

Marriage and Cohabitation Experiences Among Young Adults



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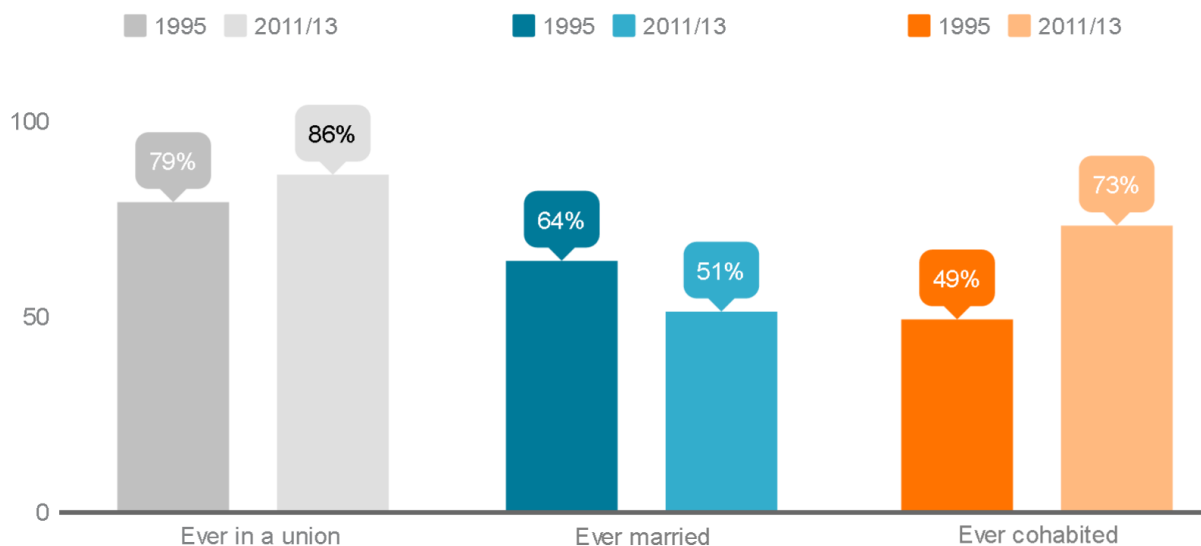
The timing and sequencing of major life events marking the transition to adulthood have changed over the past few decades. Although most young people expect to marry at some point in their lives (Manning et al., 2007), the age at first marriage is at a historic high (Anderson and Payne, 2016). At the same time, the overall age at first union formation has changed little over time due to cohabitation (Manning et al., 2014). These shifts call for a better understanding of experiences of union formation in young adulthood. Using data from the National Survey of Family Growth (1995 and 2011/13), this profile presents changes in the experiences of ever marrying and cohabiting among young adult women (aged 25-29) between 1995 and 2011/13.

Change in Marriage and Cohabitation Experiences Among Young Adults, 1995-2011/13

- Cohabitation has usurped marriage as the most common relationship experience in young adulthood.
- Between 1995 and 2011/2013, the share of ever-married women aged 25-29 declined, whereas the share of ever-cohabited women increased.
- Compared to nearly two-thirds of women in 1995, only half of young adult women had ever married in recent years.
- In contrast, fewer than half of women aged 25-29 had ever cohabited in 1995, but the majority (73%) had cohabited by 2011/13 (Figure 1).
- Young adults are not retreating from union formation but are choosing cohabitation rather than marriage.
- A large majority (86%) of young adult women aged 25-29 had married or cohabited at least once in 2011/13, up from only 79% in 1995 (Figure 1).

