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FP-14-05 Trends in Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers, 1980-2009

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Trends in Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers, 1980-2009

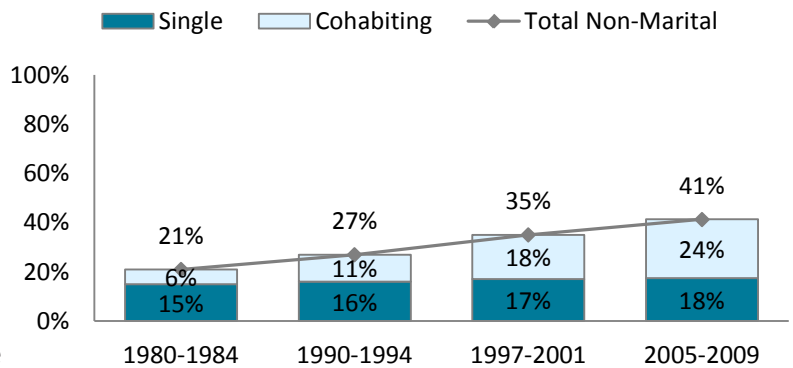
Wendy D. Manning, Susan L. Brown, Esther Lamidi, & Krista K. Payne

Historically, unmarried births typically occurred to single mothers who were not residing with the father of the child. The dramatic increase in cohabitation in recent decades has coincided with a shift in the circumstances of unmarried births, which more often occur to cohabiting mothers. At least two out of every five children born in the U.S. are expected to spend some time in a cohabiting family by age 12 (Kennedy & Bumpass 2008), and many children experience parental cohabitation from birth (Bumpass & Lu 2000). This profile presents trends in the estimated shares of unmarried births to cohabiting and single mothers under the age of 40 drawing on two published articles (Bumpass & Lu 2000; and Kennedy & Bumpass 2008) and NCFMR generated estimates based on the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG).

Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers Under Age 40 (1980-2009)

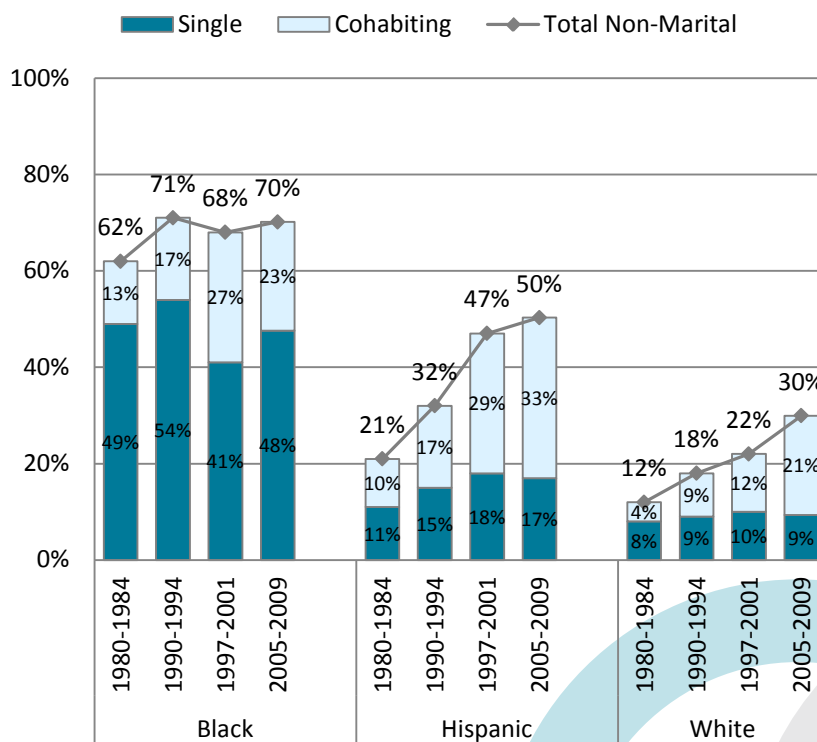
- The share of births to unmarried mothers doubled from 1980 to 2009 from 21% to 42%.
- This growth results almost entirely from a four-fold surge in births to cohabiting mothers, increasing from only 6% of all births in the early 1980s to 24% in the late 2000s. One in four births today is to cohabiting parents.
- The share of all children born to single mothers has shifted only slightly (from 15% to 18%) over the past 30 years. The share of unmarried births to single (versus cohabiting) mothers moved from the majority experience (71%) in the early 1980s to the minority experience (42%) in the late 2000s (not shown).

