

# VITAL & HEALTH STATISTICS

## **Children of Divorce**

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This report analyzes trends for the period 1950-84 in the number and proportion of children whose parents divorced. Characteristics of divorcing couples with and without children are examined, including number of previous marriages, age at divorce, age at marriage, race, education, and whether it was the husband or the wife who petitioned for the divorce. Geographic variations are also discussed.

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**Data From the National  
Vital Statistics System  
Series 21, No. 46**

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**Symbols**

- - - Data not available
  - . . . Category not applicable
  - Quantity zero
  - 0.0 Quantity more than zero but less than 0.05
  - Z Quantity more than zero but less than 500 where numbers are rounded to thousands
  - \* Figure does not meet standard of reliability or precision
  - # Figure suppressed to comply with confidentiality requirements
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# Children of Divorce

by Kathryn A. London, Division of Vital Statistics

## Introduction

### Background

Each year since 1972, over a million children have seen their parents divorce. In 1984, 1,081,000 children were affected, or 17.2 of every 1,000 children. This report presents data from one of the few major sources of national information about children and divorce, the National Vital Statistics Program. The following sections of the report document the dramatic rise in the number and proportion of children under 18 years of age whose parents divorced and describe how divorcing couples with children differ from divorcing couples without children in terms of the number of times each spouse has been married, age at divorce, age at marriage, race, education, and whether it was the husband or the wife who petitioned for the divorce. Differences by State and region of the country are also discussed.

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) receives an annual count of the number of divorces and annulments granted by county from each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia. In addition, data on characteristics of divorcing couples come from divorce certificates from the 31 States that participate in the divorce-registration area (DRA). In 1984, eight of the DRA States provided State-coded data tapes of 100 percent of their divorce records through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. In the remaining 23 DRA States, a sample of records was drawn using sampling rates ranging from 5 to 100 percent. The DRA includes all States that maintain central files of divorce records and whose divorce records are usually complete and accurate. In 1984 divorces in DRA States accounted for about 48 percent of the divorces in the United States. See the appendix for further discussion of the DRA and the sampling technique used.

### Highlights

- Each year in the United States, more than a million couples divorce and more than a million children are affected. In 1984, 54 percent of divorcing couples had at least one child under 18 years of age.
- Many more children have to cope with divorce than did previous cohorts of children. The number of children whose parents divorced more than tripled between 1950 and 1984. The percent of children whose parents divorced more than doubled.
- Couples in which one or both spouses had been married before had fewer children at divorce than couples who had not been married before, and the more times men and women had been married, the fewer children they had.
- Divorcing couples with children were 6 years younger at marriage and 3 years younger at divorce, on average, than childless couples. Among couples in which neither spouse had been married before, couples with children were 2 years younger at marriage and 1 year younger at divorce than childless couples.
- At the time the divorce was granted, couples with children had been married 2 years longer, on average, than childless couples. Among couples in which neither spouse had been married before, couples with children had been married 1 year longer than childless couples.
- Black couples and white couples had nearly equal family sizes at divorce and were equally likely to have children.
- Educational differences between couples with children and childless couples were small, but in general, men and women with a college education were more likely to be childless at divorce than men and women with less education.
- The wife was more likely to be the one to file for the divorce when the couple had children than when they did not. Among childless couples, the wife was the petitioner in 57 percent of the divorces, and among couples with children, the wife was the petitioner in 66 percent of the divorces.
- Divorcing couples in the South were least likely to have children and divorcing couples in the Midwest and West were most likely to have them; but differences were small and the majority of couples in each region had at least one child.

# Current patterns and trends in divorce

## Prevalence of divorce

Divorce is widespread in the United States, with more than a million divorces granted each year. In 1984, 1,169,000 couples divorced, the equivalent of 5.0 divorces for every 1,000 persons in the nation. Restricting the population on which the divorce rate is based to married women, there were 21.5 divorces for every 1,000 married women 15 years of age or older. Thus, 2.15 percent of married women obtained a divorce during 1984. When lifetime rather than single-year probabilities of divorce are considered, it has been estimated that nearly half of all recent marriages will eventually end in divorce (NCHS, 1980).

Because divorce is so widespread, a large number of children will spend some part of their childhood in households disrupted by divorce. In 1984, an estimated 1,081,000 children were involved, or 17.2 of every 1,000 children (1.72 percent). National estimates of children involved in divorce were made by assuming that the average number of children per decree for the United States was the same as the average in the DRA States. See the appendix for further discussion.

When long-term rather than single-year probabilities of disruption are considered, it has been estimated that 41 percent of children born to ever married women will experience the disruption of their parents' marriage before they reach age 16 (Bumpass, 1984). Separation and divorce will account for most of these disruptions, and mortality for the rest.

## Trends in children's experience with divorce

Many more of today's children have to cope with divorce than did previous cohorts of children. The annual number of divorces has risen from 385,144 in 1950 to a peak of 1,213,000 in 1981 (table 1 and figure 1). During the same period the divorce rate doubled, from 2.6 to 5.3 per 1,000 population. The number of children involved nearly quadrupled, from 299,000 in 1950 to 1,180,000 in 1981.

Because the population under age 18 was growing rapidly, the number of children involved in divorce would have risen even in the absence of any change in the probability of divorce. In 1950, 6.3 of every 1,000 children saw their parents divorce (table 1). If that proportion had not changed, about 395,000 children would have seen their parents divorce during 1984, nearly 100,000 more than during 1950, solely because of the growth of the population under age 18.

It is clear, however, that the increased birth rate alone cannot explain the growth of children's involvement in divorce.

First, the number of children involved in divorce continued to rise even after the early 1970's, when the number of children under 18 began to fall (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982). Second, the number of children whose parents divorced in 1984 was 1,081,000, more than 2½ times the 395,000 children expected if the proportion of children involved had remained the same as in 1950. Far from remaining the same, the proportion of children involved in divorce rose from 6.3 per 1,000 in 1950 to 17.2 per 1,000 in 1984. Thus, more important than increased fertility in explaining the growth of children's involvement in divorce is the increased likelihood of divorce. The growth of the population under age 18 accounted for 12 percent of the additional children involved in divorce in 1984 compared with 1950; the increased likelihood of divorce accounted for the remaining 88 percent.

Other studies have found that children deter divorce; that is, parents are less likely to divorce than childless couples (Cherlin, 1977; Thornton, 1977; Waite, Haggstrom, and Kanouse, 1985), but the extent to which children deter divorce appears to have changed since the 1950's. The percent of children whose parents got a divorce grew nearly every year between 1950 and 1981, and between 1950 and 1968 grew even faster than the divorce rate (figure 2), suggesting that couples with children accounted for a larger share of the growth in the divorce rate than childless couples. In other words, the likelihood of divorce among couples with children seems to have at least partially caught up with the likelihood of divorce among childless couples.

Further evidence comes from a comparison of divorcing couples and married couples since 1956 (table 2). In 1956, divorcing couples had fewer children, on average, than married couples—0.95 children for divorcing couples and 1.30 children for married couples, suggesting that the divorcing group was disproportionately made up of childless couples. The gap closed considerably during the late 1950's and 1960's and remained small through the 1970's (figure 3). By the 1980's divorcing couples had virtually the same number of children on average as married couples.

It appears that one reason for the convergence is that parents who were unhappy with their marriages became less likely to stay together for the sake of the children. In 1962, a study of women found that only about half disagreed with the statement: "When there are children in the family, parents should stay together even if they don't get along." When the same women were interviewed again in 1980, 82 percent disagreed with that statement (Thornton and Freedman, 1983).

