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FP-17-22 Crossover in the Median Age at First Marriage and First Birth: Thirty-Five Years of Change

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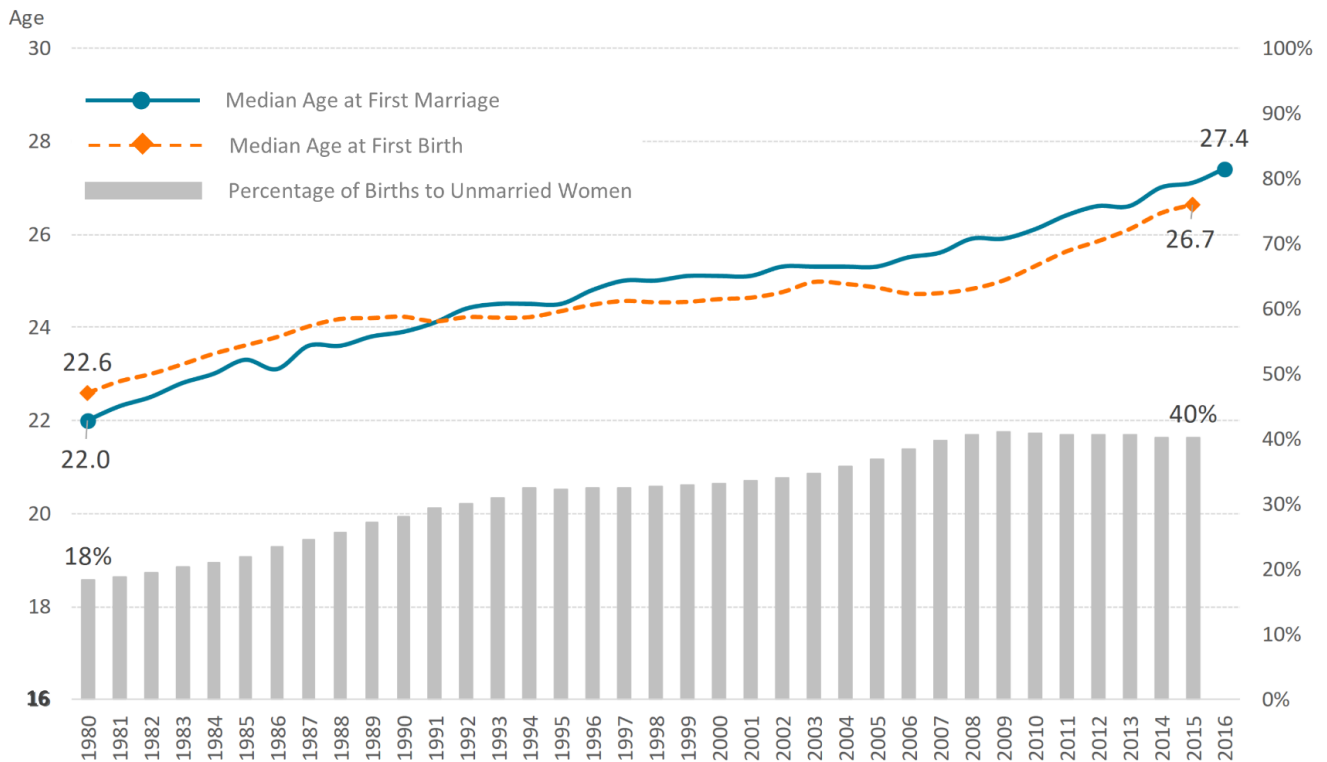
Crossover in the Median Age at First Marriage and First Birth: Thirty-Five Years of Change



Kasey J. Eickmeyer, Krista K. Payne, Susan L. Brown, & Wendy D. Manning

The increase in the age at first marriage has outpaced the increase in the age at first birth. At the same time, non-marital births continue to make up a substantial share of births in a given year. Consequently, marriage and childbearing have become decoupled (England, Wu, and Shafer, 2013; Gibson-Davis and Rackin, 2014). In an update to FP-12-03, this profile documents the trends in women's age at first marriage, age at first birth, and the proportion of births to unmarried mothers using data from the 2016 Current Population Survey (CPS) and the Center for Disease Control's 2015 National Vital Statistics.

Figure 1. Crossover in the Median Age at First Marriage and First Birth, 1980-Present



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Stats and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015

Median Age at First Marriage, 1980-2016

Between 1980 and 2016, women's median age at first marriage rose 25% from 22.0 to 27.4.

- In 2016, women's median age at first marriage reached a historic high point.
- Over the past 36 years, women's median age at first marriage experienced three distinct periods of change.
 - Between 1980 and 1990, women's median age at first marriage increased by nearly two years from 22 to 23.9.
 - Over the next fifteen years (1990-2005), the growth slowed with an increase of only 1.4 years from 23.9 to 25.3.
 - From 2006 to 2016, women's median age at first marriage experienced an upswing from 25.5 to 27.4, roughly a two-year increase.

Median Age at First Birth, 1980-2015

Since 1980, women's median age at first birth increased by 18% from 22.6 to 26.7 years.

- Half of all women who became mothers in 2015 had their first child after age 26.7, which represents a historic high point in the median age at first birth.
- Following a slight decline from 2003-2006, women's median age at first birth has since trended upward.
- The growth in the median age at first birth was between 2005 and 2015.

Crossover in the Median Ages at First Marriage and First Birth

- Between 1980 and 1991, women's median age at first marriage was lower than women's median age at first birth. The crossover in the median age at first birth occurred in 1991, and since that time, the median age at first birth is consistently lower than the median age at first marriage.
- The share of births to unmarried mothers increased markedly between 1980 and 1991 from 18.4% to 29.5%. The level continued to rise before reaching a plateau in recent years; since 2008, about 40% of children were born to unmarried mothers.
- The gap between the median age at first marriage and first birth was greatest in 2008 (1.1 years) but has since declined to less than one year.



Data Sources:

Flood, S., King, M., Ruggles, S., and Warren, J.R. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 4.0* [dataset]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015. <http://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V4.0>.

National Center for Health Statistics (2015). Data File Documentations, Natality, 2015, National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, Maryland.

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England, P., Wu, L. L., & Shafer, E. F. (2013). Cohort trends in premarital first births: What role for the retreat from marriage? *Demography*, 50(6), 2075-2104. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-013-0241-1>

Gibson-Davis, C., & Rackin, H. (2014). Marriage or carriage? Trends in union context and birth type by education. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(3), 506-519. <http://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12109>

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