Median Age of Marriage: Differences by Gender and Educational Attainment

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Overview

• Since the 1950’s, the United States has witnessed a steadily increasing median age at first marriage (US Census Bureau: Current Population Survey, 2007).
• Recently, the increase in median age at first marriage has looked uniform across states, with an average of 26 years for women and an average of approximately 28 years for men (US Census Bureau: American Community Survey, 2008).
• Some researchers have credited this increase in median age at first marriage to the low desire of people to marry or the “marriage squeeze” (South & Lloyd, 1992).
• This presentation focuses on the increase of educational attainment and its association with marital timing. It also reviews the role of gender and geography in marriage timing.

Geographical Variation in Median Age at First Marriage

• For women, the states with the highest median ages at first marriage are located in the Northeast, with the exception of California.
• A dense collection of states with the lowest median ages are located more in the Midwest and West, but still show low median ages in the South.
• For men, the states with the highest median ages at first marriage are located in the Northeast, with the exceptions of a few states on the western border such as California and the eastern border such as Florida.
• For both women and men, southern states tend to have low median ages at first marriage.

Educational Attainment

• Among females, the top five states with the highest median ages at first marriage have a higher percentage of females with a bachelor’s degree than the bottom five states.
• Among males, the top five states with the highest median ages at first marriage have a higher percentage of males with a bachelor’s degree than the bottom five states, with the exception of Rhode Island (31%).
• Overall, Massachusetts has the highest percentage of females with a bachelor’s degree (37%) and males with a bachelor’s degree (39%).
• Massachusetts has the highest median age at first marriage (28.2 years) for females and third highest for males (29.8 years).

Conclusions

• The most recent ACS (2008) data estimates indicate the median age at first marriage continues to increase.
• Additionally, the age gap between men and women also persists; however, these patterns differ slightly when examined at the state level.
• Southern states tend to have lower median ages at first marriage, while northeastern states and California tend to have the highest.
• With respect to educational attainment, those states with the highest proportion with a bachelor’s degree also tend to be the states with the highest median age at first marriage.

Acknowledgement

• This research is supported by the National Center for Family & Marriage Research, which is funded by a cooperative agreement, grant number 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.