

## First Marriage Dissolution, Divorce, and Remarriage: United States

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### Abstract

*Objectives*—This report presents national estimates of the duration of first and second marriages for women 15–44 years of age in 1995. National estimates of the probability of divorce given separation and of the probability of remarriage given divorce are also presented.

*Methods*—The life-table estimates are based on a nationally representative sample of women 15–44 years of age in the United States in 1995 from the National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle 5.

*Results*—One fifth of first marriages end within 5 years and one third end within 10 years. First marriages of teenagers disrupt faster than the first marriages of women who were ages 20 years and older at marriage. First marriages of black non-Hispanic women dissolve at a faster rate: 47 percent end within 10 years compared with 34 percent for Hispanic, 32 percent for white non-Hispanic, and 20 percent for Asian non-Hispanic women. Virtually all separations among white non-Hispanic women (98 percent) end in divorce within 6 years, compared with only 80 percent of separations among Hispanic women and 72 percent of separations among black non-Hispanic women.

Women under age 25 years at divorce are more likely to remarry than women at least age 25 years at divorce. White non-Hispanic and Hispanic women are much more likely to remarry than black non-Hispanic women. White non-Hispanic women are slightly more likely than Hispanic women to remarry. The data suggest that women who remarry before age 25 years are more likely to experience a second marital disruption than women who remarry at ages older than 25 years, although the difference is only significant at late marital durations. Black non-Hispanic remarriages are more likely to disrupt than Hispanic or white non-Hispanic remarriages.

**Keywords:** marriage • separation • divorce • remarriage

### Introduction

Marriage is associated with a variety of positive outcomes, and dissolution of marriage is associated with negative outcomes for men, women, and their children. A full analysis of the benefits of marriage to either children or spouses is beyond the scope of this report, but this brief introduction should serve to highlight the importance of the data described in this report. This report releases estimates of the patterns of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the United States as of 1995 by several important demographic characteristics. A later report will show more detailed estimates by a wide variety of other characteristics.

Compared with unmarried people, married men and women tend to have lower mortality, less risky behavior, more monitoring of health, more compliance with medical regimens, higher sexual frequency, more

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satisfaction with their sexual lives, more financial savings, and higher wages (1–3). The differences between married and unmarried people may reflect a causal effect of marriage or a selection effect (healthier people may be more likely than others to find mates and to marry). Research has suggested that the benefits of marriage may be partially due to a selection effect and partially due to true benefits to be gained from being married as opposed to being unmarried (3,4). A lower mortality risk among those who are married has been shown to persist even after health in early adulthood was controlled. This suggests that at least part of the benefit of being married is not the result of selection (4).

Compared with married individuals, divorcees exhibit lower levels of psychological well-being, more health problems and greater risk of mortality, more social isolation, less satisfying sex lives, more negative life events, greater levels of depression and alcohol use, and lower levels of happiness and self-acceptance (5). The economic consequences of divorce can be severe for women. Most often, children remain with the mother after divorce; the loss of the ex-husband's income often results in a severe loss of income per capita (6,7). For men, the retention of income combined with decreased family size may actually result in an increase in his new household's income per capita (6,8).

Adverse outcomes accrue to children of divorce and children raised in single-parent families. Although not all single-parent families are the result of divorce and not all divorced mothers remain single, virtually all children of divorce spend some time in a single-parent household until the mother remarries. Even when the mother does remarry, studies suggest that children in stepfamilies are similar to children in single-parent families: both groups of children do worse than children living with two parents in terms of academic achievement, depression, and behavior problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, premarital sexual intercourse, and being arrested (9).

Compared with two-parent families, single-parent families demonstrate lower

levels of parental involvement in school activities and lower student achievement (10). Children raised in single-parent families are more likely to drop out of high school, have lower grades and attendance while in school, and are less likely to attend and graduate from college than children raised in two-parent families (11). They are more likely to be out of school and unemployed and are more likely to become single parents than children raised in two-parent families (11). Studies have found that compared with children in two-parent families, children of divorce score lower on measures of self-concept, social competence, conduct, psychological adjustment, and long-term health (5).

The positive health benefits of marriage and the negative consequences of divorce illustrate the importance of examining trends and differentials in the patterns of marriage and divorce over time.

### Trends and differences in marriage and divorce

In the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, the proportion of people's lives spent in marriage declined due to postponement of marriage to later ages, greater incidence of never marrying, and higher rates of divorce. The increase in nonmarital cohabiting has also contributed to the decline in the proportion of people's lives spent in marriage. Increasing rates of cohabitation have largely offset decreasing rates of marriage (12,13).

The proportion of time spent in marriage has varied across demographic subgroups. Since 1950, the marital patterns of white and black Americans have diverged considerably. About 91 percent of white women born in the 1950's are estimated to marry at some time in their lives, compared with only 75 percent of black women born in the 1950's (12). Black married couples are more likely to break up than white married couples, and black divorcees are less likely to remarry than white divorcees (12).

The degree of attachment to marriage among black Americans is

similar to that of white Americans as measured by attitudes towards marriage (14,15). One prominent explanation offered by some researchers for the lower proportion of time spent in marriage among black Americans is the idea of a "marriage squeeze," in which the "marriageable pool" of black men is low due to high rates of joblessness, incarceration, and mortality (16–18). Employed men are more likely than unemployed men to marry (19).

In addition to race and employment status, other characteristics of individuals that have been found to be related to the probability of marriage include education and earnings (20), intact status of family of origin, and parents' educational levels (21). Other characteristics of individuals related to the probability of *divorce* include age at marriage, education, birth cohort (22), religion, marriage cohort, fertility status at marriage (23), premarital cohabitation (24), and premarital sexual activity (25). Other characteristics related to the probability of *remarriage* include education and age at divorce (26) and presence of children from prior marriages (9,22).

The lower economic prospects of less-educated young men has been hypothesized to decrease the probability of marriage. The increasing economic independence of women has also been hypothesized to decrease the probability of marriage, although recent evidence suggests that the increasing economic independence of women may actually increase the probability of marriage because earnings and employment may make either partner an attractive potential spouse (16,20). Marriage market conditions may also play a role in that the probability of divorce is higher in areas with large numbers of economically attractive potential alternate partners (16).

A full analysis of all the individual and community-level characteristics associated with marriage and divorce is beyond the scope of this report. This report releases estimates of the patterns of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the United States as of 1995 by a few important demographic characteristics. A later report will show more detailed

estimates by a wide variety of other characteristics.

## Methods

### Data

The national estimates of marriage and divorce patterns in this report are based on data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). Cycle 5 of the NSFG, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), was based on a multi-stage probability sample of the civilian noninstitutionalized population of women in the United States. This cycle yielded estimates that are representative of women 15–44 years of age in 1995. Between January and October 1995, in-home computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) were conducted with 10,847 women, of whom 1,553 were Hispanic women, 6,483 were white non-Hispanic women, 2,446 were black non-Hispanic women, and 365 were women of other races and ethnic origins. The overall response rate was 79 percent (27).

The sample list for the 1995 NSFG was selected from households that responded to the 1993 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). Black and Hispanic women were sampled at higher rates than were other women. Sampling weights account for differential probabilities of sample selection and for nonresponse and are adjusted to agree with control totals by age, race, parity, and marital status provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. The 10,847 women in the 1995 NSFG represent the 60 million women 15–44 years of age in the civilian noninstitutionalized population of the United States in 1995. On average, each woman in the 1995 NSFG represents about 5,500 women in the population, although sample weights vary considerably from this average value depending on the respondent's race, age, and Hispanic ethnicity; the response rate for similar women; and other factors (27,28). See the [Technical notes](#) for additional information.

The 1995 NSFG collected complete retrospective histories of each woman's experiences with marriage and divorce,

including the beginning and ending dates of each marriage and the outcome of each marriage (separation, divorce, widowhood) (29). Given these data, the probabilities of first marriage disruption, of divorce after separation, of remarriage after divorce, and of second marriage disruption can be estimated using life table techniques.

Previous analyses of marriage and divorce based on vital statistics have computed and presented rates of marriage and divorce (30, 31). Rates are snapshots of data limited to specific time points. The life table analysis in this report takes a life-cycle approach to estimate the probabilities that:

- (a) a first marriage will end in separation or divorce,
- (b) a separation will result in divorce,
- (c) a divorce from a first marriage will be followed by remarriage, and
- (d) a second marriage will end in separation or divorce.

Previous analysis of divorce and remarriage based on cycle 4 of the National Survey of Family Growth used a measure of the cumulative proportion of marriages disrupted as of interview to describe the phenomena (32). An improvement over a rate, this statistic approximates the estimates that life table analysis provides. However, it is only a single measure of the cumulative proportion at the time of interview; life tables provide estimates of cumulative proportions at every time point in the life course of a marriage.

### Life tables

The life table is a tool that demographers most often use to study mortality, but it is often applied to the study of marital stability. In studying mortality, the cohort life table is a summary of the mortality history of a given cohort from birth to death and requires data on the longevity of all cohort members, a span of more than 100 years. As a result, the period life table is typically used as a model of what would happen to a given cohort if the age-specific death rates from a certain point in time were to remain fixed for the duration of the cohort's life (33,34).

As members of the cohort age, they are subjected to the age-specific death rates of successive age categories in the life table. At each interval, the age-specific death rate for that interval is used to calculate how many members of the cohort die during that interval. That number of deaths is subtracted from the count of cohort members, and the result is the number of cohort members who survive and are counted in the next interval. Eventually, the last age interval is reached and the last cohort members die. One overall measure of longevity is the proportion who survive to specific ages (33). Survivor curves can be plotted that show the proportion of the cohort surviving to each successive age category (34,35).

