

Childlessness and Marital Status Among Middle-aged U.S. Adults, 1992-2012



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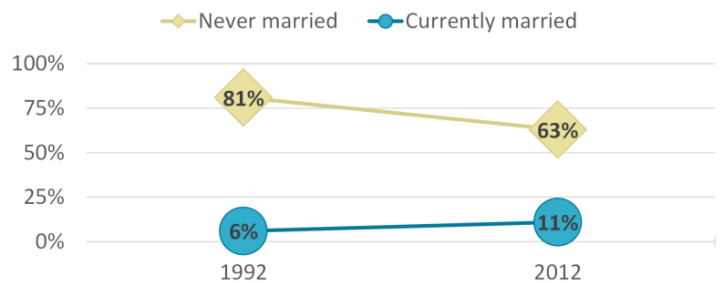
Compared to women born in the mid-1930s, those born in the early 1960s have a higher probability of childlessness by age 50 (Kimeyer & Hamilton, 2011). Further, the percentage of women who remain childless by ages 40-44 increased by 50% between 1976 and 2014 (Livingston, 2015). Childlessness is typically more common among the never married and more highly educated women (Koropecj-Cox & Call, 2007; Blackstone, 2014). The decoupling of marriage and childbearing (FP-12-09; FP-15-03) also may be shaping marital status differentials in childlessness. Although the recent increase in childlessness is driven primarily by the increased proportion of women who remain unmarried by age 40, nonmarital fertility has increased in recent decades. In fact, there has been a modest decline in childlessness among unmarried women (Hayford, 2013).

Using data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), this Family Profile examines the prevalence of childlessness among never versus currently married middle-aged adults (aged 51 to 61) in 1992 and 2012. Variation by educational attainment and race/ethnicity are also considered. Previously married middle-aged adults are excluded because their patterns are analogous to those of the currently married.

Changes in Childlessness

- In 1992, about 81% of never married middle-aged adults reported they had never had a child. This proportion decreased to 63% in 2012—a 21% decline since 1992.
- In contrast, 6% of currently married middle-aged adults reported they had never had a child in 1992. In 2012, reports of childlessness nearly doubled to 11%.

Figure 1. Childlessness by Current Marital Status



Source: Health and Retirement Study, 1992 & 2012

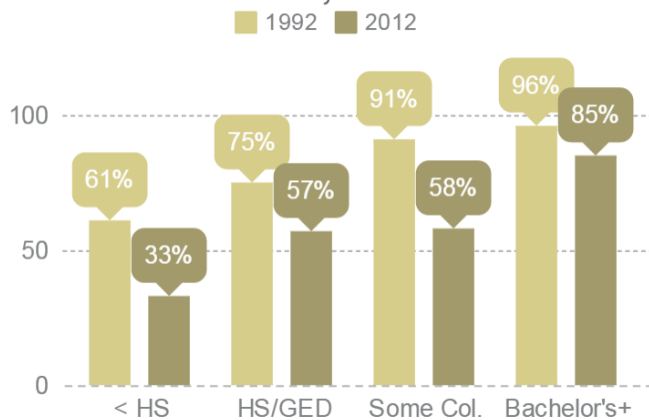
Changes in Childlessness by Education

The relationship between childlessness and education was positive regardless of year or marital status—the proportion of childlessness increased as educational attainment increased.

- Among the never-married, decreases in childlessness were observed at all levels of education from 1992 to 2012. The largest decrease was among those with less than a high school education (46% decrease).

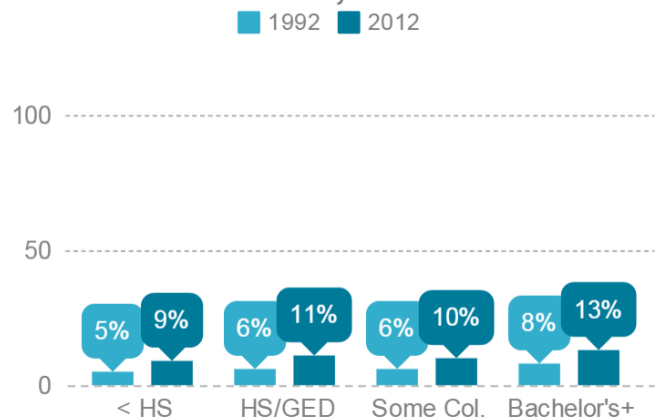
- In contrast, among the currently married, all levels of educational attainment experienced increases in the proportion childless. For those with a high school diploma/GED, the proportion nearly doubled.

Figure 2. Proportion of Never Married Middle-aged Adults with No Children Ever Born by Educational Attainment



Source: Health and Retirement Study, 1992 & 2012

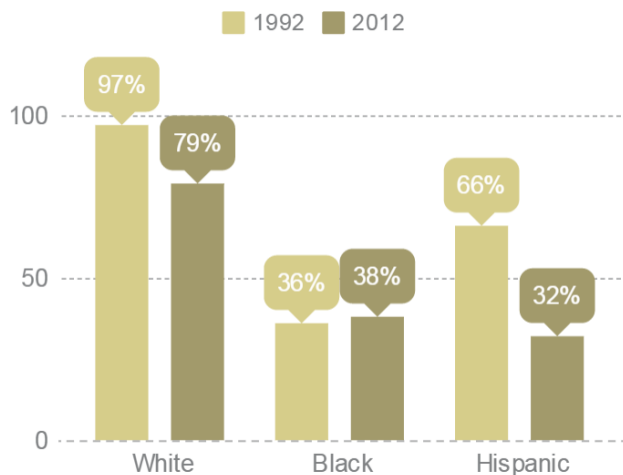
Figure 3. Proportion of Currently Married Middle-aged Adults with No Children Ever Born by Educational Attainment



Changes in Childlessness by Race & Ethnicity

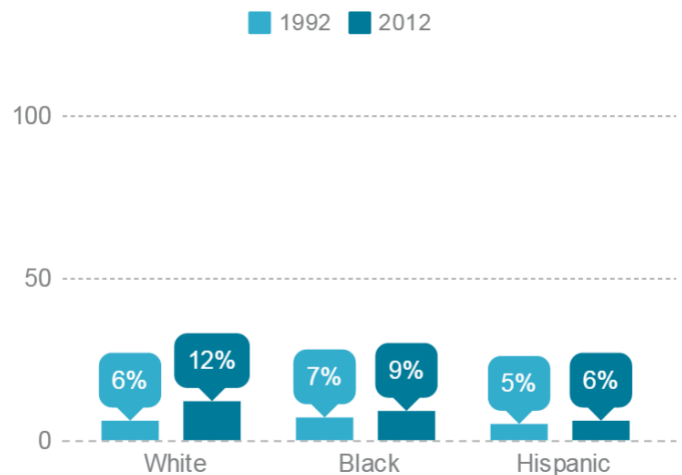
- Among never married middle-aged adults, Whites and Hispanics both showed declines in childlessness between 1992 and 2012. The decline was largest for Hispanics (52%).
- In contrast, never married Blacks experienced a slight increase of 4% in childlessness between 1992 and 2012.
- Among the currently married, all racial/ethnic groups exhibited an increase in the proportion who had not borne a child. Whites had the largest increase—their proportion doubled in the 20-year observation period (6% to 12%).

Figure 4. Proportion of Never Married Middle-aged Adults with No Children Ever Born by Race & Ethnicity



Source: Health and Retirement Study, 1992 & 2012

Figure 5. Proportion of Currently Married Middle-aged Adults with No Children Ever Born by Race & Ethnicity



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