

Statistical Brief

Family Life Today . . . And How It Has Changed

American family life has changed greatly over the last three decades; this Brief explores some important trends in family circumstances and living arrangements during this period, with a particular emphasis on children. Data come from a variety of sources, most often the Current Population Survey. Current figures refer to 1990, unless otherwise noted.

Fewer young adults are getting married.

In 1990, most young persons between ages 20 and 24 had never been married (63 percent of women, 79 percent of men). Yet as recently as 1960, only 28 percent of women, and 53 percent of men this age had never married.

In 1990, those aged 25 to 29 also were much less likely to have ever been married — 45 percent of men (more than double 1960's figure), and 31 percent of women (triple 1960's percentage) had never married. Consequently, by 1990, the median age at first marriage (23.9 years for women, 26.1 for men) was the highest it's been this century.

As fewer young adults marry, there are more premarital births.

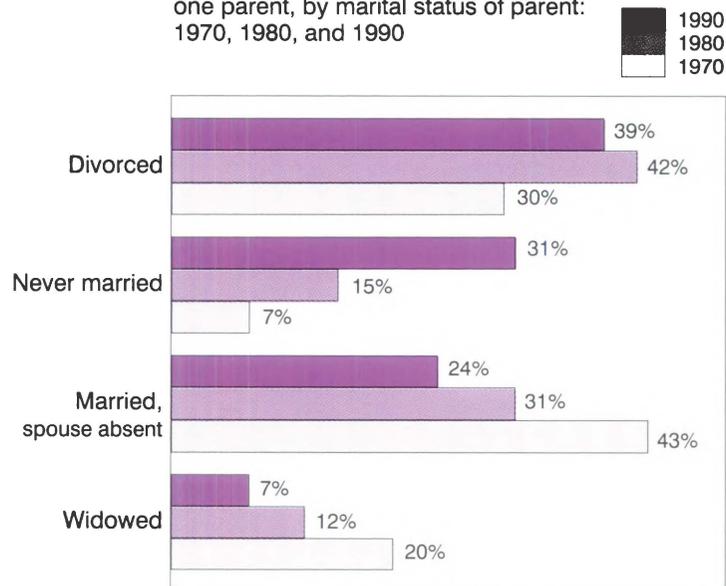
About 2.2 million women who gave birth for the first time between 1985 and 1989 had never been married, a threefold increase from the period between 1960 and 1964. In the late 1980's, 22 percent of first births occurred before marriage for White women aged 15 to 34, up from 9 percent in the early 1960's; for Black women, the proportion rose from 42 to 70 percent over this period; the comparable increase for Hispanics was 19 to 38 percent.

Children more likely to live with only one parent.

With the increasing number of premarital births and a continuing high divorce rate, the proportion of children living with just one parent rose from 9 percent in 1960 to 25 percent in 1990. Most of these children live with their mother. Black children are especially likely to live with one parent: 55 percent, compared with 19 percent of White children. Just because a child lives with two parents, though, doesn't mean he or she hasn't experienced some sort of family disruption —

Increasingly, Children Who Live With One Parent Were Born Out-of-Wedlock

Distribution of children under 18 living with one parent, by marital status of parent: 1970, 1980, and 1990



Note: Do not add due to rounding.



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16 percent of these children lived with a stepparent.

Families become smaller.

Small families with one or two children have become more predominant: 80 percent of families with children present had fewer than 3 children in 1990, up from 64 percent in 1960. The combination of fewer children per family and more one-parent families has led to smaller-sized families — the average family now contains 3.17 persons, down from 3.67 in 1960.

Parents are better educated.

The educational attainment of parents (whether married or not) increased greatly between 1960 and 1990. For instance, in 1990, only 25 percent of single mothers had less than a high school degree, down from 62 percent in 1960. In married-couple families, only 15 percent of householders had not completed high school, down from 51 percent 30 years earlier.

More married mothers are in the labor force.

The period between 1970 and 1990 saw a doubling of the proportion of married women with preschool-age children in the labor force — from 30 to 59 percent. Also, 3 in 4 married women with children of school age were in the labor force in 1990, up from 49 percent 20 years earlier. Therefore, in a majority of married couples with children (70 percent) both the husband and the wife worked. Only 21 percent were “traditional” families, where the husband worked year-round full-time and the wife did not work.

More working women with infants.

A mother who has given birth in the last year is increasingly likely to be in the labor force — 53 percent of those aged 18-44, up from 31 percent in 1976.

Poverty rate for children rises.

Children saw their poverty rate fall from 27 to 14 percent during the

1960's. During the 1970's, it fluctuated between 14 and 17 percent. In the 1980's, however, it swayed between 18 and 22 percent; in 1990, 21 percent were below the poverty line.

Child Poverty at a Glance

Poverty rates for children (under 18 years old), by characteristic: 1990

Age	
Under 3	25%
3-5	22%
6-11	21%
12-17	17%

Race and Ethnicity

White	16%
Black	45%
Hispanic origin	38%

Family Type

Married couple	10%
Female householder, no spouse present	53%

Income growth has stabilized.

Between 1947 and 1973, median family income (after adjusting for inflation) doubled. Despite rising educational attainment and married women's increasing labor force participation, in the next 17 years, adjusted family income rose just 6 percent (to \$35,353 in 1990). Though the large increase in one-parent families tended to

slow the increase in the overall median family income, married-couple families saw their adjusted income rise only 11 percent between 1973 and 1990 (to \$39,895).

More information:

Households, Families, and Children: A 30-Year Perspective, Current Population Reports, Series P-23. No. 181. Contact Customer Services at the Census Bureau (301-763-4100) for ordering information.

Contacts:

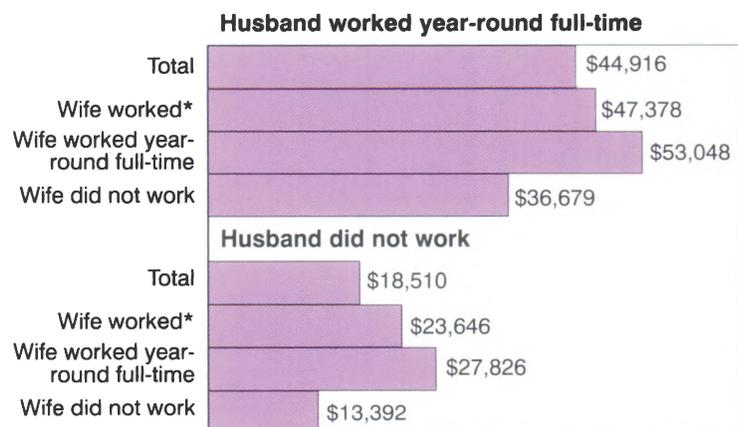
Families and Children —
Terry Lugaila
301-763-7987

Statistical Briefs —
Robert Bernstein
301-763-1584

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Families With Children Have Higher Income If Both Parents Work

Median family income of married couples with one or more related children under 18 years old, by work experience of husband and wife: 1990



*Includes those who worked part-time