To apply life table analysis to the study of marital stability, the cohort of people is replaced with a cohort of marriages; age is replaced by marital duration, and death is replaced by separation or divorce. In addition, one other issue must be addressed. The sample of women is limited to ages 15–44 years, so the marriage histories are incomplete. For respondents whose marriage has not yet ended as of the time of the interview, the end date of the marriage is unknown. Therefore, the duration of the marriage is unknown and is referred to in statistical literature as "censored." Life table procedures allow for the simultaneous analysis of both complete and incomplete marriage histories (22).

Life table analysis can handle censored cases by keeping such cases in the analysis as long as they are at risk of disruption and then dropping them out once the risk is unknown (36). For example, when calculating the proportion of marriages that dissolve in each duration interval, a marriage that has existed for 24 months and is still intact at the time of the interview would remain in the denominator for each duration interval until 24 months of duration is reached, at which point the case would no longer be used in the calculations.

Widowhood removes a marriage from the risk of dissolution. The length of time that the marriage would have endured intact if the husband had not died is unknown, so cases of

widowhood are censored (removed from the analysis) at the date of the husband's death. Widowhood is very rare in the age group 15–44 years. The mortality of wives is unobservable because the woman had to have been alive to be interviewed. As the risk of mortality among women in the age range 15–44 years is low, this is unlikely to substantially affect the results.

The probability of divorce is not always the best measure of marital instability. Subgroup comparisons of the probability of divorce are not appropriate for subgroups that differ in the conditional probability of divorce given separation (37). Research has shown that the marriages of black women are more likely to end in separation than the marriages of white women, and that separated black couples are less likely to make the transition to divorce than separated white couples (22,32). Therefore, a comparison of the probability of divorce alone obscures some of the difference between these two groups in the probability that a marriage will disrupt. For this reason, in this report, marital disruption is defined as either separation or divorce, and a second analysis examines the probability of divorce, given separation.

The [Technical notes](#) include an example of a life table for the duration of first marriage and a description of each part of the life table and its role in the generation of survival statistics. In the analysis below, for the sake of brevity, only the cumulative proportion dissolved at the beginning of each interval is presented and compared across subgroups. In addition, the overall percent of cases censored is presented for each subgroup as a comparative measure of the overall likelihood of disruption. In analyses of the probability of marital disruption, subgroups with a relatively high percent censored by interview are less likely to disrupt (are more likely to have remained intact until interview).

The analysis of first marriage stability is the only analysis in this report in which there were sufficient numbers of Asian non-Hispanic women in the NSFG sample to generate reliable estimates. In all other analyses in this

**Table 1. Number and percent distribution of women 15–44 years of age by age at interview and race/ethnicity, according to past cohabitation and marital status: United States, 1995**

Age at interview and race/ethnicity	Number in thousands	Total	Past cohabitation and marital status			
			Never married		Ever married	
			Never cohabited	Ever cohabited	Never cohabited	Ever cohabited
Total . . . . .	60,201	100.0	27.5	10.2	31.4	30.9
Age at interview						
15–19 years . . . . .	8,961	100.0	88.6	7.0	2.6	1.9
20–24 years . . . . .	9,041	100.0	45.5	20.2	16.2	18.1
25–29 years . . . . .	9,693	100.0	20.3	15.4	30.4	33.9
30–34 years . . . . .	11,065	100.0	10.8	9.3	37.8	42.1
35–39 years . . . . .	11,211	100.0	7.1	6.4	42.9	43.6
40–44 years . . . . .	10,230	100.0	5.5	4.1	51.5	38.9
Race/ethnicity						
Hispanic . . . . .	6,702	100.0	28.2	10.4	35.1	26.3
White non-Hispanic . . . . .	42,522	100.0	24.7	8.9	32.7	33.7
Black non-Hispanic . . . . .	8,210	100.0	39.7	17.3	20.2	22.9
Other non-Hispanic . . . . .	2,767	100.0	33.2	8.3	35.1	23.4

report, Asian non-Hispanic women are included in the analysis of the full sample, but omitted from separate analysis (see [Technical notes](#)).

The statistics in this report were computed using the Lifetest procedure in version 8 of PC-SAS (38).

## Results

### Cohabitation and marital status

[Table 1](#) shows the distribution of women 15–44 years of age in 1995 by past cohabitation and marital status, age at interview, and race/ethnicity. Past cohabitation and marital status is categorized as never married or ever married, with each group further split into two subgroups separating the never cohabited from the ever cohabited. These four subgroups are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, summing to 100 percent.

Almost 28 percent of women ages 15–44 years have no union experience, having never married nor cohabited ([table 1](#)). This percent is considerably larger for young women and decreases as age increases. About 62 percent of women have ever been married, half of whom have ever cohabited. The remaining 10 percent have cohabited, but never married. White non-Hispanic women are more likely to have experienced both cohabitation and

marriage, and black non-Hispanic women are more likely to have experienced neither cohabitation nor marriage ([table 1](#)).

[Table 2](#) shows the distribution of women 15–44 years of age in 1995, by current cohabitation and marital status at interview, age at interview, and race/ethnicity. Current cohabitation and marital status is categorized as currently cohabiting or not currently cohabiting. The category not currently cohabiting is further split into never married, formerly married, or currently married. These four subgroups are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, summing to 100 percent.

Roughly 50 percent of women ages 15–44 years are currently married, and 7 percent of women ages 15–44 years are currently cohabiting ([table 2](#)). One third of women ages 15–44 years are not cohabiting and have never married. The remaining 10 percent are not cohabiting and are formerly married. The percent currently cohabiting is larger for young adults in their twenties, and then decreases as age increases. The percent never married decreases as age increases, while the percent formerly married and the percent currently married increase as age increases. The most striking differences by race/ethnicity are the higher percent not cohabiting and never married and the

**Table 2. Number and percent distribution of women 15–44 years of age by age at interview and race/ethnicity, according to current cohabitation and marital status: United States, 1995**

Age at interview and race/ethnicity	Number in thousands	Total	Current cohabitation and marital status			
			Currently cohabiting	Not cohabiting		
				Never married	Formerly married	Currently married
Total . . . . .	60,201	100.0	7.0	33.4	10.3	49.3
<b>Age at interview</b>						
15–19 years . . . . .	8,961	100.0	4.1	91.5	0.6	3.8
20–24 years . . . . .	9,041	100.0	11.2	56.1	5.5	27.2
25–29 years . . . . .	9,693	100.0	9.8	28.9	8.8	52.5
30–34 years . . . . .	11,065	100.0	7.5	16.2	11.6	64.7
35–39 years . . . . .	11,211	100.0	5.3	11.9	15.0	67.9
40–44 years . . . . .	10,230	100.0	4.4	8.8	18.1	68.6
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>						
Hispanic . . . . .	6,702	100.0	8.2	32.8	11.6	47.4
White non-Hispanic . . . . .	42,522	100.0	7.0	29.4	9.3	54.3
Black non-Hispanic . . . . .	8,210	100.0	6.9	52.5	15.5	25.2
Other non-Hispanic . . . . .	2,767	100.0	4.6	39.1	7.6	48.8

**Table 3. Probability of first marriage disruption by duration of marriage and wife's age at marriage: United States, 1995**

Proportion of first marriages disrupted <sup>1</sup> after—	Total	Age			
		Less than 18 years	18–19 years	20–24 years	25 years and over
0 months . . . . .	—	—	—	—	—
6 months . . . . .	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
12 months . . . . .	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.02
18 months . . . . .	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.04	0.04
24 months . . . . .	0.07	0.10	0.09	0.06	0.05
30 months . . . . .	0.09	0.13	0.12	0.08	0.06
36 months . . . . .	0.12	0.17	0.15	0.10	0.08
42 months . . . . .	0.14	0.20	0.18	0.12	0.10
48 months . . . . .	0.16	0.23	0.20	0.14	0.11
54 months . . . . .	0.18	0.27	0.22	0.16	0.13
60 months . . . . .	0.20	0.29	0.24	0.17	0.15
72 months . . . . .	0.23	0.34	0.28	0.19	0.17
84 months . . . . .	0.26	0.39	0.32	0.22	0.19
96 months . . . . .	0.29	0.42	0.35	0.25	0.20
108 months . . . . .	0.31	0.45	0.37	0.27	0.22
120 months . . . . .	0.33	0.48	0.40	0.29	0.24
132 months . . . . .	0.35	0.49	0.42	0.31	0.26
144 months . . . . .	0.38	0.52	0.44	0.33	0.29
156 months . . . . .	0.39	0.54	0.46	0.33	0.30
168 months . . . . .	0.41	0.57	0.47	0.35	0.31
180 months . . . . .	0.43	0.59	0.49	0.36	0.35
192 months . . . . .	0.44	0.60	0.51	0.37	<sup>2</sup> 0.36
204 months . . . . .	0.46	0.62	0.53	0.38	<sup>2</sup> 0.43
216 months . . . . .	0.47	0.63	0.54	0.39	<sup>2</sup> 0.43
228 months . . . . .	0.48	0.65	0.55	0.40	<sup>2</sup> 0.43
240 months . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 0.50	0.67	0.56	0.41	---
Percent censored (intact at interview) . . . . .	66.00	41.90	53.10	71.70	81.50

— Quantity zero.

--- Data not available.

<sup>1</sup>Disruption refers to either separation or divorce.<sup>2</sup>Estimates may be affected by bias resulting from incomplete marriage histories and should be interpreted with caution. The durations in subsequent tables are limited to avoid this possible bias. For details, see section on "First marriages by wife's age at marriage."

