

Trends in Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers, 1980-2013

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The increase in non-marital childbearing has been driven by increases in the share of births to cohabiting rather than single mothers (NCFMR-FP-14-05). This profile presents trends in the share of births to single and cohabiting mothers from 1980 to 2013 using published estimates (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008) and NCFMR analyses of recent cycles of the NSFG.

Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers under Age 40

- The share of births to unmarried mothers doubled between 1980 and 2013 with 43% of births between 2009-2013 occurring to single or cohabiting mothers.
- This increase in unwed childbearing has been driven by over a 300% increase in the share of births to cohabiting mothers, whereas the share of births to single mothers has remained largely unchanged.
- Since 1997/01, the majority of unmarried births occurred to cohabiting rather than single mothers.

Figure 1. Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers under Age 40 (1980-2013)*

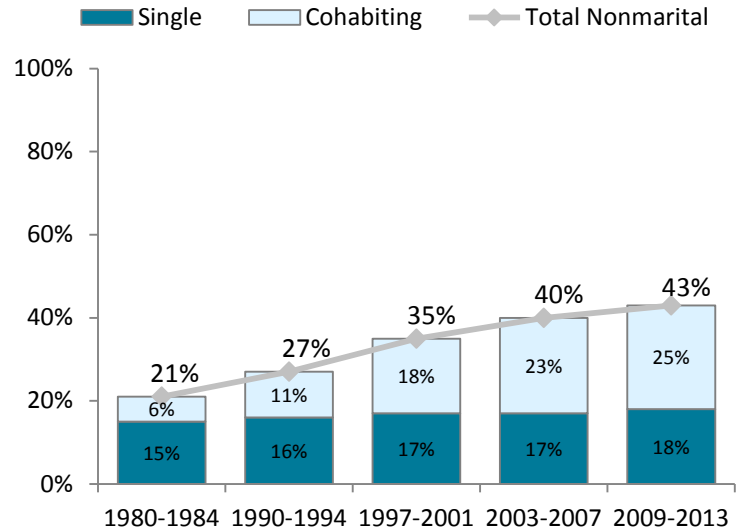
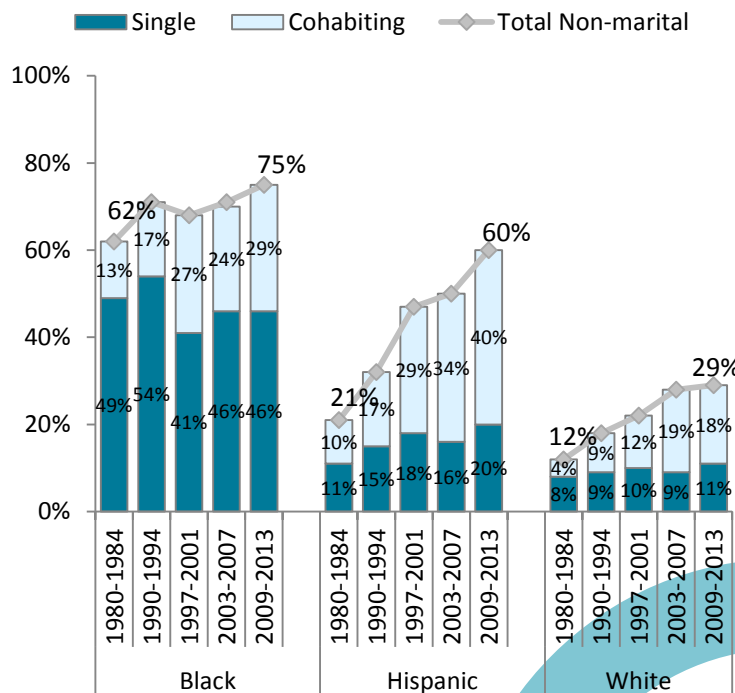


Figure 2. Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers under Age 40 by Race/Ethnicity (1980-2013)*



Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers under Age 40 by Race/Ethnicity

