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FP-22-15 Median Age at First Marriage, 2021

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The median age at first marriage in the United States has increased steadily since the mid-20th century, with a persistent gender gap (FP-21-12). In this profile, we use the 2021 Current Population Survey to document overall trends through 2021 and the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Experimental IPUMS data to examine differences by race/ethnicity and education as of 2020. The CPS and ACS tend to mimic each other for the median age at first marriage but differ slightly due to differences in how age at marriage is measured. For instance, in 2020, the CPS median age at first marriage for men was 30.5, and for women it was 28.1; the comparable figures for the 2020 ACS are 29.7 and 28.3, respectively. This is an update to our previous profiles on the topic for the years 2019 (FP-21-12), 2017 (FP-19-06), 2014 (FP-16-07), 2013 (FP-15-05), 2010 (FP-12-07), and 2008 (FP-09-03).

In 1890, the median age at first marriage for men was 26.1 and 22.0 for women; by 2021, it reached 30.4 and 28.6, respectively (see Figure 1). This represents a historic high for women, though a slight decline from the high in 2020 for men.

The gender gap in age at marriage persists and is about 2 years with a slight narrowing in recent years.

Figure 1. Median Age at First Marriage in the U.S., 1890-2021


Median Age at First Marriage by Race and Ethnicity

- Among women who married in the year preceding the 2020 ACS, foreign-born Hispanic and Black women had the highest median age at first marriage (30.6), and native-born Hispanic women had the lowest median age at first marriage (26.8).
- Among men who married the preceding year, Black men had the highest median age at first marriage (31.0). Like native-born Hispanic women, native-born Hispanic men had the lowest median age at first marriage (28.5).
- In terms of the gender gap, the largest gap was between men and women of Other/2+ races (1.9 years). The narrowest gap was between foreign-born Hispanic men and women as well as Black men and women (less than half a year).

Figure 2. Median Age at First Marriage by Race and Ethnicity, 2020

Source: NCFMR analyses of American Community Survey 1-year estimates (IPUMS USA University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org), 2020

The standard 2020 ACS 1-year data products will not be released due to the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection and data quality (for more information click here). The ACS provides annual data to directly estimate the median age at first marriage whereas the CPS is an indirect measure.
Median Age at First Marriage by Educational Attainment

- Among women who married in the year preceding the 2020 ACS, those with a doctorate degree had the highest median age at first marriage (31.5). Women with less than a high school degree had the lowest median age at first marriage (25.4).
- Among men, those with a doctorate degree, as well as those with a masters/professional degree, had the highest median age at first marriage (31.6). Men with some college but no degree had the lowest median age at first marriage (28.6) and those without a high school degree or a high school or GED degree shared a similarly low age at first marriage (28.8 and 28.7, respectively).
- In terms of the gender gap in age at marriage, the largest gap was between men and women with less than a high school degree (3.4). The narrowest gap was between men and women with a doctorate (less than 2 months).

Figure 3. Median Age at First Marriage by Educational Attainment, 2020

Source: NCFMR analyses of American Community Survey 1-year estimates (IPUMS USA University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org), 2020

Data Source:

References


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