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# MONTHLY VITAL STATISTICS REPORT

Final Data from the National Center for Health Statistics

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## Advance Report of Final Divorce Statistics, 1979

In 1979, 1,181,000 divorces were granted in the United States, the highest national divorce total ever observed. The 1979 figure was 4.5 percent above that for the preceding year (1,130,000), and nearly 3 times the number reported 20 years ago (395,000 in 1959).

The national divorce rate per 1,000 total popula-

tion was 5.4 in 1979 compared with 5.2 for 1978 and 5.0 for both 1976 and 1977. The 1979 rate, a record high, was nearly 2.5 times the rate in 1959.

The 1979 divorce rate per 1,000 married women in the population was 22.8, also the highest ever observed (figure 1). This rate was 21.1 in 1977 and

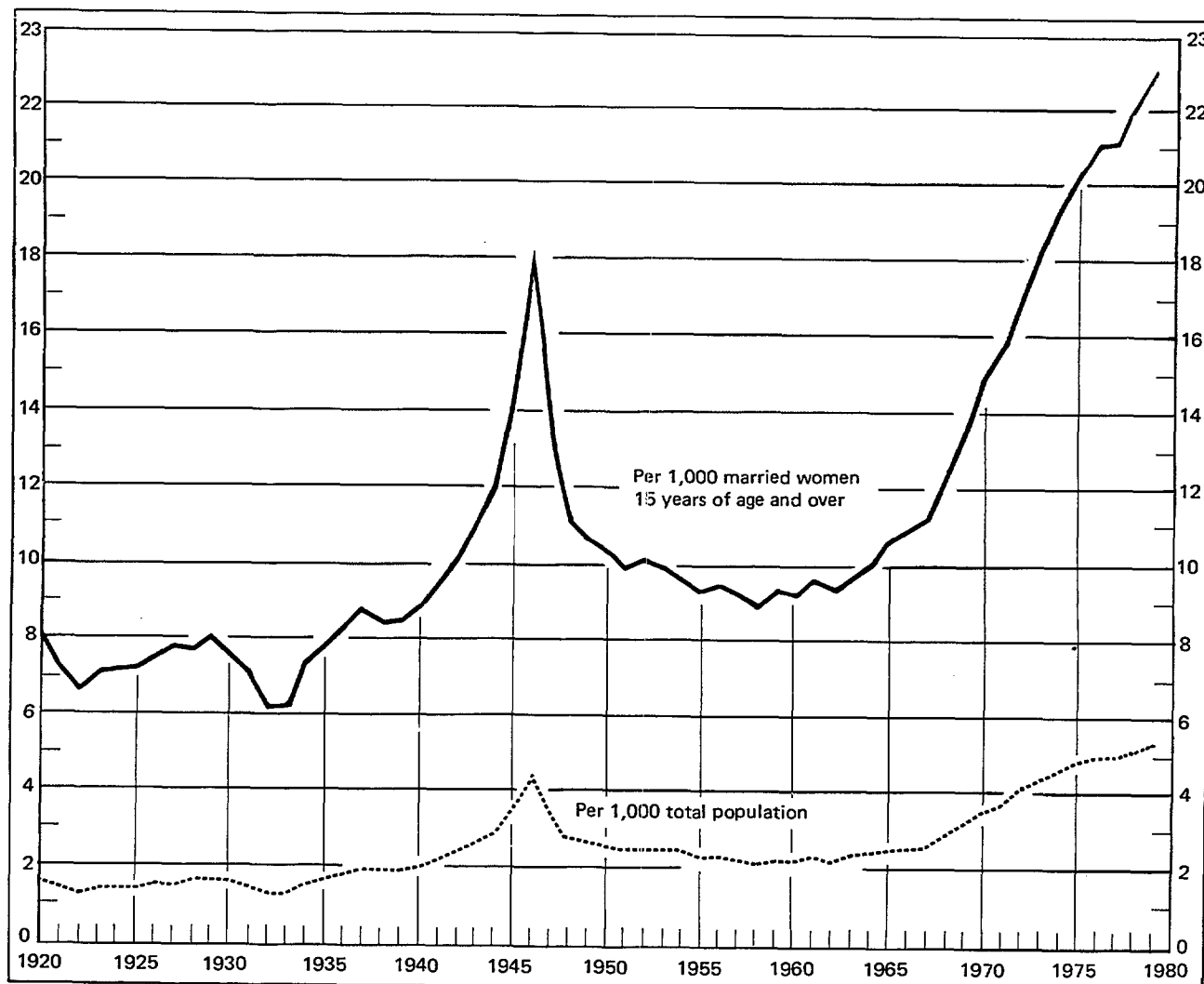


Figure 1. Divorce rates: United States, 1920-79

21.9 in 1978; it has more than doubled in 12 years (11.2 in 1967). For the past 20 years the divorce rate for married women has increased in every year except three (1960, 1962, 1977). The largest increases occurred during 1968-70, averaging 11 percent annually for these 3 years, and in 1971-74, averaging 7.4 percent annually over the 4 years. The increase in 1979 was the largest since 1975.

The national increase in divorces in 1979 was reflected in the figures for regions, divisions, and States, with most of them showing increases in the number of divorces and in the divorce rate.

According to data obtained from the 30 States comprising the divorce-registration area (DRA) in 1979, the marriages that ended by divorce in that year had lasted a little longer on the average than those that ended in any year during the seventies. The median duration of marriages that ended in 1979 was 6.8 years compared with 6.6 years in both 1978 and 1977, and a range of 6.5 to 6.7 years during 1970-76.

The increased number of divorces granted was accompanied with the involvement of more children

in broken marriages. An estimated 1,181,000 children under 18 years of age were involved in divorces in 1979. This figure has more than doubled in 16 years (562,000 in 1963) and more than tripled in 22 years (379,000 in 1957). The proportion of children in the total population that are involved in these divorce cases also increased. The rate of children involved per 1,000 children under 18 years of age in the entire population was 18.9 in 1979, a record high. For over 20 years (beginning in 1957 when the rate was 6.4) this rate has increased steadily with only two interruptions (1960 and 1977, figure 2).

In spite of the increase in the number and proportion of all children involved in divorces, the average number of children per divorcing couple declined slightly in 1979, to 1.00 child per couple. This measure has been declining generally since 1964. The decline followed a rapid increase during the fifties and early sixties to a peak of 1.36 in 1964.

The statistics for the DRA presented in this report are based on sample data and consequently are subject to sampling variability. Further discussion of sampling variability appears in the Technical Notes.

