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FP-12-06 Unmarried Births to Cohabiting and Single Mothers, 2005-2010

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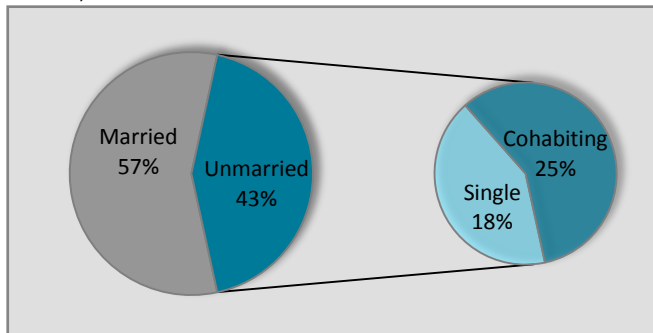
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The proportion of births to unmarried women in the U.S. has more than doubled over the past three decades, rising from 18.4% of all births in 1980 to over 40% in 2010 (FP 12-03). Unmarried mothers are not necessarily single though. In fact, a growing share of children born to unmarried mothers are living with their mother and a cohabiting partner rather than just their mother. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between the proportions of unmarried births to women who are cohabiting versus single and unpartnered. Using data from the continuous National Survey of Family Growth 2006-2010, this profile investigates the proportion of unmarried births born to women in cohabiting relationships according to age, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment of mother.

Figure 1. Percentage of Births by Informal Marital Status of Mother, 2005-2010



Source: NSFG 2006-2010

Unmarried Births

More than 2 in 5 births occurred to unmarried women between 2005 and 2010.

- One-quarter of all births were to cohabiting women, and about one-fifth were to single women.¹
- Among births to unmarried women, 57% were to women in cohabiting relationships.

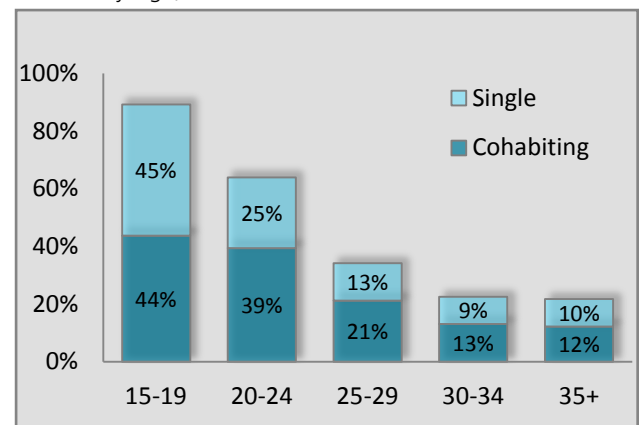
Family Profiles examine topics related to NCFMR's core research themes. Data are presented at both the national and state levels using new data sources. Written for both researchers and broad communities, these profiles summarize the latest statistics on U.S. families.

Age of Mother

The proportion of unmarried births declines with women's age. Among births to women aged 15-19, 89% were unmarried, whereas among those to women over the age of 30, only 22% were unmarried.

- Just under half of children born to unmarried teenage mothers were born into cohabiting parent families, and the remaining half were born to single mothers.
- The majority of children born to unmarried mothers over age 20 were born to those who were cohabiting rather than single. Children born to unmarried mothers aged 20-24 experienced the highest levels of cohabitation at birth, with 62% born to cohabiting mothers.

