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## FP-14-02 Healthy Marriage Initiative Spending and U.S. Marriage & Divorce Rates, a State-level Analysis

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# Healthy Marriage Initiative Spending and U.S. Marriage & Divorce Rates, a State-level Analysis

Wendy D. Manning, Susan L. Brown, Krista K. Payne, & Hsueh-Sheng Wu

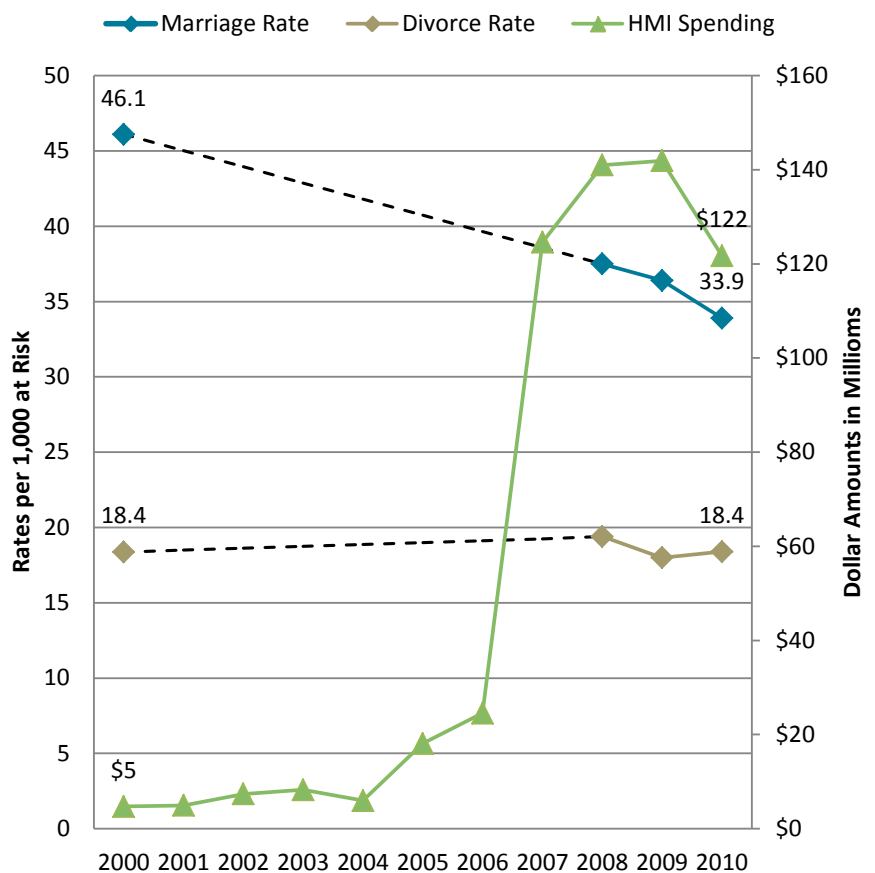
Since 2001, the federal government has spent more than \$600 million on its Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) designed to support the formation and maintenance of healthy marriages. This profile examines how HMI spending from 2000-2010 is related to trends in U.S. marriage and divorce. It also investigates the relationship between federally designated state-level HMI spending from 2000-2011 and state-level marriage and divorce rates in 2011.

**Background.** Federal support for healthy marriage and relationship programs accelerated in 2001 when the Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) named strengthening marriage as one of nine ACF priorities. In 2005, as part of the Deficit Reduction Act, \$150 million in yearly funding was set aside for the promotion of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood. Monies set aside for promotion of marriage could be used for marriage education, marriage skills training, public advertising campaigns, high school education on the value of marriage, and marriage mentoring programs (for more information, see the [ACF Archives](#)). These programs, which are jointly referred to as the [Healthy Marriage Initiative](#) (HMI), are guided by a mission “to help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.”