In addition to the relative likelihood of divorce for couples

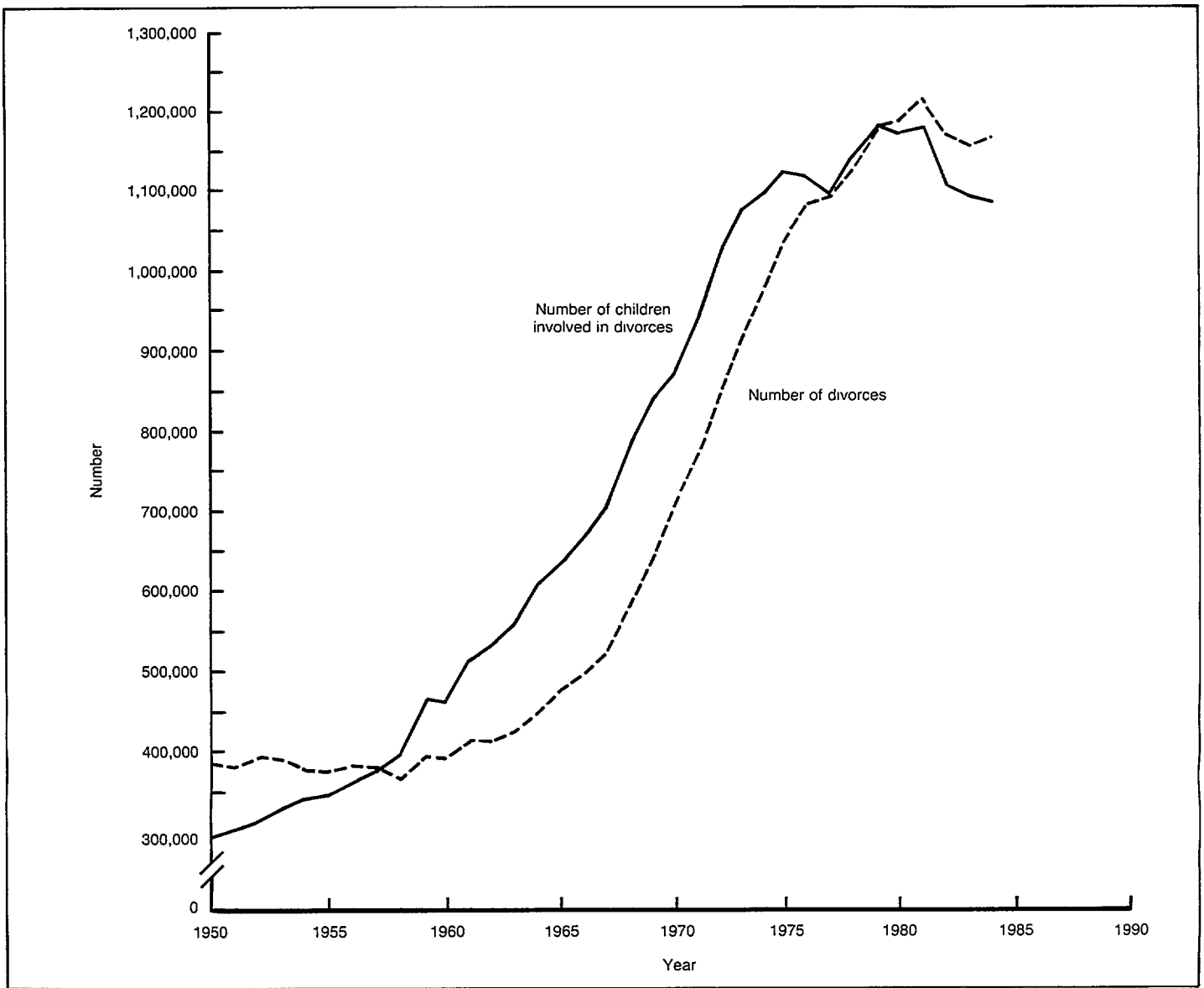


Figure 1. Divorces and children involved: United States, 1950–84

with and without children, shifts in the timing of childbearing can affect the proportion of divorcing couples who have children and the percent of children whose parents divorce. Couples divorce at all ages and durations of marriage, but because divorce rates are highest at young ages and short durations of marriage, divorcing couples tend to be younger and to have been married less time than currently married couples. Therefore, the group of married couples will have had more time to have children than the divorcing couples. A shift to early childbearing would mean that even couples who divorce shortly after marriage might have children, di-

minishing the differences between divorcing and married couples. A shift to later childbearing would mean that many couples divorce before they have had children, making the difference between divorcing and married couples more pronounced. Such shifts in the timing of childbearing have occurred. Since the mid-1930's, the percent of women who had a birth by the time they had been married two years first increased and then decreased (figure 4). All else being equal, the proportion of children involved in divorce would increase as childbearing is concentrated in the early years of marriage and would decrease as childbearing is postponed.



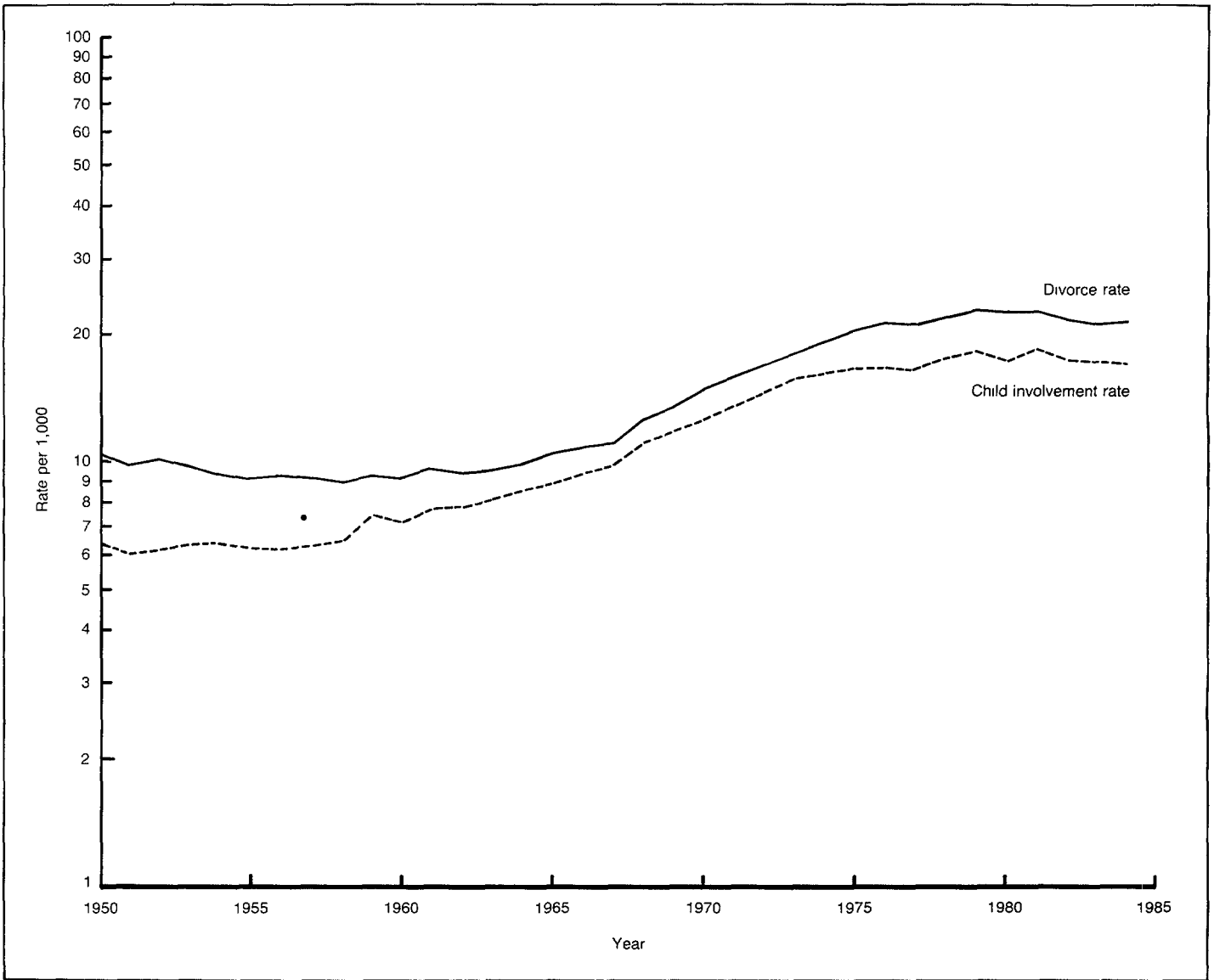


Figure 2. Divorce rate per 1,000 married women 15 years of age and over, and children involved in divorce per 1,000 children under age 18: United States, 1950-84