Marriage Decreases
Cohabitation Increases
...among young adult women

Figure 1. Share of Women Aged 25-29 who were Ever in a Union, Ever Married, and Ever Cohabited, 1995-2011/13



Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 1995 and 2011/2013

Change in Marriage and Cohabitation Experiences Among Young Adults by Race/Ethnicity, 1995-2011/13

- Nearly twenty years ago, marriage was more commonly experienced by young adult Hispanics and Whites than cohabitation. Today, the trend has shifted with cohabitation becoming the typical relationship experience in young adulthood for these two groups of young women (Figures 2 and 3).
- More than three-quarters of young Hispanic and White women had been in at least one cohabiting relationship in 2011-2013 (Figure 3).
- Twenty years ago, young adult Black women more often cohabited (48%) than married (40%), and this trend has continued. In 2011/13, 61% of Black women had ever cohabited and only 23% had ever married.

Figure 2. Share of Women Aged 25-29 who were Ever Married by Race/Ethnicity

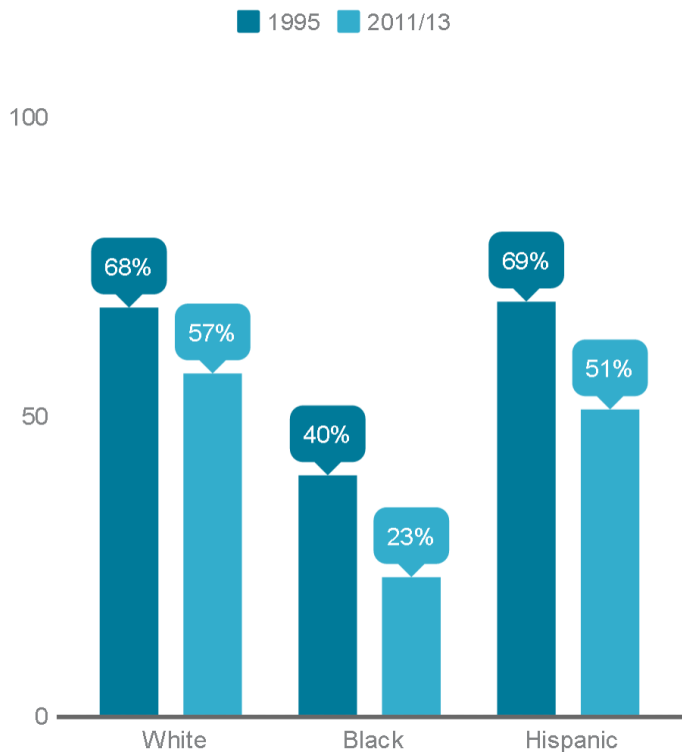
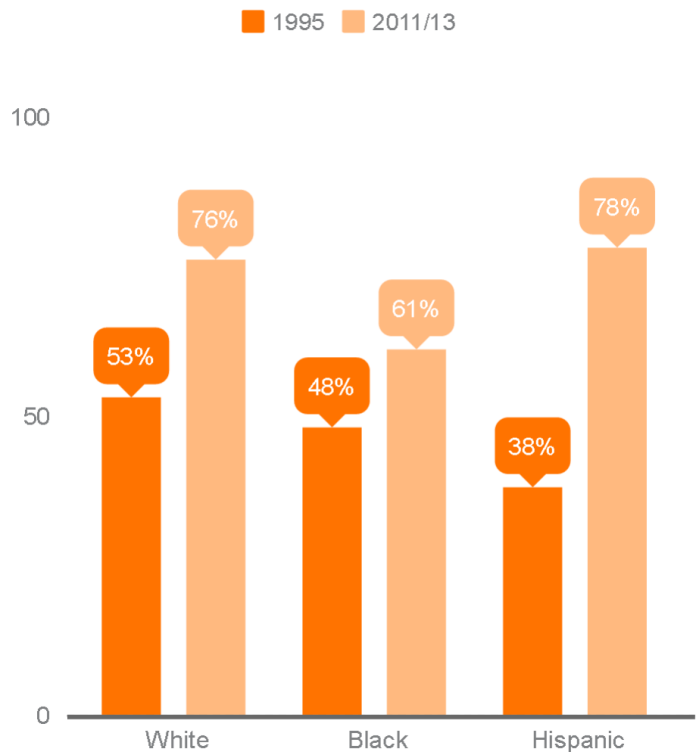


Figure 3. Share of Women Aged 25-29 who Ever Cohabited by Race/Ethnicity



Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 1995 and 2011/2013



Today, the trend has shifted with cohabitation becoming the typical relationship experience in young adulthood...



