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## Marriage and First Intercourse, Marital Dissolution, and Remarriage: United States, 1982

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Changing patterns of marriage, divorce, and premarital sexual behavior are reflected in recent trends in marital and premarital births. Over the past two decades, the proportion of births occurring to unmarried women has risen dramatically, from 5 percent in 1960 to 19 percent in 1982.<sup>1,2</sup> Slightly more than half of this change is due to a rise in births to unmarried women, resulting from an increase in both their fertility rate and their number in the population. The increased fertility rate for unmarried women is associated with a substantial shift in the timing of first sexual intercourse in relation to marriage. Nearly half of women marrying in the years 1960–64 delayed their first sexual intercourse until marriage, compared with only one-fifth of women who first married between 1975 and 1979. Declines in marital fertility rates account for the other half of the rise in the proportion of births to unmarried women. Those declines may reflect, in part, another fundamental change in the institution of marriage—declining marital stability. The likelihood of divorce, separation, or widowhood within 5 years of marriage was half as high among women first married during the years 1960–64 as among those first married in the years 1975–79. These findings on timing of first sexual intercourse and marital dissolution are based on preliminary data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), Cycle III.

The National Survey of Family Growth is conducted periodically by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) on topics related to childbearing, contraceptive practice, and related aspects of maternal and child health. In Cycle III, conducted in 1982, interviews were completed with a probability sample of 7,969 women 15–44 years of age in the noninstitutional population of the conterminous United States. The sample included 4,651 ever married and 3,318 never married women. Previous cycles of the survey were conducted in 1976 and 1973. Further details about

the sample design and reliability of the data presented in this report are given in the Technical notes.

A primary purpose of the National Survey of Family Growth is to provide national estimates of factors that influence childbearing. The most basic of these factors is, of course, exposure to sexual intercourse. Marital status is an important determinant of exposure to sexual intercourse. Women marrying during the 1960's and 1970's increasingly began their sexual experience before marriage, as this report shows, but exposure to intercourse is still substantially higher among ever married than never married women. This is true whether exposure is measured as ever having had intercourse or as having had intercourse in the 3 months before the interview.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, despite the increase in the proportion of births occurring to unmarried women since the early 1960's, the great majority of all births, and even of first births, still occur within marriage.<sup>1,2</sup> Thus, marriage and marital dissolution continue to be important factors in explaining childbearing.

This report presents data on the timing of first sexual intercourse in relation to first marriage, and the timing of marital dissolution and remarriage among ever married women in the United States. Data on age at first sexual intercourse among all women, including never married women, will be presented in a subsequent report.

### Timing of first sexual intercourse in relation to marriage

About two-thirds of ever married women 15–44 years of age had had sexual intercourse before marriage (table 1). About 20 percent of all ever married women married within 1 year of initiating sexual activity, 23 percent married

within 1–3 years, and about 25 percent married 3 or more years after their first intercourse.

The proportion of women who delayed sexual intercourse until marriage declined from 48 percent among women marrying during the period 1960–64, to 21 percent among women marrying in the years 1975–79. The largest decline appears to have occurred between 1965–69, when 42 percent of women marrying for the first time had not previously had intercourse, and 1970–74, when only 28 percent had delayed intercourse. This increase in the prevalence of premarital intercourse has also been reported in studies of both ever married and never married teenagers.<sup>4–6</sup>

Women who married in the late 1970's experienced longer periods of premarital sexual exposure than women who married in the early 1960's. Among women marrying in the years 1975–79, 23 percent had initiated their sexual experience 5 or more years before marriage, compared with only 2 percent of women marrying during the years 1960–64. About 17 percent of women marrying in the years 1960–64 married within 6 months of their first intercourse, compared with only 7 percent of women marrying in the years 1975–79. These changes reflect a probable decline in the average age of first sexual intercourse as well as an increase in the median age of women at their first marriage.<sup>4,7</sup>

Data for women who married before 1960 are not shown separately in table 1. Because the NSFG was restricted to women aged 15–44 in 1982, women marrying before 1960 who were 44 years of age at the time of the survey would have to have married before age 23; women under 44 years of age when the survey was conducted would have to have married at progressively younger ages. These women would have had fewer years to experience premarital intercourse than women marrying during the same years but at older ages. This bias may also have some effect on the comparison between the 1960–64 and later groups shown in table 1.

