

C3.205/8:
4-89

BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Statistical Brief

Singleness in America

The number of single adults has increased by almost 75 percent over the past two decades.

Adults are more likely to be single today than they were in 1970. They are marrying for the first time much later than the previous generation and many are becoming single again because of divorce or the death of their spouses. In 1970, 38 million, or 28 percent, of all adults 18 years and older were single (never-married, divorced, or widowed); by 1988, this number had grown to 66 million, or 37 percent of adults.

Singleness, in most instances, is a temporary state—about 90 percent of people will eventually marry and, of those who divorce, about 70 percent will remarry.

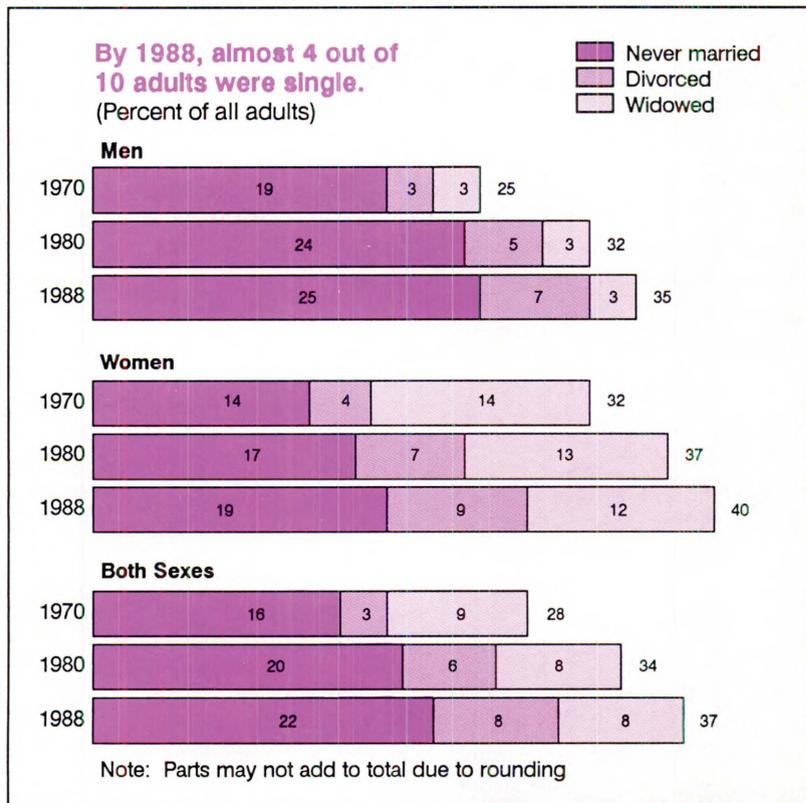
Persons are marrying later.

From 1955 to 1975, the estimated median age at first marriage gradually moved upward, increasing by just under 1 year for both men and women. Since 1975, however, the median age had increased by about 2 1/2 years for both sexes. Today, the median ages at first marriage—25.9 for men and 23.6 for women—are similar to those seen at the turn of the century.

The proportions of men and women in their twenties and early thirties who have never married have also grown substantially. Between 1970 and 1988, the proportions never married among 20- to 24-year-olds grew by 70 percent for women and by over 40 percent for men. Six of 10 women and nearly 8 of 10 men aged 20 to 24 had not yet married in 1988. The proportions never married among 25- to 29-year-olds tripled for women and more than doubled for men during the 1970-88 period and almost tripled among men and women 30 to 34 years old.

More young adults are living at home with their parents.

Fifty-four percent of adults 18 to 24 years old lived in their parents' homes in 1988, up from 48 percent in 1980 and 47 percent in 1970. This change is primarily a shift away from maintaining a family of one's own at a young age rather than a shift away from living independently of parents before forming a family. One factor behind this increase is the high cost of housing. In 1980, the average monthly income of young adults was \$539, but the monthly median gross rent throughout the Nation was \$241,



or 45 percent of their average income, and the median cost of housing for owners was \$367, or 68 percent of the average income of young adults. By 1985 (the latest year for which data are available), median gross rent had reached 57 percent of the average monthly income of young adults and owners' housing costs had jumped to 89 percent.

More marriages are ending in divorce.

Divorce increased greatly during the 1960's and 1970's. By 1985, almost one-fourth of persons who had ever been married had experienced a divorce. Teenage marriages had the highest risk of divorce: among women who married as teenagers, 32 percent had divorced as of 1985, up from 20 percent in 1970.

And fewer children live with two parents.

About one-half of all divorces involve children. Over 1 million children have been involved in divorce each year since 1972. In 1988, one-fourth of all children under 18 years old lived with a single parent, double the proportion in 1970. Divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing are the main reasons that children live with a single parent: 38 percent of children living with one parent were with a divorced parent and 31 percent were living with a parent who had never been married.

The majority of the elderly are women and most of them are single.

Among elderly women, most are widows: 49 percent of elderly women, compared with only 14 percent of elderly men. Older women's single status is more likely to be permanent because women live longer than men and are less likely to remarry after being widowed. In contrast, the majority of elderly men are married (78 percent). As a consequence,

41 percent of elderly women live alone, while only 16 percent of elderly men do so.

Elderly women had lower incomes and were thus more likely to be poor than elderly men. The poverty rate for the single elderly was higher than that for the married elderly, and the rates for single elderly women were higher than for their male counterparts.

The data shown here were derived primarily from information collected in the Current Population Survey for March of 1970 through 1988.

For information on this topic:

See-

Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 162, *Studies in Marriage and the Family*. (For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Stock number 803-005-10015-4. \$2.50.

For telephone orders, call (202) 783-3238.)

Contact-
Arlene Saluter
(301) 763-7987

For information on Statistical Briefs:

Contact-
Jennifer Marks
(301) 763-8337

This is one of a series of occasional reports from the Census Bureau that provides timely data on specific policy-related issues. The Bureau collects a variety of data from U.S. households, businesses, and other entities. This Brief presents statistics from one or more of the data collections. Statistical data are subject to sampling variability and certain errors, such as data collection design flaws, respondent classification and reporting errors, and data processing mistakes. The Bureau has taken quality control measures to reduce reported data errors, and data in this Brief have been tested and are in accord with applicable statistical standards. However, caution should be used when comparing these and other data sets.