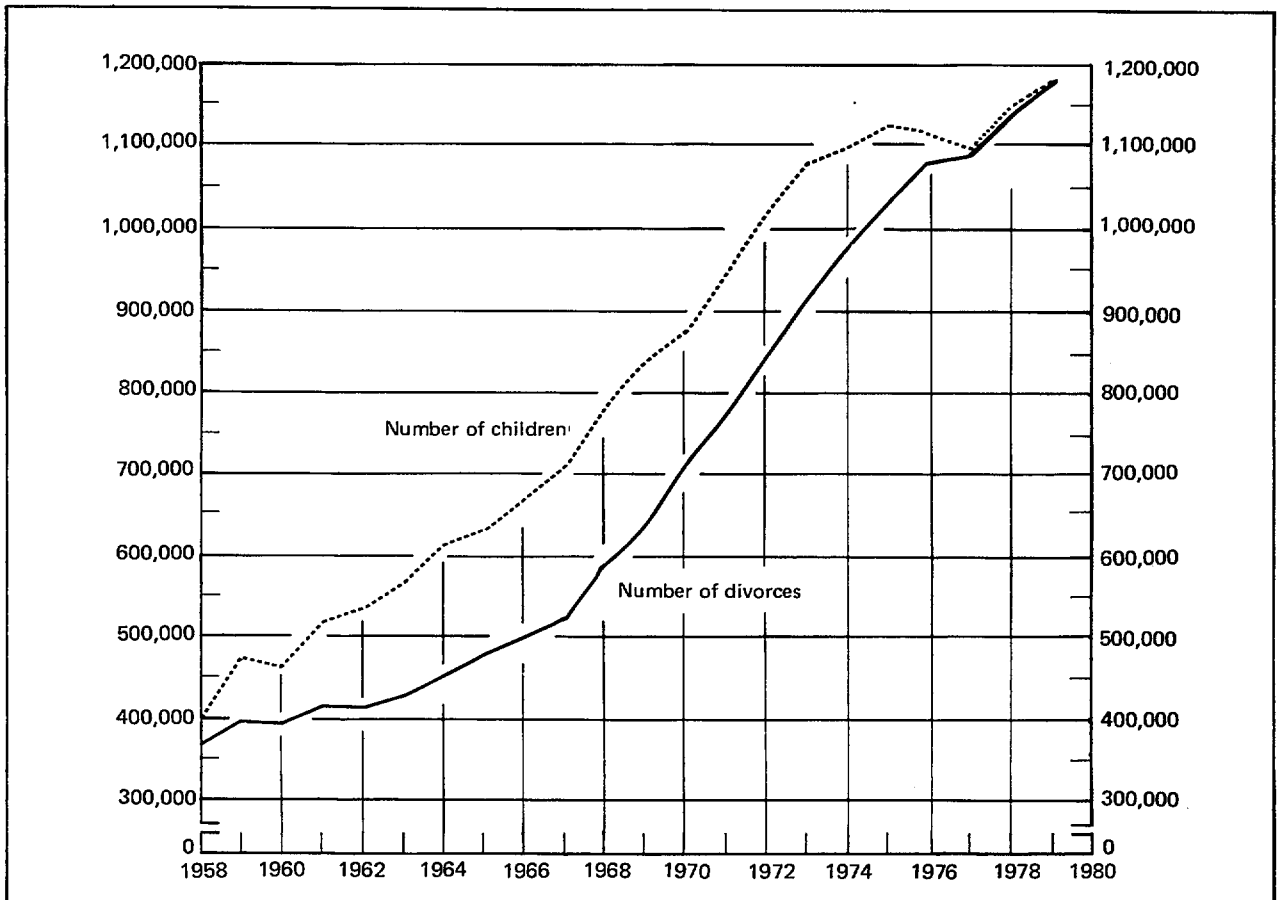


Figure 2. Divorces and children involved: United States, 1958-79

Table 1. Divorces and divorce rates: United States, each region, division, and State, 1977-79

[Data are counts of decrees granted (including reported annulments and dissolutions of marriage) supplied by States except as noted. Figures for the divorce-registration States differ slightly from those based on sample data shown in table 5. Rates per 1,000 population in each area estimated as of July 1, 1977, 1978, and 1979]

