Trends in Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers, 1980-2013
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The increase in non-marital childbearing has been driven by increases in the share of births to cohabiting rather than single mothers (NCFMR-FP-14-05). This profile presents trends in the share of births to single and cohabiting mothers from 1980 to 2013 using published estimates (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008) and NCFMR analyses of recent cycles of the NSFG.

Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers under Age 40

- The share of births to unmarried mothers doubled between 1980 and 2013 with 43% of births between 2009-2013 occurring to single or cohabiting mothers.
- This increase in unwed childbearing has been driven by over a 300% increase in the share of births to cohabiting mothers, whereas the share of births to single mothers has remained largely unchanged.
- Since 1997/01, the majority of unmarried births occurred to cohabiting rather than single mothers.

Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers under Age 40 by Race/Ethnicity

- White and Hispanic mothers experienced larger increases in unmarried childbearing compared to their Black counterparts.
- Since the 1990s, the majority of unmarried births to White and Hispanic mothers occurred in cohabiting unions. The majority of non-marital births to Black mothers were to single mothers at each time point.
Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers under Age 40 by Educational Attainment

- The share of births occurring to unmarried mothers has increased substantially between 1980 and 2013 regardless of maternal education. However, the increases in non-marital childbearing have been most pronounced for those having some college experience.
- There are substantial differences in the composition of unmarried births according to mother’s education. Almost three-fourths (73%) of college-educated mothers who experienced a non-marital birth did so in cohabiting unions compared to just over one-half (53-60%) of their less educated counterparts.

Figure 3. Changes in the Shares of Single and Cohabiting Births to Mothers under Age 40 by Educational Attainment (1980-2013)*


References