

Cohabitation in Middle and Later Life



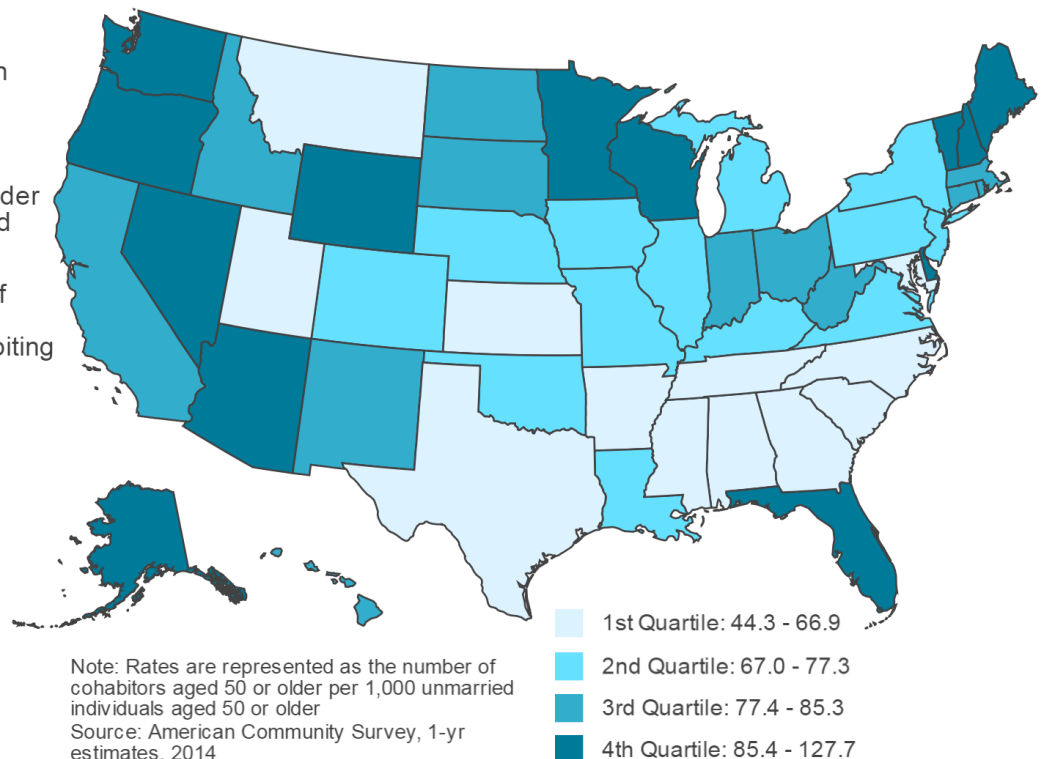
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Cohabitation is gaining popularity across the life course. In 2000, the number of older men and women (defined as those aged 50 and older) in a cohabiting relationship was about 1.2 million (or 1.6% of older adults) (Brown, Bulanda, & Lee, 2005). Since then, the number of cohabiting older adults has nearly tripled to 3.2 million in 2014. Such growth suggests that cohabitation is becoming an increasingly common experience among today's older Americans. Using data from the 2014 American Community Survey, this Family Profile examines America's population of cohabitators aged 50 or older. Specifically, we explore cohabitation rates across states and compare the characteristics of older cohabitators to those who report being married or single. We find that 77% of older cohabitators were White in 2014, whereas 12% were Black, and 11% were Hispanic (not shown). Furthermore, cohabitators were younger, on average, than their married and single counterparts; the average age of cohabitators was 60 compared to 67 and 63 for single and married individuals, respectively (not shown).

Older Cohabitation Rates by State

- In 2014, the cohabitation rate in the United States for those aged 50 or older was 75 cohabitators per 1,000 unmarried individuals, although this varied across states.
- Alaska reported the highest cohabitation rate of older Americans in 2014, with 128 older cohabitators per 1,000 unmarried adults aged 50 and older.
- Alabama had the lowest rate of older cohabitators in the United States, with less than 45 cohabiting individuals for every 1,000 unmarried adults.

Figure 1. Cohabitation Rates of Individuals Aged 50 or Older, by State, 2014



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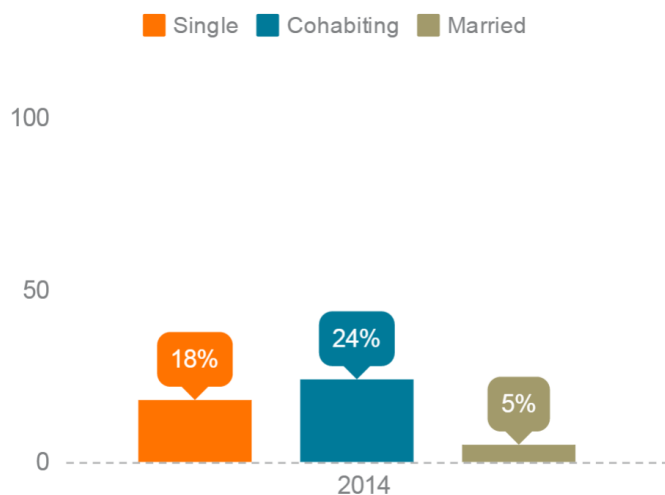


Poverty Status and Marital History of Persons Aged 50 and Older

Poverty Status

- Older cohabitators were more often poor than either married or single individuals. Nearly one in four (24%) cohabiting adults aged 50 or older was living in a household at or below the poverty line in 2014.
- The share of older cohabitators living in a household in poverty was almost five times larger than the share of married adults living in such a household (5%).
- Eighteen percent of single adults aged 50 or older were living in a household at or below the poverty line.

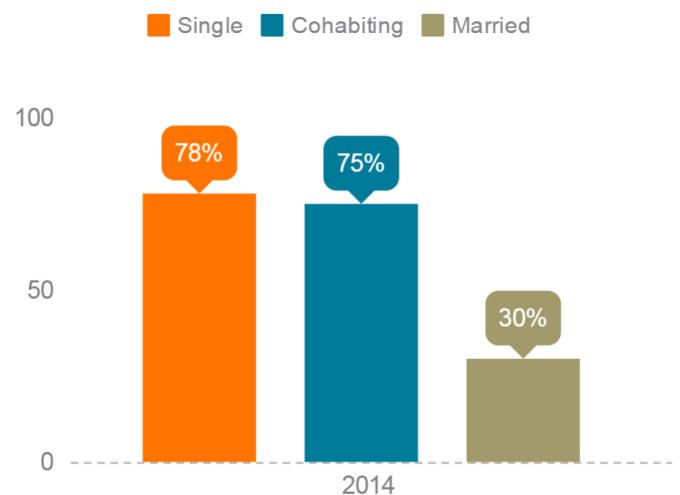
Figure 2. Percentage of Older Americans Living in a Household at or Below the Poverty Line, by Union Status, 2014



Marital History

- Among those aged 50 and older in 2014, the majority of single and cohabiting adults had been married at least once.
- Single adults aged 50 or older had the largest share (78%) of men and women who had at least one prior marriage.
- Older cohabitators had a slightly smaller share of persons who had been married in the past, at 75%.
- Thirty percent of currently married men and women aged 50 were remarried.

Figure 3. Percentage of Older Americans Previously Married, by Union Status, 2014



Source: American Community Survey, 1-yr estimates, 2014

References:

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