Region, division, and State	Number			Rate			Region, division and State	Number			Rate		
	1979	1978	1977	1979	1978	1977		1979	1978	1977	1979	1978	1977
United States . . . . .	1,181,000	1,130,000	<sup>1</sup> 1,091,000	5.4	5.2	<sup>1</sup> 5.0	West North Central:						
Regions:							Minnesota . . . . .	<sup>4</sup> 14,853	14,393	14,020	<sup>4</sup> 3.7	3.6	3.5
Northeast . . . . .	177,000	168,000	159,000	3.6	3.4	3.2	Iowa . . . . .	11,426	11,123	10,890	3.9	3.8	3.8
North Central . . . . .	293,000	286,000	271,000	5.0	4.9	4.7	Missouri . . . . .	27,719	26,308	25,235	5.7	5.4	5.3
South . . . . .	439,000	413,000	<sup>1</sup> 400,000	6.1	5.8	<sup>1</sup> 5.7	North Dakota . . . . .	2,094	2,071	1,952	3.2	3.2	3.0
West . . . . .	272,000	263,000	261,000	6.6	6.5	6.6	South Dakota . . . . .	2,665	2,449	2,436	3.9	3.5	3.5
							Nebraska . . . . .	6,286	6,066	6,112	4.0	3.9	3.9
							Kansas . . . . .	12,749	12,668	12,629	5.4	5.4	5.4
Northeast:							South Atlantic:						
New England . . . . .	48,985	45,368	44,353	4.0	3.7	3.6	Delaware . . . . .	3,110	3,302	3,030	5.3	5.7	5.2
Middle Atlantic . . . . .	127,768	122,879	114,164	3.5	3.3	3.1	Maryland . . . . .	16,927	16,497	16,617	4.1	4.0	4.0
North Central:							District of Columbia . . . . .	4,488	3,437	3,158	6.8	5.1	4.6
East North Central . . . . .	214,741	211,002	<sup>2</sup> 197,254	5.2	5.1	<sup>2</sup> 4.8	Virginia . . . . .	23,555	22,654	21,459	4.5	4.4	4.2
West North Central . . . . .	77,792	75,078	73,274	4.5	4.4	4.3	West Virginia . . . . .	10,046	9,698	9,605	5.3	5.2	5.2
South:							North Carolina . . . . .	27,445	26,558	25,013	4.9	4.8	4.5
South Atlantic . . . . .	202,430	191,432	182,957	5.8	5.5	5.3	South Carolina . . . . .	13,747	11,901	10,717	4.7	4.1	3.7
East South Central . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 85,913	<sup>2</sup> 80,543	79,467	<sup>2</sup> 6.1	<sup>2</sup> 5.8	5.7	Georgia . . . . .	33,405	31,554	30,988	6.5	6.2	6.1
West South Central <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	150,705	141,416	136,203	6.7	6.4	*	Florida . . . . .	69,707	65,831	62,370	7.9	7.6	7.4
West:							East South Central:						
Mountain . . . . .	80,905	78,229	77,278	7.6	7.5	7.7	Kentucky . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 16,016	<sup>2</sup> 13,759	15,530	<sup>2</sup> 4.5	<sup>2</sup> 3.9	4.5