Table 1 shows that white ever married women were much more likely than black ever married women to delay first sexual intercourse until marriage (35 percent compared with 9 percent, respectively), and were less likely to have delayed marriage 5 years or more after their first sexual experience (11 compared with 26 percent). Among both black and white women, those married in the years 1975–79 were less than half as likely as those married in the years 1960–64 to have delayed their first sexual intercourse until marriage. The difference among white women (22 compared with 53 percent) was statistically significant, while the difference among black women (5 compared with 12 percent) was not.

**Table 1. Number of ever married women 15–44 years of age and percent distribution by timing of marriage relative to first sexual intercourse, according to race, Hispanic origin, and year of first marriage: United States, 1982**

[Preliminary data based on a sample of the noninstitutional population of the conterminous United States. See Technical notes for discussion of the sample design, estimates of sampling variability, and definitions of terms]

Race, Hispanic origin, and year of first marriage	Ever married women	Total	Marriage before or same month as first intercourse	Months between first intercourse and marriage					
				5 months or less	6–11 months	12–35 months	36–59 months	60 months or more	
	Number in thousands			Percent distribution					
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>									
All years <sup>2</sup> .....	34,937	100.0	32.6	12.2	7.3	23.4	12.3	12.2	
1975–79 .....	7,338	100.0	21.4	7.0	6.7	24.8	16.9	23.2	
1970–74 .....	8,266	100.0	28.1	13.5	8.6	29.0	12.2	8.6	
1965–69 .....	7,326	100.0	42.2	14.3	6.7	19.1	10.7	6.9	
1960–64 .....	5,505	100.0	48.3	17.3	*6.7	20.2	*5.4	*2.1	
<b>White</b>									
All years <sup>2</sup> .....	30,419	100.0	34.6	12.5	7.1	23.4	11.3	11.0	
1975–79 .....	6,477	100.0	22.4	7.2	7.2	25.1	16.2	21.9	
1970–74 .....	7,176	100.0	29.5	13.7	8.8	29.8	10.8	7.4	
1965–69 .....	6,400	100.0	45.1	14.5	*6.4	17.8	10.0	*6.2	
1960–64 .....	4,804	100.0	52.6	17.6	*5.6	19.2	*3.4	*1.6	
<b>Black</b>									
All years <sup>2</sup> .....	3,442	100.0	8.8	9.0	8.4	25.2	22.9	25.7	
1975–79 .....	687	100.0	*5.4	*4.7	*2.8	19.0	27.4	40.7	
1970–74 .....	785	100.0	*7.7	8.6	10.2	25.2	27.0	21.3	
1965–69 .....	709	100.0	12.2	12.2	*7.7	35.6	17.4	14.9	
1960–64 .....	533	100.0	12.0	*10.9	16.4	30.8	22.1	*7.8	
<b>Hispanic origin</b>									
Hispanic .....	2,790	100.0	44.7	*12.8	*5.7	18.3	*9.5	*9.0	
Non-Hispanic .....	31,191	100.0	31.6	11.9	7.5	23.7	12.7	12.7	

<sup>1</sup> Includes white, black and other races, and women of unknown origin.

<sup>2</sup> Includes all first marriages before 1960 and between 1980 and interview.

Women of Hispanic origin were more likely than other women to delay their first sexual intercourse until marriage, as shown in the bottom rows of table 1. About 45 percent of Hispanic women, compared with 32 percent of non-Hispanic women, first had intercourse after marriage.

### Dissolution of first marriage

In 1982, approximately 30 percent of first marriages to women aged 15–44 had been dissolved by divorce, separation, or death (table 2). Nearly 4 percent of all first marriages were dissolved within 1 year of the date of the first marriage, 11 percent within 3 years, 15 percent within 5 years, and 24 percent within 10 years.

