



Family Profile No. 08, 2025

Older Adult Cohabiting and Married Couples

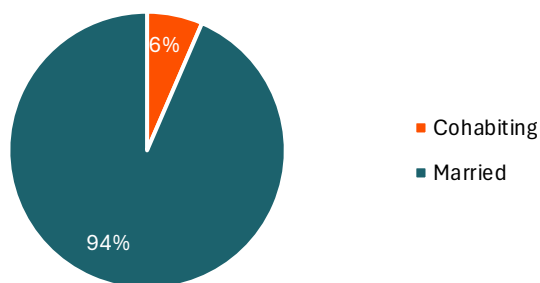
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As gray divorce has increased over the past few decades (Brown, Lin, & Julian, 2024), many older adults have chosen cohabitation over remarriage when repartnering (Brown et al., 2019). In 2000, fewer than 1 million older men and women cohabited (Brown, Lee, & Bulanda, 2006). By 2017, this number had grown to approximately 4 million (Stepler, 2017) and reached 4.6 million by 2022 (Julian & Brown, forthcoming). This rise in later-life cohabitation reflects a broad shift in relationship patterns, with cohabitation operating as an alternative to remarriage in later life (Brown & Wright, 2017). Using data from the 2023 American Community Survey, this Family Profile examines older adult couples, defined as those with at least one partner who is aged 50 or older. We provide estimates of cohabiting and married household heads, explore marital history, and assess educational homogamy among cohabiting and married couples. Additionally, we analyze average age differences between partners in these unions. This is an update of FP-22-16 (Julian, 2022).

Union-type Composition of Older Adults

- In 2023, about 6% of couples were cohabiting and 94% were married.

Figure 1. Union-type among older adults, 2023

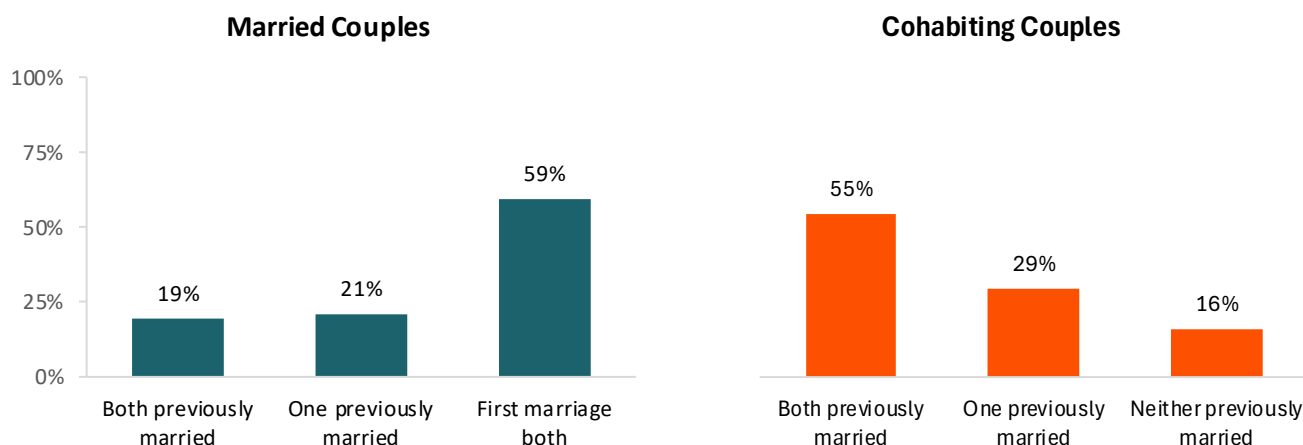


Marital History of Older Adult Couples

- Among most married older adult couples, both partners were in their first marriage (59%). The remaining married couples were near evenly split between one partner being previously married (21%) and both partners being previously married (20%).
- Among most cohabiting couples, both partners were previously married (55%). In 29% of cohabiting couples, only one partner was previously married. Only in 16% of cohabiting older adult couples had both partners not been previously married.

Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates 2023 from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Figure 2. Marital history by couple type among older adults, 2023



Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates 2023 from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

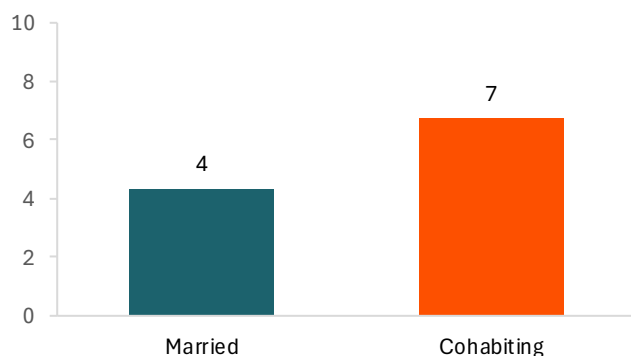
Suggested Citation

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Mean Age Gap of Cohabiting and Married Couples

- The average age gap was lower among married couples (four years) than among cohabiting couples (seven years). On average, married spouses were closer in age than cohabiting partners.

Figure 3. Mean age differences among older married and cohabiting couples, 2023

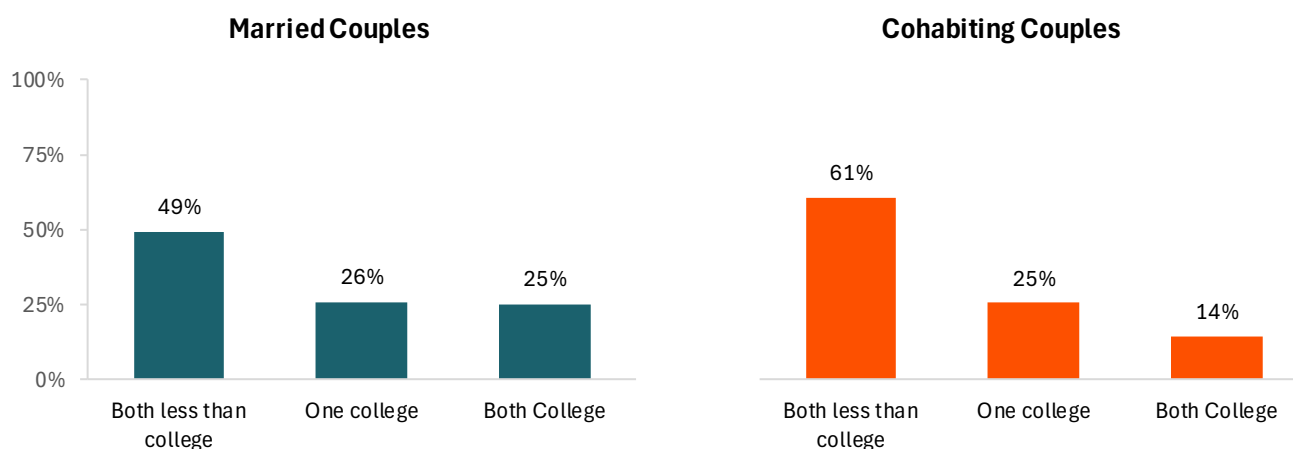


Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates 2023 from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Educational Homogamy of Older Adult Couples

- In about half (49%) of married couples, both members did not have a college degree. Among cohabiting couples, the share was slightly larger at 61%.
- The share of couples where one spouse/partner had a college degree was nearly identical for married (26%) and cohabiting (25%) couples.
- A larger share of married couples (25%) were composed of two spouses/partners with college degrees compared to their cohabiting counterparts (14%)

Figure 4. Educational homogamy of older adult couples, 2023



Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates 2023 from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Data Source

Ruggles, S., Flood, S., Sobek, M., Backman, D., Chen, A., Cooper, G., Richards, S., Rodgers, R., & Schouweiler, M. (2024). IPUMS USA: Version 15.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V15.0>

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