- Two fifths (40%) of first births to women with a high school diploma or less in 2018-2020 occurred within marriage compared to nearly half (47%) among those with some college education and over four fifths (83%) among those with a bachelor’s degree.
- Among women with a high school diploma or less and with some college, approximately one third (33% and 31%, respectively) had their first birth within cohabitation compared to just one in ten (11%) first births to women with a bachelor’s degree or more.
- The share of first births occurring to single women decreased with educational attainment, such that roughly one quarter of first births to women in the lower and middle educational attainment categories were to single women (27% and 22%, respectively) compared to only 6% among women with a bachelor’s degree.

Union Status of Recent First Births by Race/Ethnicity

- Nearly three quarters (71%) of first births to White women in 2018-2020 occurred within marriage compared to over half (55%) of first births to Hispanic women and about one quarter (24%) of first births to Black women.
- Having a first birth within cohabitation was more common among Black women (35%) than among White and Hispanic women (20% and 23%, respectively).
- Over two-fifths (41%) of first births to Black women occurred while single compared to nearly one quarter (23%) of Hispanic women and about one tenth (9%) of White women.

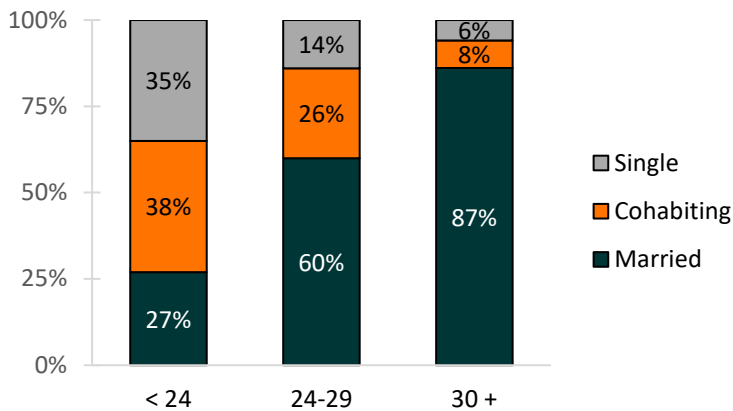
Figure 3. Union Status at First Birth by Race/Ethnicity, 2018-2020



Source: NCFMR analyses of IPUMS-CPS, 2020 CPS Fertility Supplement, University of Minnesota

Union Status of Recent First Births by Age at First Birth

Figure 4. Union Status at First Birth by Age at First Birth, 2018-2020



Source: NCFMR analyses of IPUMS-CPS, 2020 CPS Fertility Supplement, University of Minnesota

Data Sources:

Flood, S., King, M., Rodgers, R., Ruggles, S., Warren, J. R., & Westberry, M. (2021). Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Current Population Survey: Version 9.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V9.0>

References:

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