## U.S. HMI Spending and Marriage & Divorce Rates, a Decade of Change

- Annual HMI spending increased by \$117 million from 2000 to 2010, with the most pronounced increase between 2006 and 2007 (Hawkins, Amato, & Kinghorn 2013).
- Spending peaked in 2009, with total year expenditures reaching nearly \$142 million.
- During the 2000s, the General Marriage Rate continued its precipitous decline initiated in the 1970s (see [FP-13-13](#)). In 2000, 46.1 individuals married per 1,000 eligible to marry (i.e., those 15 years and older and currently unmarried), whereas 33.9 did so in 2010, representing a 26% decrease.
- The General Divorce Rate remained relatively stable, with 18.4 individuals divorcing per 1,000 at risk of divorce (i.e., those 15 years and older and currently married or separated).
- A decrease in the ratio of number of marriages to divorces occurred during this ten-year time period, dropping from 1.98 to 1.84. This change is driven, in large part, by an overall reduction in the number of marriages.

Figure 1. Annual HMI Spending and Marriage & Divorce Rates, 2000 - 2010



Sources: CDC/NCHS, [National Vital Statistics System](#), 2000; Glass & Levchak, 2010, [NCFMR County-Level Marriage & Divorce Data, 2000](#); U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2008 – 2010; HMI Spending data – Hawkins et al., 2013.

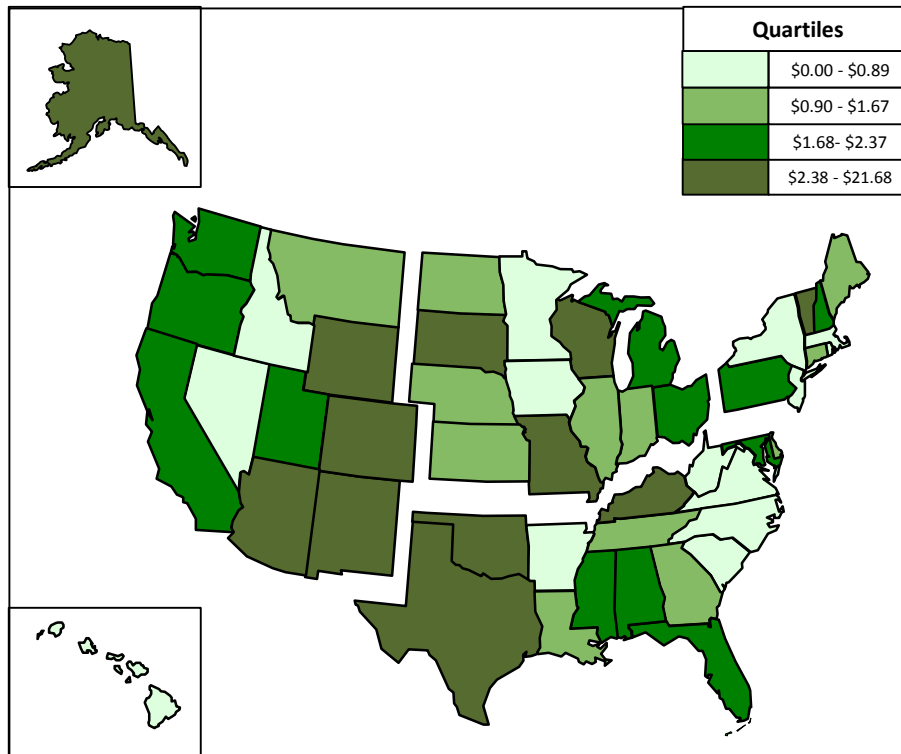
*Note:* The numerators for the marriage and divorce rates for the year 2000 were derived from state-level NVS count data and the denominators were derived from 2000 Decennial Census data. Oklahoma did not report number of marriages or divorces, and California, Indiana, and Louisiana did not report number of divorces in 2000. NCFMR County-level data collected by Glass & Levchak were summed for these missing states and used in the numerators for computing the national rate.

Family Profiles examine topics related to NCFMR's core research themes. Data are presented at both the national and state levels using new data sources. Written for both researchers and broad communities, these profiles summarize the latest statistics on U.S. families.

