

The New Demography of American Motherhood

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A Social & Demographic Trends Report

The New Demography of American Motherhood

By Gretchen Livingston and D’Vera Cohn, Pew Research Center

Executive Summary

This report examines the changing demographic characteristics of U.S. mothers by comparing women who gave birth in 2008 with those who gave birth in 1990. It is based on data from the National Center for Health Statistics and the Census Bureau. It also presents results of a nationwide Pew Research Center survey that asked a range of questions about parenthood.

Among the key findings of this report:

- **Age:** Mothers of newborns are older now than their counterparts were two decades ago. In 1990, teens had a higher share of all births (13%) than did women ages 35 and older (9%). In 2008, the reverse was true—10% of births were to teens, compared with 14% to women ages 35 and older. Each race and ethnic group had a higher share of mothers of newborns in 2008 who are ages 35 and older, and a lower share who are teens, than in 1990.
- **Marital Status:** A record four-in-ten births (41%) were to unmarried women in 2008, including most births to women in their early 20s. In 1990, 28% of births were to unmarried women. The unmarried-mother share of births has increased most sharply for whites and Hispanics, although the highest share is for black women.
- **Race and Ethnicity:** White women made up 53% of mothers of newborns in 2008, down from 65% in 1990. The share of births to Hispanic women has grown dramatically, to one-in-four.
- **Education:** Most mothers of newborns (54%) had at least some college education in 2006, an increase from 41% in 1990. Among mothers of newborns who were ages 35 and older, 71% had at least some college education.
- **Explaining the Trends:** All the trends cited above reflect a complex mix of demographic and behavioral factors. For example, the higher share of college-educated mothers stems both from their rising birth rates and from women’s increasing educational attainment. The rise in births to unmarried women reflects both their rising birth rates and the shrinking share of adults who are married.
- **Attitudes about Parenthood:** When asked why they decided to have their first (or only) child, the overwhelming majority of parents (87%) answer, “The joy of having children.” But nearly half (47%) also say, “There wasn’t a reason; it just happened.”

I. Overview

The demography of motherhood in the United States has shifted strikingly in the past two decades. Compared with mothers of newborns in 1990, today's mothers of newborns are older and better educated. They are less likely to be white and less likely to be married.

In 1990, there were more births to teenagers than to women ages 35 and older. By 2008, that had reversed—14% of births were to older women and 10% were to teens. Births to women ages 35 and older grew 64% between 1990 and 2008, increasing in all major race and ethnic groups.

Another notable change during this period was the rise in births to unmarried women. In 2008, a record 41% of births in the United States were to unmarried women, up from 28% in 1990. The share of births that are non-marital is highest for black women (72%), followed by Hispanics (53%), whites (29%) and Asians (17%), but the increase over the past two decades has been greatest for whites—the share rose 69%.

Just over half of births (53%) in 2008 were to white women, and a quarter (24%) were to Hispanic women. More than half of the mothers of newborns (54% in 2006) had at least some college education. One-in-four (24% in 2004) was foreign born.

The shift in characteristics of motherhood over the past two decades is linked to a complex mixture of demographic and behavioral changes. This analysis examines and explains these trends using data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) and the U.S. Census Bureau. A separate section, based on a Pew Research Center survey, explores the reasons people say they became parents and examines public attitudes about key trends shaping today's birth patterns.

The recasting of American motherhood takes place against a backdrop of relative stability in the total number of births—4.3 million in 2008, compared with 4.2 million in 1990. The number had risen each year from 2003 to 2007 before declining by about 66,000; the decrease appears to be [linked to the economic downturn](#).

The nation's birth rate (births per 1,000 women of childbearing age) has declined 20% from 1990. Rates have declined for all major race and ethnic groups. The birth rate for married women is stable, but it has risen for unmarried women.

Recasting Motherhood, 1990 to 2008

(% of births by characteristics of mother)

	1990	2008	Percentage Point Change
Mother's Age			
< 20	13	10	-3
20-34	78	75	-3
35+	9	14	+5
Mother's Race			
White	65	53	-12
Black	16	15	-1
Hispanic	14	24	+10
Asian	3	6	+3
Mother's Marital Status			
Married	72	59	-13
Unmarried	28	41	+13

Note: 2008 data are preliminary. Percentages may not total to 100% due to missing data or rounding.

Source: Statistics calculated using National Center for Health Statistics data (see Methodology)

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Demographic Changes

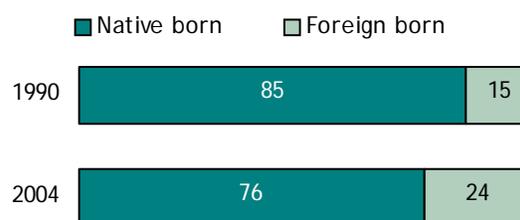
Population changes are a key factor influencing birth patterns in recent decades. There are fewer women in the prime childbearing years now than in 1990, as the youngest members of the giant Baby Boom generation have aged into their mid-40s. But changes in the race and ethnic makeup of young women—chiefly, the growth of the Hispanic population, which has higher birth rates than other groups—have helped keep birth numbers relatively level.

Another influence on births is the nation's growing number of immigrants, who tend to have higher birth rates than the native born (although those rates have declined in recent years). The share of births to foreign-born mothers, 15% of U.S. births in 1990, has grown at least 60% through 2004. Births to foreign-born women in 2004 accounted for the majority of Hispanic (61%) and Asian (83%) births.

According to Pew Research Center [population projections](#), 82% of the nation's population growth through 2050 will be accounted for by immigrants who arrived in the U.S. after 2005 and their descendants, assuming current trends continue. Of the 142 million people added to the population from 2005 to 2050, according to the projections, 50 million will be the children or grandchildren of new immigrants.

Share of Births by Nativity of Mother, 1990 and 2004

(%)



Note: Nativity data unavailable after 2004.

Source: Statistics calculated using National Center for Health Statistics data (see Methodology)

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Attitudes about Birth Trends

Americans are marrying later in life, or not at all, which has contributed to the growth in births outside marriage. Most Americans say they know at least one woman who had a baby while she was not married, and one man who fathered a child while he was not married, according to a Pew Research Center survey. Americans have softened slightly in their disapproval of unmarried parenthood, but most say it is bad for society.

The survey found that Americans are neutral or approving of two other trends that have an impact on birth patterns. One is the growing number of women ages 40 and older who have babies, a group whose relatively small birth rate has tripled since 1990. The other is the increasing number of women, often those over 30, who undergo fertility treatment in order to have a baby.

When Americans are asked what is the ideal number of children for a family, the most popular answer, according to the survey, is “two”—as it has been since the 1970s. And, indeed, among women with children at the end of their reproductive years—ages 40-44 in 2006—the largest share (43%) had two. An additional 22% each had one or three children, 8% had four and 4% had five or more.

There are race and ethnic variations in family sizes. Nearly half of Hispanic women ages 40-44 with children (48%) have three or more, compared with 27% of Asian women.

The Pew Research Center survey also asked parents why they decided to have their first child, and for the overwhelming majority, the answer is, “the joy of having children.” However, a half century after the Food and Drug Administration approved the sale of birth control pills, nearly half of parents say “there wasn’t a reason; it just happened.”

Older Mothers

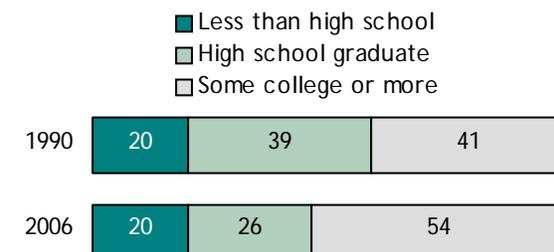
The average age for U.S. mothers who had their first baby in 2008 was 25, a year older than the average first-time mother in 1990. Among all women who had a baby in 2008, the average age is 27, up from 26 in 1990. The prime child-bearing years remain 20-34—three-quarters of mothers of newborns are in this age range. Birth rates peak among women in their late 20s.

Since 1990, birth rates have risen for all women ages 30 and older. Although in some cases the number of births is small, the rate increases have been sharpest for women in the oldest age groups—47% for women ages 35-39 and 80% for women ages 40-44, for example.

This delay in age of motherhood is associated with delay in age of marriage and with growing educational attainment. The more education a woman has, the later she tends to marry and have children. Birth rates also have risen for the most educated women, those with at least some college education, while being relatively stable for women with less education. These dual factors have worked together to increase the education levels of mothers of newborns.

Share of Births by Education of Mother, 1988-1992 and 2004-2008

(%)



Notes: Percentages may not total to 100% due to missing data or rounding.

Source: Statistics calculated using three-year averages of Current Population Survey data. Data for 1988-1992 abbreviated as “1990” and data for 2004-2008 abbreviated as “2006.” (see Methodology)

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Fertility Higher Than in Other Developed Nations

Another measure of birth levels is the total fertility rate, or number of children the average woman is predicted to have, based on current age-specific birth rates. That rate for the United States, 2.10 in 2008¹, is about what it was in 1990. The number is about or slightly below the “replacement rate”—that is, the level at which enough children are born to replace their parents in the population—and has been for most years since the baby bust of the early 1970s.

Compared with [Canada, and most nations in Europe and Asia](#), the U.S. has a higher total fertility rate. Rates such as 1.4 in Austria, Italy and Japan have produced concern about whether those nations will have enough people of working age in the future to support their elderly populations, and whether their total populations could decline in size.

¹ The rate before rounding, according to the Population Reference Bureau, is 2.098. According to preliminary 2008 birth data from the National Center for Health Statistics, the rate is 2.086. The replacement rate is 2.100.

Why are fertility rates somewhat higher in the United States than in other developed nations? Some researchers contend that fertility rates are low in some other developed countries—Italy and Japan, for example—in part because of lack of support for mothers who also hold paid employment. Those countries also have a lower share of births to unmarried women. The religiosity of the U.S. population also has been suggested as a factor, because it is associated with a desire for larger families.²

About this Report

This report is organized as follows: The first section is an overview. The second section presents trends in U.S. birth patterns from 1990 to 2008, focusing on changes in the characteristics of mothers of newborns during this period; it includes subsections on trends in age of mothers of newborns; their race and ethnicity; their marital status; and their educational attainment. The analysis in this section is based largely on data from the National Center for Health Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau. The third section analyzes the results of a nationwide Pew Research Center survey that asked respondents about their reasons for having children or intentions to have children, about ideal family size and about their attitudes toward several social trends that affect U.S. birth patterns. Appendix A provides details on methodology and data analysis in the second section.

Editorial guidance was provided by Paul Taylor, director of the Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends project. Guidance also was provided by Rakesh Kochhar, senior economist; Jeffrey Passel, senior demographer; Rich Morin, senior editor; and Kim Parker, senior researcher, all of the Pew Research Center. Charts were prepared by research assistant Daniel Dockterman. Number-checking was done by Daniel Dockterman and research associate Wendy Wang. The report was copy-edited by Marcia Kramer.

Terminology

All references to whites, blacks and Asians are to the non-Hispanic components of those populations. Asians also include Pacific Islanders.

“Native born” and “U.S. born” refer to persons who are U.S. citizens by birth. “Foreign born” and “immigrant” are used interchangeably.

Unless otherwise specified, all references to “teens” consist of ages 10-19.

In references to marital status, “married” includes those who are separated.

Data for education characteristics, children ever born and birth rates by marital status and educational attainment are derived from the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey and are based upon three-year aggregated datasets in order to compensate for the small sample size for some subgroups in the single-year data. One dataset, referred to in the text and charts as “1990” data, aggregates 1988, 1990 and 1992 survey results, while the other dataset, abbreviated in the text and charts as “2006” data, is an aggregation of 2004, 2006 and 2008 data. See Methodology for more information.

² Preston, Samuel H. and Caroline Sten Hartnett. “The Future of American Fertility.” National Bureau of Economic Research. Working Paper 14498. 2008.

II. Demography of Motherhood

A. Age Trends

Two decades ago, there were more mothers of newborns in their teens than those who were ages 35 and older. Today, the reverse is true.

A broad trend toward older mothers has taken hold among all major U.S. race and ethnic groups. Compared with 1990, a larger share of births are to women in each five-year age group 30 and older. A declining share is to teen mothers and to women in their 20s.