Change in Marriage and Cohabitation Experiences Among Young Adults by Educational Attainment, 1995-2011/13

- For all education groups, marriage was the most common union experience twenty years ago, but today cohabitation has surpassed marriage.
- Marriage has declined in young adulthood for all education groups without a Bachelor's degree. For those with a Bachelor's degree, it has increased (Figure 4).
- Cohabitation has increased across all education groups with the greatest increase among those with at least a Bachelor's degree.

Figure 4. Share of Women Aged 25-29 who were Ever Married by Educational Attainment

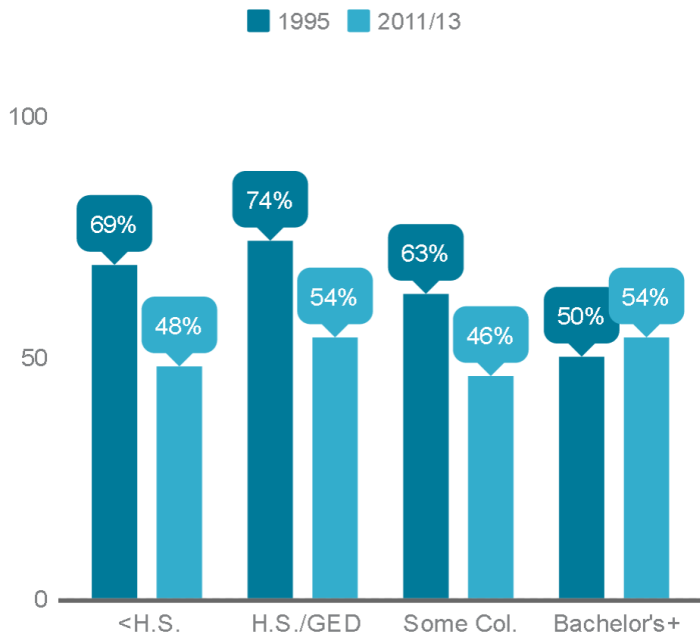
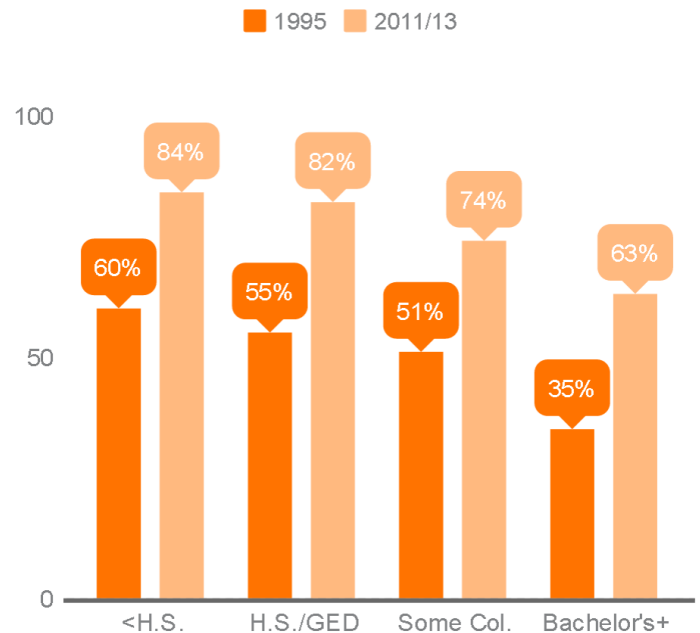


Figure 5. Share of Women Aged 25-29 who Ever Cohabited by Educational Attainment



Source: National Survey of Family Growth 1995 and 2011/2013

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