FP-18-22 Young Adulthood: Cohabitation, Birth, and Marriage Experiences

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Young Adulthood: Cohabitation, Birth, and Marriage Experiences

Paul Hemez

Forming a family by having a child or living with a romantic partner (especially in marriage) is considered a marker of adulthood. However, young adults’ experiences of family formation behaviors have shifted over time. As young men and women wait longer to have children or get married (FP-16-07; FP-17-22), and cohabitation has become a more common experience in recent decades (FP-17-02). Using rounds 1-17 of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, this Family Profile examines the share of young adults who had a child, got married, and/or cohabited before their 30th birthday for the cohort of men and women who were born between 1980 and 1984.

Cohabitation, Parenthood, and Marriage Experience in Young Adulthood

- Among the three family formation experiences considered, cohabitation was the most common – over six in ten young adults had cohabited prior to their 30th birthday.
- Overall, half of young adults had become a parent by their 30th birthday.
- Marriage was the least common family formation experience, as only 45% of young adults had married by age 30.

Cohabitation Experience in Young Adulthood

A larger share of women (66%) cohabited during young adulthood than their male counterparts (57%).

Having cohabited prior to age 30 was most common for Whites (63%) followed by Hispanics (60%) and Blacks (57%).

Men and women with a high school degree or GED experienced cohabitation more often (67%) relative to other educational attainment groups, whereas those with a Bachelor’s degree or more had the lowest share of cohabitation experience (54%).

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, rounds 1-17
Parenthood Experience in Young Adulthood

- A larger share of women (56%) became parents during young adulthood than men (44%).
- More than half of Hispanics (58%) and nearly two-thirds of Blacks had a child before their 30th birthday compared to 45% of Whites.
- About six in ten of those with less than a high school education became parents during young adulthood. On the other hand, among men and women holding a Bachelor’s degree or more, slightly over three in ten became a parent by age 30.

Marriage in Young Adulthood

- More than half (51%) of women born between 1980 and 1984 married prior to their 30th birthday. Among men who were born between these years, about 40% had married by age 30.
- Marriage experience during young adulthood was almost twice as common for Whites (49%) than it was for Blacks (26%). Hispanic young adults had a slightly lower share of marriage experience (44%) than Whites.
- Over half of those with an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree married before the age of 30, whereas less than one-third of those with less than a high school degree had married.

Figure 3. Percentage of Young Adults Who Experienced Parenthood Before Age 30, by Select Demographic Characteristics

Figure 4. Percentage of Young Adults Who Married Before Age 30, by Select Demographic Characteristics

Sources:

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Family Profiles: Original reports summarizing and analyzing nationally representative data with the goal to provide the latest analysis of U.S. families. These profiles examine topics related to the NCFMR’s core research themes.