NOTE: This table includes all first marriages of women 15–44 years of age in 1995.

lower percent currently married among black non-Hispanic women.

The focus of this report is on marriage. A more detailed analysis of cohabitation is beyond the scope of this report. A later report will include analysis of cohabitation, including analysis of the probability of cohabitational dissolution, the probability of a cohabitation making the transition to marriage, and the probability of cohabitation after the dissolution of the first marriage.

### First marriage

After 5 years, 20 percent of all first marriages have disrupted, due to separation or divorce (table 3). Data from the former divorce registration system reported only divorces, not separations (31). While 26.5 percent of women have divorced at the end of 10 years of marriage, 33 percent of all first marriages have disrupted due to either separation or divorce at the end of 10 years (NSFG cycle 5 results not shown). Separation and divorce are both classified as marital dissolution because different groups have differential probabilities of making the transition from separation to divorce (22,37).

*First marriages by wife's age at marriage*—If the wife was a teenager at first marriage, the marriage is much more likely to dissolve than if the wife was at least 20 years of age at marriage. The first marriages of brides under age 18 years are the most likely to dissolve at all marital durations, followed by the marriages of women 18–19 years of age at marriage. Marriages of women at least age 20 years at marriage are much less likely to dissolve (table 3 and figure 1). After 10 years of marriage, 48 percent of marriages of women under age 18 years at marriage have disrupted compared with 40 percent of marriages of women who were 18–19 years of age at marriage, 29 percent of marriages of women who were 20–24 years of age at marriage, and 24 percent of marriages of women at least 25 years of age at marriage. The difference in the probability of disruption between women ages 20–24 years and women at least 25 years of age at marriage is not statistically significant, but the difference

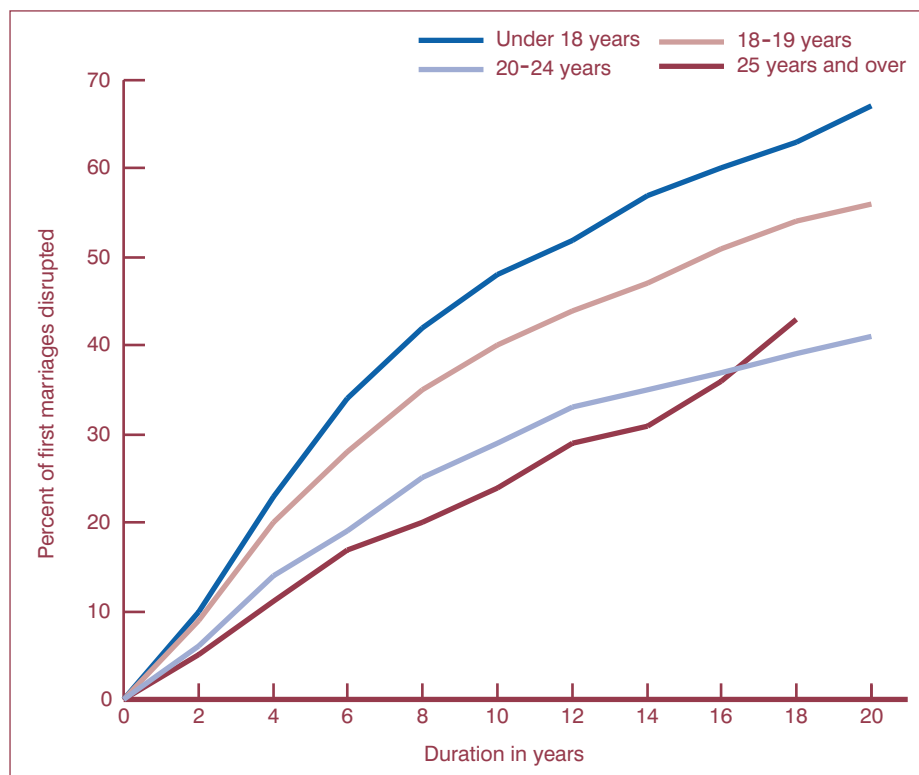


Figure 1. Probability of first marriage disruption by duration of marriage and wife's age at marriage: United States, 1995

between those over age 20 years and those under age 20 years at marriage is significant.

As noted earlier, a larger percent censored means that more marriages were still intact at the time of the interview. Due to the age limitation on the sample (15–44 years old), the older the age at marriage, the shorter the average time span available between marriage and interview, and the less likely that enough time has passed for marital dissolution to occur. Thus, the percent censored increases with age at marriage (table 3).

A woman 30 years of age at the time of her marriage cannot be included in a measure of the probability of dissolution after 20 years of marriage because she would have been 50 years of age at 20 years' duration of marriage, and the maximum age of women in the NSFG sample was 44 years old. Due to the age limitation on the sample, the longer the period of observation, the younger the women must be at marriage to fit within the duration limits. Estimates about the later durations are

Table 4. Probability of first marriage disruption by duration of marriage and wife's race/ethnicity: United States, 1995

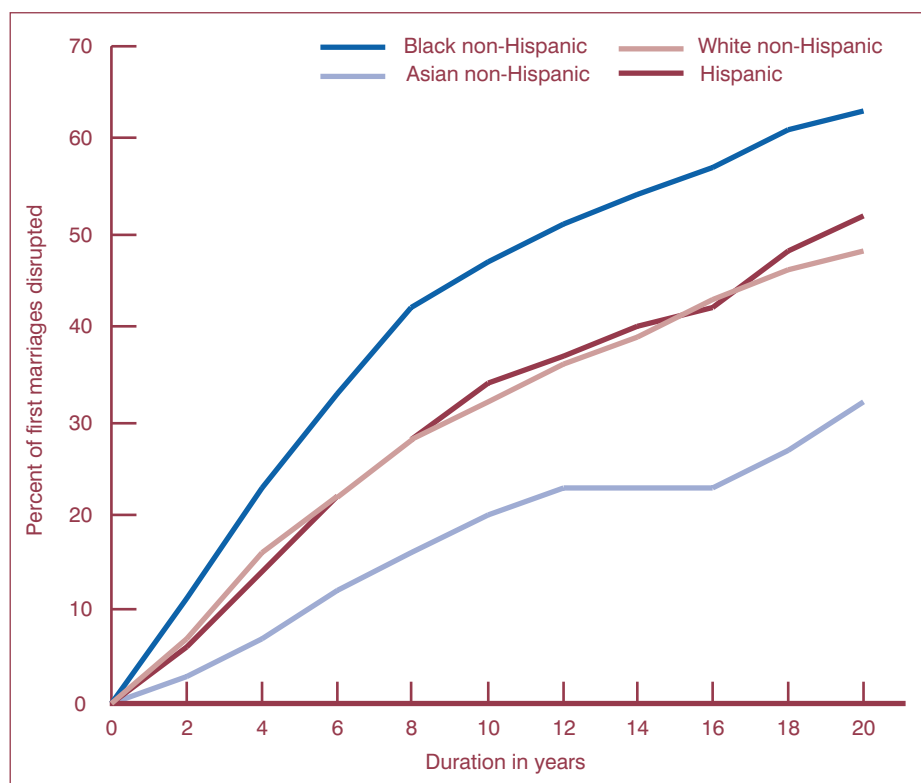
Proportion of first marriages disrupted <sup>1</sup> after—	Total	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Asian non-Hispanic	Hispanic
0 months . . . . .	—	—	—	—	—
6 months . . . . .	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01
12 months . . . . .	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.01	0.03
18 months . . . . .	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.02	0.05
24 months . . . . .	0.07	0.07	0.11	0.03	0.06
30 months . . . . .	0.09	0.09	0.13	0.04	0.09
36 months . . . . .	0.12	0.12	0.15	0.06	0.11
42 months . . . . .	0.14	0.14	0.19	0.07	0.13
48 months . . . . .	0.16	0.16	0.23	0.07	0.14
54 months . . . . .	0.18	0.18	0.25	0.08	0.16
60 months . . . . .	0.20	0.20	0.28	0.10	0.17
72 months . . . . .	0.23	0.22	0.33	0.12	0.22
84 months . . . . .	0.26	0.25	0.38	0.15	0.26
96 months . . . . .	0.29	0.28	0.42	0.16	0.28
108 months . . . . .	0.31	0.30	0.44	0.18	0.32
120 months . . . . .	0.33	0.32	0.47	0.20	0.34
132 months . . . . .	0.35	0.34	0.49	0.23	0.35
144 months . . . . .	0.38	0.36	0.51	0.23	0.37
156 months . . . . .	0.39	0.38	0.53	0.23	0.38
168 months . . . . .	0.41	0.39	0.54	0.23	0.40
180 months . . . . .	0.43	0.42	0.55	0.23	0.42
192 months . . . . .	0.44	0.43	0.57	0.23	0.42
204 months . . . . .	0.46	0.45	0.60	0.27	0.46
216 months . . . . .	0.47	0.46	0.61	0.27	0.48
228 months . . . . .	0.48	0.47	0.61	0.27	0.49
240 months . . . . .	<sup>2</sup> 0.50	<sup>2</sup> 0.48	<sup>2</sup> 0.63	<sup>2</sup> 0.31	<sup>2</sup> 0.52
Percent censored (intact at interview) . . . . .	66.00	66.30	56.00	83.10	67.90

— Quantity zero.

<sup>1</sup>Disruption refers to either separation or divorce.

<sup>2</sup>Estimates may be affected by bias resulting from incomplete marriage histories and should be interpreted with caution. The durations in subsequent tables are limited to avoid this possible bias. For details, see section on "First marriages by wife's age at marriage."