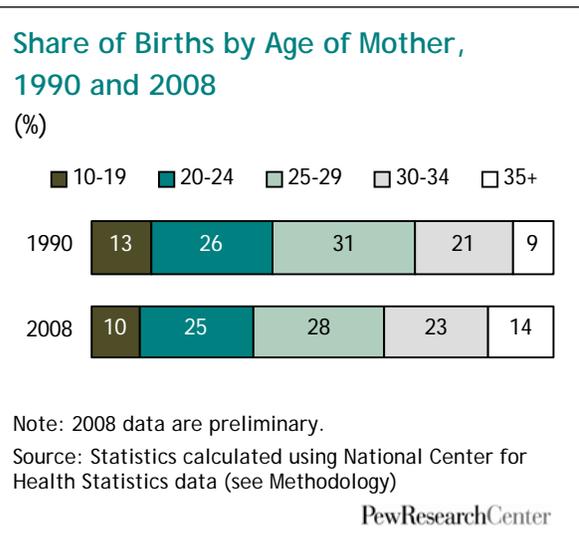
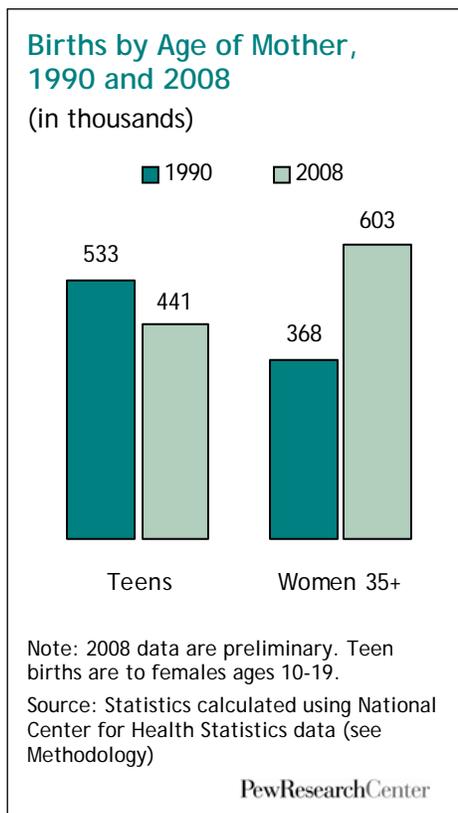
Another way of looking at birth trends is to consider birth rates by age—that is, the number of babies born per 1,000 women in each age group. Overall, according to the Pew Research Center analysis, birth rates for all women under 35 have declined 9% since 1990. Birth rates for all women ages 35 and older have grown 19%.³

The increase in births to older mothers has been fueled in part by rising education levels, which are linked to postponed marriage and childbearing. It has been enabled as well by improvements in medical care and fertility treatments that permit more older women to bear children.

Age: Older Mothers

One-in-seven babies in the U.S. today (14%) is born to a mother who is at least 35 years old. In 1990, one-in-11 babies had a mother age 35 or older. The number of babies born to these older mothers was 603,113 in 2008, compared with 367,828 in 1990. That is a 64% increase during a period when the total number of U.S. births grew only 2%.

The number, share and rate of births have grown even more sharply for mothers ages 40 and older. These indicators continued to increase in 2008, a year when



³ Using rates as a mode of analysis provides a standardized measure that offsets the impact of population size changes in different age groups. For example, the population of U.S. women ages 30-34 was smaller in 2008 than in 1990, and that age group's share of the total population also declined, but the number of births to women ages 30-34 was larger in 2008 than in 1990, because that age group's birth rate went up. In 1990, there were about 80 births per 1,000 women ages 30-34; in 2008, there were 100 births per 1,000 women in that age group. Among 30- to 34-year-olds, women's change in behavior more than counteracted their decline in population size.

they declined for women in age groups under 40, according to preliminary NCHS data. Births to mothers ages 40 and older more than doubled between 1990 and 2008, from 50,245 to 113,576. That accounted for only 3% of all births, but that share has tripled since 1990.

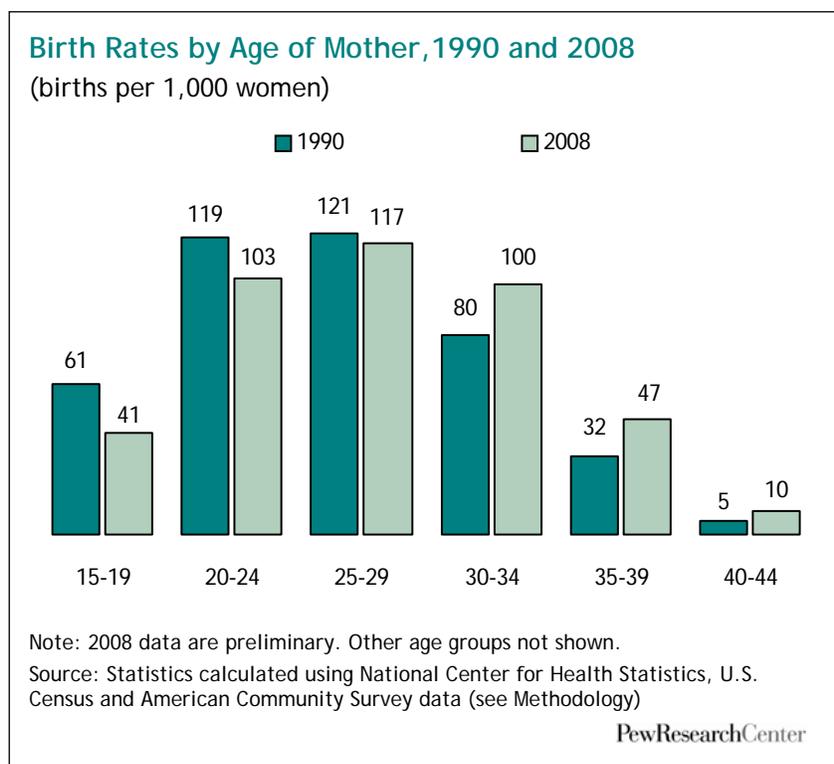
Older mothers are somewhat more likely than in the past to be first-time mothers: 23% were in 2008, compared with 21% in 1990. By contrast, among mothers of newborns who were under 35, a plurality—43%—were first-time mothers in 2008, a proportion that has not changed since 1990.

Associated with the trend toward older motherhood has been an expansion of multiple births. There was a 70% increase, for example, in the twin birth rate from 1980 to 2004.⁴ Not only are women in their 30s more likely than younger women to conceive multiples on their own, they also are more likely to undergo fertility treatments, which are linked to births of multiples.

The population of women ages 35 and older has grown by more than a third since 1990, and the increase has been even sharper for women in their 40s. That increase, along with higher birth rates, largely explains the growth in births to women ages 35 and older.

Age: Teen Mothers

The share and number of births to teen mothers generally has declined since 1990, except for a two-year reversal of that trend in 2006 and 2007. One-in-10 babies born in 2008 had a teen mother, a proportion that has declined from 13% in 1990. The number of births to teen mothers also is down—there were 440,775 births to mothers under age 20 in 2008, compared with 533,483 in 1990.



⁴ Martin, Joyce A., et al. Births: Final Data for 2006. National Vital Statistics Reports. Vol. 57, No. 7. 2009.

Another way to express the change in teen birth trends is to analyze the likelihood that a female will become a mother in her teens. Based on birth rates at the time, 17% of teens in 2008 were likely to have a child before age 20; in 1990, 23% of teens were.

The number and share of births to teen mothers has declined even though there has been an increase in the population of 10- to 19-year-old females from 1990 to 2008. That is because the teen birth rate has declined steeply since 1990—by about a third. There are about 21 births for every 1,000 female teens, compared with nearly 32 in 1990. Nearly all these births are to 15- to 19-year-olds.

Age: Race and Ethnicity

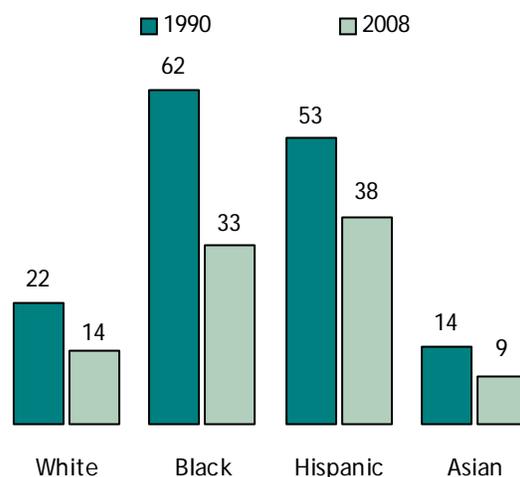
Compared with younger mothers, women who give birth at ages 35 and older are somewhat more likely to be white and less likely to be Hispanic or black.

In 2008, 59% of babies whose mothers were 35 and older were born to white women, 20% to Hispanic women, 11% to black women and 9% to Asian women. The share of white women among these older mothers decreased markedly, from 71% in 1990. The share increased notably for Hispanic women, from 12% in 1990, and for Asian women, from 6% in 1990. The share of black women among older mothers of newborns was unchanged.

Among 2008 births to mothers who were younger than 35, 53% of the mothers were white, a decline from 65% in 1990. The share of these younger mothers who are Hispanic, 25% in 2008, is an increase from 15% in 1990. The share who are black, 15% in 2008, represents a decline from 17% in 1990. The Asian share, 5% in 2008, has grown from 3% in 1990.

Teen Birth Rates by Race and Ethnicity, 1990 and 2008

(births per 1,000 women)



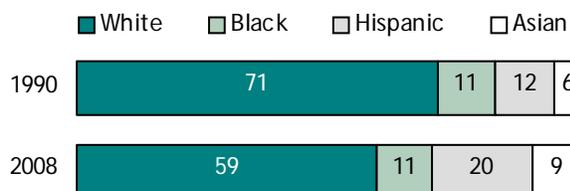
Note: 2008 data are preliminary. Teen births are to females ages 10-19.

Source: Statistics calculated using National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Census and American Community Survey data (see Methodology)

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Share of Births to Mothers Ages 35 and Older, by Race and Ethnicity, 1990 and 2008

(%)



Note: 2008 data are preliminary. Numbers may not total to 100% because of missing data or rounding.

Source: Statistics calculated using National Center for Health Statistics data (see Methodology)

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Among births to teens in 2008, 39% of the mothers were white, 33% Hispanic and 24% black. The white share has declined from 49% in 1990, and the black share has gone down from 29% in 1990. The Hispanic share of births to teen mothers has risen from 19% in 1990. The Asian share of births to teen mothers was 1% in both 1990 and 2008.

Age: Marital Status

Older mothers overwhelmingly are likely to be married, compared with younger ones, although the married share has declined for all age groups. Among babies born in 2008 to women ages 35 and older, 81% had married parents, compared with 86% in 1990. Among babies born to women under age 35, 56% had married parents, a steep decline from 71% in 1990. The majority of the youngest mothers of newborns are unmarried; 87% of births to teens in 2008 were to unmarried mothers, as were 61% of births to women ages 20-24. The unmarried share declines for each five-year age group after that until rising slightly, to 21%, for mothers ages 40 and older in 2008.

From 1990 to 2008, the number of married-mother births declined for women in their teens and 20s, but rose for women in their 30s and 40s. The number of unmarried-mother births rose for all age groups.

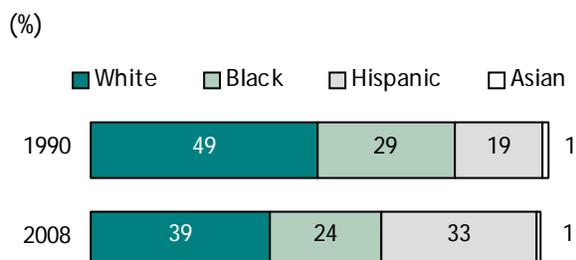
Age: Education

Women with higher levels of education tend to have children later in life than less educated women, in part because they often wait until their schooling is complete.

Among mothers who were ages 35 and older in 2006 (and those 30-34) when they gave birth, 71% had at least some college education. Among mothers in their late 20s, 58% did; among those in their early 20s, 36% did. One-in-four women ages 20-24 who gave birth in 2006 did not have a high school diploma, compared with only one-in-10 women ages 35 and older.

Among both younger and older mothers, the share with some education beyond high school has grown, in keeping with women's rising educational credentials. The share with a high school diploma but no college education has declined notably for most age groups. However, the share with less than a high school diploma has barely budged, except among women who were 35 and older when they gave birth, a group where the least-educated proportion already was low.

