

# Attitudes Towards Births Outside of Marriage, 1988 & 2012

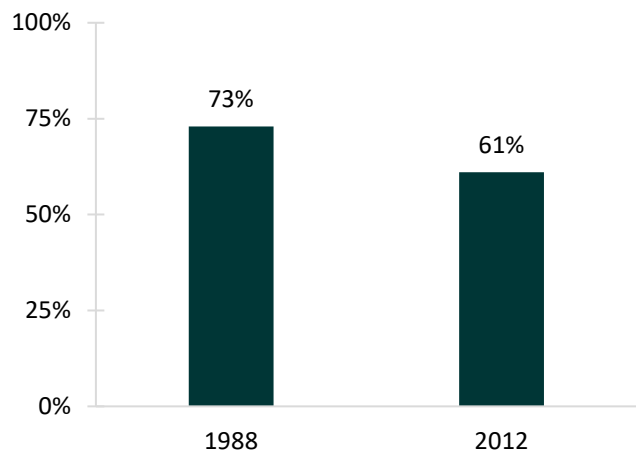
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Nonmarital childbearing has increased rapidly in the United States since the 1980s. Nowadays, about two of every five children are born to an unmarried mother (FP-15-03). Although considerable attention has been paid to trends in nonmarital childbearing, there has been less focus on how U.S. adults' attitudes towards childbearing outside of marriage shift over time. This family profile examines those attitudes in 1988 and 2012 using data from the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS asks respondents their level of agreement with the statement "People who want children ought to get married." The values presented in the figures represent those who endorse this statement by responding either "agree" or "strongly agree."

## Attitudes Towards Births Outside of Marriage

- Between 1988 and 2012, there was a decrease in the share who agreed with the statement "People who want children ought to get married." The share endorsing this view declined from nearly three-quarters in 1988 to 61% in 2012.

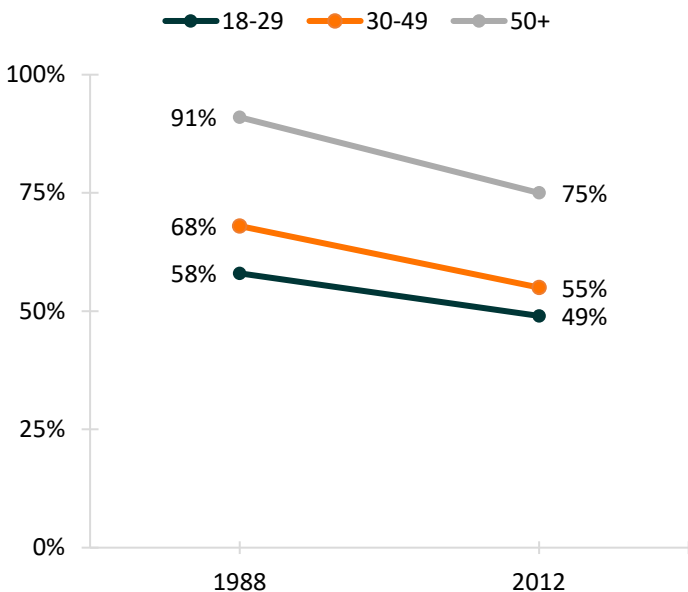
Figure 1. Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Agreed with the Statement "People Who Want Children Ought to Get Married," 1988 & 2012



Source: NCFMR analyses of GSS, 1988 & 2012

## Attitudes Towards Births Outside of Marriage by Age

Figure 2. Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Agreed "People Who Want Children Ought to Get Married" by Age, 1988 & 2012



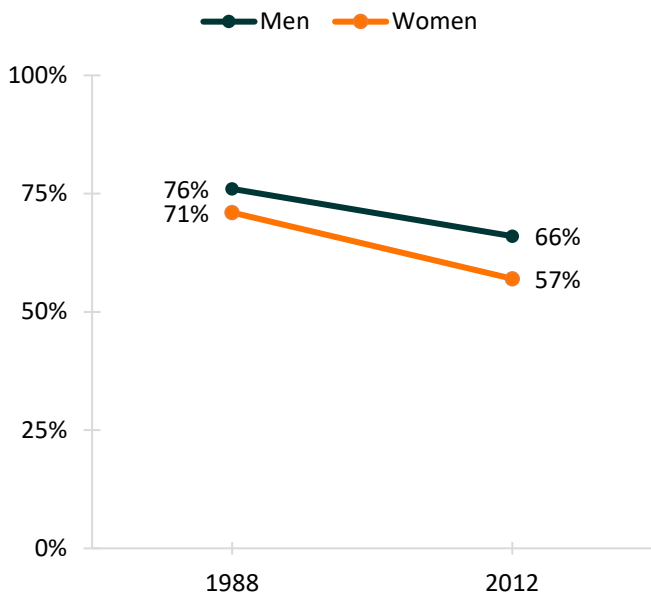
Source: NCFMR analyses of GSS, 1988 & 2012