NOTE: This table includes all first marriages of women 15–44 years of age in 1995.



affected by this limitation, tables and graphs in this report are truncated as necessary. The events examined in this report include first marriage dissolution, the transition from separation to divorce, second marriage, and second marriage dissolution. The higher the average age at the event, the more truncation is necessary to avoid this potential bias. In the future, the NSFG could address this issue by interviewing women up to 54 or 59 years of age.

*First marriages by wife's race/ethnicity*—The probability of first marital disruption varies by race/ethnicity. After 10 years, 32 percent of first marriages of white non-Hispanic women have dissolved, and 34 percent of first marriages of Hispanic people have dissolved (table 4). In sharp contrast, 47 percent of first marriages among black non-Hispanic women have dissolved after 10 years. First marriages of Asian non-Hispanic women dissolve at a considerably slower rate: after 10 years, only 20 percent have disrupted (table 4 and figure 2).

The lower percent censored for black non-Hispanic women in table 4 is a reflection of their lower likelihood of remaining married until the time of the

**Figure 2. Probability of first marriage disruption by duration of marriage and wife's race/ethnicity: United States, 1995**

therefore biased towards the experiences of younger women at marriage. Because younger age at marriage is associated with a higher probability of disruption,

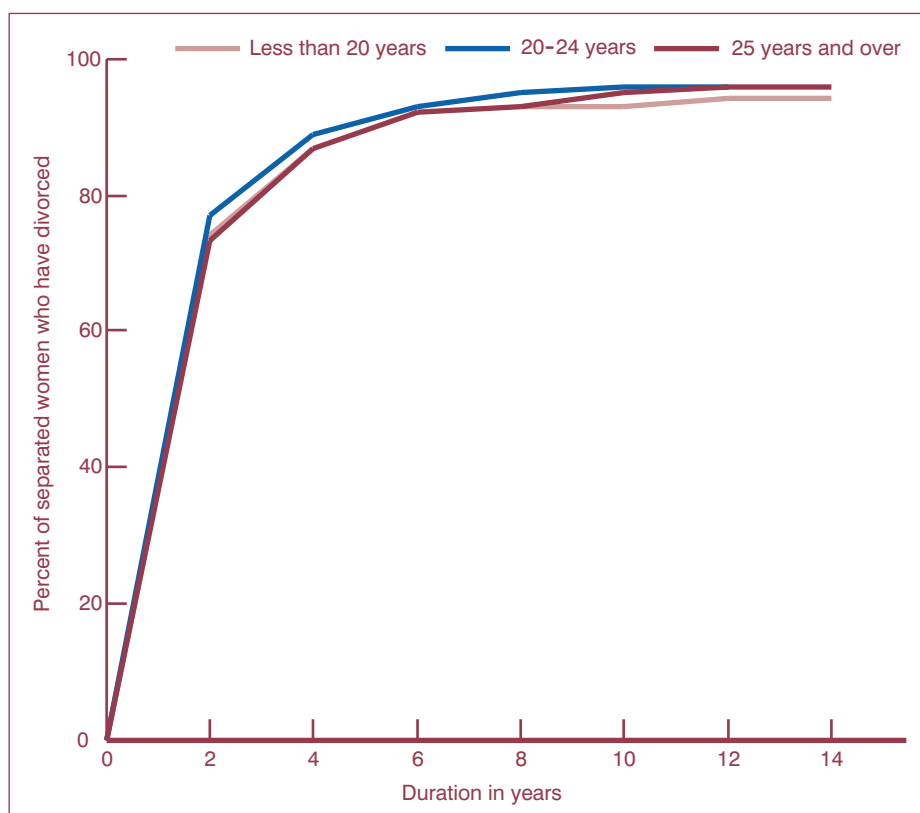
this means that estimates towards the later durations may be overestimates of the probability of disruption. To avoid awkwardness in describing results

**Table 5. Probability of first marriage separations making the transition to divorce by duration of separation and wife's age at separation: United States, 1995**

Proportion of first separations that have made the transition to divorce after—	Total	Age		
		Less than 20 years	20–24 years	25 years and over
0 months . . . . .	—	—	—	—
6 months . . . . .	0.32	0.41	0.33	0.29
12 months . . . . .	0.54	0.58	0.57	0.51
18 months . . . . .	0.69	0.70	0.72	0.66
24 months . . . . .	0.75	0.74	0.77	0.73
30 months . . . . .	0.80	0.82	0.82	0.79
36 months . . . . .	0.84	0.84	0.86	0.83
42 months . . . . .	0.86	0.86	0.88	0.85
48 months . . . . .	0.88	0.87	0.89	0.87
54 months . . . . .	0.89	0.89	0.91	0.89
60 months . . . . .	0.91	0.89	0.92	0.90
72 months . . . . .	0.92	0.92	0.93	0.92
84 months . . . . .	0.93	0.93	0.94	0.92
96 months . . . . .	0.94	0.93	0.95	0.93
108 months . . . . .	0.94	0.93	0.95	0.94
120 months . . . . .	0.95	0.93	0.96	0.95
132 months . . . . .	0.95	0.94	0.96	0.96
144 months . . . . .	0.95	0.94	0.96	0.96
156 months . . . . .	0.95	0.94	0.96	0.96
168 months . . . . .	0.95	0.94	0.96	0.96
180 months . . . . .	0.96	0.94	0.96	0.97
Percent censored (not yet divorced as of interview) . . . . .	13.60	9.10	8.70	18.00

— Quantity zero.

NOTE: This table includes all separations from first marriages of women 15–44 years of age in 1995.



interview, and the higher percent censored for Asian non-Hispanic women reflects their higher likelihood of remaining married until interview.

### Divorce following separation

There are no statistically significant differences by age at separation in the probability of divorce given separation (table 5 and figure 3). Figure 3 shows that the probability of divorce is virtually identical across all age groups at all durations of separation. Most separated women make the transition to divorce very quickly: 75 percent make the transition to divorce within 2 years, and 90 percent do so within 5 years (table 5).

The separations of white non-Hispanic women are much more likely to result in divorce than the separations of black non-Hispanic and Hispanic women (table 6 and figure 4). The separations of black non-Hispanic women are the least likely to result in divorce, but differences between black non-Hispanic and Hispanic women are

**Figure 3. Probability of divorce by duration of separation and wife's age at separation: United States, 1995**

**Table 6. Probability of first marriage separations making the transition to divorce by duration of separation and wife's race/ethnicity: United States, 1995**

Proportion of first separations that have made the transition to divorce after—	Total	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Hispanic
0 months . . . . .	—	—	—	—
6 months . . . . .	0.32	0.36	0.20	0.22
12 months . . . . .	0.54	0.60	0.30	0.40
18 months . . . . .	0.69	0.76	0.42	0.52
24 months . . . . .	0.75	0.82	0.46	0.56
30 months . . . . .	0.80	0.88	0.52	0.62
36 months . . . . .	0.84	0.91	0.57	0.66
42 months . . . . .	0.86	0.93	0.60	0.69
48 months . . . . .	0.88	0.94	0.62	0.71
54 months . . . . .	0.89	0.96	0.65	0.73
60 months . . . . .	0.91	0.97	0.67	0.77
72 months . . . . .	0.92	0.98	0.72	0.80
84 months . . . . .	0.93	0.98	0.74	0.81
96 months . . . . .	0.94	0.98	0.76	0.82
108 months . . . . .	0.94	0.98	0.78	0.84
120 months . . . . .	0.95	0.99	0.79	0.85
132 months . . . . .	0.95	0.99	0.83	0.85
144 months . . . . .	0.95	0.99	0.83	0.85
156 months . . . . .	0.95	0.99	0.83	0.85
168 months . . . . .	0.95	0.99	0.83	0.85
180 months . . . . .	0.96	0.99	0.84	0.85
Percent censored (not yet divorced as of interview) . . . . .	13.60	8.90	30.60	25.90

— Quantity zero.

NOTE: This table includes all separations from first marriages of women 15–44 years of age in 1995.



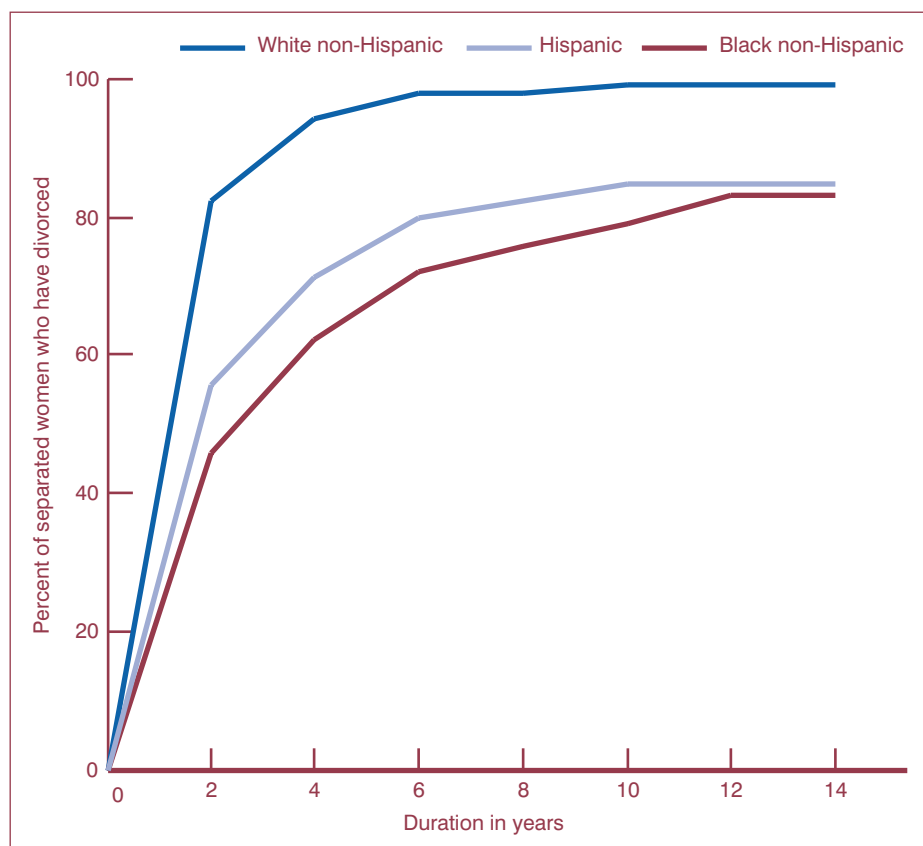


Figure 4. Probability of divorce by duration of separation and wife's race/ethnicity: United States, 1995

slight. Virtually all separations of white non-Hispanic women result in divorce very quickly: table 6 shows that 91 percent make the transition to divorce within 3 years of the separation. The very low percent censored for white non-Hispanic women shows that there were very few of them whose separations had not yet resulted in divorce by the time of the interview.