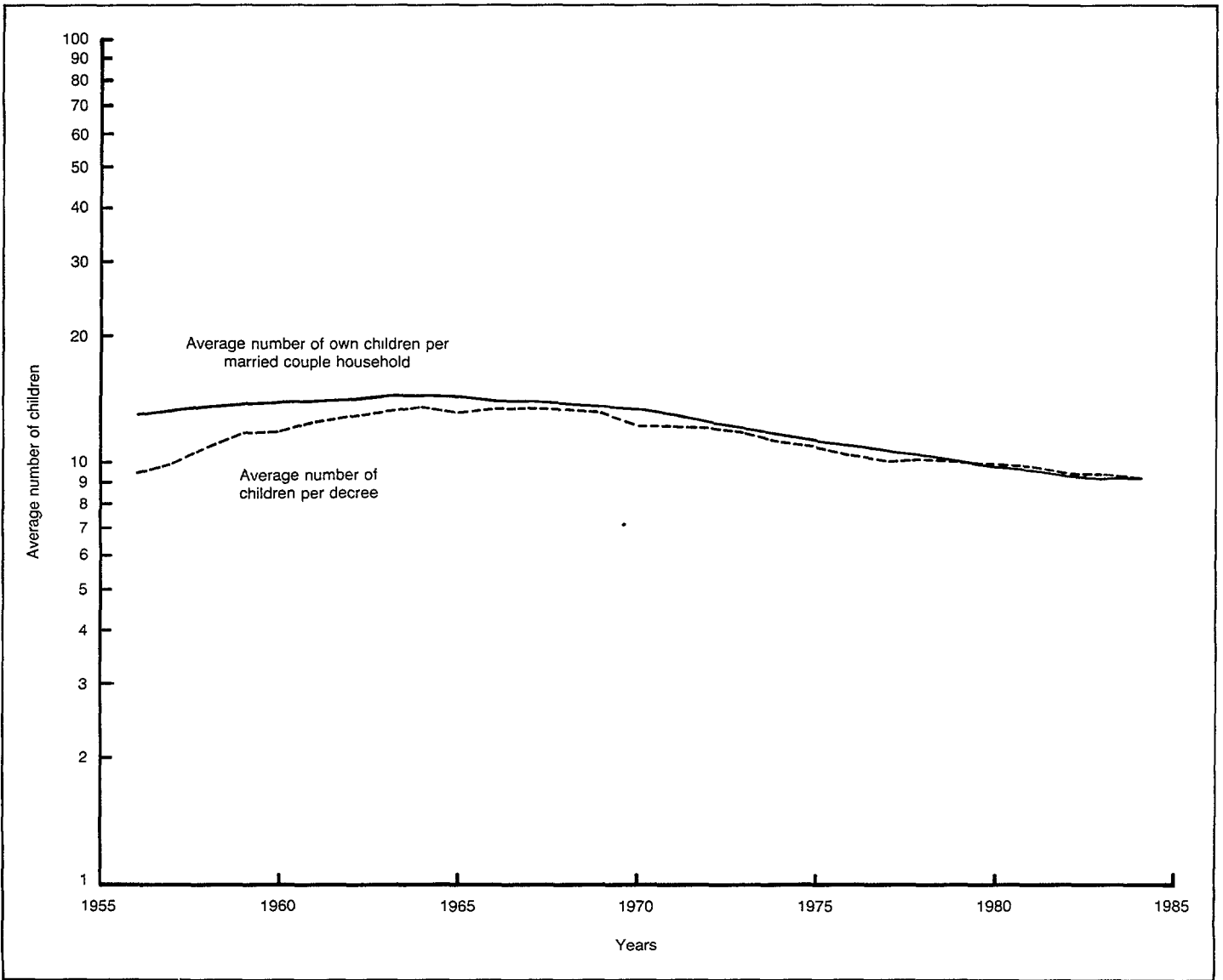


Figure 3. Average number of children per decree and average number of own children under 18 years of age per married couple household: United States, 1956-84

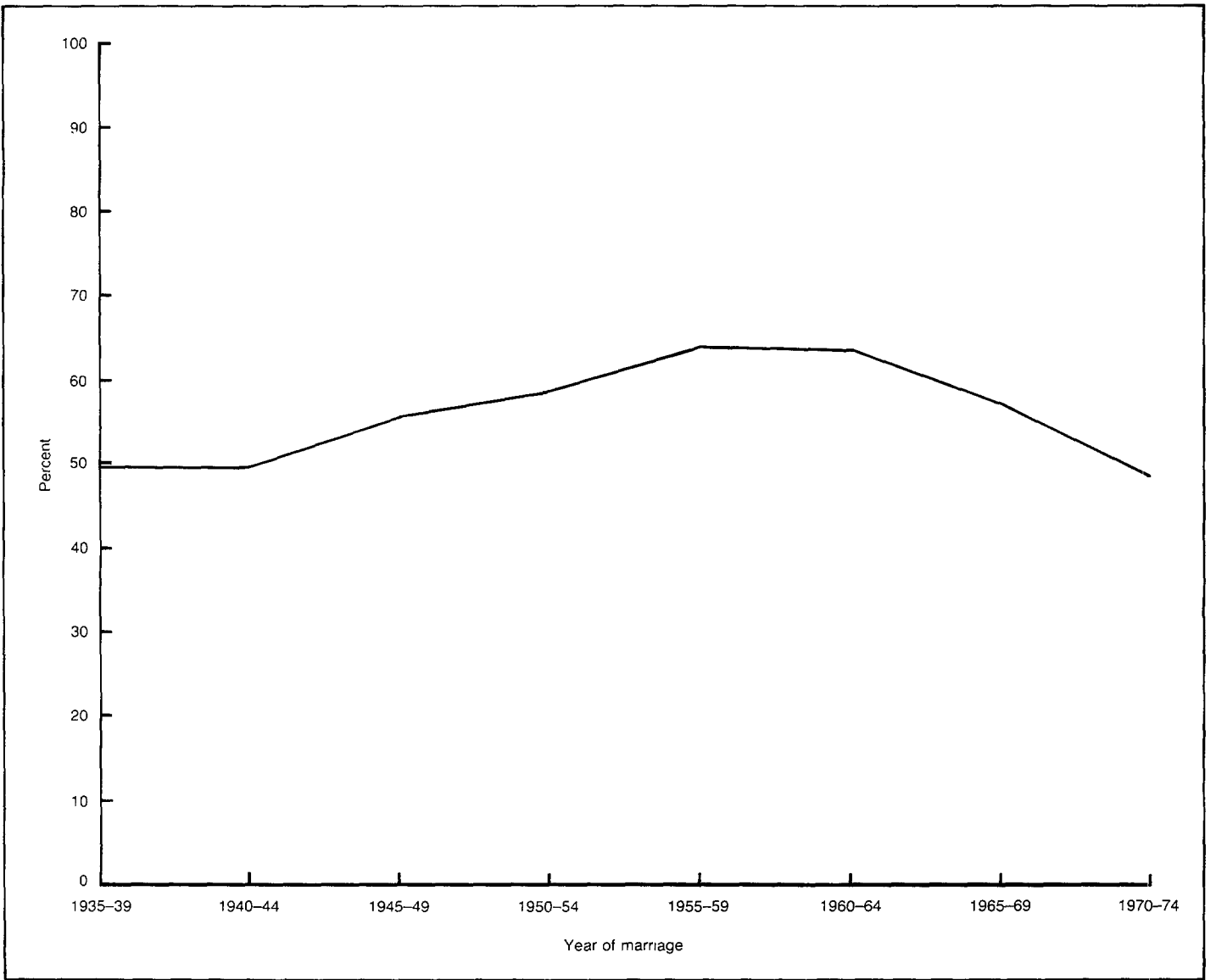


Figure 4. Percent of women who had a first birth by the time they had been married 2 years, for marriage cohorts of women: United States, 1935-74

# Current patterns of divorce by presence of children

## Source and reliability of data

Information on the number of children whose parents divorced in 1984 is available from the divorce certificates of the 31 States participating in the divorce-registration area (DRA). These States ask how many minor children are living in the household at the time of the divorce. The relevant item on the divorce certificate usually reads, "Number of children under 18 in this family." Adult children, children who have died, and children living elsewhere are excluded.

When analyzing patterns of divorce by the presence of children, complications arise when the family contains children who were born before the current marriage, either outside of marriage or during a previous marriage. It appears that some but by no means all of these children are reported on divorce certificates. In the 25 DRA States for which information is available, 2.6 percent of divorcing couples reported more children under 18 years of age than the number of children who had been born alive of the current marriage. If neither spouse had been married before, the percent was 0.8; if one or both spouses had been married before, the percent was 5.7. Since 1 to 2 percent of couples adopt children, it seems likely that some of these children were adopted, but others probably were born to one of the spouses before the current marriage.

An analysis comparing vital statistics data with data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) concluded that some children from previous marriages are not reported on divorce certificates, perhaps because their custody is not being decided. According to divorce certificates, 35 percent of previously married women who divorced in 1983 had children under 18 years of age. According to the CPS, however, 64 percent had children under 18 years of age. Apparently the discrepancy between the two data sources was due to children from previous marriages being omitted from divorce certificates, not to the CPS overestimating their number (London, 1986).

This omission from vital statistics data of children from previous marriages may obscure the strength of the relationship between divorce and the presence of children if some couples are considered as being childless who really have children. The problem might be avoided by confining the analysis to primary marriages—marriages in which neither spouse had been married before—because the reporting of children on divorce certificates appears to be much more complete for primary marriages than for remarriages. Confining the analysis to primary marriages may overcompensate for the problem, however. The strength of the overall relationship between

children and divorce could be overestimated if children are a stronger deterrent to divorce in primary marriages (the divorce of their two biological parents), than to divorce in remarriages (the divorce of one parent and one stepparent). To address these issues, the following sections of this report include separate tables for all divorces and for divorces in which neither spouse had been married before.