The proportion of first marriages dissolved within 5 years was approximately twice as high for women married in the years 1975–79 (20 percent) as for women married in the years 1960–64 (10 percent). Similarly, at each duration greater than 1 year for which the experience of a marriage cohort (a group of women marrying during the same time period) had been completed, the more recent marriage cohorts experienced a higher rate of marital dissolution than the earlier ones, although in most cases the differences were too small to be statistically significant. Note that the propor-

tions of marriages disrupted within 3 to 10 years for the 1975–79 cohort, within 10 or 15 years for the 1970–74 cohorts, and within 15 years for the 1965–69 cohorts are biased downward, because not all women in these cohorts had completed the indicated number of years of marriage by the time of the survey. This truncation bias has been indicated in table 2 by italicizing the affected percents.

Marriages of black women were dissolved at a higher rate than marriages of white women at each duration of marriage. By the time of the interview, about 29 percent of white ever married women, compared with about 46 percent of black ever married women, had experienced the dissolution of their first marriage. These differences appear to have narrowed over time. Among women married during the years 1960–64, 23 percent of black women, compared with 9 percent of white women, had experienced a marital dissolution within 5 years; among women married in the years 1975–79, the comparable proportions were 24 and 20 percent, respectively. Thus, the increase in marital disruption appears to have been confined to marriages involving white women. There were no significant differences in cumulative rates of marital disruption between Hispanic and non-Hispanic women, as shown in the bottom rows of table 2.

**Table 2. Number of ever married women 15–44 years of age and cumulative percent whose first marriage was dissolved by separation, divorce, or death, by years since first marriage, according to race, Hispanic origin, and year of first marriage: United States, 1982**

[Preliminary data based on a sample of the noninstitutional population of the conterminous United States. See Technical notes for discussion of the sample design, estimates of sampling variability, and definitions of terms]

Race, Hispanic origin, and year of first marriage	Ever married women	Years since first marriage							
		1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	10 years	15 years	All years
	Number in thousands	Cumulative percent dissolved at time of interview							
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>									
All years <sup>2</sup> .....	34,937	3.8	7.4	11.2	13.4	15.5	24.4	28.4	30.4
1975–79 .....	7,338	*4.1	9.8	15.0	18.9	20.4	22.1	...	22.1
1970–74 .....	8,266	*3.5	7.8	12.8	15.8	18.7	32.6	33.1	33.1
1965–69 .....	7,326	*3.7	7.0	10.6	12.4	15.2	28.9	38.8	39.7
1960–64 .....	5,505	*3.4	*5.6	*7.3	8.8	10.3	22.0	29.7	35.8
<b>White</b>									
All years <sup>2</sup> .....	30,419	3.5	7.1	10.9	13.0	14.7	23.2	27.0	28.9
1975–79 .....	6,477	*4.1	10.0	15.0	18.8	20.2	21.5	...	21.5
1970–74 .....	7,176	*3.2	7.3	12.5	15.3	18.0	31.5	31.8	31.8
1965–69 .....	6,400	*3.6	6.8	10.3	11.9	13.9	27.7	37.5	38.5
1960–64 .....	4,804	*2.6	*4.8	*6.4	*7.9	8.6	19.3	26.4	32.7
<b>Black</b>									
All years <sup>2</sup> .....	3,442	6.4	11.4	15.2	18.6	23.9	36.9	43.0	45.6
1975–79 .....	687	*5.4	10.4	16.4	22.0	24.3	27.6	...	27.6
1970–74 .....	785	*5.3	11.9	17.0	22.1	26.6	45.0	47.0	47.0
1965–69 .....	709	*6.5	11.7	15.6	17.6	28.1	44.1	55.6	55.9
1960–64 .....	533	*9.1	12.8	15.4	17.7	22.7	44.5	57.6	62.8
<b>Hispanic origin</b>									
Hispanic .....	2,790	*3.9	*8.6	*13.1	15.2	17.3	24.3	27.2	29.0
Non-Hispanic .....	31,191	3.7	7.3	10.9	13.2	15.2	24.3	28.4	30.4

<sup>1</sup> Includes white, black and other races, and women of unknown origin.

<sup>2</sup> Includes first marriages beginning before 1960 and between 1980 and interview.

