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FP-17-05 Thirty Years of Change in Women's Premarital Cohabitation Experience

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Thirty Years of Change in Women's Premarital Cohabitation Experience



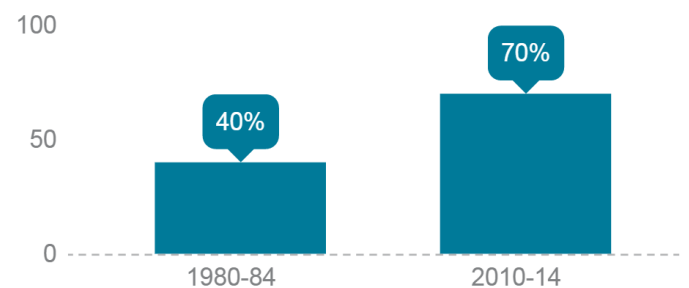
Paul Hemez & Wendy D. Manning

Cohabitation prior to marriage has become a normative living arrangement in the U.S. The current profile examines shifts in the proportion of women who lived with their first husband before marriage by comparing the experiences of two marriage cohorts (1980-1984 and 2010-2014). We use the 1988 and 2011-2015 cycles of the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to estimate the share of women who cohabited with their spouse prior to marriage in each cohort, as well as examine differences by race/ethnicity and educational attainment. Note that our analytical sample is not representative of the cohabitation experiences of all women in the U.S. because we only consider those who have ever married. This profile references different-sex couples due to data constraints.

Changes in the Percentage of Women Who Ever Cohabited

- Two-fifths of women who first married between 1980 and 1984 lived with their husband before marriage.
- Among women who first married between 2010 and 2014, seven in ten cohabited with their spouse prior to the wedding. The proportion of women who lived with their spouse prior to marriage increased by 75% over a thirty-year period.

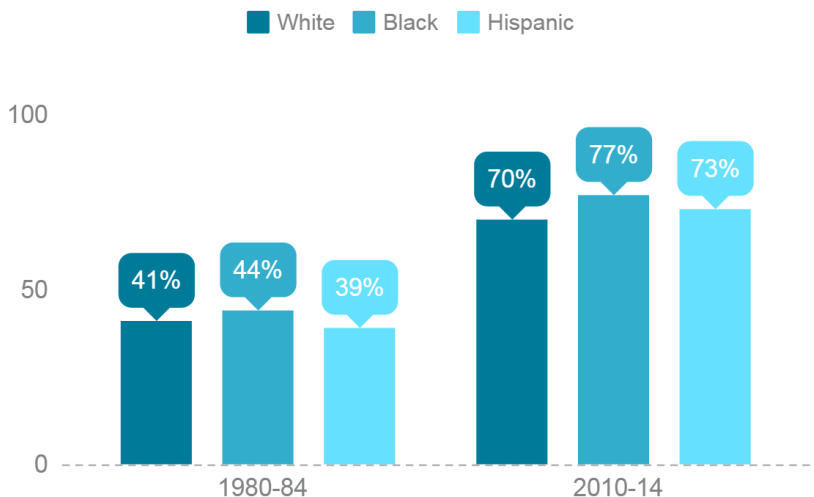
Figure 1. Percentage of Women (15-44) Who Cohabited with Their First Husband, by Marriage Cohort



Sources: 1980-1984 Marriage Cohort, 1988 NSFG; 2010-2014 Marriage Cohort, 2011/15 NSFG

Premarital Cohabitation of First Marriage Cohorts by Race and Ethnicity

Figure 2. Percentage of Women (15-44) Who Cohabited with Their First Husband, by Marriage Cohort and Race/Ethnicity



Sources: 1980-1984 Marriage Cohort, 1988 NSFG; 2010-2014 Marriage Cohort, 2011/15 NSFG
 Note: We exclude respondents who report other or multiple racial/ethnic statuses from Figure 2 due to small cell sizes, but they are included in the overall totals.

- The share of women who cohabited with their spouse prior to marriage grew among all racial and ethnic groups between the 1980/84 and 2010/14 marriage cohorts.
- The increase in cohabitation prior to marriage was lowest for White women (71%) and greatest for Hispanic women (87%). Hispanic women now surpass White women in cohabitation prior to marriage.
- Black women more often lived with their spouse prior to marriage than Whites or Hispanics.

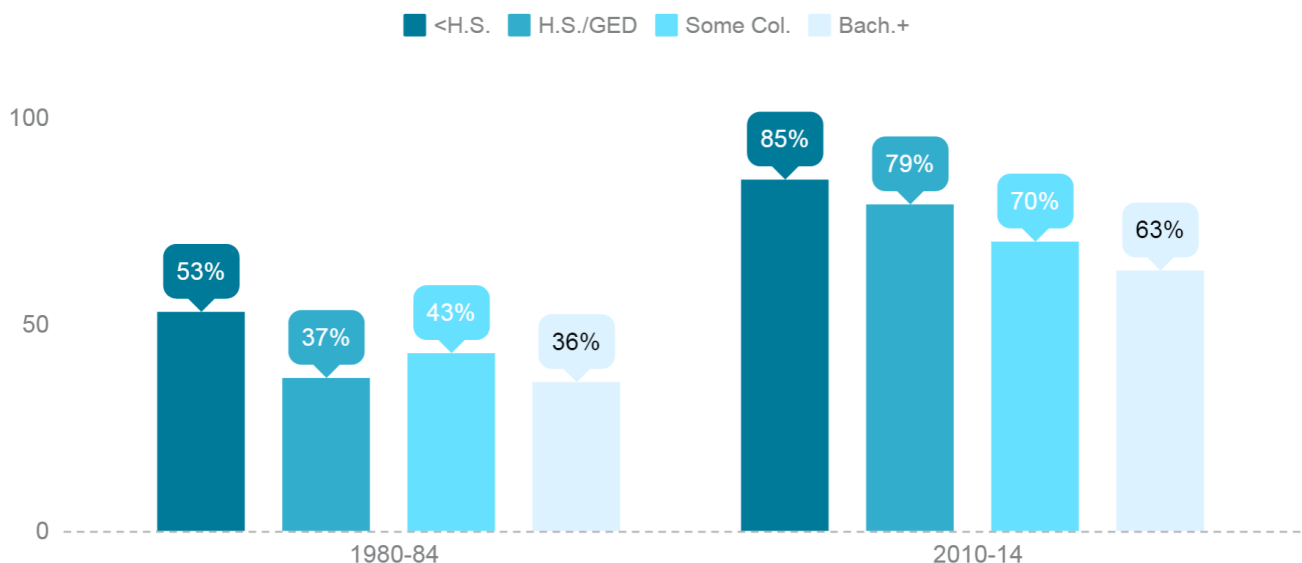
Premarital Cohabitation of First Marriage Cohorts by Educational Attainment

- Across all educational levels, the share of women who cohabited with their first husband prior to marriage increased over time.
- Premarital cohabitation experience increased the most among women with a high school education between the 1980/84 and 2010/14 marriage cohorts.
- Cohabitation prior to marriage remained most common among women with less than a high school education and least common among those with at least a Bachelor's degree.

Premarital Cohabitation more common today than 30 years ago.



Figure 3. Percentage of Women (15-44) Who Cohabited with Their First Husband, by Marriage Cohort and Educational Attainment



Sources: 1980-1984 Marriage Cohort, 1988 NSFG; 2010-2014 Marriage Cohort, 2011/15 NSFG

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