Figure 4 shows that for the first 5 years of the separation, Hispanic women are more likely than black non-Hispanic women to make the transition to divorce (table 6). After 5 years of separation, differences in the probability of divorce between separated Hispanic and black non-Hispanic women are not statistically significant. A substantial proportion (15 percent or more) of Hispanic and black non-Hispanic women who are separated remain separated for the long term.

### Remarriage following divorce

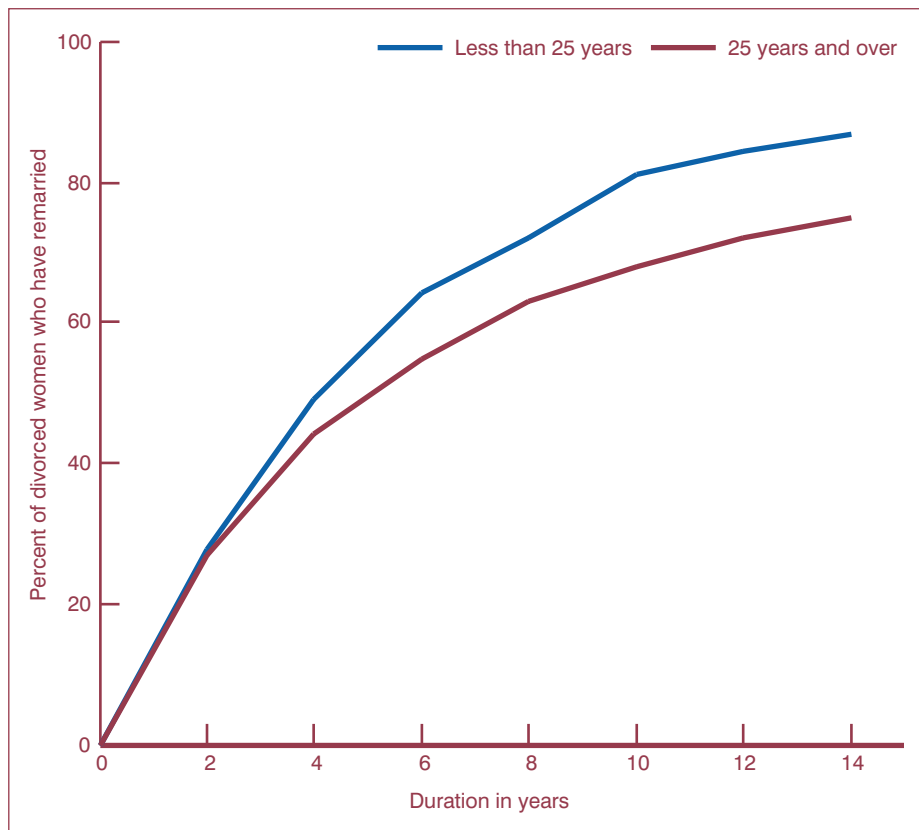
Seventy-five percent of divorced women remarry within 10 years (table 7). The probability of remarriage

Table 7. Probability of second marriage by duration of first divorce and woman's age at divorce: United States, 1995

Proportion of divorced women who have remarried after—	Total	Age	
		Less than 25 years	25 years and over
0 months . . . . .	—	—	—
6 months . . . . .	0.09	0.09	0.09
12 months . . . . .	0.15	0.17	0.14
18 months . . . . .	0.23	0.24	0.21
24 months . . . . .	0.28	0.28	0.27
30 months . . . . .	0.34	0.36	0.33
36 months . . . . .	0.39	0.41	0.37
42 months . . . . .	0.43	0.45	0.41
48 months . . . . .	0.47	0.49	0.44
54 months . . . . .	0.51	0.54	0.48
60 months . . . . .	0.54	0.57	0.51
72 months . . . . .	0.59	0.64	0.55
84 months . . . . .	0.62	0.67	0.58
96 months . . . . .	0.68	0.72	0.63
108 months . . . . .	0.71	0.77	0.65
120 months . . . . .	0.75	0.81	0.68
132 months . . . . .	0.77	0.83	0.70
144 months . . . . .	0.78	0.84	0.72
156 months . . . . .	0.80	0.86	0.73
168 months . . . . .	0.81	0.87	0.75
180 months . . . . .	0.83	0.88	0.76
Percent censored (not yet remarried as of interview) . . .	37.90	24.60	47.60

— Quantity zero.

NOTE: This table includes all first divorces of women 15–44 years of age in 1995.



is significantly higher for women who were younger at divorce: after 10 years of divorce, 81 percent of women who were under age 25 at divorce have remarried compared with 68 percent of women age 25 years and older at divorce (table 7 and figure 5). The analysis of remarriage by age at divorce is constrained to these two age categories due to the combination of two factors: very small numbers of women in the sample were under age 20 years at divorce, and the age limitation on the sample results in small numbers of women over age 30 years at divorce reaching late durations of divorce.

Black non-Hispanic women are the least likely to remarry, and white non-Hispanic women are the most likely to remarry (table 8 and figure 6). The curves in figure 6 show that the chance for remarriage for Hispanic women falls between that of white non-Hispanic and black non-Hispanic women. At early durations, the curve for Hispanic women is closer to that of black non-Hispanic women (and the difference between Hispanic and black non-Hispanic women is not statistically significant).

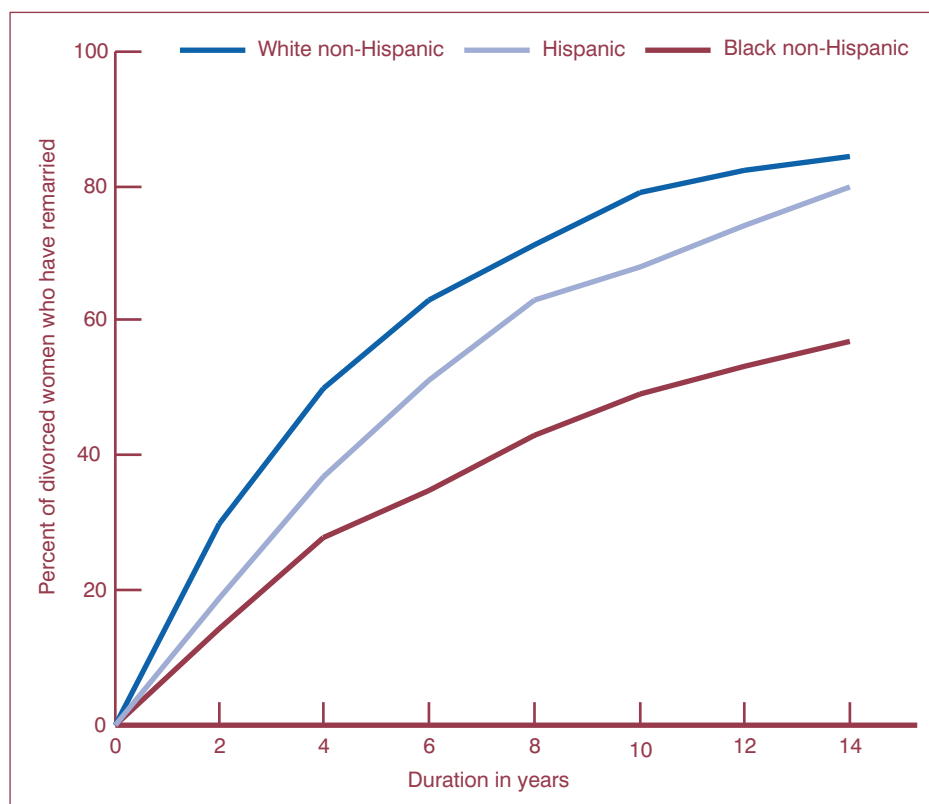
**Figure 5. Probability of remarriage by duration of divorce and woman's age at divorce: United States, 1995**

**Table 8. Probability of second marriage by duration of first divorce and woman's race/ethnicity: United States, 1995**

Proportion of divorced women who have remarried after—	Total	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Hispanic
0 months . . . . .	—	—	—	—
6 months . . . . .	0.09	0.10	0.05	0.05
12 months . . . . .	0.15	0.17	0.08	0.08
18 months . . . . .	0.23	0.25	0.12	0.13
24 months . . . . .	0.28	0.30	0.14	0.19
30 months . . . . .	0.34	0.37	0.20	0.25
36 months . . . . .	0.39	0.42	0.23	0.29
42 months . . . . .	0.43	0.46	0.26	0.34
48 months . . . . .	0.47	0.50	0.28	0.37
54 months . . . . .	0.51	0.55	0.31	0.42
60 months . . . . .	0.54	0.58	0.32	0.44
72 months . . . . .	0.59	0.63	0.35	0.51
84 months . . . . .	0.62	0.67	0.39	0.54
96 months . . . . .	0.68	0.71	0.43	0.63
108 months . . . . .	0.71	0.75	0.45	0.65
120 months . . . . .	0.75	0.79	0.49	0.68
132 months . . . . .	0.77	0.81	0.52	0.72
144 months . . . . .	0.78	0.82	0.53	0.74
156 months . . . . .	0.80	0.84	0.56	0.75
168 months . . . . .	0.81	0.84	0.57	0.80
180 months . . . . .	0.83	0.86	0.62	0.82
Percent censored (not yet remarried as of interview) . . .	37.90	34.10	61.30	44.10

— Quantity zero.

NOTE: This table includes all first divorces of women 15–44 years of age in 1995.



49 percent of black non-Hispanic divorcees, and 68 percent of Hispanic divorcees have remarried. The percent censored (not remarried as of the time of the interview) for black non-Hispanic women in table 8 is much higher than that of white non-Hispanic or Hispanic women, reflecting the lower likelihood of remarriage by the time of interview for black non-Hispanic women.

**Second marriage**

After 10 years of remarriage, 47 percent of remarriages of women under age 25 years at remarriage have dissolved, compared with only 34 percent of remarriages to women at least age 25 years at remarriage (table 9 and figure 7). For the first 7 years of remarriage, the differences are in the same direction, but they are not statistically significant.

Due to small sample sizes of Hispanic and black non-Hispanic remarriages, differences in the probability of second marriage disruption among the three racial/ethnic subgroups are not statistically significant at any duration of remarriage. However, table 10 shows that after 10 years of remarriage, 48 percent of black non-Hispanic women's remarriages, 39 percent of white non-Hispanic women's remarriages, and 29 percent of

**Figure 6. Probability of remarriage by duration of divorce and woman's race/ethnicity: United States, 1995**

At later durations, the curve for Hispanic women converges with that of white non-Hispanic women (and the difference between Hispanic and white non-Hispanic women is not statistically significant).

Table 8 shows that within 5 years of divorce, 58 percent of white non-Hispanic women have remarried, while 44 percent of Hispanic and 32 percent of black non-Hispanic women have done so. After 10 years of divorce, 79 percent of white non-Hispanic divorcees,

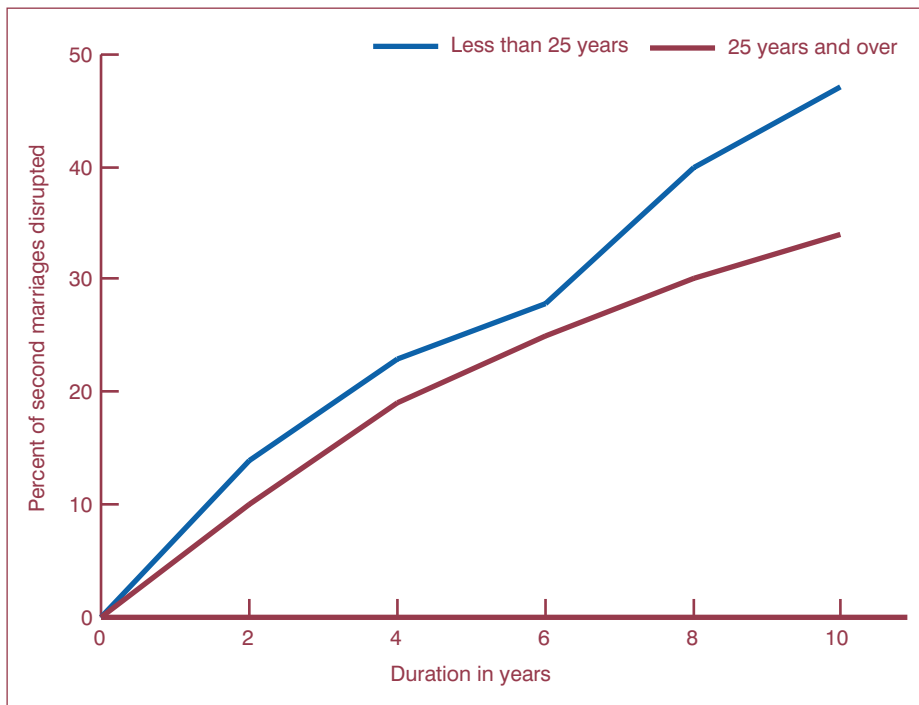
**Table 9. Probability of second marriage disruption by duration of marriage and wife's age at remarriage: United States, 1995**

Proportion of second marriages disrupted after—	Total	Age	
		Less than 25 years	25 years and over
0 months . . . . .	—	—	—
6 months . . . . .	0.02	0.03	0.02
12 months . . . . .	0.05	0.06	0.05
18 months . . . . .	0.08	0.09	0.08
24 months . . . . .	0.11	0.14	0.10
30 months . . . . .	0.13	0.16	0.12
36 months . . . . .	0.15	0.18	0.14
42 months . . . . .	0.17	0.21	0.16
48 months . . . . .	0.20	0.23	0.19
54 months . . . . .	0.21	0.24	0.20
60 months . . . . .	0.23	0.25	0.22
72 months . . . . .	0.26	0.28	0.25
84 months . . . . .	0.29	0.34	0.27
96 months . . . . .	0.34	0.40	0.30
108 months . . . . .	0.37	0.44	0.32
120 months . . . . .	0.39	0.47	0.34
Percent censored (intact at interview) . . . . .	68.50	51.10	75.00

— Quantity zero.

<sup>1</sup>Disruption refers to either separation or divorce.

NOTE: This table includes all second marriages of women 15–44 years of age in 1995.



**Figure 7. Probability of second marriage disruption by duration of marriage and wife's age at remarriage: United States, 1995**

Hispanic women's remarriages have disrupted (table 10 and figure 8). Although the differences are not significant, prior research has suggested that the remarriages of black women are less stable than those of white women (22). McCarthy's research did not consider Hispanic women separately because the number of Hispanic women

in the sample was too small to be analyzed separately.

**Trends over time**

The statistics presented in this report are based on data from cycle 5 of the NSFG, collected in 1995. Cycle 1 of the NSFG was collected in 1973. Some of the statistics in this report are

comparable with statistics presented in a published analysis of the cycle 1 data (22). The cumulative probability of first marriage dissolution after 10 years of marriage was 0.20 in 1973 and 0.33 in 1995. The probability of second marriage dissolution after 10 years of marriage was 0.29 in 1973 and 0.39 in 1995. Marital dissolution is more likely now than in the past for both first and second marriages.

Comparisons of estimates of the probability of marital dissolution by race/ethnicity are also possible. In the cycle 1 analysis, there were very few Hispanic women in the sample so women were grouped by race without regard to Hispanic origin. Estimates of marital dissolution were presented for all white women and for all black women regardless of Hispanic ethnicity. The cycle 5 estimates of marital dissolution are recalculated for all white women and all black women to provide comparability with the cycle 1 analysis.

Comparing the recalculated 1995 estimates with the 1973 estimates, the probability of first marital dissolution after 10 years of marriage was 0.18 for white women in 1973 and 0.32 in 1995. The probability of first marital dissolution was 0.40 for black women in 1973 and 0.47 in 1995. The probability of second marital dissolution after 10 years of marriage was 0.28 for white women in 1973 and 0.39 in 1995. The

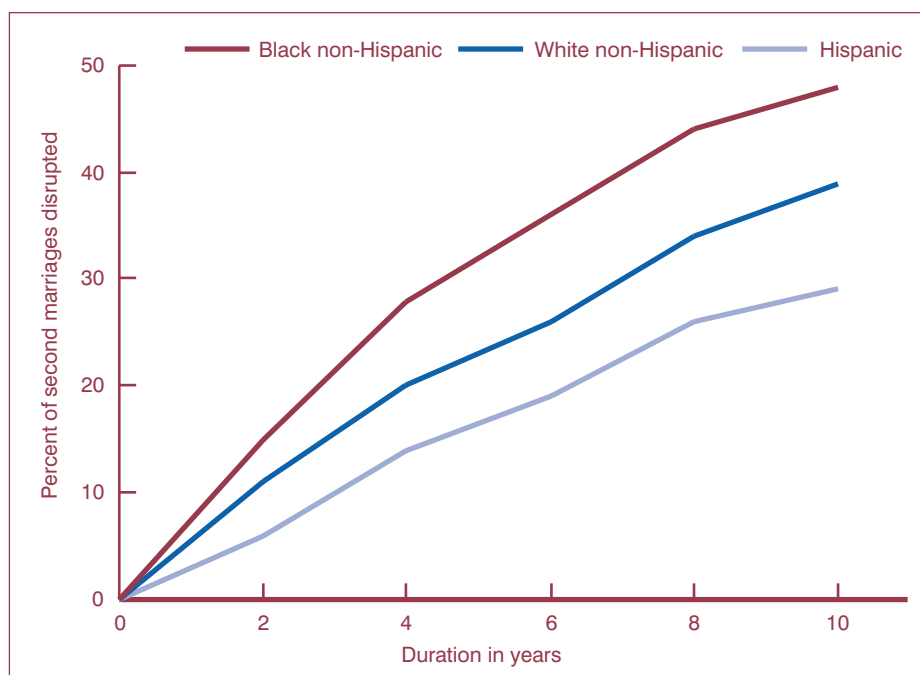
**Table 10. Probability of second marriage disruption by duration of marriage and wife's race/ethnicity: United States, 1995**

Proportion of second marriages disrupted <sup>1</sup> after—	Total	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Hispanic
0 months . . . . .	—	—	—	—
6 months . . . . .	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.02
12 months . . . . .	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.05
18 months . . . . .	0.08	0.08	0.12	0.06
24 months . . . . .	0.11	0.11	0.15	0.06
30 months . . . . .	0.13	0.14	0.17	0.07
36 months . . . . .	0.15	0.16	0.21	0.08
42 months . . . . .	0.17	0.18	0.24	0.10
48 months . . . . .	0.20	0.20	0.28	0.14
54 months . . . . .	0.21	0.21	0.29	0.16
60 months . . . . .	0.23	0.23	0.32	0.17
72 months . . . . .	0.26	0.26	0.36	0.19
84 months . . . . .	0.29	0.30	0.39	0.22
96 months . . . . .	0.34	0.34	0.44	0.26
108 months . . . . .	0.37	0.37	0.48	0.26
120 months . . . . .	0.39	0.39	0.48	0.29
Percent censored (intact at interview) . . . . .	68.50	67.80	57.90	79.50

— Quantity zero.