NOTE: Figures in italics reflect incomplete experience of all or some women in a given marriage cohort (see text).

**Remarriage**

Nearly 60 percent of the women whose first marriages were dissolved by divorce or death of the spouse had remarried by the time of the survey (table 3). Women whose first marriages ended in separation only are not included in this table because they are not legally permitted to remarry. About 7 percent of women whose first marriages were dissolved by divorce or death had remarried within 1 year, about 35 percent within 3 years, and about 48 percent within 5 years. Over half of the women who had remarried by the time of the survey had done so within 3 years.

Table 3 shows proportions of women who remarried according to the years in which their first marriages ended. Over four-fifths of women who were divorced or widowed in the 1960's had remarried by the time of the survey, compared with only about half of women divorced or widowed during the period 1975-79. This reflects not only the longer period to time in which the former group of women could have remarried, but also a probable decline in the likelihood of remarriage between the 1960's and late 1970's. Women whose first marriages ended in the 1970's tended to remarry within 2 to 5 years less often than women whose first marriages ended in the 1960's. Although none of these differences

is statistically significant, they consistently suggest a lower rate of remarriage in the 1970's than in the 1960's. As in table 2, some of the percents in table 3 are biased downward in this case because not all women whose marriages ended during a given period of time had completed the indicated number of years between dissolution and interview. These percents appear in italics.

Data from the marriage-registration area indicate a similar trend in remarriage (see Technical notes). These data show that the yearly remarriage rate per 1,000 widowed or divorced women aged 25-44 varied between 140 and 157 during the years 1963-72 and then fell from 155 to 128 during the period 1972-79.<sup>8</sup>

Rates of remarriage among divorced or widowed women were significantly lower for black women compared with white women. Considering all marriage cohorts together, 61 percent of white women and 46 percent of black women had remarried by the time of the survey. Similar differences appear in the cumulative proportions remarrying by 2 to 5 years after divorce or death, and for 2 of the 4 marriage cohorts.

When all women whose first marriages dissolved are considered, including women whose first marriages ended in separation only, the differences by race in the percent

**Table 3. Number of women 15-44 years of age whose first marriage was dissolved by divorce or death of spouse, and cumulative percent who remarried by years since dissolution, according to race, Hispanic origin, and year of dissolution: United States, 1982**

[Preliminary data based on a sample of the noninstitutional population of the conterminous United States. See Technical notes for discussion of the sample design, estimates of sampling variability and definitions of terms]

Race, Hispanic origin, and year of dissolution	First marriage dissolved	Years since dissolution of first marriage					
		1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	All years
	Number in thousands	Cumulative percent remarried at time of interview					
Total <sup>1</sup>							
All years <sup>2</sup>	9,459	6.9	23.6	34.7	42.1	48.2	59.1
1975-79	3,185	*6.4	23.2	<i>34.8</i>	<i>43.8</i>	<i>48.1</i>	53.6
1970-74	2,543	*9.0	22.1	35.1	42.2	52.2	68.8
1965-69	1,212	*6.5	32.5	45.5	54.4	59.6	82.7
1960-64	526	*3.7	*31.3	*43.6	56.6	69.1	89.1
White							
All years <sup>2</sup>	8,145	7.3	25.2	36.5	44.3	50.5	60.6
1975-79	2,831	*6.6	24.7	<i>36.0</i>	<i>45.9</i>	<i>50.1</i>	55.4
1970-74	2,183	*10.5	24.0	38.0	44.5	54.8	70.9
1965-69	1,027	*5.4	34.1	49.1	58.9	63.6	85.3
1960-64	384	*3.0	37.4	48.8	63.5	80.0	94.6
Black							
All years <sup>2</sup>	1,056	*4.3	10.5	18.2	23.3	28.2	45.7
1975-79	277	*5.8	*9.2	*17.4	*19.4	<i>24.9</i>	30.2
1970-74	303	*0.4	*7.0	*15.6	23.8	29.8	51.0
1965-69	164	*7.7	*20.3	*21.7	*26.0	34.5	70.7
1960-64	118	*6.8	*9.3	*27.1	*37.0	39.1	69.1
Hispanic origin							
Hispanic	641	*4.0	*17.5	*27.7	*34.3	*36.7	57.1
Non-Hispanic	8,484	7.2	24.2	35.5	43.0	49.2	59.7

