Over the last four decades, the proportion of Americans who are currently divorced more than quadrupled, rising from 2.9% in 1970 to 13.4% in 2012 (FP-14-07). Although prior research suggests the divorce rate peaked in the late 1970s (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007), new work indicates researchers may have underestimated the divorce rate in recent years, particularly for persons over age 35 (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014). Roughly half of first marriages are expected to end in separation or divorce, and the risk of divorce varies substantially according to educational attainment and racial/ethnic status (Amato, 2010; Raley & Bumpass, 2003).

- In 2012, the rate of first divorce in the U.S. was 17.3 per 1,000 women in a first marriage aged 18 years and older (Figure 1), remaining largely unchanged since 2010 (FP-11-09).

We focus on women 18 and older given this profile’s emphasis on educational differences, however, supplemental analyses confirm similar patterns exist among women aged 15 and older.

**First Divorce Rates of Women by Educational Attainment, 2012**

Educational attainment is related to divorce rates (Raley and Bumpass, 2003). The association between women’s education and divorce has remained stable since 2010 (FP-11-09).

- Among women in a first marriage, the rate of first divorce is highest for those who have attained some education after high school but have not earned a Bachelor’s degree (‘some college’) (23.3 per 1,000).
- The association between educational attainment and divorce is curvilinear: the least (no high school diploma/GED) and highest (college degree) educated women share the lowest rates of first divorce with 13.2 and 14.6 per 1,000, respectively.
- A similar education pattern in divorce exists for Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites (results not shown).

![Figure 1. First Divorces per 1,000 Women in First Marriages Aged 18 and Older by Educational Attainment, 2012](image-url)
First Divorce Rates of Women by Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity 2012

Divorce rates have declined for all racial/ethnic groups since 2008 (FP-10-06, FP-11-09). However, in 2008, Black women have the highest first divorce rate, whereas Native-born Hispanic women have the highest rate in 2012.

- Asian women have the lowest first divorce rate at 10.9 divorces per 1,000 women in a first marriage.
- The first divorce rates of White and Foreign-born Hispanic women are comparable at 16.1 and 14.0, respectively.
- Black and Native-born Hispanic women have the highest rates of first divorce at 25.4 and 26.8 (respectively) divorces per 1,000 women in a first marriage.

Figure 2. First Divorce Rates per 1,000 Women in First Marriages Aged 18 and Older by Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity, 2012

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2012 (IPUMS)

Note: This graph does not include racial categories (comprising American Indians, Alaska Native Tribes, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders and/or a combination of these racial/ethnic groups) as it constitutes less than 4% of the overall population.

References:


