



Family Profile No. 25, 2025

## Trends in Cohabitation Prior to Marriage

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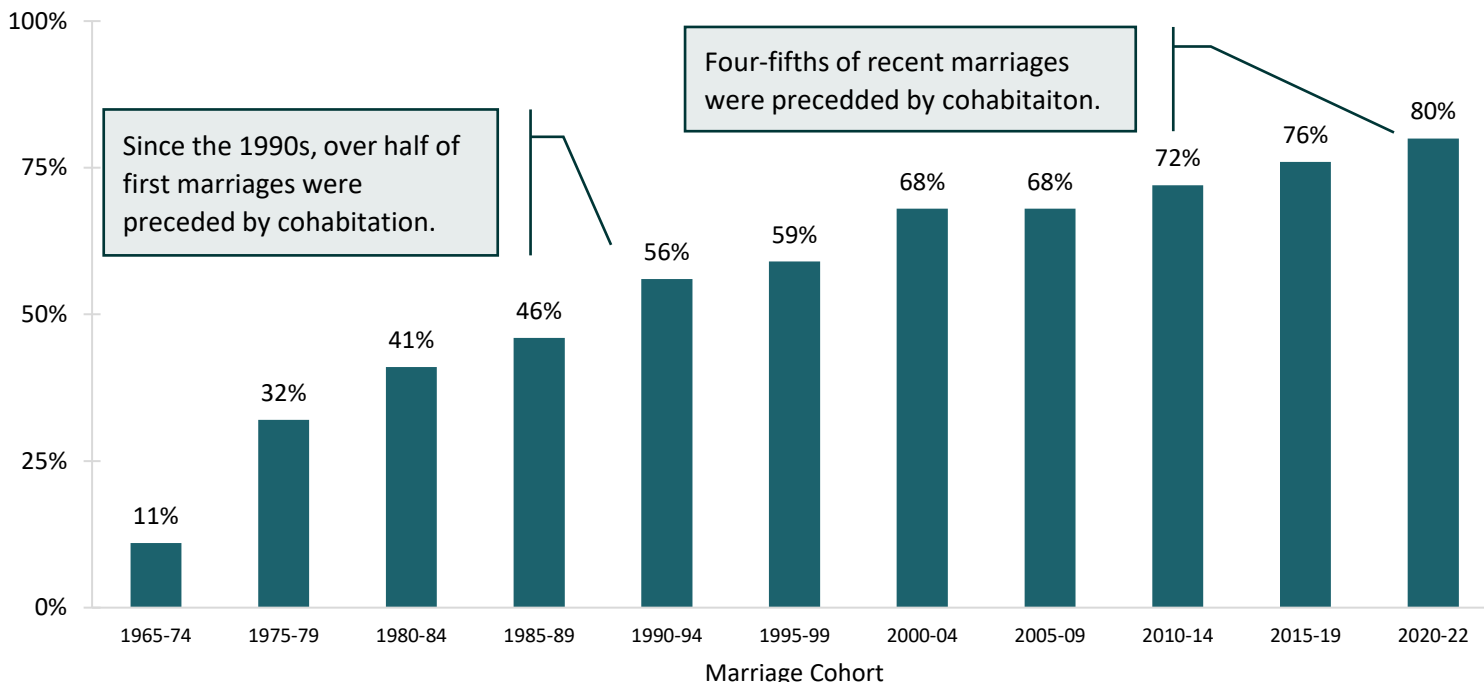
Cohabitation prior to marriage has become a normative pathway to marriage in the U.S. This profile examines shifts in the percentage of women who cohabited before marriage over the past 50 years, according to marriage cohorts. We report published results, use the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to estimate the share of women who cohabited prior to marriage in each cohort, and analyze a recent marriage cohort (2020-2022). We document premarital cohabitation trends by educational attainment and age at marriage. All estimates are based on weighted analyses, and an age restriction of 19 to 44-year-olds is imposed to ensure comparability over time. Note our analytical sample is not representative of the cohabitation experiences of all women in the U.S. because we only consider those who have ever married. Additionally, due to data constraints in the NSFG, this profile focuses on different-sex couples. The mode of interview changed from in person to mixed (on-line and in person) in 2022-2023 so caution should be exercised in analyzing trends. We find the results reported here are statistically similar regardless of mode of interview. More details on the NSFG can be found in the [2022-2023 Cycle of National Survey of Family Growth web page](#) and on the [NSFG web page](#). Additional [NCFMR profiles on cohabitation](#) are also available. Three new profiles released in 2025 focus on cohabitation, including:

1. [Older Adult Cohabiting and Married Couples \(FP-25-08\)](#)
2. [Same-sex Married and Cohabiting Couples Raising Children, 2023 \(FP-25-07\)](#)
3. [Age Variation in Prevalence of Cohabitation Among Unmarried Men and Women, 2009 & 2024 \(FP-25-04\)](#)

### Changes in Cohabitation Prior to Marriage, 1965-2022

- The vast majority of married couples lived with a cohabiting partner prior to marriage. Four out of five (80%) recent marriages (2020-2022) were preceded by cohabitation.
- The share of women who cohabited prior to marriage continued to increase gradually.