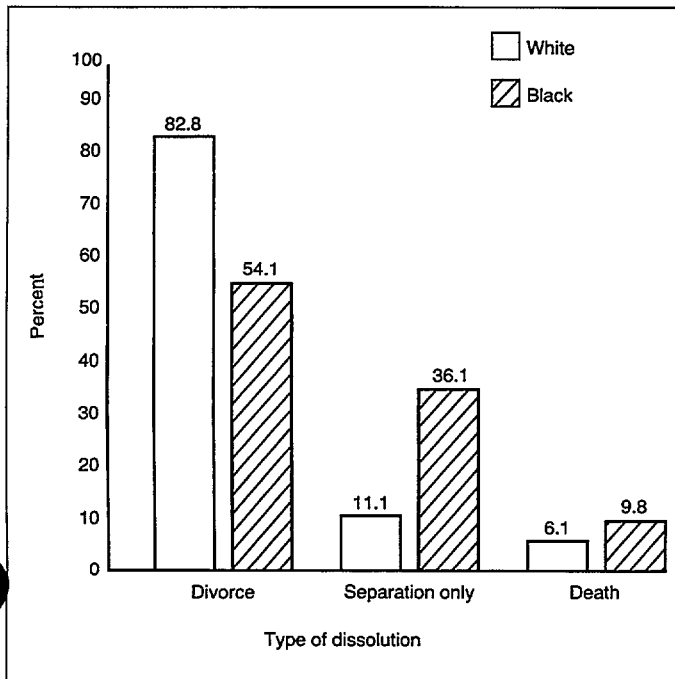
<sup>1</sup> Includes white, black and other races, and women of unknown origin.

<sup>2</sup> Includes first marriages dissolved before 1960 and between 1980 and interview.

NOTE: Figures in italics reflect incomplete experience of all or some women in a given marriage cohort (see text).

remarrying are even larger (31 percent of black women compared with 55 percent of white women). This is because the first marriages of black women are more likely than those of white women to end in separation only. As the figure shows, 36 percent of dissolved first marriages of black women ended in separation only, compared with 11 percent

**Figure.** Percent distribution of dissolved first marriages of women 15–44 years of age by type of dissolution, according to race: United States, 1982



of dissolved first marriages of white women. Thus the lower percent of divorced or widowed black women who remarried is compounded by a higher proportion of black women who are no longer married and are not legally free to remarry. Differences in remarriage rates between Hispanic and non-Hispanic women were not statistically significant.

### Related sources of data

A detailed analysis of remarriage among women whose first marriage ended in divorce is presented in a previous report based on data from the National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle II.<sup>9</sup> These data are not directly comparable to those presented in this report because the earlier data were based on computed probabilities of remarriage rather than cumulative proportions remarriage, and because the data in the earlier report are limited to women whose first marriages ended in divorce. Nevertheless, findings of both reports are similar with respect to race differences in remarriage.

Data on marriage and divorce are also published annually by the National Center for Health Statistics in *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, Advance report of final marriage statistics; *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, Advance report of final divorce statistics; and in *Vital Statistics of the United States*, Volume III, Marriage and Divorce.

## References

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<sup>2</sup>National Center for Health Statistics: Advance report of final natality statistics, 1982. *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*. Vol. 33, No. 6 Supp. DHHS Pub. (PHS) 84-1120. Public Health Service. Hyattsville, Md., Sept. 28, 1984.

<sup>3</sup>C. A. Bachrach: *Contraceptive Practice*, 1982. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America. Minneapolis, May 3, 1984.

<sup>4</sup>M. Zelnik and J. F. Kantner: Sexual activity, contraceptive use, and pregnancy among metropolitan-area teenagers, 1971–79. *Fam. Plann. Perspect.* 12(5): 230–237, 1980.