Share of Teen Births by Race and Ethnicity of Mother, 1990 and 2008



Note: 2008 data are preliminary. Teen births are to females ages 10-19. Numbers may not total to 100% because of rounding or missing data.

Source: Statistics calculated using National Center for Health Statistics data (see Methodology)

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B. Race and Ethnicity Trends

Hispanics, who are a young and rapidly expanding population, are the fastest-growing segment of mothers of newborns. About one-in-four babies born in 2008 (24%) had a Hispanic mother, compared with one-in-seven (14%) in 1990. The share of births to Asian mothers, 3% in 1990, has doubled to 6% in 2008. A slight majority of babies in 2008 were born to white mothers (53%), a decline from 65% in 1990. The share of babies with mothers who are black, 15%, has changed little from 16% in 1990.

The number of babies born to Hispanic mothers in 2008—1,038,933—represented an increase of 443,797 compared with the 1990 total. The number of babies with Asian mothers in 2008—243,460—was an increase of 104,591 over the number in 1990. Among white mothers, the 2,273,220 babies born in 2008 represented a decline of 439,304 from the 1990 total. The number of babies born to black mothers in 2008—625,314—also declined, by 48,823, from the total in 1990.

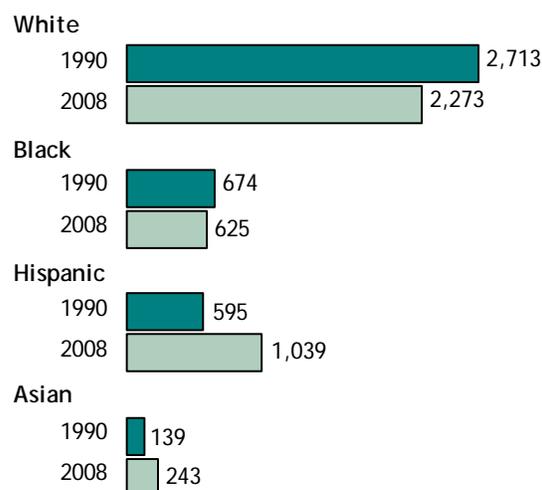
These ups and downs are the product of changes in population size and birth rates of each race and ethnic group. Birth rates have declined since 1990 among all major groups, but the rapid growth of the Hispanic and Asian populations of childbearing-age women has more than offset their shrinking birth rates.

Race: Age of Mother

Since 1990, all four major race and ethnic groups have had decreased birth rates for younger women and increased rates for women ages 30 and older. The trend toward births to older women is especially dramatic for Asian mothers. In 2008, nearly one-in-four (23%) babies with Asian mothers were born to women ages 35 and older. This compares with 15% in 1990 and 19% in 2000.

Among babies with white mothers, 16% were born to women ages 35 and older in 2008, compared with 10% in 1990. Among babies with black mothers, 10% were born to women ages 35 and older in 2008, compared with 6% in 1990. Among babies with Hispanic mothers, 11% were born to women ages 35 and older in 2008,

Births by Race and Ethnicity, 1990 and 2008 (in thousands)

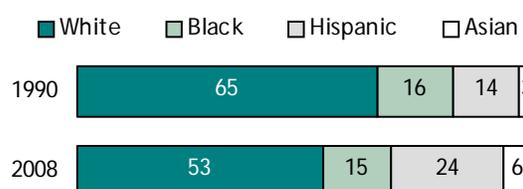


Note: 2008 data are preliminary.

Source: Statistics calculated and obtained from National Center for Health Statistics data (see Methodology)

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Share of Births by Race and Ethnicity, 1990 and 2008 (%)



Note: 2008 data are preliminary. Numbers may not total to 100% because of missing data or rounding.

Source: Statistics calculated using National Center for Health Statistics data (see Methodology)

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compared with 7% in 1990. The share of Hispanic older mothers has grown more rapidly since 2000 than it has for whites or blacks.

Teen birth rates and the proportion of all births to teenagers have declined since 1990 for each major race and ethnic group—whites, blacks, Asians and Hispanics. Birth rates for black teens have declined most sharply, and now are below those of Hispanics; in 1990, they were higher.

The number of births to teens has declined for all groups except Hispanics. Among Hispanics, the growth in the size of the teen population has overwhelmed the decline in birth rates.

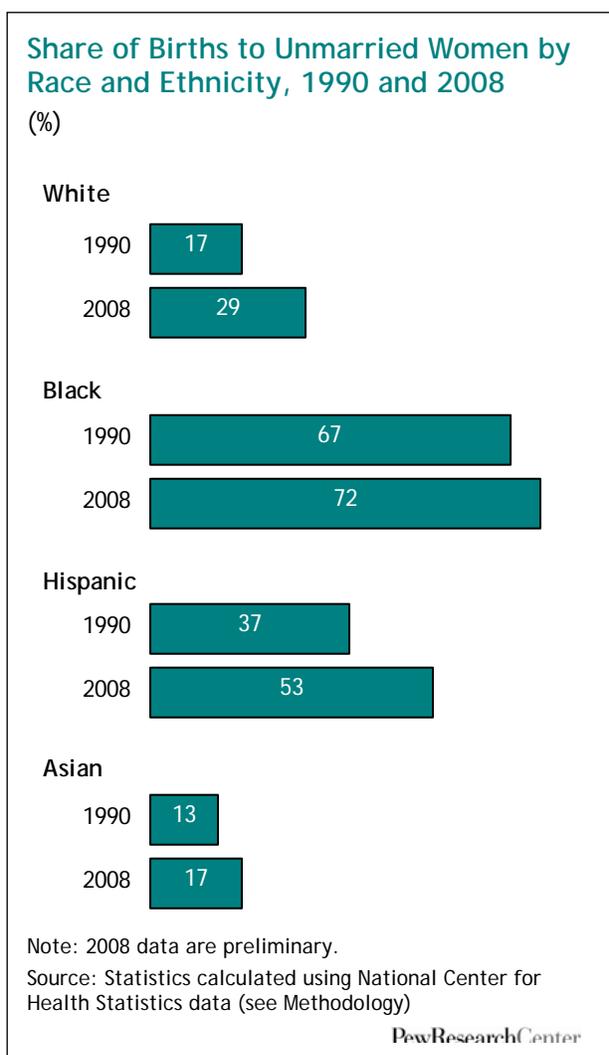
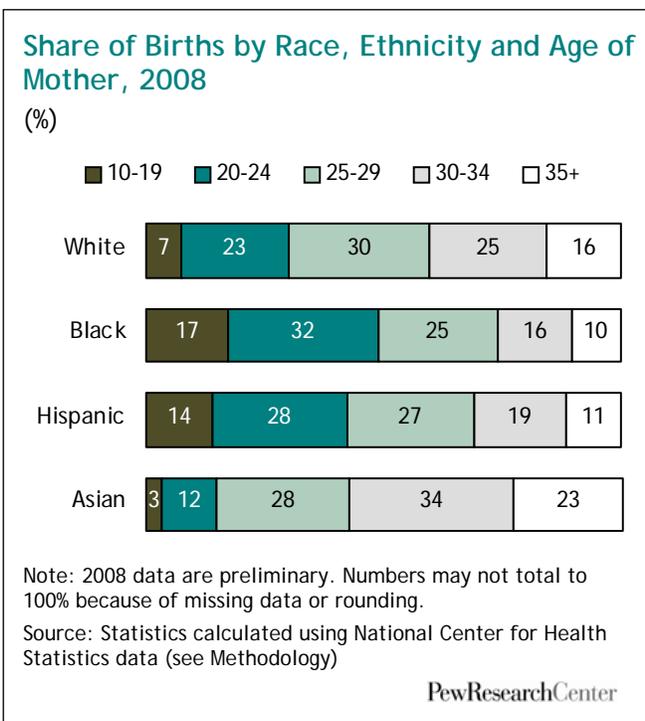
Looked at another way, based on 2008 birth rates, the likelihood that a female will become a mother before age 20 has declined for all four major race and ethnic groups. An estimated 32% of Hispanic female teens will become mothers, compared with 25% of black teens, 11% of white teens and 6% of Asian teens.

The share of births in each age group differs by race and ethnicity. For Hispanic and black mothers, all births peak among women in their early 20s. For white and Asian mothers, all births peak among women in their late 20s and early 30s.

The five-year age group with the highest share of births is 20- to 24-year-olds for Hispanic women (28%) and black women (32%). Among whites, the highest share is to women in their late 20s (30%). For Asians, the highest share of births is to women in their early 30s (34%).

Race: Marriage and Education

The share of babies born to unmarried mothers varies widely among race and ethnic groups, and it has increased for each. The proportions of births that are to unmarried mothers (41% overall in 2008) range from 72% of black births to 17% of Asian births. The



1990 proportion for blacks was 67%; for Asians, it was 13%.

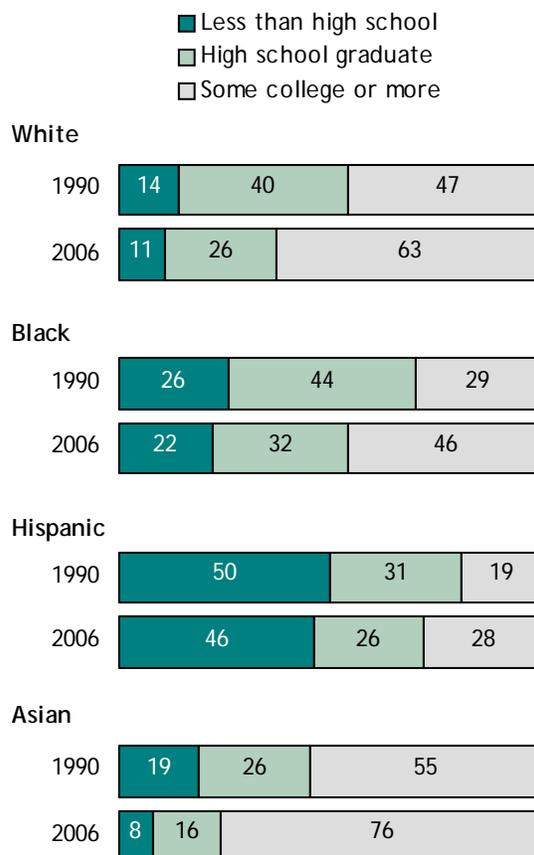
Among whites, 29% of births in 2008 were to unmarried mothers, compared with 17% in 1990. For Hispanics, the shares were 53% in 2008 and 37% in 1990. Thus, although white mothers have lower shares of unmarried births than black or Hispanic mothers, the growth in unmarried motherhood has been steeper for whites.

Among all race and ethnic groups, birth rates are higher for married women than unmarried women.

Looking at educational attainment of mothers of newborns by race and ethnicity, Asian women are the most likely to have some college education (76% did in 2006) and Hispanic women are the least likely (28% did). Among white mothers of newborns in 2006, 63% had some college education; the comparable figure for black mothers was 46%. These shares have increased for all four groups.

Share of Births by Race, Ethnicity and Education of Mother, 1988-1992 and 2004-2008

(%)



Notes: Percentages may not total 100% due to missing data or rounding.

Source: Statistics calculated using three-year averages of Current Population Survey data (see Methodology); 1988-1992 data abbreviated as "1990" and 2004-2008 data abbreviated as "2006."

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C. Marriage and Motherhood

In 2008, 2.5 million babies were born to married mothers and 1.7 million to unmarried mothers—shares of 59% and 41%, respectively. Both the number and share of births to unmarried mothers were at historic highs that year.

The number of births to unmarried mothers, 1.2 million in 1990, grew 48% through 2008. The number of births to married mothers, 3 million in 1990, declined by 16%.

Births to unmarried mothers represented 28% of births in 1990. By 2008, they were a third of births.

Among women considered to be of childbearing age—10 to 54—a slightly higher share was unmarried (55%) than married (45%) in 2008.