## Number of times previously married

Couples in which one or both spouses had been married before had fewer children at divorce than couples in primary marriages, and the more times the men and women had been married, the fewer children they had. Couples in primary marriages averaged 1.1 children under 18 years of age, compared with 0.6 children for couples in which one or both spouses had been married before. When the specific number of previous marriages was considered, women who had been married once before averaged 0.6 children, and women who had been married at least twice before averaged only 0.4 children (table A). The figures for men were similar.

Couples in which one or both spouses had been married before had smaller average family sizes than did couples in primary marriages, mainly because a greater proportion of those previously married were childless, not because those who did have children had fewer of them. Compared with women who were ending their first marriages, women who had been married once before were 1½ times as likely and women who had been married at least twice before were nearly twice as likely to report no children under 18 years of age (table A). When only couples with at least one child were considered, the average number of children was only slightly higher for couples in primary marriages than for couples in which one or both spouses had been married before; couples in primary marriages averaged 1.8 children, compared with 1.6 children for couples in which one or both spouses had been married before.

Although children from previous marriages are probably underreported, the smaller average family size for remarried men and women could also be related to age. If children of couples in which one or both spouses had been married before were older, on average, than the children of couples in primary marriages, a larger proportion of them would have reached adulthood by the time of the divorce, and so would not be reported on divorce certificates. The divorce certificate contains no information on the specific ages of children, but men and women who had been married before were older

**Table A. Percent distribution of divorces by presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce, according to number of this marriage for wife and husband, and mean number of children: 30 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States.]

Number of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce	Number of this marriage: wife				Number of this marriage: husband			
	All marriages <sup>1</sup>	First	Second	Third or more	All marriages <sup>1</sup>	First	Second	Third or more
	Percent distribution							
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No children	46.5	39.9	60.9	77.1	46.5	40.6	59.9	71.5
1 or more children	53.5	60.1	39.1	22.9	53.5	59.4	40.1	28.5
	Number of children							
Mean	0.9	1.1	0.6	0.4	0.9	1.0	0.7	0.4

<sup>1</sup>Includes number of this marriage not stated

on average than men and women who had not been married before, so it is plausible that their children would be older, too. Men who had been married before were 41.6 years old at divorce, on average, compared with 34.2 years for men who had not been married before. Women who had been married before were 38.2 years old at divorce, on average, compared with 31.9 years for women who had not been married before.

### Age at divorce

Couples who had no children under age 18 at divorce were more than 3 years older, on average, than divorcing couples with children. Childless women were 35.3 years old while women with children were 32.1 years old (table 3). Childless men were 38.0 years old while men with children were 34.7 years old. When only primary marriages were considered, the age difference between childless couples and parents was less than 1 year. Childless women were 32.5 years old while women with children were 31.7 years old. Childless men were 34.6 years old while men with children were 33.8 years old.

When duration of marriage was taken into account, age differences between childless couples and couples with children remained. Women with no children under age 18 were 3.7 to 9.4 years older than women with children (table 4). Men with no children under age 18 were 4.8 to 9.4 years older than men with children.

Among primary marriages of at least one year's duration, age differences between childless couples and couples with children were larger when duration of marriage was taken into account than when it was not. Excluding marriages of less than one year's duration, childless women were 1.9 to 8.8 years older than women with children and childless men were 1.6 to 9.1 years older than men with children, compared with age differences of less than a year when duration of marriage was not considered.

The distribution of the presence of children by age reflects fertility patterns by age. Fertility rates are highest for women in their 20's and decline with age. One might therefore expect many divorcing couples in their 20's to have children, and

most couples to have had at least one child by their late 30's. After couples reach their 40's, a growing proportion of their children will have reached age 18, so the percent of couples with children should decline after age 40. This was indeed the case (table 3). Couples divorcing while in their 30's were most likely to have children; couples divorcing at age 50 or older were least likely. About 65 percent of women divorcing at ages 35–39 had at least one child under age 18, but only 12 percent of women divorcing at age 50 or above did. The pattern was the same when only primary marriages were considered, although the percent of women and men in each age group who had children was greater.

### Age at marriage

Divorcing couples with no children under age 18 had been older when they got married than divorcing couples with children. Childless women were nearly 6 years older at marriage (27.1 years, on average) than women with children (21.5 years). Childless men were also nearly 6 years older (29.7 years) than men with children (24.1 years) (table 5). When only primary marriages were considered, the age difference between childless couples and parents was approximately 2 years. Childless women were 22.1 years old at marriage, on average, and women with children were 20.2 years old. Childless men were 24.1 years old and men with children were 22.3 years old.

The older that men and women were at marriage, the less likely they were to have children under age 18 at the time they divorced. Whereas 71 percent of women who married before age 20 years had children, only 3 percent of those who married at age 45 years or later did (table 5). The pattern was the same when only primary marriages were considered, although in these marriages a larger percent of older men and women had children. The percent of women in primary marriages who married at age 40 or later and had children at divorce is surprising, given the very low fertility rates after age 40. Perhaps some of these children were born premaritally or were adopted, or perhaps women who marry for the first time at age 40 or later actually do have relatively high fertility rates to make up for postponed childbearing.

## Duration of marriage

Couples with children under age 18 waited longer to divorce than couples with no children under age 18. Couples with children remained married an average of 10.6 years and childless couples an average of 8.3 years, a difference of 2.3 years (table 6). About 76 percent of couples with children had remained married at least 5 years, compared with only 46 percent of childless couples.

Among primary marriages, couples with children remained married an average of 11.6 years and childless couples an average of 10.6 years, a difference of 1 year. About 81 percent of couples with children had been married at least 5 years, compared with only 53 percent of childless couples.

The data describe an association but do not answer the question of which is cause and which is effect. Does the absence of children cause (or allow) couples to divorce more quickly, or is it simply that couples who divorce soon after marriage have less opportunity to have children than couples who stay together longer? It seems likely that both contribute to the association between presence of children and duration of marriage.

Parents differed little from childless couples in the length of time between their separation and the final divorce decree. The average separation interval was about 3 months longer for childless couples (22 months) than for parents (19 months) (table 7). The difference was about 6 months for primary marriages. Regardless of marital history, childless couples were more likely than parents to divorce after a very short separation, but they were also slightly more likely to wait 60 months (5 years) or more between separation and divorce, perhaps because there is less need for the legal end of the marriage when child custody and support are not at issue. The differences between parents and childless couples are small, however. Thus the interval between separation and

divorce appears to have little to do with the presence or absence of children and is probably determined in large part by the time schedule of the courts.

## Race

White couples, black couples, and couples of other races were equally likely to have children under age 18 at divorce. Approximately 53 percent of women in each racial category had children at the time of the divorce (table B); among primary marriages, more men and women reported having children, but there was still very little difference by race. When only couples with at least one child were considered, for all marriages and for primary marriages, white couples reported 1.7 children, on average, black couples reported 1.8 children, and couples of other races reported 1.9 children.

Although the race of the children does not appear on the divorce certificate, it can be inferred from the race of the parents. An estimated 85.6 percent of the children whose parents divorced in 1984 were white, 12.0 percent were black, and 2.4 percent were of other races. (See the appendix for the procedure used to code the race of the child.) These percents are very similar to the racial distribution of divorcing husbands and wives, reflecting the low frequency of intermarriage between racial groups, and their relatively equal family sizes at divorce. Among husbands, 86.9 percent were white, 11.5 percent were black, and 1.6 percent were of other races. Among wives, 87.1 percent were white, 11.1 percent were black, and 1.8 percent were of other races. Figures for primary marriages were similar.

## Education

Childless couples and couples with children had approximately the same level of education (slightly more than 12

**Table B. Percent distribution of divorces by presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce, according to race of wife and husband, and mean number of children, all marriages and primary marriages: 26 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States.]

<i>Number of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce</i>	<i>Race of wife</i>				<i>Race of husband</i>			
	<i>All races<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>All races<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Percent distribution</i>								
All marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No children . . . . .	47.0	47.0	47.1	47.0	47.0	47.1	46.9	47.9
1 or more children . . . . .	53.0	53.0	52.9	53.0	53.0	52.9	53.1	52.1
<i>Number of children</i>								
Mean . . . . .	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0
<i>Percent distribution</i>								
Primary marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No children . . . . .	39.1	38.7	40.8	40.4	39.1	38.7	40.4	43.3
1 or more children . . . . .	60.9	61.3	59.2	59.6	60.9	61.3	59.6	56.7
<i>Number of children</i>								
Mean . . . . .	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1

<sup>1</sup>Includes race not stated

and a half years on average). Childless women in primary marriages had the most education, 12.9 years, followed by childless men in primary marriages, 12.8 years (table 8). In general, the percent of couples who had children at divorce decreased as educational attainment increased. Differences in percent childless between the least and most educated groups were greater for women than for men, and were greater for primary marriages than for all marriages.

