Introduction

The last 20 years have been marked by increases in the average age at marriage and increasing proportions of individuals remaining single (Lichter, McLaughlin, & Ribar, 2002). Furthermore, rates of cohabitation have increased such that it has replaced marriage as the first co-residential union experience for most young adults (Manning, Porter, & Smock, 2005). Marriage is less dominant as a social institution (deinstitutionalization) in the United States than at any time in history (Cherlin, 2004). This is ironic in that the awareness of individual and societal benefits related to marriage has grown (Lichter, McLaughlin, & Ribar, 2002).

There is increasing evidence of the deinstitutionalization of American marriage, which is defined as the weakening of the social norms that define people’s behavior in a social institution [such as marriage] (Cherlin, 2004).

Utilizing the latest data from the American Community Survey (2008), this project further examines trends in the proportion of Americans who are never married with a focus on gender, race, and ethnicity.

The ACS is an ongoing survey used to gather population estimates for the population of the United States (Cherlin, 2004). This research is supported by the National Center for Family & Marriage Research, which is funded by a cooperative agreement, grant number 1 U01 AE000001-01, between the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Bowling Green State University.

Gender and Geographical Differences in Proportion of the Never Married Population

Gender and geographical differences in the proportion of never married individuals vary between men and women.

The proportion of Americans who are never married varies substantially across the U.S. ( ranging from 48.2% for women and 57.5% for men (DC, Wash)—among individuals aged 15 and older—to 21.1% for women (West Virginia) and 28.2% for men (Idaho) with a national average of 28.1% for women and 34.6% for men.

The states with the highest proportion of their population never married tend to be clustered in the East, Great Lakes, and Southwest regions of the U.S.

The states with the smallest proportion of their population never married tend to be clustered in the central region of the U.S.

Conclusions

The eastern region of the United States tends to have a higher proportion of never married individuals.

There are differences among Whites and Blacks with respect to the proportion of individuals by marital status.

A similar proportion of Hispanics and Whites are currently married.

The majority of Whites are currently married, while nearly half of Blacks are never married.

In terms of gender, there are more never married men in the United States compared to women; however, the age structure of the population in each state should be taken into account. Those states with higher proportions of older individuals tend to have higher proportions of married individuals, while those states with higher proportions of younger individuals tend to have lower proportions of married individuals.

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