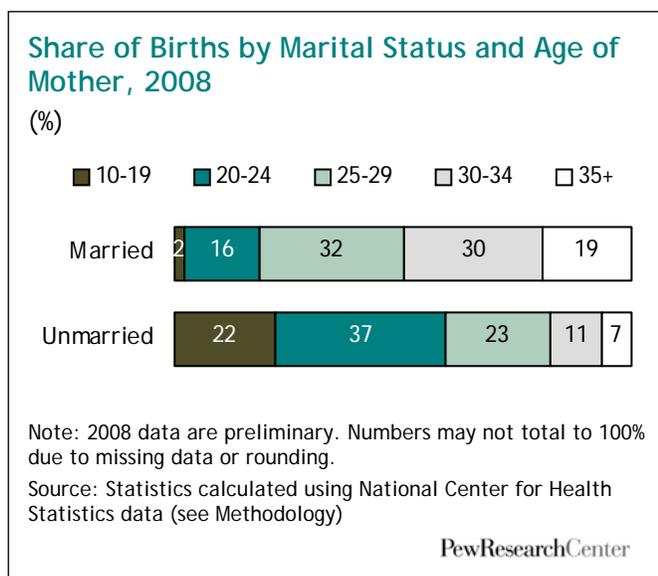
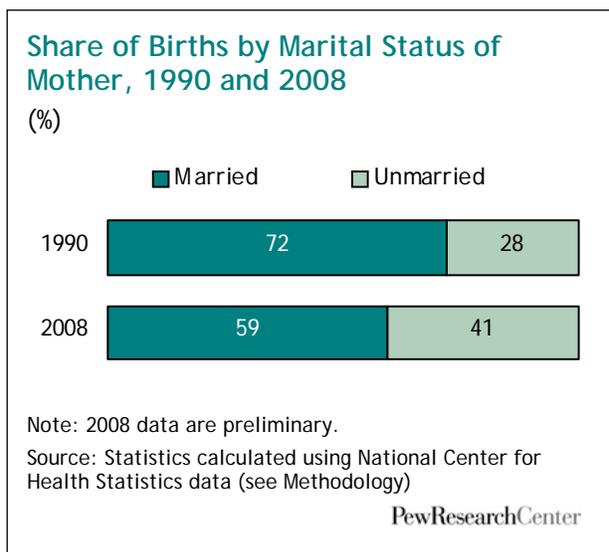
That is the reverse of the pattern two decades earlier, and is one reason that a growing share of births are to women who are not married.

Another reason that explains the differing trends for married and unmarried mothers is that birth rates for unmarried women rose more from 1990 to 2006 than those for married women—25% vs. 3%—although rates for married women are higher.

Unmarried mothers of newborns are disproportionately likely to be young. More than half (59%) in 2008 were under 25, compared with 19% of married women who had births that year. Half of the married mothers of newborns in 2008 were 30 or older, compared with 18% of unmarried mothers.

Marital Status: Race

Looking at trends in unmarried motherhood by race, the most dramatic change from 1990 to 2008 was the decline in the share who are black. In 1990, 39% of unmarried mothers were black; in 2008, 26% were. This is due to a decline in birth rates to unmarried black women of childbearing age, which amounted to 15% from 1990 to 2006, combined with a large increase in the Hispanic share of births to unmarried women.



Birth rates of unmarried women rose from 1990 to 2006 for whites (up 55%) and Hispanics (up 5%). Births to white mothers made up 38% of all births to unmarried women in 2008, compared with 39% in 1990; Hispanic births were 32% of births to unmarried women in 2008, compared with 19% in 1990. Asian births were 2% of births to unmarried women in both years.

Among births to married women in 2008, 64% were to whites, a decline from 75% in 1990. Hispanics accounted for 20% of births to married mothers in 2008, a rise from 13% in 1990. The black share of births to married mothers was 7% in 2008 and 8% in 1990. Asians accounted for 4% of births to married mothers in 1990 and 8% in 2008.

Birth rates have risen slightly for married white mothers and married black mothers but declined 14% for married Hispanic mothers.

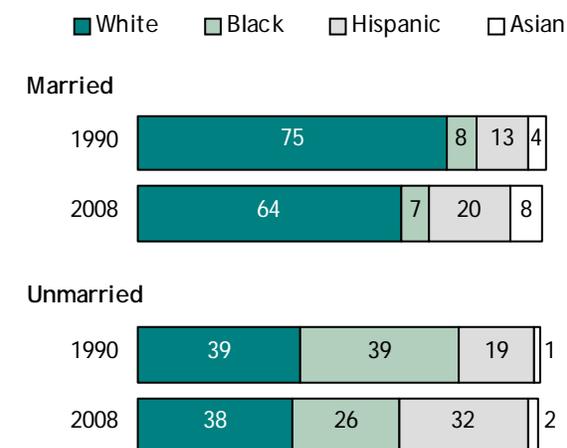
Marital Status: Education

The education profile of mothers differs notably by marital status; the younger age profile of unmarried mothers explains some, but not all, of the difference. Only a third (32% in 2006) of unmarried mothers have some education beyond high school, compared with 64% of married mothers. About a third of unmarried mothers (34% in 2006) have not completed high school, compared with 13% of married mothers.

The share of mothers with at least some college education grew from 1990 to 2006 among both married and unmarried mothers, and the share with less than a high school diploma declined slightly for both groups.

Birth rates rose by double-digit percentages from 1990 to 2006 for all education levels of unmarried motherhood—14% for women who did not complete high school, 33% for those with only a high school diploma and 68% for those with education beyond high school. Birth rates declined somewhat (8%) for married mothers with only a high school diploma and rose slightly for married mothers with less or more educational attainment.

Share of Births by Race, Ethnicity and Marital Status of Mother, 1990 and 2008 (%)



Note: 2008 data are preliminary. Numbers may not total to 100% due to missing data or rounding.

Source: Statistics calculated using National Center for Health Statistics data (see Methodology)

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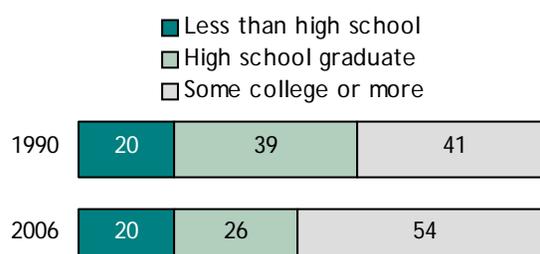
D. Education and Motherhood

The rise in women's education levels has changed the profile of the typical mother of a newborn baby. In 1990, roughly equal shares of births were to women with a high school diploma and to women with some education beyond high school. Now, more than twice as many births are to women with at least some college education as to women who hold only a high school diploma.

Most mothers of newborns in 2006—54%—had some education beyond high school, a notable increase from the 41% who did so in 1990. The share of births to women with high school diplomas was 26% in 2006, compared with 39% in 1990, reflecting in part the increasing level of female educational attainment. The share of births to women without a high school diploma remained at 20%. Birth rates have increased for women with at least some college education, while remaining relatively level for those with less education.

Share of Births by Education of Mother, 1988-1992 and 2004-2008

(%)



Notes: Percentages may not total to 100% due to missing data or rounding.

Source: Statistics calculated using three-year averages of Current Population Survey data. Data for 1988-1992 abbreviated as "1990" and data for 2004-2008 abbreviated as "2006." (see Methodology)

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Education: Race

Looking at the race and ethnic makeup of each education group, Hispanic women accounted for about half (47%) of mothers of newborns who did not have a high school diploma in 2006. That share has grown from about a third (32%) in 1990. The white share of the least educated mothers declined (to 33% in 2006), as did the black share (to 16%).

Among high school graduates, whites were the majority of mothers of newborns in 2006 (58%), although their share declined from 69% in 1990. The Hispanic share of high school graduate mothers of newborns more than doubled over that time, from 10% in 1990 to 21% in 2006. Black women were 17% of high school graduate mothers of newborns in both years.

White women also are the majority of mothers of newborns with at least some college education in 2006—69%, a decline from 78% in 1990, reflecting other groups' increasing attainment and the shrinking white share of the population. Black women were 12% of the mothers of newborns in 2006 with at least some college education, up slightly from 11%. Hispanic women were an 11% share of this group in 2006, compared with 6% in 1990. The Asian share in 2006 was 8% (1990 data are not available for Asian women).

Education: Marital Status

Education levels and marital status are closely related. The overwhelming majority of mothers of newborns in 2006 who had some college education were married—80%. The married share declined to 58% for high school graduates and 45% for women without a high school diploma. The married share has declined for all education categories, most sharply for the least educated women.

Births by Age, Race, Ethnicity and Marital Status of Mother, 1990-2008

	1990	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total	4,158,212	4,058,814	4,025,933	4,021,726	4,089,950	4,112,052	4,138,349	4,265,555	4,317,119	4,251,095
Age										
Total (10-19)	533,483	477,509	453,725	432,808	421,241	422,024	421,315	441,832	451,263	440,775
10-14	11,657	8,519	7,781	7,315	6,661	6,781	6,722	6,396	6,218	5,775
15-19	521,826	468,990	445,944	425,493	414,580	415,243	414,593	435,436	445,045	435,000
Total (20-34)	3,256,901	3,034,631	3,022,589	3,033,716	3,094,217	3,104,467	3,122,675	3,212,594	3,253,520	3,207,208
20-24	1,093,730	1,017,806	1,021,627	1,022,106	1,032,305	1,034,419	1,040,388	1,080,437	1,082,837	1,052,928
25-29	1,277,108	1,087,547	1,058,265	1,060,391	1,086,366	1,104,443	1,131,596	1,181,899	1,208,504	1,196,713
30-34	886,063	929,278	942,697	951,219	975,546	965,605	950,691	950,258	962,179	957,567
Total (35+)	367,828	546,674	549,619	555,202	574,492	585,377	594,359	611,129	612,336	603,113
35-39	317,583	452,057	451,723	453,927	467,642	475,580	483,156	498,616	499,916	489,357
40-44	48,607	90,013	92,813	95,788	101,005	103,675	104,667	105,539	105,071	106,090
45+	1,638	4,604	5,083	5,487	5,845	6,122	6,536	6,974	7,349	7,666
Race										
White	2,712,524	2,400,347	2,346,435	2,318,229	2,344,104	2,322,249	2,303,211	2,330,332	2,312,474	2,273,220
Black	674,137	607,419	592,330	580,848	579,392	582,455	587,301	621,687	627,230	625,314
Hispanic	595,136	815,868	851,851	876,642	912,329	946,349	985,505	1,039,077	1,061,971	1,038,933
Asian	138,869	196,308	196,336	206,691	214,644	220,771	221,356	231,593	244,745	243,460
Marital Status										
Married	2,992,828	2,711,771	2,676,684	2,655,760	2,673,955	2,641,863	2,611,315	2,623,609	2,602,478	2,523,146
Unmarried	1,165,384	1,347,043	1,349,249	1,365,966	1,415,995	1,470,189	1,527,034	1,641,946	1,714,641	1,727,950

Note: 2007 and 2008 data are preliminary.

Source: Statistics calculated and obtained using National Center for Health Statistics data (see Methodology)

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III. Attitudes about Having Children and Birth Rate Trends

When American parents are asked why they decided to have a child, one reason outweighs all others: “the joy of having children.” For nearly half of parents, though, an important explanation is, “It wasn’t a decision; it just happened.”

Among the other findings of a Pew Research Center survey on attitudes toward parenthood is that most parents who do not plan to have more children say finances were an important reason in the decision to limit the size of their family. Nearly three-quarters cite the cost of having an additional child as a very or somewhat important reason. That is nearly as many as the share who say they stopped having children because they wanted to have time for the children they already have.

The survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults included parents, people who intend to become parents and people who do not intend to have children. It was taken April 2-8, 2009.

The survey also asked all adults whether they approve of several trends shaping current fertility patterns. Most Americans disapprove of single motherhood but are neutral or approving of women without children, women having babies after age 40 and women undergoing fertility treatment in order to have a baby.

Among the main findings of the survey:

- “It wasn’t a decision; it just happened” is cited by 35% of parents as very important and 12% as somewhat important in the decision to have their first or only child.
- Women (51%) are somewhat more likely than men (42%) to say that “it just happened” was somewhat or very important.
- Asked why they had their first or only child, 76% of parents say “the joy of having children” was very important and an additional 11% say that was a somewhat important reason. No other offered reason wins a majority of “very important” responses.
- Among parents who say they don’t plan to have more children, the most cited reasons are wanting to have time for the children they already have (76%) or concerns about the cost of raising a child (72%). Of those who cite finances, 48% said this was a “very important” reason.
- A plurality of American adults (46%) say two children is the ideal number for a family; 26% say three; 9% say four; and 3% each say zero, one or five or more. Among parents of three or more children, 33% say two is ideal.
- Nearly two-thirds of Americans (65%) say the growing number of single women having babies is bad for society. Only a minority disapproves of more women having babies after age 40 (33%), more women undergoing fertility treatment in order to have a baby (28%) and more women not ever having children (38%).