- Consistent with the overall trend, regardless of age, the share who agreed with the statement "People who want children ought to get married" decreased.
- At both time points, however, age is positively related to agreement—the older the respondent, the greater share who agreed.
  - In 2012, three-fourths of those aged 50 and older agreed childbearing should occur within marriage compared to half of those aged 18-29.
- As the overall percentage who agreed has decreased, so too has the gap in agreement between those aged 18-29 and those aged 30-49.
  - In 2012, about half of the youngest respondents agreed, as did slightly more than half (55%) of those in the middle-age group.

### Attitudes Towards Births Outside of Marriage by Gender

- At both time points, smaller shares of women, compared to men, agreed that people who want children should get married.
- Over the past twenty-four years, the gender-gap in agreement has nearly doubled—agreement with the statement has declined more rapidly for women than for men.

Figure 3. Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Agreed "People Who Want Children Ought to Get Married" by Gender, 1988 & 2012



Source: NCFMR analyses of GSS, 1988 & 2012

#### Data Source:

Smith, T. W., Marsden, P., Hout, M., & Kim, J. General Social Surveys, 1972-2014 [machine-readable data file] /Principal Investigator, Tom W. Smith; Co-Principal Investigator, Peter V. Marsden; Co-Principal Investigator, Michael Hout; Sponsored by National Science Foundation. NORC ed. Chicago: NORC at the University of Chicago [producer]; Storrs, CT: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut [distributor], 2015. 1 data file (57,061 logical records) + 1 codebook (3,567p.). (National Data Program for the Social Sciences, No. 22).

**References:**  
 Thornton, A. & Yong-DeMarco, L. (2001). Four decades of trends in attitudes toward family issues in the United States: The 1960s through the 1990s. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 63(4), 1009-1037. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.01009.x/full>.

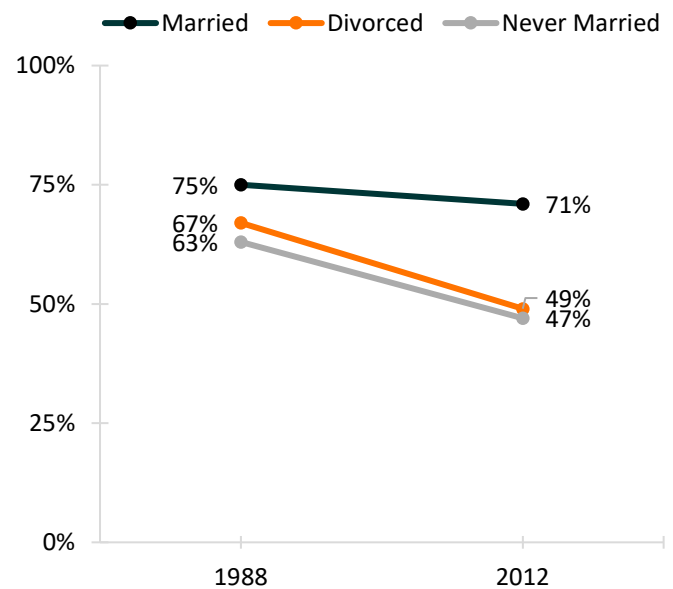
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### Attitudes Towards Births Outside of Marriage by Marital Status

- Married individuals are the least accepting of nonmarital childbearing over time.
  - In 2012, seven in ten married individuals agreed childbearing should occur in the context of marriage, whereas slightly fewer than five in ten of the currently unmarried agreed.
- The currently married experienced the most modest decline in agreement over time.
- The decline in agreement was similar among the unmarried with the divorced declining marginally more than the never married.

Figure 4. Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Agreed "People Who Want Children Ought to Get Married" by Marital Status, 1988 & 2012



Source: NCFMR analyses of GSS, 1988 & 2012