Pacific . . . . .	190,838	184,606	183,426	6.3	6.2	6.3	Tennessee . . . . .	29,716	28,412	27,421	6.8	6.6	6.4
							Alabama . . . . .	26,549	25,059	23,757	7.0	6.7	6.4
							Mississippi . . . . .	<sup>4</sup> 13,632	13,313	12,759	<sup>4</sup> 5.6	5.5	5.3
							West South Central:						
New England:							Arkansas . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 20,313	19,964	<sup>2</sup> 19,222	<sup>2</sup> 9.3	9.2	<sup>2</sup> 9.0
Maine . . . . .	6,170	6,192	5,671	5.6	5.7	5.2	Louisiana <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	15,170	13,229	12,910	3.8	3.3	*
New Hampshire . . . . .	5,245	4,721	4,417	5.9	5.4	5.2	Oklahoma . . . . .	22,823	22,439	21,806	7.9	7.9	7.8
Vermont . . . . .	2,292	2,055	2,131	4.6	4.2	4.4	Texas . . . . .	92,399	85,784	82,265	6.9	6.6	6.4
Massachusetts . . . . .	17,524	16,160	16,492	3.0	2.8	2.9	Mountain:						
Rhode Island . . . . .	3,610	3,475	3,420	3.9	3.7	3.7	Montana . . . . .	5,107	4,884	4,692	6.5	6.3	6.2
Connecticut . . . . .	14,144	12,765	12,222	4.5	4.1	3.9	Idaho . . . . .	6,449	6,356	6,013	7.1	7.2	7.0
Middle Atlantic:							Wyoming . . . . .	3,510	3,130	3,068	7.8	7.4	7.6
New York . . . . .	64,420	58,043	55,803	3.7	3.3	3.1	Colorado . . . . .	16,498	18,590	20,557	6.0	6.9	7.8
New Jersey . . . . .	23,540	26,575	20,493	3.2	3.6	2.8	New Mexico . . . . .	9,978	9,608	9,143	8.0	7.9	7.7
Pennsylvania . . . . .	39,808	38,261	37,868	3.4	3.3	3.2	Arizona . . . . .	19,982	17,320	16,578	8.2	7.3	7.2
East North Central:							Utah . . . . .	7,594	7,128	6,947	5.6	5.4	5.5
Ohio . . . . .	59,548	59,200	57,266	5.5	5.5	5.4	Nevada . . . . .	11,787	11,213	10,280	16.8	16.8	16.2
Indiana <sup>3</sup> . . . . .	41,777	40,333	<sup>2</sup> 33,338	7.7	7.5	<sup>2</sup> 6.3	Pacific:						
Illinois . . . . .	52,133	50,311	48,980	4.6	4.5	4.4	Washington . . . . .	27,030	26,485	26,679	6.9	7.0	7.3
Michigan . . . . .	44,109	45,029	43,036	4.8	4.9	4.7	Oregon . . . . .	17,584	16,965	16,372	7.0	6.9	6.9
Wisconsin . . . . .	17,174	16,129	14,634	3.6	3.4	3.1	California . . . . .	137,683	132,850	132,193	6.1	6.0	6.0
							Alaska . . . . .	3,486	3,469	3,581	8.6	8.4	8.8
							Hawaii . . . . .	5,055	4,837	4,601	5.5	5.4	5.1

<sup>1</sup> Figure includes estimates.  
<sup>2</sup> Data are incomplete.  
<sup>3</sup> Data include divorce petitions filed for some counties.  
<sup>4</sup> Data are estimated.