- Most adults say they know at least one woman who had a baby while she was not married and one man who fathered a child while he was not married. A third say they know a woman who had fertility treatment in order to get pregnant.

Ideal Number of Children

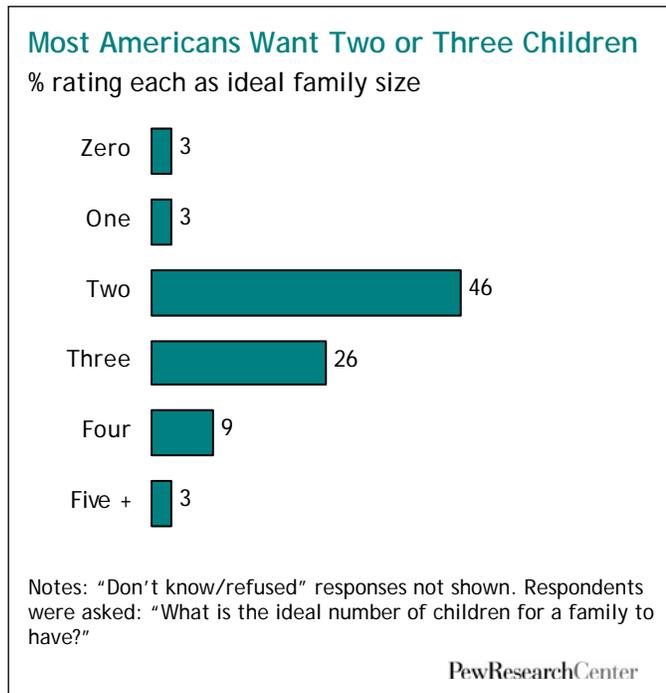
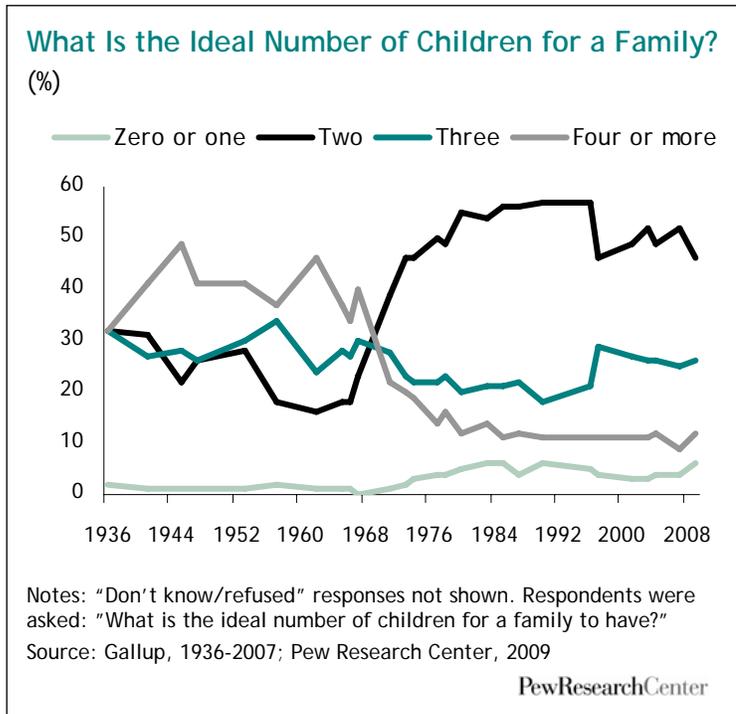
Americans prefer smaller families now than they did several decades ago. When asked to name the ideal number of children for a family, a plurality of Americans (46%) say two, trailed by 26% who say three. Only 9% select four; 3% each choose zero, one or at least five.

The survey question about the ideal number of children has been asked in Gallup organization surveys since the 1930s. Through the 1960s, “two” vied with “three” and “four” as the most popular choice. “Two” won decisively in the 1970s, and it has been the plurality or majority response ever since.

There is no significant difference by gender on responses to this question, but there are notable splits in family-size preference by age, education and religiosity.

Half of 18- to 29-year-olds (52%) say three or more children is ideal, compared with 33% of adults ages 30-49 and 50-64 and 40% of those 65 and older. Only 37% of young adults say one or two children is ideal, compared with more than half of adults ages 30-49 (55%) or 50-64 (51%).

Families of three or more children also have appeal for a higher share of Americans with at most a high school diploma (44%) than for college graduates (29%). Those larger families are more popular among Americans whose annual household incomes are under \$30,000 (46%), compared with those whose incomes exceed \$75,000 (28%). Religiosity also is associated with a preference for larger families: Three or more children are the ideal



for about four-in-ten Americans who attend religious services each week while three-in-ten Americans who seldom or never attend religious services say so.

European Family Size Ideals

Family size ideals in the United States are similar to those of European nations. Among 25 member countries of the European Union, the two-child family also is the most frequently cited ideal, according to the [latest survey of 25 nations](#), conducted in 2006.⁵

When asked, “Generally speaking, what do you think is the ideal number of children for a family?”, more than half (53%) of European respondents say two, followed by 22% who say three. Only 6% say one, and “none” is selected by only 2% of respondents. By country and gender, the mean preferences ranged from 1.8 for both men and women in Austria to 3.0 for both men and women in Cyprus. For all 25 nations, the mean preference is 2.3 for both men and women. In the U.S., the mean is 2.7 for men and 2.6 for women.

Do the Real and Ideal Match Up?

For most Americans with children, the number they have matches the number they consider ideal: 61% of parents with one or two children consider one or two children to be the ideal number, and 53% of those with three or more children say three or more is ideal. Notably, though, a third of adults who have three or more children (33%) say two is ideal (and an additional 2% say one is ideal).

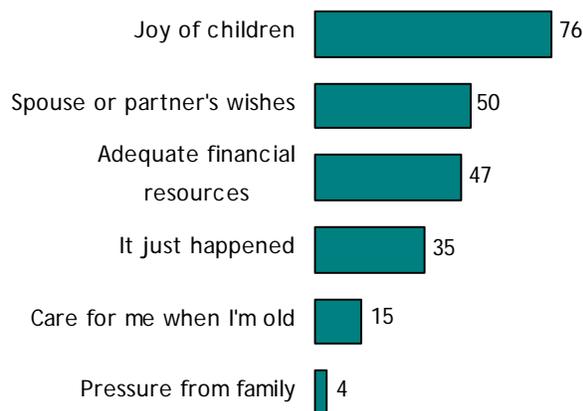
Among Americans who have children and potentially could have more—women under 50 and men under 60—11% say they plan to have more. Among those of childbearing age without children, 66% say they plan to have them, 4% say it depends and 3% say they hope to have them. One-in-four (24%) don’t plan to have children.

Parenting: Why Have Children?

When parents are asked why they decided to have children,⁶ one reason stands out: the joy of having them. Among all parents, 87% say that was a very important or somewhat important reason they decided to have their first or only child. As shown in the chart, 76% say the joy of having children was a very important reason for them, the only reason among six offered choices that most parents deem very important.

Why Do Parents Decide to Have Children?

% citing reason as very important



Notes: Asked of parents (n=770). Respondents were asked how important each reason was for them in deciding to have their first child.

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⁵ Testa, Maria R. “Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe.” European Commission. Special Eurobarometer 253/Wave 65.1. 2006.

⁶ This question was asked of all people who say they have children, whether those children are living or not. Respondents include parents of stepchildren.

Most parents also say it was very or somewhat important to them that their spouse or partner wanted a child (73%) and that they had the financial resources to provide for a child (70%).

About half (47%) say there wasn't a reason, but "it just happened." Only one-in-four (24%) say having someone to take care of them when they grow old was a very important or somewhat important reason for them. A smaller 8% say family pressure to have a child was a very or somewhat important reason they had their first or only child.⁷

How Do Reasons Differ for Demographic Groups?

Men and women are equally likely to say that the joy of having children was important to them in deciding to have a child. But men (56%) are more likely than women (46%) to say that their spouse or partner's wishes were very important in deciding to have a child.

Women (51%) are more likely than men (42%) to say that a very important or somewhat important reason was that "it just happened." Findings from the National Survey of Family Growth indicate that about a third of births are unplanned. According to 2002 figures from the survey, 21% of births were mistimed and 14% were unwanted.⁸

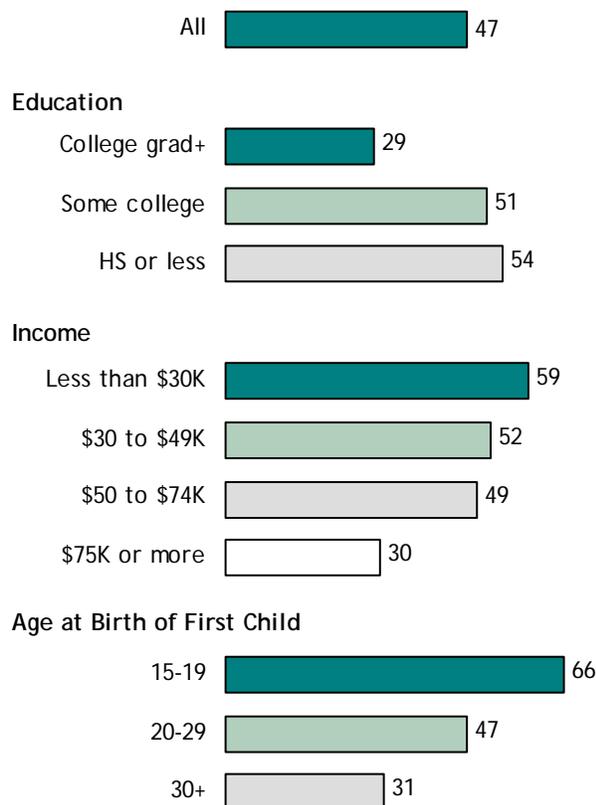
Education and Income

Education and household income play a role in people's answers about their reasons for having children. Americans with high levels of education and income are more likely than those with lower levels to cite the joy of children and their spouse or partner's wishes. Those with lower levels of income and education are more likely to say, "It wasn't a decision; it just happened."

The joy of having children was the most important reason among all education and income levels. But a higher share of college-educated Americans (94%) say it was very or

Why Did You Have a Child? It Just Happened

% citing reason as somewhat or very important



Notes: Asked of parents (n=770). Respondents were asked how important this factor was for them in deciding to have their first child: "It wasn't a decision; it just happened."

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⁷ Because of rounding multiple responses, the total share of respondents who cite a reason as "somewhat" or "very" important may differ from the total that would be obtained from the topline by adding the totals for those categories.

⁸ Chandra, A., G. Martinez, W. Mosher, et al. "Fertility, Family Planning and Reproductive Health of U.S. Women: Data From the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth." National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Statistics Series 23 (25). 2005.

somewhat important to them, compared with 82% of adults with at most a high school diploma. Similarly, Americans with household incomes of \$75,000 or more (92%) are more likely to cite this reason than those with household incomes of less than \$30,000 (84%).

A spouse or partner's wishes to have children is cited as important by 81% of college graduates, compared with 67% of adults with at most a high school diploma. This reason is cited by 76% of Americans with household incomes of at least \$75,000, compared with 62% of Americans with household incomes below \$30,000.

Higher income Americans are more likely than lower income Americans to say it was very or somewhat important to them to have adequate financial resources before deciding to have a child. Among those with incomes of \$75,000 or more, 79% cite this reason as important. Among those with household incomes under \$30,000, 61% do.

The explanation that "it just happened" is cited as very or somewhat important by half of Americans with at most a high school education (54%), compared with 29% of college-educated Americans. This explanation also is cited as somewhat or very important by more than half of Americans with household incomes under \$30,000 (59%) and only 30% of adults with household incomes of at least \$75,000.

Less educated Americans are among the most likely to say that a somewhat or very important reason they had their first (or only) child was to have someone to take care of them when they get old. Among adults with high school diplomas or less, 31% cite this reason, compared with only 14% of college graduates. A similar pattern applies to income groups on this question: 31% of Americans with household incomes of \$30,000 or less say this reason is important, compared with 12% of those with incomes of at least \$75,000.

