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Single, Cohabiting, and Married Mothers in the U.S., 2011

Julissa Cruz

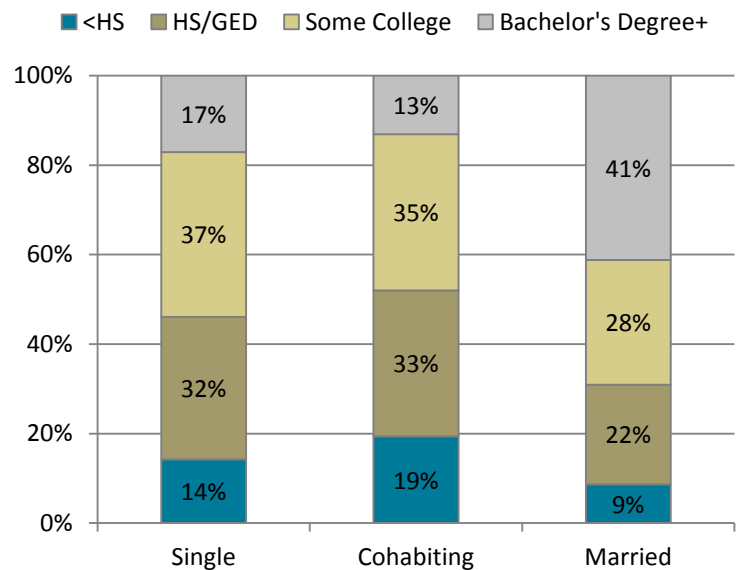
Recent demographic trends have contributed to increases in unmarried (single and cohabiting) mothers in the U.S. The share of births that are to unmarried mothers has doubled in the past three decades and is now 40% (Martin et al., 2009). More than one-half of unmarried births are to cohabiting mothers (Martinez et al., 2012). Further, being born to married parents is no guarantee of a stable family life; roughly half of all marriages end in divorce (Kreider & Ellis, 2011; Raley & Bumpass, 2003). This profile examines the demographic characteristics of single, cohabiting, and married mothers in the U.S. aged 18 and older who have children under age 18 living in their household.

- Approximately one-quarter of mothers in the U.S. are single (24%), 6% are currently cohabiting, and the vast majority are married (70%).
- Half of single mothers (49%) are previously married, whereas slightly over one out of three (37%) cohabiting mothers is previously married.
- With a median age of 37, married mothers tend to be older than single and cohabiting mothers (34 and 31, respectively).

Educational Attainment of Mothers, 2011

- The educational attainment of mothers varies by family structure. Married mothers have higher educational attainment, on average, than either single mothers or cohabiting mothers.
 - Two out of five (41%) married mothers hold Bachelor's degrees, whereas less than one out of five single mothers (17%) and cohabiting mothers (13%) have Bachelor's degrees.
 - Thirty-seven percent of single and 35% of cohabiting mothers have some college—that is, they have received some education after high school, but have not earned a Bachelor's degree. Thirty-two percent of single and 33% of cohabiting mothers have a high school diploma.
 - One out of five cohabiting mothers (19%) has less than a high school diploma, whereas the corresponding percentages for single mothers (14%) and married mothers (9%) are smaller.

Figure 1. Mother Type by Educational Attainment, 2011



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011

This profile draws on research published in the following articles:

King, M., Ruggles, S., Alexander, J. T., Flood, S., Genadek, K., Schroeder, M. B., Trampe, B., & Vick, R. (2010). Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 3.0. [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Kreider, R. M., & Ellis, R. (2011). Living arrangements of children: 2009. *Current Population Reports*, P70-126, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

Martin, J. A., Hamilton, B. E., Sutton, P. D., Ventura, S. J., Menacker, F., Kirmeyer, S., & Mahews, M. S. (2009). Births: Final data for 2006. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

Martinez, G. M., Daniels, K., & Chandra, A. (2012). Fertility of men and women aged 15-44 years in the United States: National Survey of Family Growth, 2006-2010. *National Health Statistics Reports*, no. 51. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