## Geographic Variation in Cumulative State per Capita HMI Spending

- HMI spending varied substantially by state:
  - States with the highest HMI tend to be located in the Western region of the U.S. (Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, & Wyoming).
  - Among the top quarter in spending, investments ranged from \$2.38 to \$21.68 per person.
  - States with the lowest HMI spending are primarily located in the Southern region of the U.S. (Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, & West Virginia).
  - Among the bottom quarter in spending, investments ranged from \$0.00 to \$0.89 per person.

Figure 2. Geographic Variation of State per Capita HMI Spending

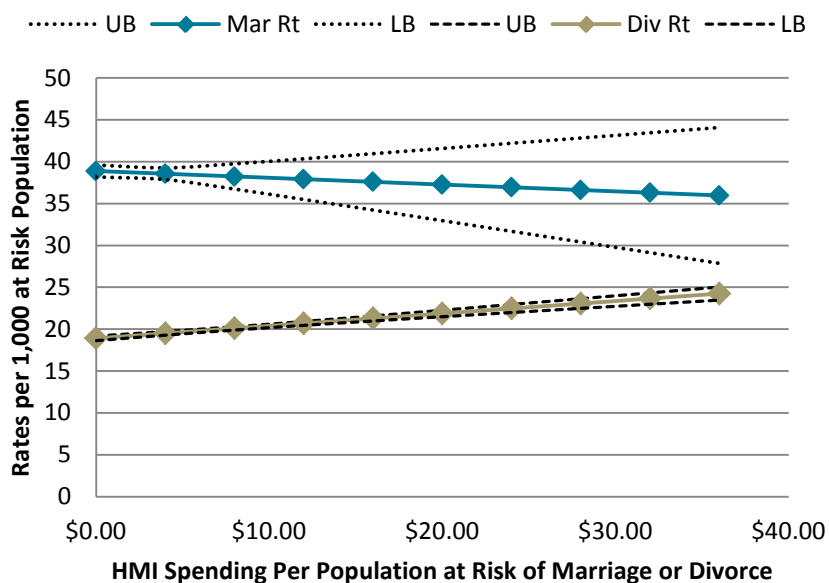


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2010; HMI Spending data— Hawkins et al., 2013.



## The Relationship Between State-Level HMI Spending and State-Level Marriage & Divorce Rates

Figure 3. Predicted Marriage & Divorce Rates With Respected Upper Bounds (UB) & Lower Bounds (LB)



- Figure 3 illustrates the bounded predicted marriage and divorce rates given actual federally designated state-level spending on HMIs. The predicted General Marriage and Divorce Rates are based on a fixed-effect model estimating the average relationship between cumulative (2000-2011) HMI spending and marriage/divorce rates (2008-2011), controlling for state and time period variations.<sup>1</sup>
  - State-level spending on HMIs did not have a significant association with state marriage rates.
  - State-level spending on HMIs did have a significant positive association with state divorce rates.