Figure 1. Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers Under Age 40 (1980-2009)*



Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers Under Age 40 by Race/Ethnicity (1980-2009)

Figure 2 Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers Under Age 40 by Race/Ethnicity (1980-2009)*



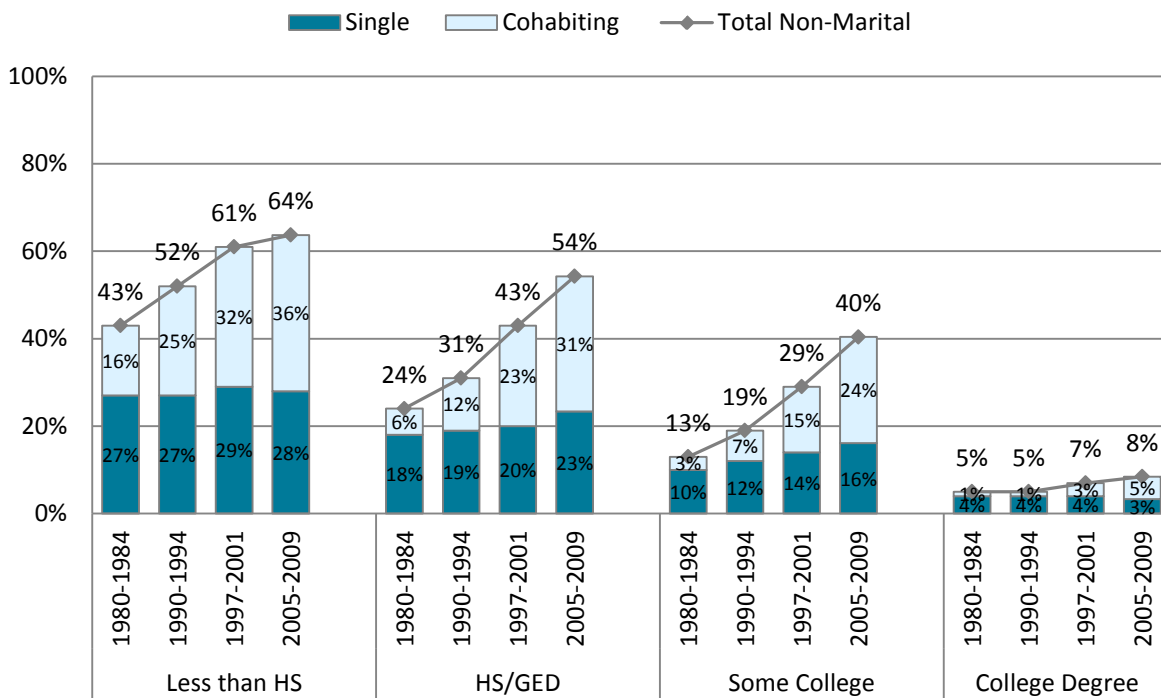
- From 1980 to 2009, the share of unmarried births to Hispanic and White mothers more than doubled, whereas those to Black mothers increased only slightly (Figure 2).
- Births to unmarried Black mothers are typically to single mothers, whereas unmarried births to Hispanic and White mothers are usually to cohabiting mothers.
- The share of all births to single mothers remained relatively stable among Black and White mothers and increased by about 50% among Hispanic mothers.
- Dramatic increases in children born to cohabiting mothers occurred for all race/ethnic groups, with the greatest increases among White and Hispanic mothers. The share of births to cohabiting mothers increased five-fold among White mothers and three-fold among Hispanic.

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.

Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers Under Age 40 by Educational Attainment (1980-2009)

- The share of unmarried births increased from 1980 to 2009, regardless of maternal educational attainment.
- The share of births to single mothers increased slightly among moderately educated women (high school degree and some college), but remained relatively stable among the most educated and the least educated mothers.
- Births to cohabiting mothers increased for every education category with the greatest increase among mothers who had some education post high school but not a college degree. Nearly two-fifths of mothers without a high school degree had a birth in a cohabiting union versus only 5% among college educated mothers.

Figure 3. Changes in the Shares of Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers Under Age 40 by Educational Attainment (1980-2009)*



*Sources: 1980-1984 data, Bumpass & Lu (2000) using NSFH, 1987/1988; 1990-1994 & 1997-2001 data, Kennedy & Bumpass (2008) using NSFG 1995 & NSFG 2002; 2005-2009, NCFMR analyses using NSFG 2006-2010.

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