<sup>1</sup>Disruption refers to either separation or divorce.

NOTE: This table includes all second marriages of women 15–44 years of age in 1995.



**Figure 8. Probability of second marriage disruption by duration of marriage and wife's race/ethnicity: United States, 1995**

probability of second marital dissolution was 0.29 for black women in 1973 and 0.47 in 1995. For both white and black women, the probability of marital dissolution appears to have grown over this 22-year period for both first and second marriages.

## Summary and discussion

Higher age at first marriage is associated with longer marital durations. Age at separation is not significantly related to the probability that a separation will result in divorce. Women at least age 25 years at the time of divorce are less likely to remarry than women under age 25 years at divorce. Women younger than 25 years old at remarriage are more likely to experience a second marital disruption than are women over age 25 years at remarriage, although this difference only becomes statistically significant at later durations of a second marriage.

In each comparison of racial/ethnic subgroups, the results consistently suggest that the marriages of black non-Hispanic women are less stable than those of white non-Hispanic or Hispanic women. The first marriages of black non-Hispanic women disrupt faster than the first marriages of other women. The

separations of black non-Hispanic women are much less likely to make the transition to divorce, and the interval between divorce and remarriage is longer for this group. The data suggest that the remarriages of black non-Hispanic women disrupt faster than the remarriages of other women. Some researchers have suggested that these differences may be related to higher rates of unemployment, incarceration, and mortality; lower levels of educational attainment and earnings; previous experiences as children of unmarried or less-educated parents; and higher rates of poverty and lack of job opportunities in the communities in which black Americans live (12,18,19).

Comparisons among women of other races are not as consistent. There is no significant difference between white non-Hispanic and Hispanic women in the stability of the first marriage. White non-Hispanic women are more likely to make the transition from separation to divorce than Hispanic women and are more likely to remarry than Hispanic women. However, remarriages among Hispanic people appear to last longer than the remarriages of white non-Hispanic women, although this final finding is not statistically significant. Although the

numbers of Asian non-Hispanic women were not sufficient for most analyses, the data suggest that the first marriages of Asian women are more stable than those of other groups.

Undoubtedly, there are complex economic, social, and community factors that affect the differences found in this report. Some of these factors will be investigated further in a subsequent report on marriage, divorce, and cohabitation in the United States.

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## Technical notes

### Definitions of terms

*Cohabitation and marital status*—The categories of past and current cohabitation and marital status were derived from two variables in the NSFG cycle 5, formal marital status at interview and informal marital status at interview. The formal marital status variable classifies women according to their legal marital status at interview (married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married), and the informal marital status variable includes an additional category, “not married, but living with a partner.” Both variables are required to determine the legal marital status of cohabiting women. An additional variable, “ever cohabited outside of marriage,” was used to determine whether women had ever cohabited.

*Marital duration*—The duration of a first marriage is calculated as the number of months between the beginning of the first marriage and the separation or divorce, or alternatively, between the beginning of the marriage and the date of interview, if censored by the interview. The duration of the second marriage is similarly calculated as the number of months between the beginning of the second marriage and the separation or divorce, or between the beginning of the marriage and the date of the interview, if censored by the interview.

*Marital disruption/dissolution*—Disruption and dissolution are used interchangeably and are defined as either separation or divorce. Widowhood is very rare in the age range for the sample and is not defined as disruption. Widowhood removes a marriage from the risk of disruption via separation or divorce. Because the duration of the marriage is unknown if the spouse had survived, such cases are treated as censored and the date of the spouse’s death is used as the end date for calculating duration.

*Separation*—Separation is defined at the date when the husband and wife stopped living together for the last time.

*Divorce*—Divorce is defined at the date the divorce became finalized.

*Remarriage*—Remarriage refers to the second marriage. Third and higher-order marriages are not included in the statistics in this report.

*Age at marriage*—The wife’s age at marriage is calculated as the number of months between the date of birth and the date of the marriage, divided by 12, and truncated to the integer value.

*Age at separation*—The wife’s age at separation is calculated as the number of months between the date of birth and the date of the separation, divided by 12, and truncated to the integer value.

*Age at divorce*—The wife’s age at divorce is calculated as the number of months between the date of birth and the date of the divorce, divided by 12, and truncated to the integer value.

*Age at remarriage*—The wife’s age at remarriage is calculated as the number of months between the date of birth and the date of the remarriage, divided by 12, and truncated to the integer value.

*Race and Hispanic origin*—Women who answered “yes” to the following question were classified as Hispanic: “Are you of Hispanic or Spanish origin?” Those who answered “yes” were asked “Are you Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, or a member of some other group?” All other women were classified according to race, based on responses to the following question: “Which of the groups best describes your racial background?” The response categories were “Alaskan native or American Indian,” “Asian or Pacific Islander,” “Black” and “White.” Women who selected more than one race category were asked to select the one category that best describes them. Alaskan native or American Indian non-Hispanic women are too small a group for reliable estimates from this sample and are omitted from all analyses by racial/ethnic subgroups. Asian non-Hispanic women are too small a group for reliable estimates for most of the analyses by racial/ethnic subgroups and are omitted as necessary.

*Life table analysis*—Life table analysis is a methodology that estimates probabilities of death at each duration of life, adapted for marital stability analysis to estimate probabilities of marital events given that the relationship has

endured intact to specific duration values. For further definition of the term, see the Methods section.

*Censored*—A case is termed “censored” if it is removed from the risk of an event before that event has occurred. For a marriage that is intact at interview, the eventual date of marital disruption is unknown. Therefore, it is referred to as “censored by interview.” For a marriage that ended in widowhood, the eventual date of marital disruption, had the husband survived, is unknown. Therefore, it is referred to as “censored by widowhood.” For a further explanation, see the Methods section of the text.

### Sample sizes

The estimates of first marriage duration are based on 6,841 first marriages in the 1995 NSFG. The estimates of the duration of the separation until the transition to divorce are based on 2,386 first marriages that ended in separation. The estimates of the duration of divorce until remarriage are based on 2,033 first divorces. The estimates of second marriage duration are based on 1,282 second marriages (table I). Table I presents the sample sizes of subgroups used for estimating event probabilities by age and race/ethnicity. Subgroups with less than 100 cases are not analyzed separately.

There was one case in the sample that reported a later date of divorce from the first marriage than the date of remarriage, resulting in a negative value for the duration of divorce until remarriage. This is likely either a reporting error or a recording error. In addition, 35 cases reported a later date of final separation from the husband than the date of divorce. Presumably, these are cases where the ex-husband and ex-wife continued living together after the divorce was finalized, either for the sake of the children or for economic reasons. All negative duration values were reset to zero, and the time interval until divorce (if separated) or until remarriage (if divorced) is equal to zero in these cases.

Table I. Sample sizes of subgroups of women 15–44 years of age: United States, 1995

Subgroup	First marriage	Separation from first marriage	First divorce	Second marriage
Total . . . . .	6,841	2,386	2,033	1,282
Under 18 years of age . . . . .	817	...	...	...
18–19 years of age . . . . .	1,532	...	...	...
20–24 years of age . . . . .	2,895	...	...	...
Over 24 years of age . . . . .	1,597	...	...	...
Under 20 years of age . . . . .	...	280	...	...
20–24 years of age . . . . .	...	867	...	...
25–29 years of age . . . . .	...	657	...	...
Over 29 years of age . . . . .	...	582	...	...
Under 25 years of age . . . . .	...	...	834	336
25 years of age and over . . . . .	...	...	1,199	946
Asian non-Hispanic . . . . .	167	...	...	...
Black non-Hispanic . . . . .	1,144	495	352	149
White non-Hispanic . . . . .	4,452	1,510	1,387	956
Hispanic . . . . .	1,020	326	247	150

... Category not applicable.

NOTE: Age refers to age at the time of the event: age at first marriage, age at separation from first marriage, age at first divorce, age at remarriage.

## Sampling errors

The statistics presented in this report are based on a sample survey and may, therefore, differ from statistics that would be obtained if it were possible to interview all of the 60.2 million women that the survey sample represents. The standard error of an estimate is a measure of such differences. The software package SUDAAN, version 7.5.4, was used to estimate the standard errors used to test for statistical significance. Selected standard errors are shown in [table II](#).