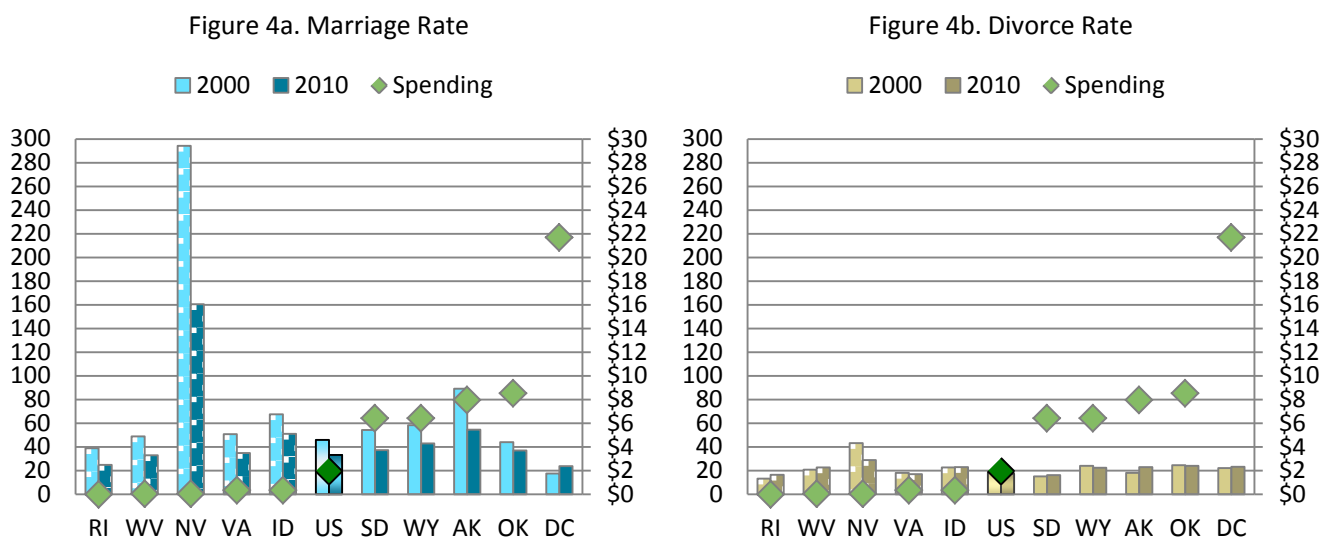
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2008-2011; HMI spending data— Hawkins et al., 2013.

<sup>1</sup>Full models are available upon request.

## Bottom & Top States in Cumulative per Capita HMI Spending and Marriage & Divorce Rates

- The five states with the smallest per capita cumulative HMI investments all experienced declines in their GMR from 2000 to 2010, but so did 4 out of the 5 states with the largest HMI spending.
- Washington, D.C. had the highest cumulative per capita investment (\$21.68) and experienced a 35% increase in their GMR, from 17.6 to 23.8 marriages per 1,000 unmarried individuals ages 15 and older.
- Although there is a positive association between state spending and divorce rates, the top and bottom spenders share similar divorce trends.
  - For both the bottom and top cumulative HMI spenders, 3 states experienced increases in their GDRs and 2 experienced decreases (as well as an overall U.S. decrease). These decreases are all quite small (all at or less than 7% drop, or in other words, a drop of less than 2 people per 1,000 at risk) with the exception of Nevada (33% decrease, or in other words, a drop of 14 people per 1,000 at risk).
  - For GMRs & GDRs with cumulative per capita HMI spending for all 50 states and Washington, D.C., please click the following links:
    - [General Marriage Rates](#)
    - [General Divorce Rates](#)

Figures 4a & 4b. Bottom and Top Five States in 2000-2010 Cumulative per Capita HMI Spending with NVS Marriage & Divorce Rates, 2000 & 2010



Sources: CDC/NCHS, [National Vital Statistics System](#); Glass & Levchak, 2010, [NCFMR County-Level Marriage & Divorce Data, 2000](#); U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2010; HMI Spending data—Hawkins et al. 2013.

*Note:* The denominator for the GMR is comprised of individuals who are currently unmarried (never-married, divorced or widowed) and those who married in that given year and the denominator for the GDR is comprised of individuals who are currently married or separated and those who divorced in that given year.

*Note:* The numerators for the marriage and divorce rates were derived from state-level NVS count data (when available) and the denominators were derived from 2000 Decennial Census and 2010 ACS 1-year estimates. When NVS data were unavailable for the year 2000, NCFMR County-level data collected by Glass & Levchak were summed and used for the missing states. When 2010 data were unavailable, individual state reporting was utilized. If unreported, NCFMR staff contacted the states directly.

### References

1. Hawkins, Amato, & Kinghorn (2013). Are Government-Supported Healthy Marriage Initiatives Affecting Family Demographics? A State-Level Analysis. *Family Relations*. 62, 501-513. doi: 10.1111/fare.12009

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