Figure 1. Over 50 Years of Change in the Share of Women (19-44) Cohabiting Prior to First Marriage, by Marriage Cohort



Source: Data for 1987 from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989); 1995 from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG; Bumpass & Lu, 2000); and NCFMR analyses of female data files from NSFG cycles 2002, 2006-10, 2011-15, 2015-19, and 2020-22.

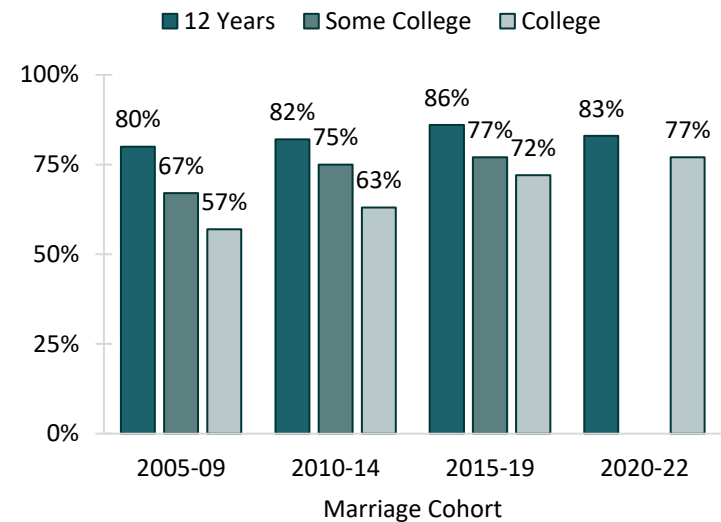
# Cohabitation Prior to Marriage by Educational Attainment and Age

## Educational Attainment

- Generally, the share of married women who cohabited prior to marriage increased across education groups.
- An educational convergence in premarital cohabitation is evident. The educational gap in premarital cohabitation narrowed largely due to the increase among college graduates.

*Note:* The category ‘less than 12 years of education’ is excluded due to small sample size. In NSFG 2020-22 data, education groups were combined due to sample sizes (‘12 years’ and ‘some college’ were combined).

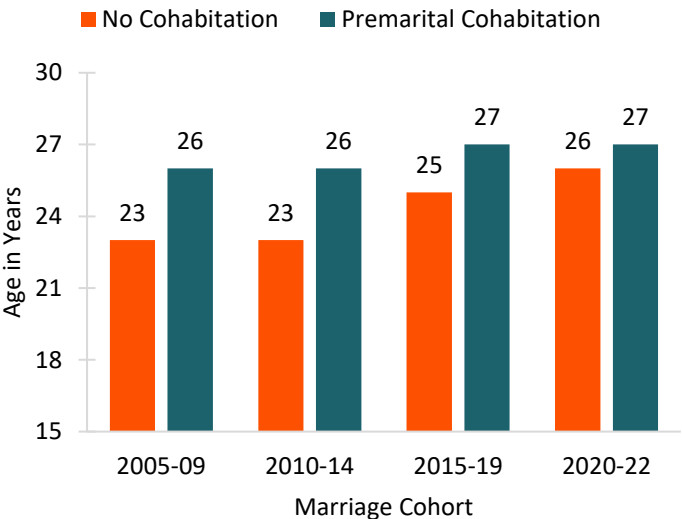
Figure 2. Change in the Share of Women (19-44) Who Ever Cohabited Prior to First Marriage, by Educational Attainment



Source: NCFMR analyses of female data files from NSFG cycle 2020–2022.

## Median Age at Marriage

Figure 3. Median Age at First Marriage by Premarital Cohabitation Status for Marriage Cohort



Source: NCFMR analyses of female data files from NSFG cycle 2020–2022.

- The median age at marriage was higher among women who cohabited prior to marriage compared with women who did not cohabit prior to marriage. However, the gap has narrowed.
- Women who did not cohabit prior to marriage experienced a slight uptick in the age at marriage, from 23 among those who married in 2005-09 to 26 among those who married in 2020-22.
- Among women who did cohabit prior to marriage, the median age remained steady at 27 years for the most recent marriage cohort.

### Data Source:

National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). 2006-10, 2011-15, 2015-17, 2017-19, and 2022-23 National Survey of Family Growth Public-Use Data and Documentation. Hyattsville, MD: CDC National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved February 7, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/index.htm>

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