Marital Status and Age

Parents who are currently married and unmarried are equally likely to say the joy of parenthood was a key reason they had children. They differ on some other reasons, though, including the importance of having enough money to raise a child. Having adequate financial resources is cited as somewhat or very important by a higher share of married parents (73%) than of not-married parents (65%).

On the other hand, not-married parents (61%) are more likely than married parents (39%) to say "it just happened." The not-married (31%) are more likely to say it was important to have someone to take care of them as they age, compared with 19% of married parents.

The explanation of "it just happened" is more likely to be cited as important by Americans who became parents in their teens (66%) than by those who became parents in their 20s (47%) or in their 30s and beyond (31%). The joy of having children is cited as important by 72% of Americans who became parents in their teens, but by much higher shares of those who became parents for the first time in their 20s (90%) or 30s and beyond (93%).

Older first-time parents also ascribe more importance than do teen parents to a spouse or partner's wishes in their decision to have a child. Teen parents (33%) are more likely than first-time parents in 20s (22%) or their 30s and beyond (18%) to say that having someone to care for them in old age was important.

Prospective Parents

People who say they intend to have children were offered a choice of reasons for deciding to have a child that included some of the same ones asked of current parents. Higher shares of prospective parents than of current parents cite most of these reasons as important to them.

Nearly all prospective parents (98%) say finding the right person will be very or somewhat important. As shown in the chart, fully 94% say it will be very important. About as many (94%) say having the financial resources to raise a child will be somewhat or very important to them. Among people who intend to become parents in the future, 93% say the joy of having children will be somewhat or very important to them. The wishes of a spouse or partner are deemed somewhat or very important by 90% of prospective parents, including 67% who say it will be very important.

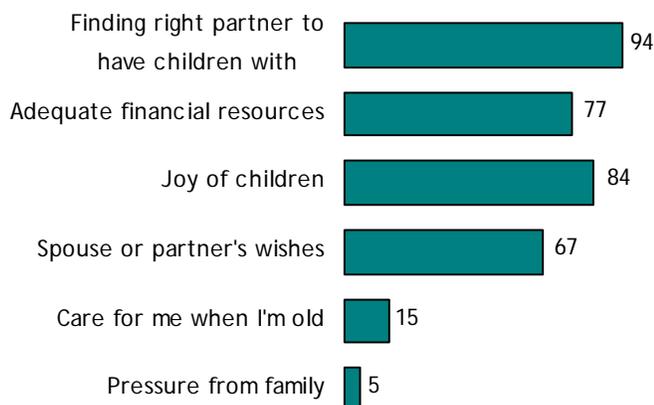
A third of people who say they intend to have children (35%) say it will be very or somewhat important to have someone to take care of them when they are old. Pressure from family is cited by 16% of prospective parents as a somewhat or very important reason that will factor into their decision to have children.

Why Did You Limit Family Size?

Among mothers under age 50 and fathers under age 60, 82% say they plan to have no more children. When those parents, as well as parents beyond the childbearing ages, were asked why they decided to limit the number of children they had, the only reason cited as “very important” by most parents (64%) is that they

What Would Make You Decide to Have a Child?

% citing reason as very important

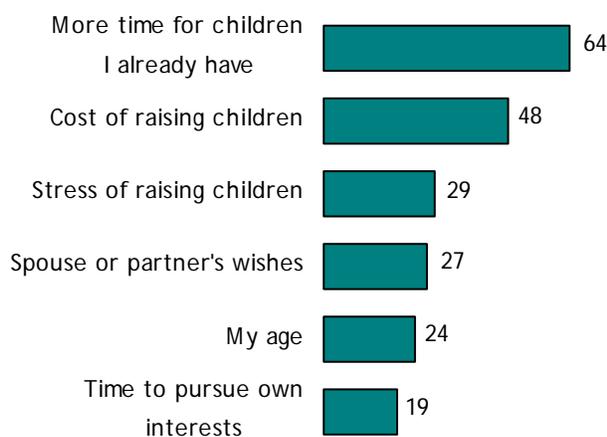


Notes: Asked of people who do not have children but say they intend or hope to have them (n=125). Respondents were asked how important each factor will be for them in deciding to have a child.

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Why Do Parents Decide to Have No More Children?

% citing reason as very important



Notes: Asked of mothers 50 and older; fathers 60 and older; and other parents who say they intend to have no more children (n=703). Respondents were asked how important each factor was for them in deciding to limit the number of children they have.

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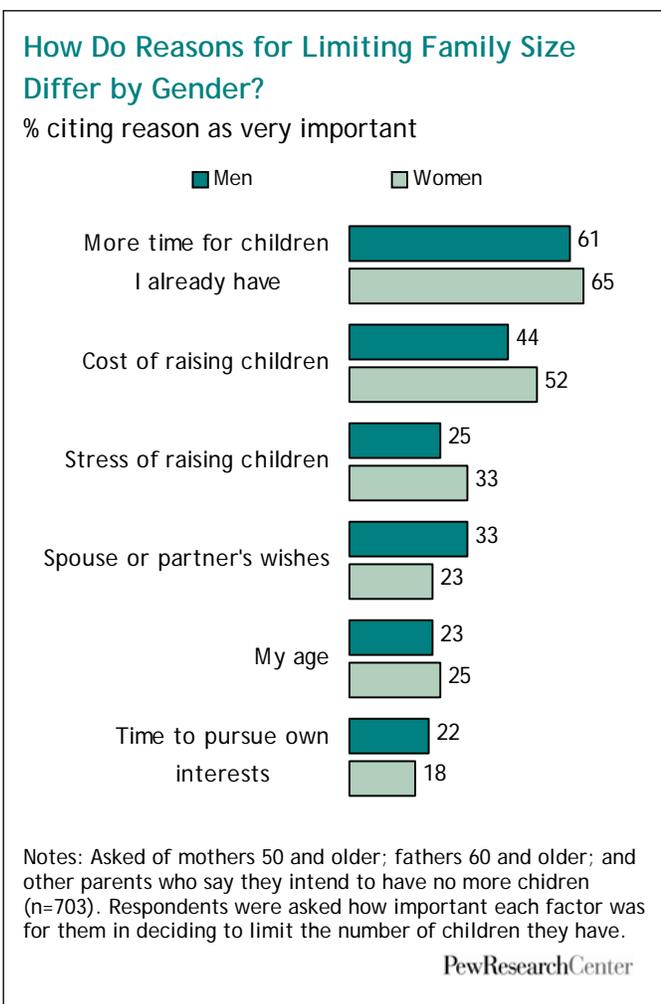
wanted to devote time to the children they already had, as shown in the chart. A total of 76% describe this reason as very important or somewhat important. A total of 72% say the cost of having another child was very or somewhat important to them in deciding to limit their family size.

A second tier of reasons, cited by a smaller share of respondents as very or somewhat important, include the stress of raising children (49%), the wishes of their spouse or partner for no more children (46%), their age (42%) and wanting to have time for other interests (40%).

There are gender differences in responses about stress, money and the wishes of a spouse or partner. Women (56%) are more likely than men (40%) to cite the stress of raising children as a very or somewhat important factor in their decision to limit family size. Men and women are about equally likely to say that financial concerns were somewhat to very important; a higher share of women (52%) than men (44%) say money issues were very important. A spouse or partner's wishes are cited as very important by 33% of men but only 23% of women.

Adults with at most a high school diploma are more likely than college graduates to cite stress and having the time to pursue their own interests as reasons for not having more children. Stress is cited as very important by 35% of adults with a high school education or less and 23% of college graduates. Time for their own interests is cited as very important by 25% of adults with a high school education or less and 12% of college graduates. Time to pursue their own interests also is cited as a very important reason by a higher share of Americans with household incomes under \$30,000 (29%) than by those with household incomes of \$75,000 or more (13%).

Younger parents and unmarried parents are more likely than older or married parents to cite the cost of raising children as a very important reason for limiting their family size. Among parents in their 20s and 30s, 68% do, compared with 44% of parents ages 40-59 and 43% of those ages 60 and older. More than half of unmarried parents (55%) cite this reason as very important, compared with 45% of married parents.



Do You Know Any ... Unmarried Mothers?

Most Americans say they know a woman who became a mother without being married and a man who became a father without being married. Younger Americans are more likely than older ones to be acquainted with a woman or man who became a parent while unmarried.

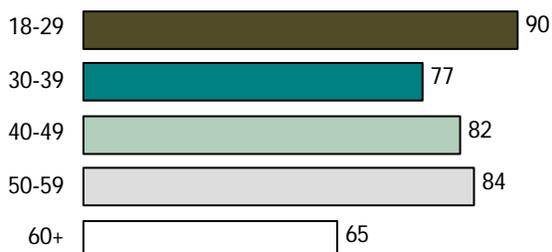
Nearly eight-in-ten Americans (79%) say they know an unmarried woman who had a child without being married, with no variation by gender, marital status, education level or income level. The likelihood of knowing a single mother is highest among younger age groups—90% of 18- to 29-year-olds say they do. Among those ages 60 and older, 65% do.

The most religious Americans are more likely than the least religious to say they know a woman who had a child while she was not married. Among those who go to religious services at least weekly, 84% are acquainted with a single mother, compared with 74% of Americans who seldom or never go to religious services.

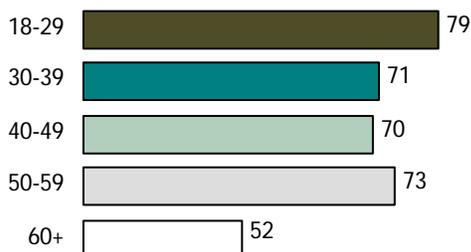
Do You Know Any Unmarried Mothers or Fathers?

% citing yes, by age of respondents

Unmarried Mothers



Unmarried Fathers



Notes: Respondents were asked whether they know any women who have had a baby without being married or any men who fathered a baby without being married.

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... Unmarried Fathers?

More than two-thirds of adults (68%) say they know an unmarried father. As with unmarried mothers, younger adults are more likely than older ones to know a man who fathered a child without being married. Nearly eight-in-ten Americans ages 18-29 (79%) do so, compared with 52% of Americans ages 60 and older.

On this question, men (72%) are somewhat more likely than women (65%) to say they know a man who fathered a child out of wedlock. Americans who are not married (73%) are slightly more likely to know an unmarried man who became a father than are Americans who are married (64%).

... Women Who Have Had Fertility Treatment?

A third of adults (33%) say they know a woman who has undergone fertility treatment. Among certain demographic groups, more than half know a woman who has had fertility treatment. They include college graduates (54%) and people with household incomes of \$100,000 or more (56%).

Women (40%) are more likely than men (25%) to know a woman who has had fertility treatment. This is especially true for 18- to 49-year-old women (45%), compared with similarly aged men (27%).

Married people (41%) are more likely than people who are not married (24%) to know a woman who has had fertility treatment. People who became parents for the first time in their 30s (47%) are more likely than those who became parents at younger ages to know a woman who has had fertility treatment.

Birth Trends: Good or Bad?

The survey tested attitudes on about unmarried motherhood, women without children, older mothers and women who undergo fertility treatment to become mothers. Most Americans disapprove of the increase in unmarried women having babies. They have mixed opinions about the other trends.

About two-thirds of American adults (65%) say the growing number of single women having babies is a bad thing for society, 27% say it doesn't make much difference and 4% say it's a good thing. Most people in all age groups are critical of this trend, but the proportion is highest among the oldest adults.

Among adults 18-29, 57% say the increase in single motherhood is a bad thing for society, as do 64% of 30- to 49-year-olds, 70% of those ages 50-64 and 74% of those 65 and older. The youngest adults are most likely to say it does not make much difference—35% of 18- to 29-year-olds say so, compared with 20% of those ages 65 and older.

The most religious Americans (76%)—those who go to services at least weekly—are more likely than adults who seldom or never go to services (53%) to say single motherhood is bad for society. Somewhat religious adults (62%)—those who go to services monthly or yearly—fall in between.

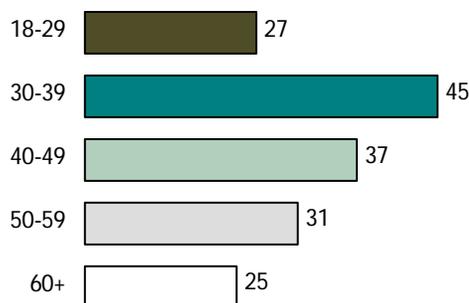
There is only a slight difference between respondents who are married (69%) or not married (62%) in the share that is critical of single motherhood. The responses of adults who know a woman who became a mother without being married do not differ significantly from those of adults who do not know one.