### Petitioner

The wife was more likely to be the one to file for the divorce when the couple had children than when they did not. Among childless couples, the wife was the petitioner (or "plaintiff" in some States) in 57 percent of the cases and the husband was the petitioner in 37 percent of the cases (table C). Among couples with children, the wife was the petitioner in 66 percent of the cases, and the husband in 29 percent. The figures for primary marriages were nearly the same.

To investigate the link between petitioner and presence of children, the appropriate question seems to be "Why would women be more likely to want to end their marriages when they have children than when they have none, or conversely, why would men be more likely to want to end their marriages when they have no children than when they do?" But it is also possible that the appropriate question to ask is "Given that a couple has decided to end their marriage, why is the woman more likely to be the one to file the petition when there are children than when there are none?"

Keeping these two approaches in mind, four hypotheses suggest themselves. The first three address the question of how children might affect the desire to end marriages. First, husbands, facing the prospect of child support payments, may be reluctant to file for divorce when there are children. Second, remarriage rates for older women are lower than remarriage rates for older men, so childless women might be more reluctant to file for divorce than women with children simply because

childless women are older on average than women with children. Third, because women are granted custody in most divorces involving children, fathers may be more reluctant than mothers to file for divorce because, for men, divorce means separation from the children. The fourth hypothesis addresses the question of who files for divorce given that the couple has already decided to end the marriage: women may take the initiative in filing for divorce if they feel that the petitioner has a better chance of being awarded custody.

The data do not support the hypothesis that men avoid divorce to avoid child support. If that were their aim, the more children men had, and hence the more costly child support would be, the less likely men should be to file for divorce. The data show, however, that among divorcing couples with children, men with many children are no less likely to file than men with only one child (table C). It is only men with no children who are more likely to file.

It does not appear that the association between children and petitioner is really a function of age. That is, the lower proportion of women petitioning among childless couples does not simply reflect older women being reluctant to file because they have a comparatively small probability of remarriage. The data show that within each age group except 50 years or older, women with children were more likely to be the petitioner than childless women.

Reports from divorce attorneys that women's overriding concern in divorce cases is the custody of their children (Weitzman, 1985) may support the hypothesis that women choose to be the petitioner because they feel it will give them a better chance of being awarded custody of the children. Of course, other explanations are possible as well.

### Geographic differences

Divorcing couples in the South were least likely to have children under age 18 and divorcing couples in the Midwest and West were most likely, but differences were small (table D). A majority of the couples in all four regions had

**Table C. Percent distribution of divorces by petitioner, according to presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce, and mean number of children, all marriages and primary marriages: 30 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States]

Petitioner	Number of children							Mean number of children	
	Total <sup>1</sup>	None	1 or more				4 or more		
			Total	1	2	3			
	Percent distribution							Number	
All marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 0.9
Husband . . . . .	32.3	36.6	28.6	28.7	28.6	27.9	28.4	0.8	
Wife . . . . .	61.6	57.1	65.7	65.8	65.2	66.3	66.6	1.0	
Both or other person . . . . .	6.0	6.3	5.8	5.5	6.1	5.8	5.1	0.9	
Primary marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 1.1
Husband . . . . .	32.9	37.9	29.9	29.8	30.0	29.8	29.2	1.0	
Wife . . . . .	63.6	58.4	66.8	67.1	66.5	66.9	67.3	1.1	
Both or other person . . . . .	3.5	3.8	3.3	3.1	3.5	3.3	3.5	1.0	

<sup>1</sup>Includes number of children not stated

<sup>2</sup>Includes petitioner not stated

children: 50.6 percent in the South, 52.9 percent in the North-east, and 55.7 percent in the Midwest and West.

In the DRA, 46.5 percent of divorcing couples had no children, 25.5 percent had one child, 19.9 percent had two children, 6.1 percent had three children, and 2.0 percent had four children or more (figure 5). Differences among States were moderate (table 9).

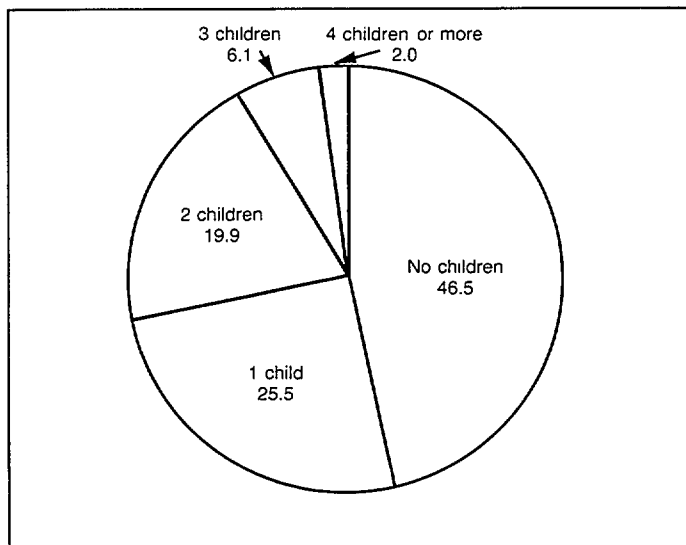


Figure 5. Percent distribution of divorcing couples by number of children at divorce: divorce-registration area, 1984

Table D. Percent distribution of divorces by presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce, according to region of the country where divorce was granted, and mean number of children, all marriages and primary marriages: 30 reporting States, 1984

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States]

Number of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce	Region				
	DRA	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Percent distribution					
All marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No children . . . . .	46.5	47.1	44.3	49.4	44.3
1 or more children . . . . .	53.5	52.9	55.7	50.6	55.7
Number of children					
Mean . . . . .	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.8	1.0
Percent distribution					
Primary marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No children . . . . .	38.7	42.2	35.3	39.6	33.5
1 or more children . . . . .	61.3	57.8	64.7	60.4	66.5
Number of children					
Mean . . . . .	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.2



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# List of detailed tables

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**Table 1. Estimated number of divorces and annulments, divorce rate per 1,000 population, estimated number of children involved, average number of children per decree, and rate per 1,000 children under 18 years of age: United States, 1950–84**

[Figures for children based on sample data for 1960–84. Beginning in 1970 estimated from frequencies for the entire divorce-registration area rather than for selected States. For method of computation see appendix]

Year	Divorces		Children		
	Number	Rate per 1,000 population	Estimated number involved	Average number per decree	Rate per 1,000 children under 18 years of age
1984	1,169,000	5.0	1,081,000	0.92	17.2
1983	1,158,000	4.9	1,091,000	0.94	17.4
1982	1,170,000	5.0	1,108,000	0.94	17.6
1981	1,213,000	5.3	1,180,000	0.97	18.7
1980	1,189,000	5.2	1,174,000	0.98	17.3
1979	1,181,000	5.3	1,181,000	1.00	18.4
1978	1,130,000	5.1	1,147,000	1.01	17.7
1977	1,091,000	5.0	1,095,000	1.00	16.7
1976	1,083,000	5.0	1,117,000	1.03	16.9
1975	1,036,000	4.8	1,123,000	1.08	16.7
1974	977,000	4.6	1,099,000	1.12	16.2
1973	915,000	4.3	1,079,000	1.17	15.7
1972	845,000	4.0	1,021,000	1.20	14.7
1971	773,000	3.7	946,000	1.22	13.6
1970	708,000	3.5	870,000	1.22	12.5
1969	639,000	3.2	840,000	1.31	11.9
1968	584,000	2.9	784,000	1.34	11.1
1967	523,000	2.6	701,000	1.34	9.9
1966	499,000	2.5	669,000	1.34	9.5
1965	479,000	2.5	630,000	1.32	8.9
1964	450,000	2.4	613,000	1.36	8.7
1963	428,000	2.3	562,000	1.31	8.2
1962	413,000	2.2	532,000	1.29	7.9
1961	414,000	2.3	516,000	1.25	7.8
1960	393,000	2.2	463,000	1.18	7.2
1959	395,000	2.2	468,000	1.18	7.5
1958	368,000	2.1	398,000	1.08	6.5
1957	381,000	2.2	379,000	0.99	6.4
1956	382,000	2.3	361,000	0.95	6.3
1955	377,000	2.3	347,000	0.92	6.3
1954	379,000	2.4	341,000	0.90	6.4
1953	390,000	2.5	330,000	0.85	6.4
1952	392,000	2.5	318,000	0.81	6.2
1951	381,000	2.5	304,000	0.80	6.1
1950	385,144	2.6	299,000	0.78	6.3

Table 2. Average number of children per decree and average number of own children per married couple household: United States, 1956-84

Year	Average number of children per decree	Average number of own children per married couple household
1984	0.92	0.92
1983	0.94	0.92
1982	0.94	0.93
1981	0.97	0.96
1980	0.98	0.97
1979	1.00	1.00
1978	1.01	1.03
1977	1.00	1.06
1976	1.03	1.09
1975	1.08	1.12
1974	1.12	1.16
1973	1.17	1.19
1972	1.20	1.24
1971	1.22	1.30
1970	1.22	1.33
1969	1.31	1.35
1968	1.34	1.37
1967	1.34	1.39
1966	1.34	1.40
1965	1.32	1.43
1964	1.36	1.44
1963	1.31	1.44
1962	1.29	1.41
1961	1.25	1.40
1960	1.18	1.39
1959	1.18	1.38
1958	1.08	1.36
1957	0.99	1.33
1956	0.95	1.30

Source for average number of own children per married couple household: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1956-84 Household and Family Characteristics, 1956-84 *Curr Popul Rep Series P-20*, Nos. 75, 83, 88, 100, 106, 116, 125, 139, 153, 164, 173, 191, 200, 218, 233, 246, 258, 276, 291, 311, 326, 340, 352, 366, 371, 381, 388, 398. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.