**Table 2. Divorces and annulments and rates: United States, 1950-79**

[Data refer only to events occurring within the United States. Alaska included beginning 1959 and Hawaii, 1960]

Year	Divorces and annulments	Rate per 1,000 <sup>1</sup> —	
		Total population	Married women 15 years and over
1979	1,181,000	5.4	22.8
1978	1,130,000	5.2	21.9
1977	1,091,000	5.0	21.1
1976	1,083,000	5.0	21.1
1975	1,036,000	4.9	20.3
1974	977,000	4.6	19.3
1973	915,000	4.4	18.2
1972	845,000	4.1	17.0
1971	773,000	3.7	15.8
1970	708,000	3.5	14.9
1969	639,000	3.2	13.4
1968	584,000	2.9	12.5
1967	523,000	2.6	11.2
1966	499,000	2.5	10.9
1965	479,000	2.5	10.6
1964	450,000	2.4	10.0
1963	428,000	2.3	9.6
1962	413,000	2.2	9.4
1961	414,000	2.3	9.6
1960	393,000	2.2	9.2
1959	395,000	2.2	9.3
1958	368,000	2.1	8.9
1957	381,000	2.2	9.2
1956	382,000	2.3	9.4
1955	377,000	2.3	9.3
1954	379,000	2.4	9.5
1953	390,000	2.5	9.9
1952	392,000	2.5	10.1
1951	381,000	2.5	9.9
1950	385,000	2.6	10.3

<sup>1</sup>Data are based on population enumerated as of April 1 for 1950, 1960, and 1970, and estimated as of July 1 for all other years.

**Table 3. Median duration of marriage prior to divorce or annulment: Divorce-registration area and each registration State, 1977-79**

[Based on sample data. Medians computed on data by single years, excluding duration of marriage not stated. The divorce-registration area included 29 States in 1977, 28 States in 1978, and 30 States in 1979]

Area	Median duration of marriage		
	1979	1978	1977
Divorce-registration area	6.8	6.6	6.6
Alabama	5.3	4.9	4.9
Alaska	5.2	5.3	5.0
California	---	---	7.0
Connecticut	8.5	8.4	8.3
Georgia	5.7	5.6	5.3
Hawaii	6.0	5.5	5.7
Idaho	5.0	4.8	5.0
Illinois	6.5	6.3	6.2
Iowa	6.0	5.9	5.8
Kansas	4.9	5.0	5.2
Kentucky	5.7	5.8	5.6
Maryland	8.4	8.5	8.4
Massachusetts	8.9	---	---
Michigan	7.1	7.0	7.0
Missouri	5.8	5.7	5.5
Montana	5.3	5.1	5.1
Nebraska	6.3	6.4	6.1
New Hampshire	7.1	---	---
New York	8.3	8.3	8.1
Ohio	6.2	6.0	6.0
Oregon	6.2	6.2	6.0
Pennsylvania	7.9	7.7	7.7
Rhode Island	8.5	8.2	8.2
South Carolina	7.3	6.9	6.8
South Dakota	5.9	5.6	5.8
Tennessee	5.8	5.5	5.3
Utah	4.8	5.0	4.8
Vermont	7.9	7.7	7.8
Virginia	8.2	7.9	7.8
Wisconsin	7.0	7.1	7.0
Wyoming	4.8	4.7	4.6

**Table 4. Estimated number of children involved in divorces and annulments, average number of children per decree, and rate per 1,000 children under 18 years of age: United States, 1954-79**

[Refers only to events occurring within the United States. For 1960-79 estimated from frequencies based on sample data; for all other years estimated from total counts. For estimating method see Technical Notes]