A Pew Research Center survey question on the same topic in 2007—“more single women deciding to have children without a male partner to help raise them”—had a similar response of 66% disapproval. The share of women who disapproved, 60%, was a slight decrease from 65% in 1997, when the same question was asked in a women-only survey.

Aside from the question of whether unmarried motherhood is good for society, there has been an increase in the share of people who agree that a single parent “can bring up a child as well as two parents together,” according to results from the [General Social Survey](#). In 1994, 36% agreed, 49% disagreed, and the rest were neutral or didn't answer. In 2002, 42% agreed that a single parent could equal two parents, 45% disagreed, and the rest were neutral or did not answer.

Do You Know Any Women Who Have Had Fertility Treatment?

% citing yes, by age of respondents



Note: “Don't know/refused responses not shown. Respondents were asked whether they know any women who have undergone fertility treatment in order to have a baby.

PewResearchCenter

Women Without Children

Americans are somewhat ambivalent about the increase in the number of women who do not ever have children. A plurality (46%) say it doesn't make much difference to society, 38% say it is a bad thing and 9% say it is a good thing for society.

There are no significant differences by age or gender on this question. Religiosity does play a role, though: The most religious Americans (44%) are more critical of women without children than are the least religious (30%).

When this question was asked in a 2007 Pew Research Center survey, 52% said it did not make much difference, 29% said it was a bad thing and 13% said it was a good thing.

This question has been addressed over the years from another angle by the General Social Survey, which asked respondents whether they agree or disagree that "people who have never had children lead empty lives." In 1988, 39% disagreed, 17% agreed and the rest were neutral or could not decide. By 2002, 59% disagreed, 18% agreed and the rest were neutral or could not decide.

Older Mothers

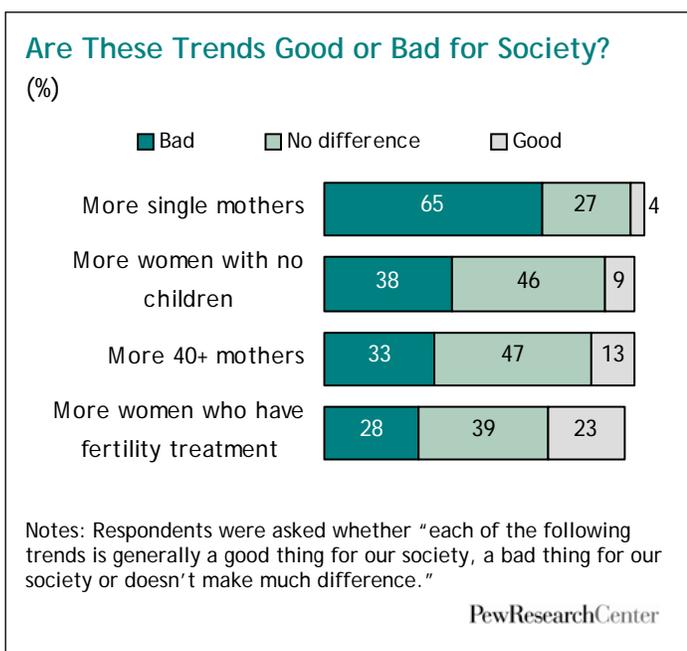
On the topic of women who become mothers after age 40, a plurality of Americans (47%) don't think it makes much difference, while 33% say it's bad and 13% say it's good for society. Responses vary by age, with older Americans the most critical; 43% of those ages 65 and older say it is bad for society. Men (52%) are somewhat more likely than women (43%) to say this does not make much difference to society.

College graduates are more likely than other group to have children at older ages, and most college graduates (54%) say this trend does not make a difference to society. Among Americans with at most a high school education, 44% say it makes no difference.

Most Americans who do not have children (55%), compared with 44% of those who do, say the growing number of older mothers is a trend that doesn't make much difference to society. Parents (36%) are more likely than non-parents (27%) to say it's a bad thing for society.

Fertility Treatment: Good or Bad?

A plurality (39%) of adults say it doesn't make much difference to society that a growing number of women undergo fertility treatment in an effort to have children. The remaining adults are split on whether it's a good thing for society (28%) or a bad thing (23%). A notable 10% say they do not know or do not give an answer.



Younger Americans are the most likely to say this trend does not make much difference to society: 46% of 18- to 49-year-olds say so, compared with 31% of adults ages 50 and older. Similarly, those older adults (34%) are more likely to disapprove than are younger ones (25%).

College graduates (48%) are more likely than adults with at most a high school education (35%) to say this trend makes no difference to society. Americans who know a woman who has undergone fertility treatment to have a child are more likely than those who do not to say it is a good thing for society (29% vs. 19%) and less likely to say it is a bad thing (23% vs. 31%).

About the Survey

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults living in the continental United States. A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. A total of 752 interviews were completed with respondents contacted by landline phone and 251 with those contacted on their cell phone. The data are weighted to produce a final sample that is representative of the general population of adults in the continental United States.

- Interviews conducted April 2-8, 2009
- 1,003 interviews
- Margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.6 percentage points for results based on the total sample at the 95% confidence level

Survey interviews were conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International.

PEW SOCIAL & DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS TOPLINE
April 2-8, 2009, FERTILITY SURVEY
TOTAL N=1,003

NOTE: ALL NUMBERS ARE PERCENTAGES. PERCENTAGES GREATER THAN ZERO BUT LESS THAN 0.5 % ARE REPLACED BY AN ASTERISK (*). COLUMNS/ROWS MAY NOT TOTAL 100% DUE TO ROUNDING. UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL TRENDS REFERENCE SURVEYS FROM THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S SOCIAL & DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS PROJECT AND THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS.

Q.1 Generally, how would you say things are these days in your life—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?

April 2009		Feb 2009	Oct 2008	June 2008	Sept 2006	Oct 2005	Late Mar 2003	Feb 2003	Sept 1996
29	Very happy	32	29	35	36	34	29	29	34
52	Pretty happy	49	51	48	51	50	51	51	53
16	Not too happy	15	17	14	12	15	16	17	11
3	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	4	3	3	1	1	4	3	2

On another subject ...

Q.2 What do you think is the ideal number of children for a family to have?

	<u>Zero</u>	<u>One</u>	<u>Two</u>	<u>Three</u>	<u>Four</u>	Five or <u>more</u>	DK/Ref. <u>(VOL.)</u>	<u>Mean</u> ⁹
April 2009	3	3	46	26	9	3	11	2.6
June 2007 Gallup	1	3	52	25	7	2	9	2.5
February 2004 Gallup/CNN/USA Today	1	3	49	26	9	3	9	2.6
July 2003 Gallup	1	2	52	26	9	2	8	2.5
May 2001 Gallup	1	2	49	27	9	2	11	2.6
May 1997 Gallup/CNN/USA Today	2	2	46	29	9	2	6	2.6
February 1996 Gallup	2	3	57	21	7	4	6	2.4
April 1990 Gallup	3	3	57	18	8	3	8	2.4
March 1987 Gallup	1	3	56	22	9	3	6	2.6
February 1985 Gallup	2	4	56	21	8	3	6	2.5
January 1983 Gallup	3	3	54	21	11	3	5	2.6
November 1980 Gallup	3	2	55	20	9	3	8	2.5
September 1978 Gallup	2	2	49	23	13	3	8	2.6
February 1977 Gallup	2	2	50	22	10	4	10	2.6
February 1974 Gallup	1	2	46	22	14	5	10	2.8
January 1973 Gallup	1	1	46	23	14	6	9	2.8
December 1967 Gallup	0	*	23	30	31	9	7	3.4
January 1966 Gallup	0	1	18	27	27	7	20	3.3
April 1965 Gallup	0	1	18	28	29	8	16	3.4
February 1962 Gallup	0	1	16	24	33	13	13	3.3
February 1957 Gallup	1	1	18	34	27	10	9	3.6
1953 Gallup	0	1	28	30	29	12	0	3.3
1947 Gallup	0	1	26	26	29	12	6	3.4
1945 Gallup	0	1	22	28	31	18	0	3.3
1941 Gallup	0	1	31	27	27	14	0	3.3
1936 Gallup	0	2	32	32	22	10	0	3.6

⁹

Means for 1936-1996 were estimated by Gallup.

Q.3 Next, please tell me if you think each of the following trends is generally a good thing for our society, a bad thing for our society, or doesn't make much difference. (First, Next) **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**

READ IF NECESSARY: Is this generally a good thing for our society, a bad thing for our society, or doesn't it make much difference?

	Good thing <u>for society</u>	Bad thing <u>for society</u>	Doesn't make <u>much difference</u>	DK/Ref (VOL.)
a. More single women having babies	4	65	27	3
b. More teenage girls having babies	1	94	4	1
c. More women not ever having children	9	38	46	7
February 2007	13	29	52	6
d. More women having babies after age 40	13	33	47	6
e. More women undergoing fertility treatments in order to have a baby	23	28	39	10

Q.4 Now thinking about teenage girls having babies. Please tell me whether you think each of the following is a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason why teenage girls are having babies these days. (First/Next) **(INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE)** **(READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN AS NECESSARY: Is this a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason why teenage girls are having babies these days?)**

	Major <u>reason</u>	Minor <u>reason</u>	Not a <u>reason</u>	DK/Ref (VOL.)
a. Parents don't provide enough supervision	69	21	7	3
b. Teenagers don't think about the consequences of their actions	88	7	3	2
c. The media and popular culture present a lot of sexual content	64	22	10	4

Q.4d Of the three reasons I just listed, which one do you think is the MOST important reason why teenage girls are having babies these days? **(IF NECESSARY, READ BACK ITEMS a. THRU c. FROM ABOVE IN SAME ORDER)**

37	Parents don't provide enough supervision
38	Teenagers don't think about the consequences of their actions
19	The media and popular culture present a lot of sexual content
2	All are equally important (VOL.)
2	Some other reason (VOL.)
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

On another subject ...

AGE Can you please tell me your age?

22	18-29
37	30-49
24	50-64
16	65 and older
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.5 Do you have any children under age 18?

INTERVIEWER: INCLUDE CHILDREN/STEPCHILDREN/ DECEASED CHILDREN:

34	Yes
66	No
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

INTERVIEWER: IF R VOLUNTEERS "NO KIDS AT ALL" IN Q5, DO NOT ASK Q6 BUT AUTOMATICALLY CODE Q6 AS A "NO" (Q6=2) AND PROCEED.

Q.6 Do you have any ADULT children age 18 or older?

INTERVIEWER: INCLUDE CHILDREN/STEPCHILDREN/ DECEASED CHILDREN:

46	Yes
53	No
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

IF HAVE ANY CHILDREN (Q.5=1 or Q.6=1) ASK: [N=775]

Q.7 Altogether, how many children do you have?

INTERVIEWER: INCLUDE CHILDREN/STEPCHILDREN/ DECEASED CHILDREN:

20	One
35	Two
22	Three
11	Four
11	Five or more
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

IF ONE CHILD (Q.7=1), ASK: [N=144]

Q.8 Is that a stepchild or not?

7	Yes
93	No
0	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

IF MORE THAN ONE CHILD (Q.7=2-11), ASK: [N=626]

Q.8a How many of your children, if any, are stepchildren?

86	None
11	One or two
3	Three or more
0	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

NO Q.9 OR Q.10

IF WOMAN WITH AT LEAST ONE CHILD AND UNDER AGE 50 (SEX=2 & Q.7=1-11 & AGE=18-49) OR MAN WITH AT LEAST ONE CHILD AND UNDER AGE 60 (SEX=1 & Q.7=1-11 & AGE=18-59), ASK: [N=369]

Q.11 Do you think you will have more children or not?

11	Yes
82	No
5	Maybe (VOL.)
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

IF MORE THAN ONE CHILD (Q.7=2-11), ASK: [N=626]

Q.12 How old were you when your first child was born?

20	15-19
63	20-29
15	30-39
*	40 or older
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

23.8 Mean age

IF ONE CHILD (Q.7=1), ASK: [N=144]

Q.12a How old were you when your child was born?

