Over the past few decades, there have been rapid changes in marriage patterns in the U.S. The shift in marriage is marked by a declining marriage rate, a historically high median age at first marriage (29.2 among men, 27.5 among women), and growing premarital and postmarital cohabitation that less often eventuate in marriage (Cherlin 2004; FP-14-18; Manning et al. 2014). Using data from the 1989 and 2014 Current Population Survey, this profile examines women’s experiences of marriage over the past 25 years. We present the share of American women aged 18-49 who had ever been married by race/ethnicity and by educational attainment. In a related profile (FP-15-01), we reported 25 years of change in cohabitation.


- A declining share of American women 18-49 are ever married.
- In 1989, 27% of women aged 18-49 were never married; by 2014, 40% had yet to tie the knot (Figure 1).
- The drop in the share of ever married women is largest among those who are younger (aged 18-29), suggesting much of the decline in marriage results from postponement rather than a retreat from marriage.

Figure 1. Twenty-five Years of Change in the Share of Women (18-49) Who Ever Married by Age at Interview


References:
Change in Marriage Across Education

- The decline in marriage over the past 25 years cuts across racial/ethnic groups (Figure 2).
- Blacks experienced the greatest decline in the share of women aged 18-49 who had ever married (29%). Hispanics and Whites experienced similar declines (18% and 16%, respectively).
- White women were the most likely to have experienced marriage in 1989 and 2014—more than two-thirds (64%) of White women had been married in 2014.
- Larger shares of White and Hispanic women had been married in 2014 than Black women in 1989.


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