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FP-11-08 On the Road to Adulthood: Forming Families

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For many, an important marker of adulthood is forming a family—whether having a child, getting married, or cohabiting with a romantic partner. The past twenty years have seen increasing delays in the age at first birth among women and men (FP-11-04) and age at first marriage (FP-09-03) as well as increases in the proportion of young adults who have ever cohabited or are currently cohabiting (FP-10-07). This profile examines these family formation experiences throughout young adulthood.

**Family Formation Experiences Throughout Young Adulthood**

Longitudinal data from the National Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) reveal the cumulative experiences of having a child, cohabitation, and marriage among young adults by age 25. Young adults can have vastly different experiences within this critical period in the life course.

- By age 25, nearly half of young adults have ever cohabited (47%), one-third have ever had a child (33%), and one-quarter have ever married (26%).
- Among those who experienced a marriage, 18% subsequently divorced by age 25.
- There is a sizable minority (39%) of young adults who did not have any family formation experiences by age 25.

![Figure 1: Types of Family Formation Experiences Throughout Young Adulthood (by age 25)](source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97), Rounds 1-13: 1997-2009 (weighted). U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, NCFMR analyses of valid cases.)

**Types of Family Formation Experiences Among Women and Men**

By their twenty-fifth birthdays, women are more likely than men to have ever cohabited, had a child, or married.

- A majority of women (54%) have ever cohabited compared to just less than half of men (40%).
- Two-fifths of women have had a child (40%) versus only one-quarter of men (26%).
- Approximately 31% of women have tied the knot, whereas only 21% of men have married.

Family Formation Experiences Among Racial and Ethnic Groups

- Among racial and ethnic groups, relatively similar proportions of young adults have ever cohabited: 44% of Blacks, 48% of Hispanics, and 47% of Whites.
- Over one-half (51%) of Blacks have had a child by age 25 compared to two-fifths of Hispanics (43%) and only one-quarter of Whites (27%).
- Similar proportions of Hispanics and Whites have experienced a marriage—30% and 28%, respectively. Only 13% of Blacks experience a marriage before their 25th birthday.

Figure 3. Types of Family Formation Experiences Through Young Adulthood (by age 25) Among Racial and Ethnic Groups

Suggested Citation:

Family Formation Experiences Among Educational Attainment Groups

- Among all groups examined, those with a GED by age 25 are the most likely to have cohabited (69%), whereas those with at least a Bachelor's degree (31%) are least likely.
- Close to half of respondents with a GED or without any degree have had a child—56% and 49%, respectively. Only 8% of individuals with at least a Bachelor's degree had a child.
- Only about one-fifth (19%) of adults without a high school degree or at least a Bachelor's degree (21%) have tied the knot.
- There is little remaining variation in the proportion of young adults who have married by age 25.
  - Those with an Associate's degree are the most likely to have married (32%) followed by individuals with a GED (31%) and a HS diploma (28%).

Figure 4. Types of Family Formation Experiences Through Young Adulthood (by age 25) Among Educational Attainment Groups