Figure 2. Percentage of All Births to Cohabiting and Single Women by Age, 2005-2010



Source: NSFG 2006-2010

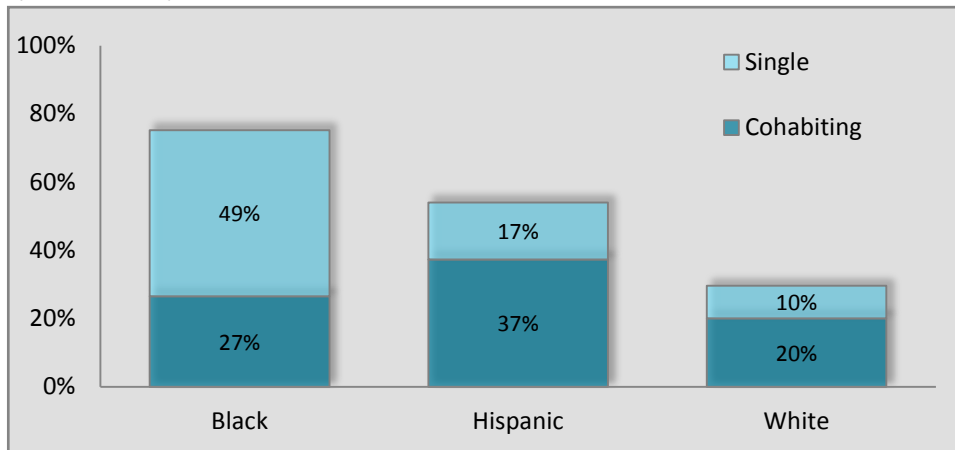
¹ Single refers to women who report being never-married, separated, divorced, or widowed and not residing with a cohabiting partner at the time of live birth.

Race and Ethnicity of Mother

Over half of births to minority women were unmarried births: 76% of births to Black women and 54% to Hispanic women. By comparison, 30% of births to White women were to unmarried mothers.

- Although the proportion of unmarried births was largest among Black women, Black women had the smallest share of unmarried births occurring in cohabiting relationships at 35%.
- Most unmarried births to Hispanic and White women occurred in cohabiting relationships (69% and 68%, respectively).

Figure 3. Percentage of All Births to Cohabiting and Single Women by Race/Ethnicity, 2005-2010



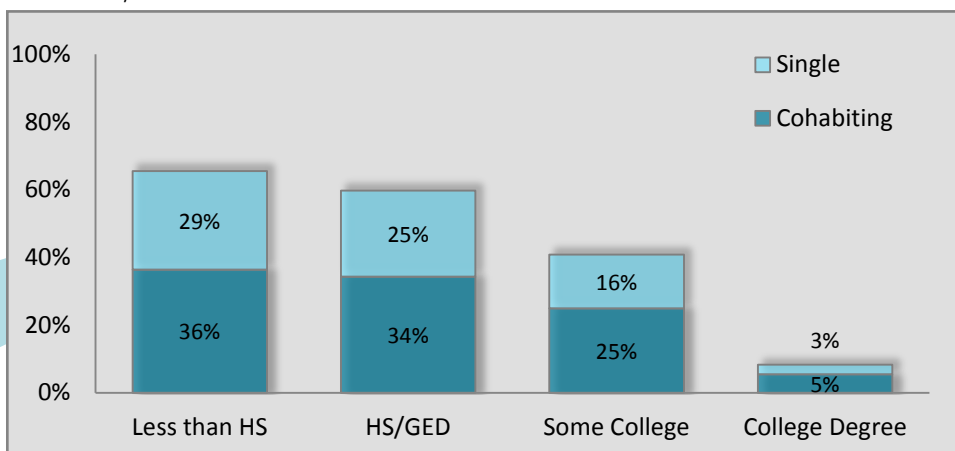
Source: NSFG 2006-2010

Educational Attainment of Mother

The proportion of unmarried births declines with increased levels of educational attainment. Among births to women with less than a completed high school education, 65% were unmarried, whereas among women with a college degree, only 8% were unmarried.

- Although the proportion of unmarried births was largest among women with the least education, women without a high school education had the smallest share of unmarried births occurring in cohabiting relationships at 56%.
- Most unmarried births to women with a high school degree or more occurred to cohabiting not single women.
 - The percentage of unmarried births that occurred in a cohabiting relationship was largest among women with a college degree at 66%.

Figure 4. Percentage of All Births to Cohabiting and Single Women by Educational Attainment, 2005-2010



Source: NSFG 2006-2010

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