**Table 3. Percent distribution of divorces by presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce, and mean number of children, according to age of wife and husband at divorce and mean age at divorce, all marriages and primary marriages: 30 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States]

Number of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce	Age at divorce									Mean age at divorce
	All ages <sup>1</sup>	Under 20 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	35-39 years	40-44 years	45-49 years	50 years or more	
<b>All marriages</b>										
	Percent distribution									Years
Wife . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 33.6
No children . . . . .	46.5	52.1	48.1	42.7	37.7	35.0	46.4	64.6	88.0	35.3
1 child or more . . . . .	53.5	47.9	51.9	57.3	62.3	65.0	53.6	35.4	12.0	32.1
	Number of children									
Mean . . . . .	0.9	0.5	0.7	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.0	0.5	0.2	...
	Percent distribution									Years
Husband . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 36.2
No children . . . . .	46.5	58.4	50.4	45.4	39.4	35.1	39.5	53.8	78.8	38.0
1 child or more . . . . .	53.5	41.6	49.6	54.6	60.6	64.9	60.5	46.2	21.2	34.7
	Number of children									
Mean . . . . .	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.3	1.2	0.8	0.3	...
<b>Primary marriages</b>										
	Percent distribution									Years
Wife . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 32.0
No children . . . . .	38.7	50.4	46.5	39.7	28.2	18.1	30.6	55.2	82.7	32.5
1 child or more . . . . .	61.3	49.6	53.5	60.3	71.8	81.9	69.4	44.8	17.3	31.7
	Number of children									
Mean . . . . .	1.1	0.6	0.7	1.0	1.4	1.7	1.3	0.7	0.3	...
	Percent distribution									Years
Husband . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 34.1
No children . . . . .	38.7	55.9	48.3	42.9	33.1	21.4	23.2	42.6	73.2	34.6
1 child or more . . . . .	61.3	44.1	51.7	57.1	66.9	78.6	76.8	57.4	26.8	33.8
	Number of children									
Mean . . . . .	1.1	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.2	1.6	1.5	1.0	0.4	...

<sup>1</sup>Includes age at divorce not stated  
<sup>2</sup>Includes number of children not stated

**Table 4. Mean age at divorce by duration of marriage and presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce, all marriages and primary marriages: 30 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States]

<i>Duration of marriage</i>	<i>No children</i>	<i>1 or more children</i>	<i>Difference<sup>1</sup></i>
<b>All marriages</b>			
		Years	
Wife . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 35.3	<sup>2</sup> 32.1	3.2
Less than 1 year . . . . .	31.8	28.1	3.7
1-2 years . . . . .	30.0	24.9	5.1
3-4 years . . . . .	31.1	26.0	5.1
5-9 years . . . . .	34.4	28.9	5.5
10-14 years . . . . .	39.6	33.5	6.1
15 years or more . . . . .	49.9	40.5	9.4
Husband . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 38.0	<sup>2</sup> 34.7	3.3
Less than 1 year . . . . .	35.1	30.3	4.8
1-2 years . . . . .	32.7	27.6	5.1
3-4 years . . . . .	33.6	28.8	4.8
5-9 years . . . . .	36.9	31.6	5.3
10-14 years . . . . .	41.8	35.9	5.9
15 years or more . . . . .	52.4	43.0	9.4
<b>Primary marriages</b>			
Wife . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 32.5	<sup>2</sup> 31.7	0.8
Less than 1 year . . . . .	23.1	23.7	-0.6
1-2 years . . . . .	24.3	22.3	2.0
3-4 years . . . . .	26.4	24.2	2.2
5-9 years . . . . .	29.3	27.4	1.9
10-14 years . . . . .	34.4	32.5	1.9
15 years or more . . . . .	49.0	40.2	8.8
Husband . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 34.6	<sup>2</sup> 33.8	0.8
Less than 1 year . . . . .	25.3	25.8	-0.5
1-2 years . . . . .	26.4	24.3	2.1
3-4 years . . . . .	28.4	26.3	2.1
5-9 years . . . . .	31.2	29.5	1.7
10-14 years . . . . .	36.2	34.6	1.6
15 years or more . . . . .	51.5	42.4	9.1

<sup>1</sup>Mean age at divorce for persons with no children minus mean age for persons with 1 or more children

<sup>2</sup>Includes duration not stated

**Table 5. Percent distribution of divorces by presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce, and mean number of children, according to age of wife and husband at marriage and mean age at marriage, all marriages and primary marriages: 30 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States.]

Number of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce	Age at marriage								Mean age at marriage
	All ages <sup>1</sup>	Under 20 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	35-39 years	40-44 years	45 years or more	
<b>All marriages</b>									
	Percent distribution								Years
Wife	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 24.1
No children	46.5	29.1	43.5	56.9	71.7	81.4	91.9	97.3	27.1
1 child or more	53.5	70.9	56.5	43.1	28.3	18.6	8.1	2.7	21.5
	Number of children								
Mean	0.9	1.3	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.0	...
	Percent distribution								Years
Husband	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 26.7
No children	46.5	26.1	38.4	50.2	60.5	69.5	77.9	90.5	29.7
1 child or more	53.5	73.9	61.6	49.8	39.5	30.5	22.1	9.5	24.1
	Number of children								
Mean	0.9	1.3	1.1	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.1	..
<b>Primary marriages</b>									
	Percent distribution								Years
Wife	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 20.9
No children	38.7	28.6	43.9	59.2	67.3	74.0	85.7	92.1	22.1
1 child or more	61.3	71.4	56.1	40.8	32.7	26.0	14.3	7.9	20.2
	Number of children								
Mean	1.1	1.3	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.1	...
	Percent distribution								Years
Husband	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 23.0
No children	38.7	25.2	37.9	50.9	57.8	62.3	65.0	79.9	24.1
1 child or more	61.3	74.8	62.1	49.1	42.2	37.7	35.0	20.1	22.3
	Number of children								
Mean	1.1	1.4	1.1	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.3	...

<sup>1</sup>Includes age at marriage not stated.

<sup>2</sup>Includes number of children not stated.

**Table 6. Percent distribution of divorces by duration of marriage, and mean duration of marriage, according to presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce and mean number of children, all marriages and primary marriages: 30 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States]

<i>Duration of marriage</i>	<i>Total</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>No children</i>	<i>1 or more children</i>	<i>Mean number of children</i>
				<i>Number</i>
		<b>Percent distribution</b>		
All marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 0.9
Under 1 year . . . . .	4.2	8.0	1.0	0.2
1-2 years . . . . .	16.9	26.0	8.9	0.3
3-4 years . . . . .	16.7	19.8	14.1	0.6
5-9 years . . . . .	25.7	21.9	29.1	1.0
10-14 years . . . . .	15.4	8.0	21.9	1.5
15 years or more . . . . .	21.1	16.4	25.1	1.3
		<b>Years</b>		
Mean duration . . . . .	9.5	8.3	10.6	...
		<b>Percent distribution</b>		
Primary marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 1.1
Under 1 year . . . . .	2.1	4.7	0.5	0.2
1-2 years . . . . .	13.0	22.8	6.8	0.4
3-4 years . . . . .	15.0	19.3	12.2	0.7
5-9 years . . . . .	24.8	21.0	27.2	1.1
10-14 years . . . . .	17.4	8.1	23.3	1.7
15 years or more . . . . .	27.8	24.3	30.0	1.3
		<b>Years</b>		
Mean duration . . . . .	11.2	10.6	11.6	..

<sup>1</sup>Includes number of children not stated.

<sup>2</sup>Includes duration of marriage not stated.