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<sup>7</sup>National Center for Health Statistics: Advance report of final marriage statistics, 1981. *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, Vol. 32, No. 11

Supp. DHHS Pub. No. (PHS) 81-1120. Public Health Service. Hyattsville, Md., Feb. 29, 1984.

<sup>8</sup>National Center for Health Statistics: *Vital Statistics of the United States*, Vol. III. Public Health Service. Annually.

<sup>9</sup>National Center for Health Statistics, W. Grady: Remarriages of women 15–44 years of age whose first marriage ended in divorce, United States, 1976. *Advance Data From Vital and Health Statistics*, No. 58. DHEW Pub. No. (PHS) 80-1250. Public Health Service. Hyattsville, Md., Feb. 14, 1980.

<sup>10</sup>National Center for Health Statistics, D. French: The National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle I, Sample design, estimation procedures, and variance estimation. *Vital and Health Statistics*. Series 2, No. 76. DHEW Pub. No. (PHS) 78-1350. Public Health Service. Washington. U.S. Government Printing Office, Jan. 1978.

<sup>11</sup>National Center for Health Statistics, W. Grady: The National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle II, Sample design, estimation procedures, and variance estimation. *Vital and Health Statistics*. Series 2, No. 87. DHEW Pub. No. (PHS) 81-1361. Public Health Service. Washington. U.S. Government Printing Office, Feb. 1981.

## Technical notes

### Survey design

The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) is conducted periodically by the National Center for Health Statistics to collect data on fertility, family planning, and related aspects of maternal and child health. Field work for the first cycle was conducted under contract in 1973 by the National Opinion Research Center. Field work for the second and third cycles was conducted by Westat, Inc., in 1976 and 1982, respectively.

In all cycles, personal interviews were conducted with a multistage area probability sample of women 15–44 years of age in the noninstitutional population of the conterminous United States. In Cycles I and II, ever married women and never married women with offspring living in the same household were eligible for the survey. In Cycle III, all women aged 15–44 were eligible, regardless of marital status or the presence of offspring. Women living in group quarters (such as college dormitories) were excluded from the samples in Cycles I and II, but included in Cycle III. Interviews were conducted with 7,969 women in Cycle III.

Fieldwork for Cycle III was conducted between August 1982 and February 1983. Black women and women aged 15–19 were oversampled. Interviews were conducted by trained female interviewers and lasted an average of 1 hour. The interview focused on a woman's pregnancy history, use of contraceptives in each pregnancy interval, ability to bear children, future childbearing expectations, use of family planning and infertility services, marital history, and labor force participation; and incorporated a wide range of social, economic, and demographic characteristics.

### Reliability of estimates

Because the statistics presented in this report are based on a sample, they may differ from the statistics that would result if all 54 million women represented by the NSFG had been interviewed. The standard error (SE) of an estimate is a measure of such differences. The standard error of an estimated number or percent presented in this report may be calculated by using the appropriate values of *A* and *B* from table I in the equations,

$$SE_{(N')} = \left( A + \frac{B}{N'} \right)^{1/2} \cdot N'$$

and

$$SE_{(P')} = \left( B \cdot P' \cdot \frac{100 - P'}{X'} \right)^{1/2}$$

where *N'* is the number of women, *P'* is the percent, and *X'* is the number of women in the denominator of the percent. Approximate standard errors for estimated percents of ever married women of all races in Cycle III are shown in table II.

**Table I. Parameters used to compute estimated standard errors and relative standard errors of numbers and percents of ever married women, by race: National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle III**

Race	A	B
All races and white .....	-0.001097329	39809.1677
Black .....	-0.000908632	6346.0484

**Table II. Approximate standard errors for estimated percents (expressed in percentage points) for ever married women of all races: National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle III**

Base of percent	Estimated percent						
	2 or 98	5 or 95	10 or 90	20 or 80	30 or 70	40 or 60	50
100,000 .....	8.8	13.8	18.9	25.2	28.9	30.9	31.5
500,000 .....	4.0	6.1	8.5	11.3	12.9	13.8	14.1
1,000,000 .....	2.8	4.3	6.0	8.0	9.1	9.8	10.0
5,000,000 .....	1.2	1.9	2.7	3.6	4.1	4.4	4.5
10,000,000 .....	0.9	1.4	1.9	2.5	2.9	3.1	3.2
30,000,000 .....	0.5	0.8	1.1	1.5	1.7	1.8	1.8

