The sustained rise in non-marital childbearing is largely due to the growth in births to cohabiting mothers rather than an increase in births to single, unpartnered mothers (FP-15-03). Using data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), this profile updates trends in the shares of births to single and cohabiting mothers since the early 1980s.

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

- Compared to births in the early 1980s, the share of births to unmarried mothers occurring from 2005-2009 had more than doubled from 21% to 43%.
  - More recently, the share of births to unmarried mothers has declined slightly, with 41% of all births from 2010-2014 occurring to single or cohabiting mothers.
- The share of births to single mothers has changed little over the past few decades, ranging from 15-18% between 1980-84 and 2005-2009 and currently at 15% in the past five years.
- The share of births to cohabiting mothers has more than quadrupled from 6% to 26% between 1980 and 2014. The majority of unmarried births have been to cohabiting rather than single mothers since the late 1990s.
  - Recently, three out of five children born to unmarried mothers were born into a cohabiting union.

### Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers Under Age 40 by Race & Ethnicity

- Among Hispanic mothers, the total share of non-marital births slightly declined between the periods of 2005-2009 and 2010-2014. Among White mothers, the share of non-marital births remained stable. Among Black mothers, the share slightly increased, standing at 79% in 2010-2014.
  - Recently, seven out of ten children born to unmarried White and Hispanic women were born into a cohabiting union.
- In contrast, although the share of births to Black women in cohabiting unions has increased over time, only four out of ten children born to unmarried Black women were born in a cohabiting union.
Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers Under Age 40 by Educational Attainment

- The total share of non-marital births continuously rose over the past few decades among women at all levels of educational attainment, except among mothers with a high school diploma/GED.
  - The shares of births to both cohabiting and single mothers with a high school diploma/GED decreased between the two most recent time periods, but the decline was especially pronounced for single mothers.
  - Among women without a high school diploma, some college education, or a college degree, the increase in non-marital childbearing is due to an increase in the share of births to cohabiting mothers. The source of growth in non-marital childbearing for most women is cohabitation.
- There are substantial differences across education levels in the share of all births occurring outside of marriage.
  - The share of births to unmarried mothers with less than a high school education climbed to 70% in 2010-2014, whereas unmarried births accounted for only 12% of all births to mothers with at least a bachelor's degree in 2010-2014.

Figure 3. Percentage of Women (15-44) Who Cohabited with Their First Husband, by Marriage Cohort and Educational Attainment


References:

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