

Marital Duration at Divorce, 2010

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, couples who divorce tend to separate after about seven years of marriage and obtain a legal divorce one year later (Kreider and Ellis, 2011). This trend is popularly recognized as the “seven-year-itch.” Beginning in 2008, new questions were added to the marital history section of the American Community Survey (ACS) allowing for the calculation of the duration of recent marriages (first or remarriages) without using anniversary time points as benchmarks.

Duration of First Marriages & Remarriages

- In 2010, the median duration of first marriage (the point at which half of first marriages end) among women aged 15 years and older who reported divorcing in the past 12 months was 11 years (Figure 1). The median duration remains unchanged since 2008 (FP-10-06).
 - Among women who have experienced a first divorce in the past year, half spent about 7 months separated prior to divorce; the average time between separation and divorce for women is 22 months (NCFMR analyses, SIPP 2008).
- Half of remarriages ended within 9 years of nuptials. Remarriages end in divorce sooner than first marriages.

Figure 1. Median Duration of Marriages at Time of Divorce Among Women Aged 15 and Older by Type of Marriage, 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010

*The ACS asked all respondents in 2010 if they divorced in the past 12 months; therefore, they could have divorced in 2009 or 2010. For ease of discussion, all women who reported divorcing in the past 12 months are considered to have divorced in 2009.

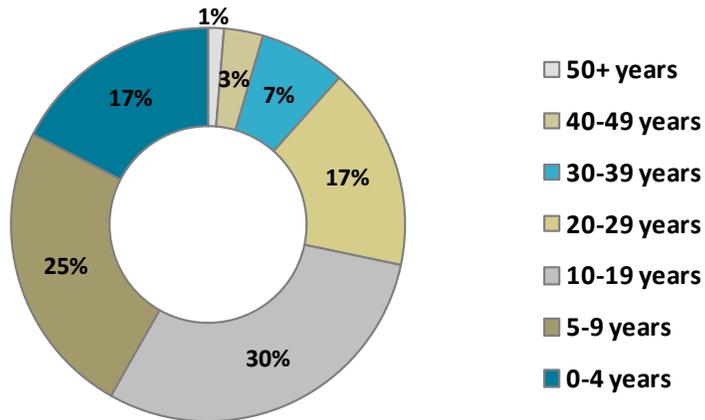
¹The median duration of marriage for those divorced in the last 12 months = 2010 – year last married. Because the ACS does not provide the month of the last marriage, the actual duration is plus or minus 1 year. This is estimated for female respondents aged 15 years and older who report being divorced in the last 12 months, current marital status is divorced, and has only married once.

Family Profiles examine topics related to NCFMR’s core research themes. Data are presented at both the national and state levels using new data sources. Written for both researchers and broad communities, these profiles summarize the latest statistics on U.S. families.

How Long Are Marriages Lasting?

- Among women who divorced in the past 12 months, about two-fifths (42%) divorced within the first 9 years of marriage.
 - About one-sixth (17%) of women who divorced in 2010 ended their marriage before their 5th wedding anniversary.
- Thirty percent of women who divorced in 2010 had been married between 10-19 years.
- About 1% of women who divorced in the last year made it past their golden wedding anniversary before divorcing.

Figure 2. Percentage of First Divorces by Duration of Marriage at Time of Divorce Among Women Aged 15 Years and Older, 2010

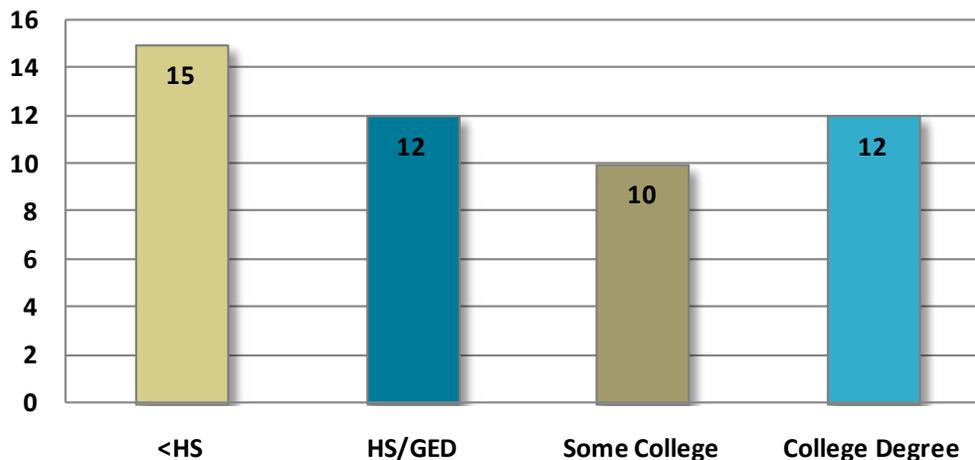


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010

Duration of First Marriages at Divorce and Educational Attainment

- The association between education and median duration of marriage at time of divorce reflects a slight U-shaped distribution (Figure 3). This is not surprising given the curvilinear association of educational attainment by first divorce rate (FP-11-09). Half of the women who have not earned a high school degree or GED and divorced in 2010 did so within 15 years of marrying. In contrast, the median duration of marriages among college educated women who divorced in 2010 was 12 years.
- Women who have attained some education after high school but have not earned a Bachelor's degree ('some college') were the most vulnerable to marital dissolution with a median duration of 10 years.

Figure 3. Median Duration of First Marriages at Time of Divorce Among Women Aged 15 and Older by Educational Attainment, 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010

Kreider, R. M., & Ellis, R. (2011). Number, timing, and duration of marriages and divorces: 2009. *Current Population Reports*, P70-125, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

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