10	15-19
54	20-29
31	30-39
2	40 or older
4	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

26.5 Mean age

IF WOMAN WITH NO CHILDREN AND UNDER AGE 50 (SEX=2 & Q.5=2 & Q.6=2 & AGE=18-49) OR MAN WITH NO CHILDREN AND UNDER AGE 60 (SEX=1 & Q.5=2 & Q.6=2 & AGE=18-59), ASK: [N=178]

Q.13 Do you think you will have children in the future, or not?

66	Yes
24	No
3	Hope to have children (VOL.)
4	Depends (VOL.)
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

*****NOTE: RESULTS FOR Q.14 AND Q.14a ARE NOT SHOWN DUE TO SMALL SAMPLE SIZES*******IF NO IN Q.13 (Q.13=2), ASK: [N=48]**

Q.14 Tell me about why you don't think you will ever have children. Is it because (READ AND ROTATE)?

You would like to have children but it hasn't happened [OR]
 You don't want to have children
[DO NOT READ] It just worked out that way
 Unable to have kids (VOL.)
[DO NOT READ] Don't know/Refused

IF WOMEN AND AGE 50+ AND NEVER HAD KIDS (SEX=2 & AGE=50-97 & Q.5=2 & Q.6=2 OR IF MAN AND AGE 60+ AND NEVER HAD KIDS (SEX=1 & AGE=60-97 & Q.5=2 & Q.6=2), ASK: [N=41]

Q.14a Tell me about why you don't have any children. Is it because (READ AND ROTATE)?

You wanted to have children but it never happened [OR]
 You didn't want to have children
[DO NOT READ] It just worked out that way
 Unable to have kids (VOL.)
[DO NOT READ] Don't know/Refused

ASK THOSE WHO HAVE CHILDREN (Q.7=1-11): [N=770]

Q.15 I'm going to read a list of reasons why some people have children. For each one, please tell me how important this factor was for YOU in deciding to have your first child. (First,/Next,) **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE – ITEM f. SHOULD ALWAYS COME LAST]** (READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN AS NECESSARY: was this very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important in your decision to have your first child?)

	Very <u>important</u>	Somewhat <u>important</u>	Not too <u>important</u>	Not at all <u>important</u>	Not Applicable (VOL.)	DK/Ref (VOL.)
a. Having the financial resources to raise a child	47	24	8	17	2	2
b. Wanting to have someone to take care of you when you're old	15	9	13	58	3	3
c. The joy of having children	76	11	2	8	1	1
d. Feeling pressure from parents or other family members to have a baby	4	4	11	77	3	2
e. Your spouse or partner really wanted to have a baby	50	22	6	17	2	2
f. It wasn't a decision; it just happened	35	12	7	29	9	8

ASK THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE CHILDREN BUT THINK THEY WILL OR HOPE TO IN THE FUTURE OR SAY "IT DEPENDS" (Q.13=1,3,4): [N=125]

Q.16 I'm going to read a list of reasons why some people have children. For each one, please tell me how important you think this factor will be for YOU in deciding to have a child. (First,/Next,) **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]** (READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN AS NECESSARY: will this be very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important in your decision to have children?)

	Very <u>important</u>	Somewhat <u>important</u>	Not too <u>important</u>	Not at all <u>important</u>	Not Applicable (VOL.)	DK/Ref (VOL.)
a. Finding the right person to have children with	94	4	0	2	0	0
b. Having the financial resources to raise a child	77	16	2	4	1	0
c. Wanting to have someone to take care of you when you're old	15	20	32	32	0	1
d. The joy of having children	84	9	2	3	0	3
e. Feeling pressure from parents or other family members to have a baby	5	10	24	60	0	1
f. Your spouse or partner really wanting to have a baby	67	23	3	6	0	0

IF WOMAN AND UNDER AGE 50 AND HAS CHILDREN AND DOESN'T PLAN TO HAVE ANY MORE (SEX=2 & AGE=18-49 & Q.7=1-11 & Q.11=2) OR IF WOMAN AGE 50 AND OLDER AND HAS KIDS (SEX=2 & AGE=50-97 & Q.7=1-11) OR IF MAN AND UNDER AGE 60 AND HAS CHILDREN AND DOESN'T PLAN TO HAVE ANY MORE (SEX=1 & AGE=18-59 & Q.7=1-11 & Q.11=2) OR IF MAN AGE 60 AND OLDER AND HAS KIDS (SEX=1 & AGE=60-97 & Q.7=1-11), ASK: [N=703]

Q.17 Now I'm going to read a list of reasons why some people decide to LIMIT the number of children they have. For each one, please tell me how important this factor was for YOU in deciding to limit the number of children you have. (First,/Next,) **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]** (READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN AS NECESSARY: was this very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important in deciding to limit the number of children you have?)

	Very <u>important</u>	Somewhat <u>important</u>	Not too <u>important</u>	Not at all <u>important</u>	Not Applicable (VOL.)	DK/Ref (VOL.)
a. Because of your age	24	18	13	41	2	1
b. The financial cost of raising children	48	24	10	16	1	2
c. The stress of raising children	29	20	15	32	2	2
d. Wanting time to pursue your own interests	19	21	19	38	1	2
e. Your spouse or partner didn't want to have more children	27	19	9	36	4	5
f. Wanting to devote your time to the children you already have	64	12	6	15	1	2

*****NOTE: RESULTS FOR Q.18 ARE NOT SHOWN DUE TO SMALL SAMPLE SIZE [N=89]. SEE THE FULL WRITTEN REPORT FOR FINDINGS. *****

IF WOMAN AND UNDER AGE 50 AND DOESN'T PLAN TO HAVE KIDS (SEX=2 & AGE=18-49 & Q.13=2) OR IF WOMAN AGE 50 AND OLDER AND DOESN'T HAVE CHILDREN (SEX=2 & AGE=50-97 & Q.5=2 & Q.6=2) OR IF MAN AND UNDER AGE 60 AND DOESN'T PLAN TO HAVE KIDS (SEX=1 & AGE=18-59 & Q.13=2) OR IF MAN AGE 60 AND OLDER AND DOESN'T HAVE CHILDREN (SEX=1 & AGE=60-97 & Q.5=2 & Q.6=2), ASK:

Q.18 Now I'm going to read a list of reasons why some people do not have children. Please rate the importance of each factor in making your own decisions regarding children. (First,/Next,) **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]** (READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN AS NECESSARY: would you rate this factor as very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important in making your own decisions regarding children?)

- a. Because of your age
- b. The financial cost of raising children
- c. The stress of raising children
- d. Wanting time to pursue your own interests
- e. Fertility problems
- f. Not finding the right person to have children with

ASK ALL WOMEN UNDER AGE 50 (SEX=2 & AGE=18-49) AND ALL MEN UNDER AGE 60 (SEX=1 & AGE=18-59): [N=550]

Q.19 Has the present state of the U.S. economy affected your own plans about whether to have a child or whether to have more children, or not?

21	Yes
77	No
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

Now, just a couple more questions about children and families. Thinking about the people you know ...

RANDOMIZE Q.25 AND Q.26

Q.25 Do you personally know any WOMEN who **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**, or not? **[READ FOR EVERY ITEM]:** And do you know any women who **[INSERT NEXT ITEM]**, or not?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	DK/Ref (VOL.)
a. Have had a baby without being married	79	20	1
b. Had a baby while they were a teenager	69	30	1
c. Have undergone fertility treatments in order to have a baby	33	67	1

Q.26 Do you personally know any MEN who **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**, or not? And do you know any MEN who **[INSERT NEXT ITEM]**, or not?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	DK/Ref (VOL.)
a. Fathered a baby without being married	68	30	2
b. Fathered a baby while they were a teenager	50	49	1

Appendix A. Methodology of Demographic Analysis

Data Sets

Data regarding births are obtained from two main sources: vital statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) and information regarding recent births from the Current Population Survey (CPS).

Vital statistics data from the National Center for Health Statistics reflect information extracted from completed birth certificates, which include the mother's characteristics at the time of the birth. These tabulations are based upon births to all residents of the United States in a given calendar year, regardless of where the birth occurred. Since final data for 2007 and 2008 have not yet been released, the statistics for these years were obtained from published reports of preliminary data. For more information on the preliminary data, see [Births: Preliminary Data for 2007](#) and [Births: Preliminary Data for 2008](#).

The 2007 and 2008 NCHS publications show data for all Asian and Pacific Islanders but do not include details regarding non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islanders. As such, statistics for this population were estimated by applying the proportion of non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islanders from the 2006 data to the 2007 and 2008 statistics for all Asian and Pacific Islanders.

The 2007 and 2008 NCHS publications aggregate births among women ages 45 to 54 into one category. The age distribution from the 2006 NCHS data was applied to this aggregate number for 2007 and 2008 data, in order to approximate the number of births occurring at ages 45 to 49 and 50 to 54 in each year.

Data from the June supplement of the CPS includes information from female respondents ages 15 to 44 regarding their fertility history, including the timing of any births. Any woman who gave birth from the prior June through the month of May preceding the survey is included, and the mother's characteristics are based upon the information provided at the time of the survey. Whereas the NCHS data include a record for each baby born, the CPS data account for each mother giving birth. Given that approximately three percent of live births include multiples (twins, triplets, etc.), the CPS slightly undercounts the number of babies born.

All CPS analyses are based upon aggregated three-year samples. Since the June supplement is administered every other year, 1988, 1990, and 1992 data are combined in one file (referred to in the text and charts as "1990"), and 2004, 2006, and 2008 data are combined in another file (referred to in the text and charts as "2006.") . Analyses are based upon combined data sets to increase sample size, which for some subgroups is quite small in the single-year files. Even with the data aggregation, sample sizes for some of the Asian cells for 1988-92 are still too small to allow for analysis.

Variables

All variables, including race and ethnicity, are based upon the characteristics of the mother, not of the father or the baby.

Statistics for whites, blacks, and Asians are for non-Hispanics only. The Asian population is defined as including both Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Any person born in the U.S. or a U.S. territory is defined as native born in this analysis. All others are defined as foreign born. NCHS data regarding mother's nativity is not publicly available after 2004, so statistics are shown only through 2004.

A mother is described as married if she is either married or separated. Otherwise she is considered unmarried.

Educational attainment is divided into three categories representing the mother's highest level of education completed—less than a high school diploma; high school diploma; and some college or more. During the period of analysis, several government agencies adjusted the way they collected education data. Through 2002, NCHS defined education based upon years of schooling as opposed to degree obtained. In 2003, some NCHS records continued to use this system, while others adopted a new approach based upon degree obtained (the method of education definition varied by state). Through 1990, the CPS defined education using the years-of-education approach; by 1992, all CPS data were coded based upon educational degree obtained. To create comparable data across time, for both the NCHS and the CPS data where education was based upon years of schooling, respondents with 12 years of education were classified as having a high school diploma, while those with more years of education were defined as having at least some college experience, and those with fewer years of education were defined as having less than a high school diploma.

Counts and Shares

Statistics regarding birth counts and proportions are derived from NCHS data for all variables except education and children ever born. Since the NCHS did not publish the educational characteristics of recent mothers in its 2007 and 2008 publications, education data are obtained from the 2004-08 and the 1988-92 CPS June supplement data. The NCHS does not collect information on cumulative fertility for all women, so the CPS June supplement files were also used to calculate children ever born statistics. Information regarding the composition of the female population of childbearing age is derived from the decennial Census (for 1990 and 2000) and from the American Community Survey (for 2008).

Birth Rates

The primary measure of birth rate used is the General Fertility Rate (GFR), which is the number of births divided by the number of women of childbearing age in a given year.

For analyses of birth rates by marital status or education, CPS data are used to define both the numerator (births) and the denominator (population). All women ages 15 to 44 are considered of childbearing age in the CPS analyses.

For all other analyses, NCHS birth data are used in the numerator, while the population totals in the denominator are derived from decennial Census Bureau data (for 1990) and from American Community Survey data (for 2008). For 1990, the denominator consists of the number of women ages 10 to 49, because this is the age range for which births are recorded. For 2008, the denominator is the number of women ages 10 to 54.¹⁰

¹⁰ Some 99.7% of births occurred to females ages 15 to 44 in 2008.

Birth rates differ from those published by NCHS primarily for two reasons: NCHS calculates birth rates using Census Bureau population estimates to measure the number of women of childbearing age; and NCHS typically calculates birth rates with the number of women ages 15 to 44 in the denominator.