The chances are about 68 in 100 that a sample estimate would fall within one standard error, and about 95 in 100 that it would fall within two standard errors of a statistic based on a complete count of the population represented by the NSFG. Differences between percents discussed in this report were found to be statistically significant at the 95-percent confidence level using a two-tailed *t*-test with 39 degrees of freedom. This means that in repeated samples of the same type and size, a difference as large as the one observed would occur in only 5 percent of samples if there were in fact no difference between the percents in the population.

The relative standard error of a statistic is the ratio of the standard error to the statistic and is usually expressed as a percent of the estimate. In this report, statistics with relative standard errors of 30 percent or larger are indicated with an asterisk (\*). These estimates are considered unreliable by themselves but may be combined with other estimates to make comparisons of greater precision.

Statistics in this report may also be subject to nonsampling error, that is, errors or omissions in responding to the interview, recording answers, and processing data. The data have been adjusted for nonsampling error resulting from nonresponse by means of adjustments to the sample weights assigned to each case. Other types of nonsampling error were minimized by a series of stringent quality control measures similar to those used in Cycles I and II.<sup>10,11</sup>

### Definitions of terms

**Race**—Race refers to the race of the woman interviewed and is reported as black, white, or other. In Cycle III, race was classified according to the woman's report of the race that best described her.

**Hispanic origin**—In Cycle III, a respondent was classified as being of Hispanic origin if she reported that her only or principal national origin was Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican

American, Central or South American, or other Spanish. For 3 percent of respondents, origin was not ascertained.

In this report, values have not been imputed, and only cases with known values are included in the statistics on Hispanic origin. In tables where data are presented for women according to race and Hispanic origin, women of Hispanic origin are included in the statistics for white and black women if they were classified as such by race.

**Marital status**—Persons were classified by marital status as married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married. In Cycles I and II, informally married women—women who volunteered that they were sharing living quarters with their sexual partner—were classified as currently married. These women constituted about 2 percent of currently married respondents in Cycle I and 3 percent in Cycle II. In Cycle III, such women were classified according to their legal marital status. In all cycles, women who were married but separated from their spouses were classified as separated if the reason for the separation was marital discord; otherwise, they were classified as currently married. Formal marital status is used throughout this report. Thus, for example, the number of years between first marriage and dissolution refers to the time elapsed between the date of the first formal marriage and the date of dissolution; remarriage is entry into a second formal union.

**Marital dissolution**—Dissolution of formal marriage includes death of the spouse, separation due to marital discord, and divorce. In the case of divorce, the date that a woman and her husband separated is used to compute the number of years between first marriage and dissolution.

**Timing of first sexual intercourse**—Persons were classified according to whether their first sexual intercourse occurred after their first marriage, or, if not, how long before marriage it occurred. The date of first sexual intercourse was ascertained by the question: "Thinking back, *after* your first menstrual period, when did you have sexual intercourse for the first time—what month and year was that?" Women who were unable to recall the exact month and year were probed for a season and year, their age at first intercourse, and whether or not it occurred before or after the birthday for the given age. For women who gave ages or seasons rather than exact dates of first intercourse, dates were estimated for purposes of classifying timing in relation to marriage. Dates of first intercourse were then compared with the date of first *formal* marriage. Thus, women whose first intercourse occurred after initiating an *informal* marriage were classified as having premarital intercourse.

**Marriage-registration area (MRA)**—In 1963, the marriage-registration area consisted of 35 States and the District of Columbia. It did not include Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia. The 1971 MRA consisted of 41 States and the District of Columbia. Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, and Washington were not included. Colorado was added to the MRA in 1979. Marriages performed in the MRA included 63 percent of the marriages registered in the United States in 1963, 81 percent in 1971, and 79 percent in 1979.

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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 standards of reliability or precision (more than 30-percent relative standard error)
  - # Figure suppressed to comply with confidentiality requirements
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