



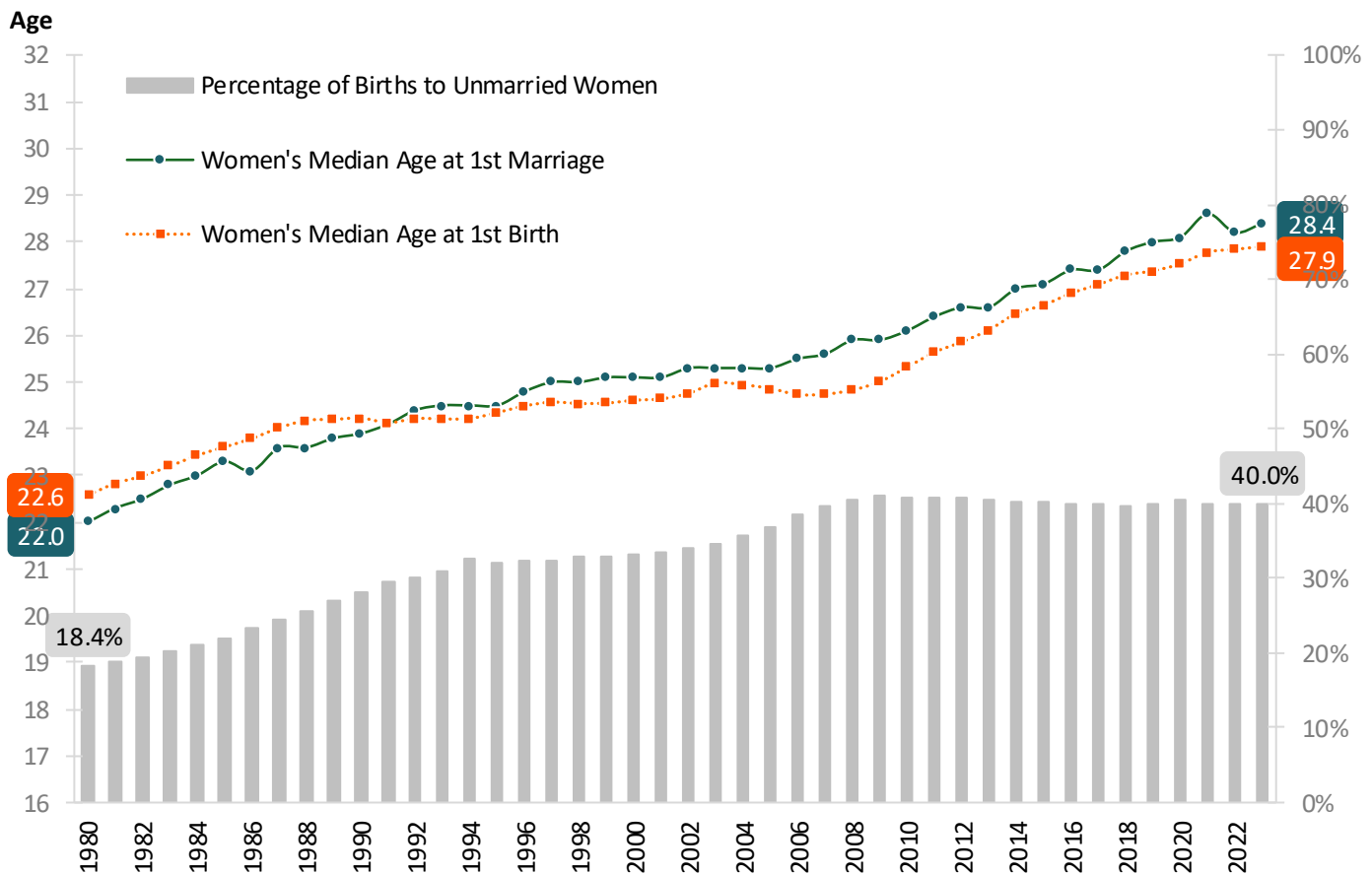
Family Profile No. 13, 2025

Crossover in the Median Age at First Marriage and First Birth: Forty-Three Years of Change

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The increase in the age at first marriage has outpaced the increase in the age at first birth. At the same time, non-marital births continue to make up a substantial share of births in a given year. Consequently, marriage and childbearing have become decoupled (England, Wu, & Shafer, 2013; Gibson-Davis & Rackin, 2014). In an update to [FP-12-03](#) (Arroyo, Payne, Brown, & Manning, 2012) and [FP-17-22](#) (Eickmeyer, Payne, Brown, & Manning, 2017), this profile documents the trends in women's age at first marriage, age at first birth, and the proportion of births to unmarried mothers through the year 2023 from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the Center for Disease Control's National Vital Statistics final birth data files.

Figure 1. Crossover in the Median Age at First Marriage and First Birth, 1980-Present



Sources: Median age at first birth computed by NCFMR, percentage of births to unmarried women pulled from National Vital Statistics Reports of final birth data, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Stats, 1980-2023; Median age at first marriage is pulled from *Table MS-2. Estimated Median Age at First Marriage, by Sex: 1890 to Present*, United States Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March and Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1980-2023.

Median Age at First Marriage, 1980-2023

Between 1980 and 2023, women's median age at first marriage rose 29% from 22.0 to 28.4.

- Over the past 43 years, women's median age at first marriage exhibited four distinct periods of change.
 - Between 1980 and 1990, women's median age at first marriage increased by nearly two years from 22 to 23.9.
 - Over the next fifteen years (1990-2005), the growth slowed with an increase of only 1.4 years from 23.9 to 25.3.
 - From 2006 to 2020, women's median age at first marriage experienced an upswing from 25.5 to 28.1, roughly a two-and-a-half-year increase.
 - In 2021, women's median age at first marriage reached a historic high point at 28.6 followed by slight dip to 28.2 in 2022 and subsequent uptick to 28.4 in 2023.

Median Age at First Birth, 1980-2023

Since 1980, women's median age at first birth increased by 23% from 22.6 to 27.9 years.

- Half of all women who became mothers in 2023 had their first child after age 27.9, which represents a historic high point in the median age at first birth.
- Following a slight decline from 2003-2006, women's median age at first birth has since trended upward.

Crossover in the Median Ages at First Marriage and First Birth

- Between 1980 and 1991, women's median age at first marriage was lower than women's median age at first birth. The crossover in the median age at first birth occurred in 1991, and since that time, the median age at first birth has been consistently lower than the median age at first marriage.
 - The share of births to unmarried mothers increased markedly between 1980 and 1991 from 18.4% to 29.5%. The level continued to rise before reaching a sustained plateau in recent years; since 2008, about 40% of children were born to unmarried mothers.
- The gap between the median age at first marriage and first birth was greatest in 2008 (1.1 years) but has since ranged from 0.9 to 0.3 years.

Age @ 1st Marriage & 1st Birth CONTINUE TO RISE

References

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