**Table 7. Percent distribution of divorces by interval between separation and divorce, and mean duration of separation, according to presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce and mean number of children, all marriages and primary marriages: 30 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States]

<i>Interval between separation and divorce</i>	<i>Total</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>No children</i>	<i>1 or more children</i>	<i>Mean number of children</i>
				<i>Number</i>
		<b>Percent distribution</b>		
All marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 0.9
Under 6 months . . . . .	27.8	31.1	25.0	0.8
6-11 months . . . . .	24.1	23.8	24.3	0.9
12-23 months . . . . .	26.2	23.8	28.3	1.0
24-59 months . . . . .	15.9	14.5	17.1	1.0
60 months or more . . . . .	6.0	6.8	5.3	0.8
		<b>Months</b>		
Mean duration of separation . . . . .	20.4	21.7	19.2	...
		<b>Percent distribution</b>		
Primary marriages . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 1.1
Under 6 months . . . . .	24.7	26.0	24.0	1.0
6-11 months . . . . .	23.1	23.0	23.2	1.1
12-24 months . . . . .	27.6	26.0	28.7	1.1
25-59 months . . . . .	17.4	16.3	18.1	1.1
60 months or more . . . . .	7.1	8.8	6.0	0.9
		<b>Months</b>		
Mean duration of separation . . . . .	22.6	26.0	20.3	...

<sup>1</sup>Includes number of children not stated.

<sup>2</sup>Includes duration of separation not stated.



**Table 8. Percent distribution of divorces by presence of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce, and mean number of children, according to educational attainment of wife and husband and mean education, all marriages and primary marriages: 21 reporting States, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States]

Number of children under 18 years of age at time of divorce	Years of school completed						Mean education
	Total <sup>1</sup>	0-11 years	12 years	13-15 years	16 years	17 years or more	
<b>All marriages</b>							
Percent distribution							Years
Wife . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 12.6
No children . . . . .	47.0	45.1	45.3	46.6	54.6	56.7	12.7
1 child or more . . . . .	53.0	54.9	54.7	53.4	45.4	43.3	12.6
Number of children							Years
Mean . . . . .	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.7	...
Percent distribution							Years
Husband . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 12.5
No children . . . . .	47.0	45.5	45.8	45.9	52.1	51.8	12.5
1 child or more . . . . .	53.0	54.5	54.2	54.1	47.9	48.2	12.5
Number of children							Years
Mean . . . . .	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	...
<b>Primary marriages</b>							
Percent distribution							Years
Wife . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 12.7
No children . . . . .	39.1	34.1	37.3	40.0	50.1	51.8	12.9
1 child or more . . . . .	60.9	65.9	62.7	60.0	49.9	48.2	12.6
Number of children							Years
Mean . . . . .	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	0.9	0.8	...
Percent distribution							Years
Husband . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<sup>2</sup> 12.7
No children . . . . .	39.1	34.7	38.0	39.4	46.0	46.6	12.8
1 child or more . . . . .	60.9	65.3	62.0	60.6	54.0	53.4	12.6
Number of children							Years
Mean . . . . .	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	...

<sup>1</sup>Includes years of school not stated

<sup>2</sup>Includes number of children not stated

**Table 9. Number of divorces and annulments and percent distribution by number of children under 18 years of age involved: divorce-registration area and each registration State, 1984**

[Based on sample data. See the appendix for a discussion of reporting States]

Area	All divorces and annulments  Number	Number of children under 18 years involved						
		Total	None	1	2	3	4	5 or more
		Percent distribution						
Divorce-registration area . . . . .	567,783	100.0	46.5	25.5	19.9	6.1	1.5	0.5
Alabama . . . . .	25,510	100.0	46.3	26.8	19.2	5.5	1.5	0.7
Alaska . . . . .	3,897	100.0	47.8	24.1	20.2	5.5	1.5	1.0
Connecticut . . . . .	11,708	100.0	46.3	25.3	21.4	5.4	1.3	0.3
Delaware . . . . .	2,960	100.0	44.9	25.8	21.9	5.7	1.3	0.3
Georgia . . . . .	33,320	100.0	51.3	24.5	18.2	4.4	1.1	0.5
Hawaii . . . . .	4,764	100.0	46.1	24.6	19.6	6.9	2.0	0.8
Idaho <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	6,148	100.0	46.5	23.8	20.2	6.5	2.2	0.8
Illinois . . . . .	48,880	100.0	46.0	25.4	19.6	6.6	1.8	0.6
Iowa . . . . .	10,508	100.0	39.9	25.6	24.1	7.9	1.9	0.6
Kansas . . . . .	12,945	100.0	44.4	25.9	21.2	6.8	1.4	0.3
Kentucky . . . . .	17,135	100.0	47.3	27.2	18.4	5.5	1.3	0.3
Maryland . . . . .	16,110	100.0	51.0	26.0	17.6	4.4	0.7	0.3
Massachusetts . . . . .	16,760	100.0	42.0	25.8	22.7	7.3	1.7	0.5
Michigan . . . . .	37,620	100.0	44.7	23.4	22.1	7.3	2.0	0.5
Missouri . . . . .	24,860	100.0	46.5	26.2	19.5	6.1	1.3	0.4
Montana . . . . .	4,367	100.0	45.2	24.1	21.2	7.0	2.0	0.6
Nebraska . . . . .	6,403	100.0	37.0	26.6	24.0	9.5	2.0	0.9
New Hampshire . . . . .	4,942	100.0	41.2	27.0	23.4	6.7	1.3	0.4
New York . . . . .	64,607	100.0	51.5	23.1	17.6	5.8	1.4	0.5
Ohio . . . . .	53,300	100.0	45.2	26.4	20.2	6.1	1.7	0.4
Oregon . . . . .	15,625	100.0	44.3	25.6	22.7	5.7	1.5	0.1
Pennsylvania . . . . .	40,330	100.0	44.1	27.0	20.4	6.8	1.4	0.3
Rhode Island . . . . .	3,642	100.0	42.5	25.7	22.4	7.0	1.7	0.7
South Carolina . . . . .	13,689	100.0	46.1	27.6	19.1	5.7	1.1	0.3
South Dakota . . . . .	2,498	100.0	39.7	26.1	23.8	8.0	1.8	0.4
Tennessee . . . . .	29,670	100.0	51.8	25.4	17.0	4.3	1.1	0.4
Utah . . . . .	8,212	100.0	39.8	24.7	20.4	9.4	3.4	2.3
Vermont . . . . .	2,354	100.0	38.3	26.3	25.5	7.6	1.9	0.5
Virginia . . . . .	24,683	100.0	49.7	27.2	17.5	4.5	0.9	0.2
Wisconsin . . . . .	16,635	100.0	38.3	25.6	25.4	8.1	1.9	0.6
Wyoming . . . . .	3,701	100.0	43.2	23.9	22.4	8.0	1.8	0.7

<sup>1</sup>This State reports number of children affected by decree

# Appendix

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# Appendix

## Technical notes

### The divorce-registration area

The divorce-registration area (DRA) was established in 1958 and currently includes 31 States. The DRA includes all States with adequate programs for collecting divorce statistics. Criteria for participating in the DRA are: (1) a statistical report conforming closely in content to the U.S. Standard Certificate of Divorce, Dissolution of Marriage, or Annulment; (2) a State office that maintains a central file of divorce records from all local areas in which divorces are recorded; (3) regular reporting to the State office by all local areas; and (4) tests for completeness and accuracy of divorce registration carried out in cooperation with the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Table I shows, for each State, the year central files of divorce records were established and the year the State was admitted to the divorce-registration area.

### Sources of data

The divorce statistics in this report come from data collected by NCHS and published annually in *Vital Statistics of the United States*, Volume III, Marriage and Divorce. The data come from two sources: (1) all States provide complete counts of the number of divorces and annulments granted by county, and (2) the DRA States provide information from divorce certificates on the characteristics of divorcing couples.

Divorce statistics for the United States, for the DRA, and for individual States are tabulated by place of occurrence, not by place of residence. Tabulations exclude divorces that occur outside the United States, that is, outside the 50 States and the District of Columbia. The term "divorce" as used in this report includes absolute divorces, decrees of marital dissolution, and annulments.

### Sampling

The complete file of divorce records was included for eight States—Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, and Virginia—which supplied State-coded data tapes of 100 percent of their divorce records through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. For the remaining DRA States, a systematic sample of divorce records for 1984 was selected by using five different sampling rates. For each DRA State either 5, 10, 20, 50, or 100 percent of the divorce records were included. Sampling rates were selected so that the expected sample would contain at least

2,500 records for each State. This criterion required 100-percent sampling for Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Montana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

Using the sample to estimate the frequency of an event in the actual population will usually result in some error. Estimates of this sampling error are shown in table II for the DRA for 1984. These sampling errors can be used to create a "confidence interval" for the estimated frequency of an event, which is assumed to include the true frequency of the event. The sample frequency minus the sampling error gives the lower bound and the sample frequency plus the sampling error gives the upper bound of the confidence interval. In the long run, these confidence intervals would include the true frequency of the event in 68 of every 100 similarly selected samples.