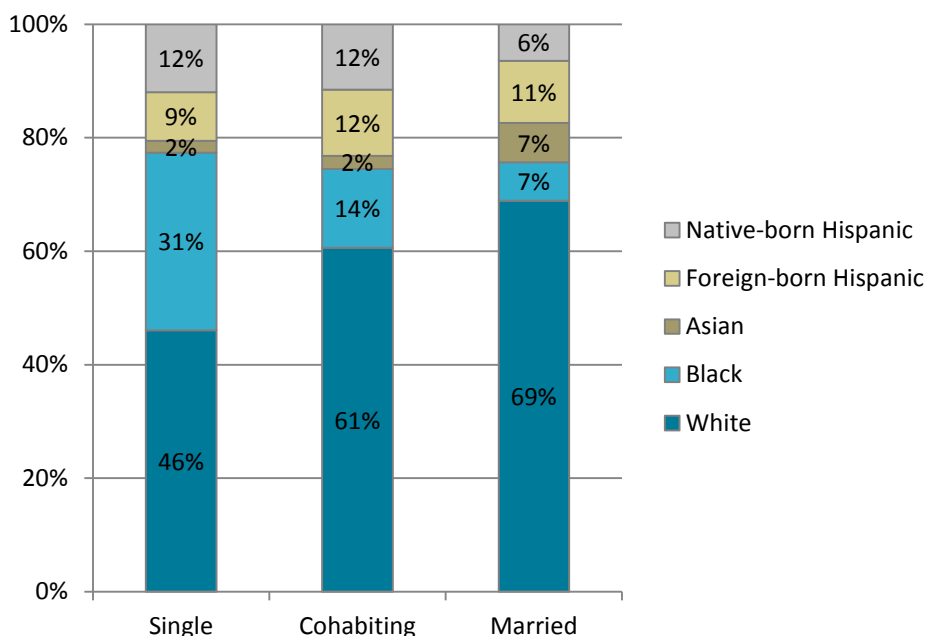
Raley, K. R., & Bumpass, L. (2003). The topography of the divorce plateau: Levels and trends in union stability in the United States after 1980. *Demographic Research*, 8, 245-260. doi:10.4054/DemRes.2003.8.8

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.

Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity of Hispanic Mothers, 2011

- Racial, ethnic, and nativity composition differs across single, cohabiting, and married mothers.
 - Over two-thirds (69%) of married mothers are White, but they comprise less than half (46%) of single mothers. Asian mothers are especially likely to be married—7% of married mothers are Asian versus 2% of single and cohabiting mothers.
 - Approximately one out of three (31%) single mothers is Black, whereas only 7% of married mothers are Black.
 - The same percentages of cohabiting mothers are foreign-born and native-born Hispanics (12%). Yet a greater percentage of married mothers are foreign-born (versus native-born) Hispanics (11% vs. 6%), and a smaller percentage of single mothers are foreign-born (versus native-born) Hispanics (9% vs. 12%).

Figure 2. Mother Type by Race, Ethnicity, and Hispanic Nativity, 2011

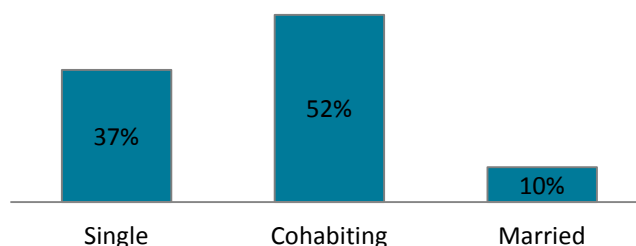


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011

Poverty Status of Mothers, 2011

- Roughly two-thirds of single, cohabiting, and married mothers are employed (results not shown). Yet there are large discrepancies in their poverty statuses.
 - Half (52%) of cohabiting and 37% of single mother families are living below the poverty line. In contrast, only 10% of married families are living below the poverty line.

Figure 3. Mother Type by Percentage in Poverty, 2011



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011

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