<i>Year</i>	<i>Estimated number of children involved</i>	<i>Average number of children per decree</i>	<i>Rate per 1,000 children under 18 years of age</i>
1979	1,181,000	1.00	18.9
1978	1,147,000	1.01	18.1
1977	1,095,000	1.00	17.0
1976	1,117,000	1.03	17.1
1975	1,123,000	1.08	16.9
1974	1,099,000	1.12	16.3
1973	1,079,000	1.17	15.8
1972	1,021,000	1.20	14.8
1971	946,000	1.22	13.6
1970	870,000	1.22	12.5
1969	840,000	1.31	11.9
1968	784,000	1.34	11.1
1967	701,000	1.34	9.9
1966	669,000	1.34	9.5
1965	630,000	1.32	8.9
1964	613,000	1.36	8.7
1963	562,000	1.31	8.2
1962	532,000	1.29	7.9
1961	516,000	1.25	7.8
1960	463,000	1.18	7.2
1959	468,000	1.18	7.5
1958	398,000	1.08	6.5
1957	379,000	0.99	6.4
1956	361,000	0.95	6.3
1955	347,000	0.92	6.3
1954	341,000	0.90	6.4

Table 5. Divorces and annulments by number of children reported: Divorce-registration area and each registration State, 1979

[Based on sample data. Data refer to children under 18 years of age]

Area	All divorces and annulments	Number of children reported						
		None	1	2	3	4	5 or more	Not stated
Divorce-registration area . . . . .	589,723	257,420	147,254	113,675	41,547	12,626	5,178	12,023
Alabama . . . . .	26,660	10,550	5,910	4,430	1,740	440	200	3,390
Alaska . . . . .	3,490	1,484	836	637	240	55	21	217
Connecticut . . . . .	14,128	5,966	3,276	3,066	1,094	318	98	310
Georgia . . . . .	33,410	16,810	8,290	5,550	1,890	370	130	370
Hawaii . . . . .	5,052	2,252	1,208	992	396	140	62	2
Idaho <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	6,450	2,950	1,494	1,272	438	162	58	76
Illinois . . . . .	52,136	23,032	12,986	9,991	3,730	1,184	565	648
Iowa . . . . .	11,394	4,646	2,954	2,512	904	282	84	12
Kansas . . . . .	12,905	5,770	3,335	2,485	940	255	85	35
Kentucky . . . . .	16,135	7,415	4,270	2,770	910	250	95	425
Maryland . . . . .	16,860	7,695	4,390	3,135	960	270	130	280
Massachusetts . . . . .	16,870	6,815	4,080	3,560	1,585	565	235	30
Michigan . . . . .	44,110	18,120	10,390	8,960	3,910	1,200	490	1,040
Missouri . . . . .	27,769	12,842	7,163	5,222	1,777	501	215	49
Montana . . . . .	5,126	2,282	1,278	1,034	340	136	26	30
Nebraska . . . . .	6,301	2,392	1,616	1,456	584	175	77	1
New Hampshire . . . . .	5,189	1,976	1,332	1,241	430	143	63	4
New York . . . . .	64,420	29,476	15,218	12,047	4,609	1,487	617	966
Ohio . . . . .	59,700	26,040	15,340	12,080	4,040	1,460	460	280
Oregon . . . . .	17,600	7,060	4,050	3,520	1,055	295	80	1,540
Pennsylvania . . . . .	40,020	16,430	10,390	8,000	2,760	860	450	1,130
Rhode Island . . . . .	3,603	1,327	932	792	297	121	47	87
South Carolina . . . . .	13,748	6,037	3,933	2,552	870	226	90	40
South Dakota . . . . .	2,667	1,024	694	634	196	64	30	25
Tennessee . . . . .	29,770	14,360	7,810	4,960	1,740	440	210	250
Utah . . . . .	7,510	2,966	1,850	1,372	594	258	120	350
Vermont . . . . .	2,291	835	555	569	200	82	31	19
Virginia . . . . .	23,571	10,475	6,368	4,296	1,477	409	143	403
Wisconsin . . . . .	17,325	6,850	4,420	3,835	1,575	415	230	-
Wyoming . . . . .	3,513	1,543	886	705	266	63	36	14

<sup>1</sup>This State asks for number of children affected by decree.