### Completeness of coverage

Many of the items tabulated in this report appeared on the divorce certificate of all States in the DRA (table III). These items are: date of divorce (used to compute age at divorce and duration of marriage), date of marriage (used to compute age at marriage and duration of marriage), petitioner, number of children under 18 years of age, and age or date of birth (used to compute age at marriage and divorce). Each of these items was reported with over 97 percent completeness except age or date of birth, which was reported with about 89 percent completeness. All States but South Dakota reported the number of previous marriages or a similar measure of marriage order, but reporting was incomplete in several States. Overall, marriage order was reported on about 85 percent of the certificates in the DRA. Because South Dakota did not report number of previous marriages, it was excluded from all tabulations in this report that took marriage order or number of previous marriages into account.

Race was omitted from the certificates of four States (Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Ohio) and was incompletely reported in other States. Overall, race was reported on about 76 percent of the certificates. Education was omitted from the certificates of 10 States (Delaware, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and South Dakota) and date of separation from those of 10 States (Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and South Dakota). Completeness of reporting on these two items was about 56 percent for the DRA as a whole.

**Table I. Years central files of divorce records were established and years areas were admitted to the divorce-registration area**

Area	Central files established	Admitted to the DRA
	Year	
Alabama . . . . .	1908	1958
Alaska . . . . .	1949	1958
Arizona . . . . .	( <sup>1</sup> )	( <sup>2</sup> )
Arkansas . . . . .	1923	( <sup>2</sup> )
California . . . . .	1962	( <sup>3</sup> )
Colorado . . . . .	1968	( <sup>2</sup> )
Connecticut . . . . .	1947	1968
Delaware . . . . .	1935	1981
District of Columbia . . . . .	1802	( <sup>2</sup> )
Florida . . . . .	1927	( <sup>2</sup> )
Georgia . . . . .	1952	1958
Hawaii . . . . .	1951	1958
Idaho . . . . .	1947	1958
Illinois . . . . .	1962	1968
Indiana . . . . .	( <sup>1</sup> )	( <sup>2</sup> )
Iowa . . . . .	1914	1958
Kansas . . . . .	1951	1959
Kentucky . . . . .	1958	1969
Louisiana . . . . .	1942	( <sup>2</sup> )
Maine . . . . .	1892	( <sup>2</sup> )
Maryland . . . . .	1914	1959
Massachusetts . . . . .	1882	1979
Michigan . . . . .	1897	1961
Minnesota . . . . .	1970	( <sup>2</sup> )
Mississippi . . . . .	1926	( <sup>2</sup> )
Missouri . . . . .	1948	1961
Montana . . . . .	1943	1958
Nebraska . . . . .	1909	1958
Nevada . . . . .	1968	( <sup>2</sup> )
New Hampshire . . . . .	1881	1979
New Jersey . . . . .	1795	( <sup>2</sup> )
New Mexico . . . . .	( <sup>1</sup> )	( <sup>2</sup> )
New York (excl. N.Y.C.) . . . . .	1963	1969
New York City . . . . .	1963	1969
North Carolina . . . . .	1958	( <sup>2</sup> )
North Dakota . . . . .	1949	( <sup>2</sup> )
Ohio . . . . .	1949	1962
Oklahoma . . . . .	( <sup>1</sup> )	( <sup>2</sup> )
Oregon . . . . .	1925	1958
Pennsylvania . . . . .	1943	1958
Rhode Island . . . . .	1962	1963
South Carolina . . . . .	1962	1971
South Dakota . . . . .	1905	1958
Tennessee . . . . .	1945	1958
Texas . . . . .	1968	( <sup>2</sup> )
Utah . . . . .	1953	1958
Vermont . . . . .	1896	1968
Virginia . . . . .	1918	1958
Washington . . . . .	1968	( <sup>2</sup> )
West Virginia . . . . .	1967	( <sup>2</sup> )
Wisconsin . . . . .	1907	1958
Wyoming . . . . .	1941	1958
Puerto Rico . . . . .	1931	( <sup>2</sup> )
Virgin Islands . . . . .	1953	1958

<sup>1</sup>Not yet established

<sup>2</sup>Not yet admitted

<sup>3</sup>California was admitted to the DRA in 1968 but ceased to participate in 1978

**Table II. Sampling error of estimated percent: divorce-registration area and each registration State, 1984**

[Figures for Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, and Wyoming have no sampling errors in 1984 because all records were tabulated]

Area and year	Sampling error of estimated percent			
	1 or 99	10 or 90	25 or 75	50
Divorce-registration area . . . . .	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Alabama . . . . .	0.2	0.6	0.8	0.9
Alaska . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Connecticut . . . . .	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.5
Delaware . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Georgia . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.8
Hawaii . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Idaho . . . . .	0.1	0.4	0.6	0.6
Illinois . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Iowa . . . . .	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.5
Kansas . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.8	0.9
Kentucky . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.8
Maryland . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.8
Massachusetts . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.8
Michigan . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.8
Missouri . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Montana . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Nebraska . . . . .	..	..	..	..
New Hampshire . . . . .	..	..	..	..
New York . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Ohio . . . . .	0.2	0.6	0.8	0.9
Oregon . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.8
Pennsylvania . . . . .	0.1	0.4	0.6	0.7
Rhode Island . . . . .	..	..	..	..
South Carolina . . . . .	..	..	..	..
South Dakota . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Tennessee . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.8	0.9
Utah . . . . .	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.6
Vermont . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Virginia . . . . .	..	..	..	..
Wisconsin . . . . .	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.8
Wyoming . . . . .	..	..	..	..

of children involved in divorce. For 1950–59 the average number of children per decree was calculated using data from all reporting States, for 1960 from a nationwide sample, for 1961–69 from 16 States, and thereafter from all DRA States.

### Race of children

The race of a child whose parents divorced is inferred from the race of the divorced couple. When the spouses are the same race, the child is assigned that race. When the husband is white and the wife is not, the child is assigned the wife's race. When the husband is not white, the child is assigned the husband's race. When the race of only one spouse is stated, the child is assigned the stated race.

### Computation of rates, percent distributions, and means

The divorce rates and the child involvement rate in this report are based on populations estimated by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Rates for the census years 1950–80 are based on the populations enumerated as of April 1. Rates for all other years are based on the estimated midyear (July 1) populations. Percent distributions and means exclude cases for which the pertinent information (number of children, duration of

### Estimates of children involved in divorce

To make the national estimates of the number of children involved in divorce, it was assumed that the average number of children per decree for the United States was the same as the average in the DRA States. This average was multiplied by the national divorce total to estimate the national number

Table III. Items of statistical information coded from divorce or annulment records of divorce-registration States: 1984

["X" or footnote indicates the item is coded]

Area	Items concerning marriage							Items concerning husband and wife						
	Items concerning divorce		State of this marriage	Date of this marriage	Date couple separated	Number of children ever born alive of this marriage	Children under 18 in this family	Date of birth or age	Race	Number of this marriage	Education	State of residence	If previously married, how many ended by	
	Date	Petitioner											Death	Divorce
Alabama . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Alaska . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	( <sup>1</sup> )	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Connecticut . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Delaware . . . . .	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X		
Georgia . . . . .	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Hawaii . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Idaho . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	( <sup>2</sup> )	( <sup>3</sup> )	X	X	X	X	X		
Illinois . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Iowa . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kansas . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kentucky . . . . .	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X		
Maryland . . . . .	X	X	X	X		( <sup>1</sup> )	X	X	X			X		
Massachusetts . . . . .	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X		
Michigan . . . . .	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Missouri . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Montana . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nebraska . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New Hampshire . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New York . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ohio . . . . .	X	X	( <sup>4</sup> )	X			X	X	X			X		
Oregon . . . . .	X	X	X	X		( <sup>2</sup> )	( <sup>5</sup> )	X	X	X	X	X		
Pennsylvania . . . . .	X	X	X	X		( <sup>2</sup> )	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Rhode Island . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
South Carolina . . . . .	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X		
South Dakota . . . . .	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X		
Tennessee . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Utah . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vermont . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Virginia . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wisconsin . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wyoming . . . . .	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

<sup>1</sup>Total number of children

<sup>2</sup>Number of children by this marriage

<sup>3</sup>Number of children affected by decree

<sup>4</sup>Item does not specifically request State, but State or city was reported on most records; major cities were allocated to appropriate States

<sup>5</sup>Date of birth of each living child

marriage, or age) is not stated. Mean age at marriage and mean age at decree were computed using ungrouped data. Persons with education beyond four years of college are coded as having 17 years of education. No adjustment for this truncation was made in computing mean education.

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Public Health Service  
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