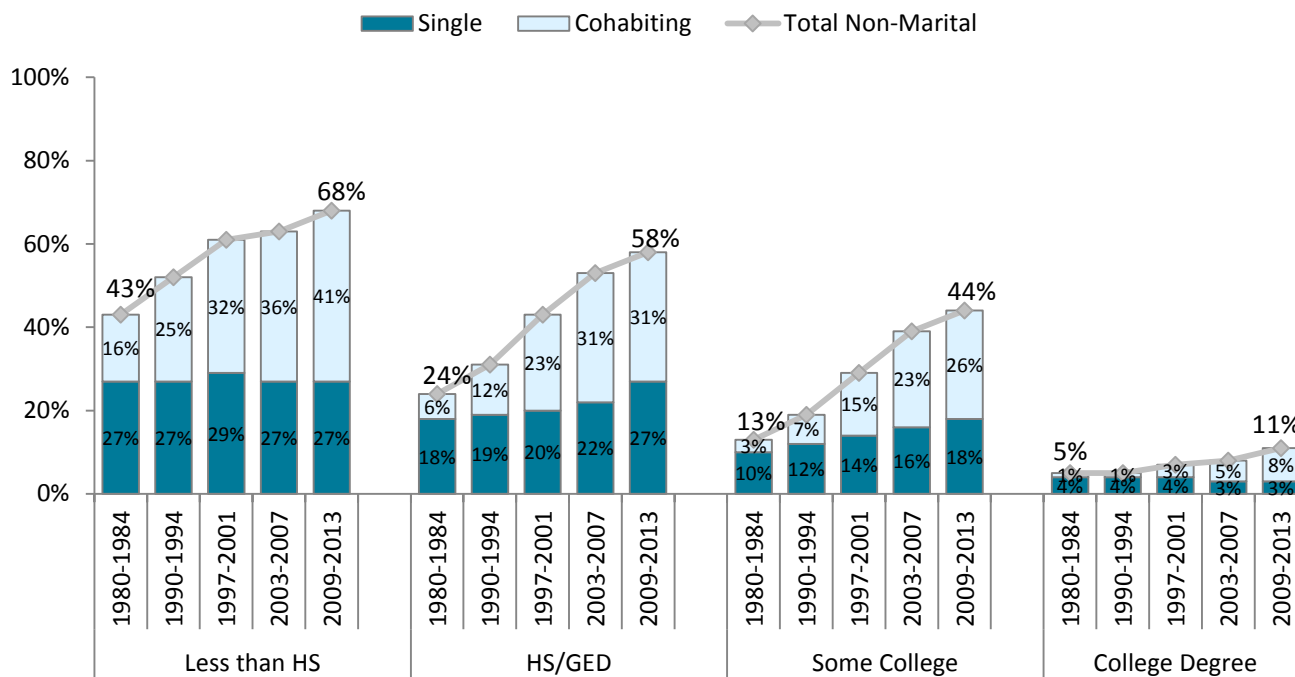
- White and Hispanic mothers experienced larger increases in unmarried childbearing compared to their Black counterparts.
- Since the 1990s, the majority of unmarried births to White and Hispanic mothers occurred in cohabiting unions. The majority of non-marital births to Black mothers were to single mothers at each time point.

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.

Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers under Age 40 by Educational Attainment

- The share of births occurring to unmarried mothers has increased substantially between 1980 and 2013 regardless of maternal education. However, the increases in non-marital childbearing have been most pronounced for those having some college experience.
- There are substantial differences in the composition of unmarried births according to mother's education. Almost three-fourths (73%) of college-educated mothers who experienced a non-marital birth did so in cohabiting unions compared to just over one-half (53-60%) of their less educated counterparts.

Figure 3. Changes in the Shares of Single and Cohabiting Births to Mothers under Age 40 by Educational Attainment (1980-2013)*



*Sources: 1980-1984, Bumpass & Lu (2000) using 1987/88 NSFH; 1990-1994 & 1997-2001, Kennedy & Bumpass (2008) using 1995 and 2002 cycles of the NSFG; 2003-2007, NCFMR analyses using the 2006/10 NSFG; 2009-2013, NCFMR analyses using an appended 2008/13 NSFG data file.

References

- Bumpass, L., & Lu, H. (2000). Trends in cohabitation and implications for children's family contexts in the United States. *Population Studies*, 54, 29-41.
- Kennedy, S., & Bumpass, L. (2008). Cohabitation and children's living arrangements: New estimates from the United States. *Demographic Research*, 19, 1663-1692.

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