In this report, unless otherwise noted, comparisons between probability estimates that refer to differences between subgroups in the probability of an event (such as marital disruption) are statistically significant at the 5-percent level. This indicates that if the difference were merely the result of random chance and did not reflect a true difference in the general population, the difference would only be observed in less than 5 percent of all possible samples. Lack of comment about a specific comparison does not necessarily indicate a lack of a statistically significant difference because not all possible comparisons are discussed in the text.

The statistical significance of differences in probability estimates

between subgroups is assessed by comparing the boundaries of 95 percent confidence intervals constructed around each estimate. The confidence interval is constructed by the formula:  $p \pm (1.96)(se)$ , where  $p$  is the probability estimate, and  $se$  is the standard error. If a positive difference exists between the lower limit of the confidence interval around the larger estimate and the upper limit of the confidence interval around the smaller estimate, then the difference between the two estimates is statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

Like all survey data, the data in this report may be affected by nonsampling error from such sources as nonresponse, respondent misreporting due to memory loss, misclassification of unions or misreporting of dates, and processing errors. Nonsampling error was minimized by stringent quality control procedures incorporated into the survey design and administration (27).

## Example life table

[Table III](#) presents an example of a life table for the duration of first marriage. The first column in [table III](#) lists the duration intervals. In this example, the intervals are in groups of 12 months, from 0 to 300 (300 months = 25 years). The second column shows the number of marriages that failed (due

to separation or divorce) within the interval. The third column shows the number of marriages that are censored (due to interview or widowhood) in the interval. The fourth column shows the effective sample size at the midpoint of the interval. Because the marriages that are censored within an interval are assumed to be distributed evenly across the interval, the effective sample size in a particular interval is equal to the effective sample size of the previous interval, minus the failures that occurred in the previous interval, minus one-half of the censored cases in the previous interval, minus one-half of the censored cases in the current interval.

The fifth column of [table III](#) shows the probability of failure within the interval and is calculated as the number of failures divided by the effective sample size. The sixth column shows the cumulative proportion that failed as of the beginning of the interval. The final column in [table III](#) shows the proportion that survived intact until the beginning of the interval and is simply the complement of the cumulative proportion that failed.

Columns two through five are primarily calculation steps to derive the final two columns. In the analysis in this report, for the sake of brevity, columns two through five of each life table are not shown. Only the cumulative



Table II. Standard errors for selected probability estimates: United States, 1995

Subgroup	Standard errors for probability estimates after—					
	3 years	5 years	7 years	10 years	15 years	20 years
First marriage to disruption						
Total (tables 3,4) . . . . .	0.0048	0.0062	0.0066	0.0074	0.0087	0.0098
Under 18 years of age at marriage (3) . . . . .	0.0155	0.0195	0.0205	0.0216	0.0225	0.0227
18–19 years of age at marriage . . . . .	0.0104	0.0124	0.0134	0.0155	0.0152	0.0161
20–24 years of age at marriage . . . . .	0.0061	0.0075	0.0088	0.0105	0.0124	0.0144
Over 24 years of age at marriage . . . . .	0.0083	0.0120	0.0140	0.0172	0.0237	0.0414
White non-Hispanic (4) . . . . .	0.0058	0.0074	0.0081	0.0087	0.0100	0.0115
Black non-Hispanic . . . . .	0.0156	0.0178	0.0198	0.0229	0.0242	0.0258
Asian non-Hispanic . . . . .	0.0202	0.0241	0.0356	0.0420	0.0428	0.0714
Hispanic . . . . .	0.0144	0.0159	0.0182	0.0254	0.0313	0.0315
First separation to divorce						
Total (tables 5,6) . . . . .	0.0093	0.0069	0.0064	0.0062	0.0060	
Under 20 years of age at separation (5) . . . . .	0.0282	0.0233	0.0211	0.0206	0.0202	
20–24 years of age at separation . . . . .	0.0120	0.0089	0.0077	0.0066	0.0064	
Over 24 years of age at separation . . . . .	0.0130	0.0100	0.0095	0.0100	0.0169	
White non-Hispanic (6) . . . . .	0.0079	0.0054	0.0042	0.0033	0.0033	
Black non-Hispanic . . . . .	0.0315	0.0308	0.0300	0.0322	0.0328	
Hispanic . . . . .	0.0310	0.0279	0.0295	0.0277	0.0277	
First divorce to remarriage						
Total (tables 7,8) . . . . .	0.0131	0.0149	0.0149	0.0137	0.0119	
Under 25 years of age at divorce (7) . . . . .	0.0209	0.0209	0.0209	0.0165	0.0136	
25 years of age and over at divorce . . . . .	0.0173	0.0189	0.0202	0.0209	0.0238	
White non-Hispanic (8) . . . . .	0.0153	0.0165	0.0165	0.0147	0.0130	
Black non-Hispanic . . . . .	0.0283	0.0321	0.0388	0.0445	0.0502	
Hispanic . . . . .	0.0337	0.0434	0.0481	0.0426	0.0426	
Second marriage to disruption						
Total (tables 9,10) . . . . .	0.0113	0.0138	0.0159	0.0193		
Under 25 years of age at remarriage (9) . . . . .	0.0227	0.0254	0.0285	0.0318		
25 years of age and over at remarriage . . . . .	0.0130	0.0168	0.0194	0.0224		
White non-Hispanic (10) . . . . .	0.0125	0.0147	0.0176	0.0212		
Black non-Hispanic . . . . .	0.0440	0.0582	0.0586	0.0635		
Hispanic . . . . .	0.0254	0.0326	0.0390	0.0499		

proportion that failed at the beginning of each interval is presented and compared across subgroups. In addition, the overall percent of cases censored is presented for each subgroup as a comparative measure of the overall likelihood of disruption. In analyses of the probability of marital disruption, subgroups with a relatively high percent censored by interview are less likely to dissolve (are more likely to have survived intact until the interview).

Table III. First marriage life table estimates for women 15–44 years old: United States, 1995

Duration interval x	Number failed <sup>1</sup> during interval (F <sub>x</sub> )	Number censored <sup>2</sup> during interval (C <sub>x</sub> )	Effective sample size <sup>3</sup> at interval midpoint (ESS <sub>x</sub> )	Probability of failure <sup>4</sup> during interval (PF <sub>x</sub> )	Cumulative proportion failed <sup>5</sup> as of start of interval (CF <sub>x</sub> )	Proportion surviving <sup>6</sup> as of start of interval (S <sub>x</sub> )
0–11 months . . . . .	1,033,065	1,412,535	36,777,298.5	0.0281	–	1
12–23 months . . . . .	1,471,780	1,393,281	34,341,325.5	0.0429	0.0281	0.9719
24–35 months . . . . .	1,605,553	1,354,446	31,495,682.0	0.0510	0.0697	0.9303
36–47 months . . . . .	1,357,987	1,403,071	28,511,370.5	0.0476	0.1172	0.8828
48–59 months . . . . .	1,209,263	1,362,065	25,770,815.5	0.0469	0.1592	0.8408
60–71 months . . . . .	877,368	1,470,283	23,145,378.5	0.0379	0.1987	0.8013
72–83 months . . . . .	908,833	1,106,335	20,979,701.5	0.0433	0.2290	0.7710
84–95 months . . . . .	717,709	1,039,565	18,997,918.5	0.0378	0.2624	0.7376
96–107 months . . . . .	543,885	1,124,049	17,198,402.5	0.0316	0.2903	0.7097
108–119 months . . . . .	510,398	1,066,175	15,559,405.5	0.0328	0.3127	0.6873
120–131 months . . . . .	404,891	1,119,949	13,955,945.5	0.0290	0.3353	0.6647
132–143 months . . . . .	406,272	941,474	12,520,343.0	0.0324	0.3546	0.6454
144–155 months . . . . .	274,994	1,049,563	11,118,552.5	0.0247	0.3755	0.6245
156–167 months . . . . .	236,301	988,623	9,824,465.5	0.0241	0.3910	0.6090
168–179 months . . . . .	298,600	878,885	8,654,410.5	0.0345	0.4056	0.5944
180–191 months . . . . .	177,560	794,816	7,518,960.0	0.0236	0.4261	0.5739
192–203 months . . . . .	217,311	785,294	6,551,345.0	0.0332	0.4397	0.5603
204–215 months . . . . .	136,559	775,284	5,553,745.0	0.0246	0.4583	0.5417
216–227 months . . . . .	94,765	810,976	4,624,056.0	0.0205	0.4716	0.5284
228–239 months . . . . .	109,255	694,968	3,776,319.0	0.0289	0.4824	0.5176
240–251 months . . . . .	36,254	674,093	2,982,533.5	0.0122	0.4974	0.5026
252–263 months . . . . .	53,307	651,434	2,283,516.0	0.0233	0.5035	0.4965
264–275 months . . . . .	46,338	599,026	1,604,979.0	0.0289	0.5151	0.4849
276–287 months . . . . .	14,465	407,770	1,055,243.0	0.0137	0.5291	0.4709
288–299 months . . . . .	8,880	374,135	649,825.5	0.0137	0.5355	0.4645
300 months or more . . . . .	–	453,878	226,939.0	–	0.5419	0.4581

– Quantity zero.

<sup>1</sup>Marriages "fail" by separation or divorce.<sup>2</sup>"Censored" marriages were still intact at interview.<sup>3</sup>ESS<sub>x+1</sub> = ESS<sub>x</sub> - F<sub>x</sub> - ½ (C<sub>x</sub> + C<sub>x+1</sub>)<sup>4</sup>PF<sub>x</sub> = F<sub>x</sub> / ESS<sub>x</sub><sup>5</sup>CF<sub>x</sub> = 1 - S<sub>x</sub><sup>6</sup>S<sub>x+1</sub> = S<sub>x</sub> \* (1 - PF<sub>x</sub>)

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