Symbols

- Data not available
- ... Category not applicable
- Quantity zero
- 0.0 Quantity more than 0 but less than 0.05
- \* Figure does not meet standards of reliability or precision

## Technical notes

### Place and time of occurrence

Divorces, including absolute divorces, annulments, and dissolutions of marriage, are shown in all tables by State where decree was granted, which is also the State of legal residence of the petitioner. The time of divorce is based on the date the decree was granted.

### Sources of data

Figures in tables 1 and 2 are based on totals of divorce decrees tabulated and reported by States and counties. Figures in tables 3 and 5 are based on data tabulated from State-coded data tapes and from probability samples of divorce records selected and coded in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) from copies of the records sent in by States participating in the divorce-registration area (DRA). For 1971-77, 29 States participated. In 1978 the DRA comprised 28 States, as California ceased to participate in that year. In 1979 New Hampshire and Massachusetts joined the DRA, increasing the number of participating States to 30.

Figures in table 4 were estimated by using several methods. Estimates for 1954-59 were prepared on the assumption that the average number of children per decree for the Nation was identical with that for the reporting States. The figure for 1960 was based on a nationwide sample. Figures for 1961-79 were prepared by multiplying the national divorce total by the average number of children per decree found in the combined States with satisfactory reporting of the number of children. There were 16 such States in 1961-69, all 28 registration States in 1970, 29 registration States in 1971-77, 28 registration States in 1978, and 30 registration States in 1979.

### Divorce samples

Sample data used to estimate the 1979 frequencies in table 5 and the frequencies used to compute median duration of marriage for 1977-79 in table 3 were selected by using five different sampling rates, including 5, 10, 20, 50, or 100 percent of the divorces granted in a State. Samples were selected only from the States that participated in the DRA. Eight States—Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, and Virginia—supplied State-coded data tapes of all their divorce records through the Cooperative Health Statistics System, and 100 percent of these records were used by NCHS. In all other States, sampling

rates depended on the size of the annual divorce total for each State. Alaska, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and Wyoming were the only States coded in NCHS with a 100-percent sampling rate.

Sampling errors are given in the table for the estimates which constitute 1, 10, 25, 50, 75, 90, and 99 percent of the annual divorce totals. These sampling errors are given for the DRA and each registration State for 1979 data and only for the DRA for 1977 and 1978 data.

Sampling error of estimated frequency expressed as percentage of area total: Divorce-registration area, 1977-79 and each registration State, 1979

[Figures for Alaska, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, and Wyoming have no sampling errors in 1979 because all records were tabulated]

Area and year	Sampling error of estimated frequency expressed as percentage of area total			
	1 or 99	10 or 90	25 or 75	50
<b>Divorce-registration area:</b>				
1979 (30 States)	176	531	767	885
1978 (28 States)	172	519	749	865
1977 (29 States)	232	698	1,008	1,164
<b>Registration States, 1979:</b>				
Alabama	49	147	212	244
Alaska	...	...	...	...
Connecticut	12	36	52	59
Georgia	55	164	237	274
Hawaii	7	21	31	36
Idaho	8	24	35	40
Illinois	...	...	...	...
Iowa	11	32	46	54
Kansas	22	68	98	113
Kentucky	25	76	109	126
Maryland	26	78	113	130
Massachusetts	26	80	115	133
Michigan	63	189	273	315
Missouri	...	...	...	...
Montana	7	21	31	36
Nebraska	...	...	...	...
New Hampshire	...	...	...	...
New York	...	...	...	...
Ohio	106	319	461	532
Oregon	26	80	115	133
Pennsylvania	60	180	259	299
Rhode Island	...	...	...	...
South Carolina	...	...	...	...
South Dakota	...	...	...	...
Tennessee	51	155	224	259
Utah	9	26	38	44
Vermont	...	...	...	...
Virginia	...	...	...	...
Wisconsin	26	79	113	131
Wyoming	...	...	...	...

This report represents summary tabulations from the final divorce statistics for 1979. More detailed tabulations for 1979 will be published in *Vital Statistics of the United States, Volume III-Marriage and Divorce*. Prior to the publication of that volume, the National Center for Health Statistics will respond to requests for unpublished data whenever possible.

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