

Births to Unmarried Women

INDICATORS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH



After years of growth, the proportion of births that are to unmarried women has leveled off, and since 2009 has been at just over 40 percent.

Importance

Children born to unmarried mothers are more likely to grow up in a single-parent household, experience instable living arrangements, live in poverty, and have socio-emotional problems.^{1,2,3,4} As these children reach adolescence, they are more likely to have low educational attainment, engage in sex at a younger age, and have a birth outside of marriage.^{5,6,7,8} As young adults, children born outside of marriage are more likely to be idle (neither in school nor employed), have lower occupational status and income, and have more troubled marriages and more divorces than those born to married parents.⁹

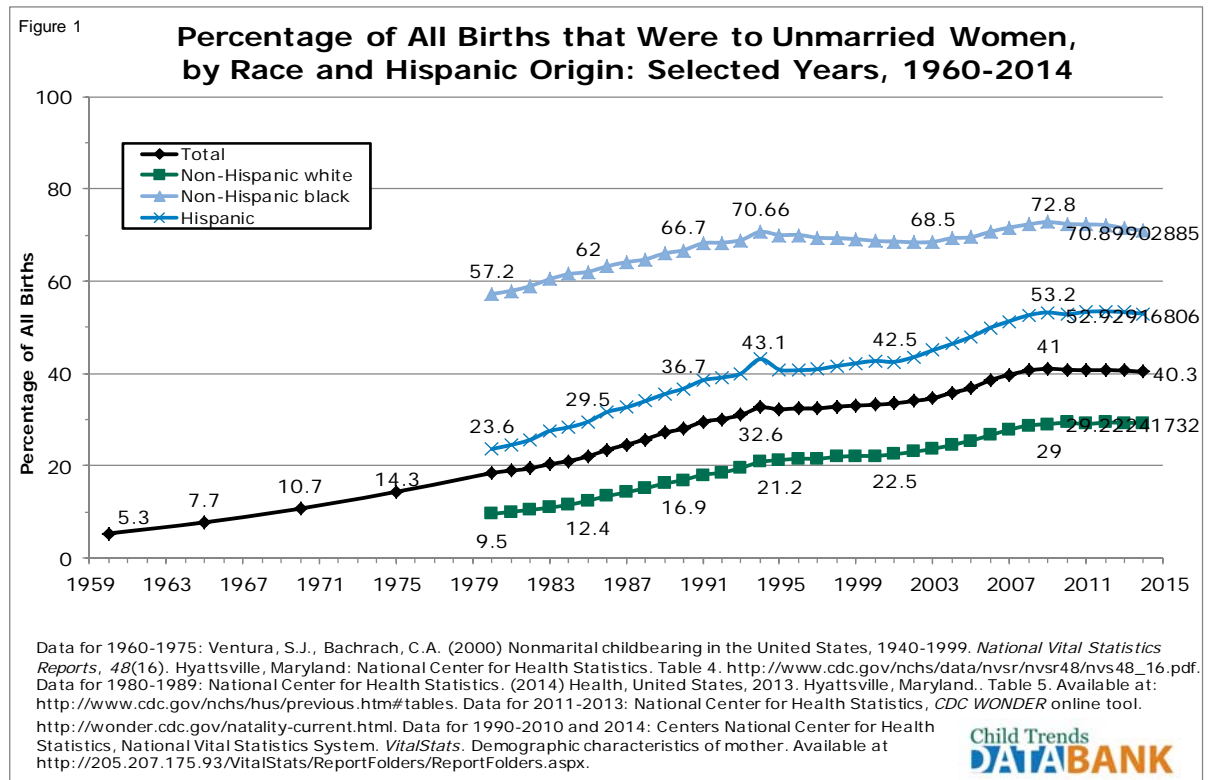
Women who give birth outside of marriage tend to be more disadvantaged than their married counterparts, both before and after the birth. Unmarried mothers generally have lower incomes, lower education levels, and are more likely to be dependent on welfare assistance compared with married mothers.^{10,11,12,13} Women who have a nonmarital birth also tend to fare worse than childless single women; for example, they have reduced marriage prospects compared with single women without children.^{14,15}

A majority of unmarried births now occur to cohabiting parents.¹⁶ Between 2006 and 2010, 58 percent of unmarried births were to cohabiting parents: in 2002, the proportion was 40 percent.¹⁷ Children born to cohabiting parents are more likely to see their parents eventually marry than are those born to non-co-residential parents.¹⁸ Nevertheless, children born to cohabiting parents experience higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, and fare worse across a range of behavioral and emotional outcomes than those born to married parents.¹⁹



Trends

The proportion of births to unmarried women has increased greatly in recent decades, rising from five percent in 1960 to 32 percent in 1995. After some stability in the mid-1990s, there was a gradual rise from 1997 through 2008, from 32 to 41 percent. The rate appears to have stabilized again, and was at 40 percent in 2014. (Figure 1) The long-term trend toward non-marital births may be attributed, in part, to an increase in cohabiting unions and in births within such relationships. Data for 2014 show an increase among all age groups over 19 years in the share of births that were to unmarried women. (Appendix 1)



Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin²⁰

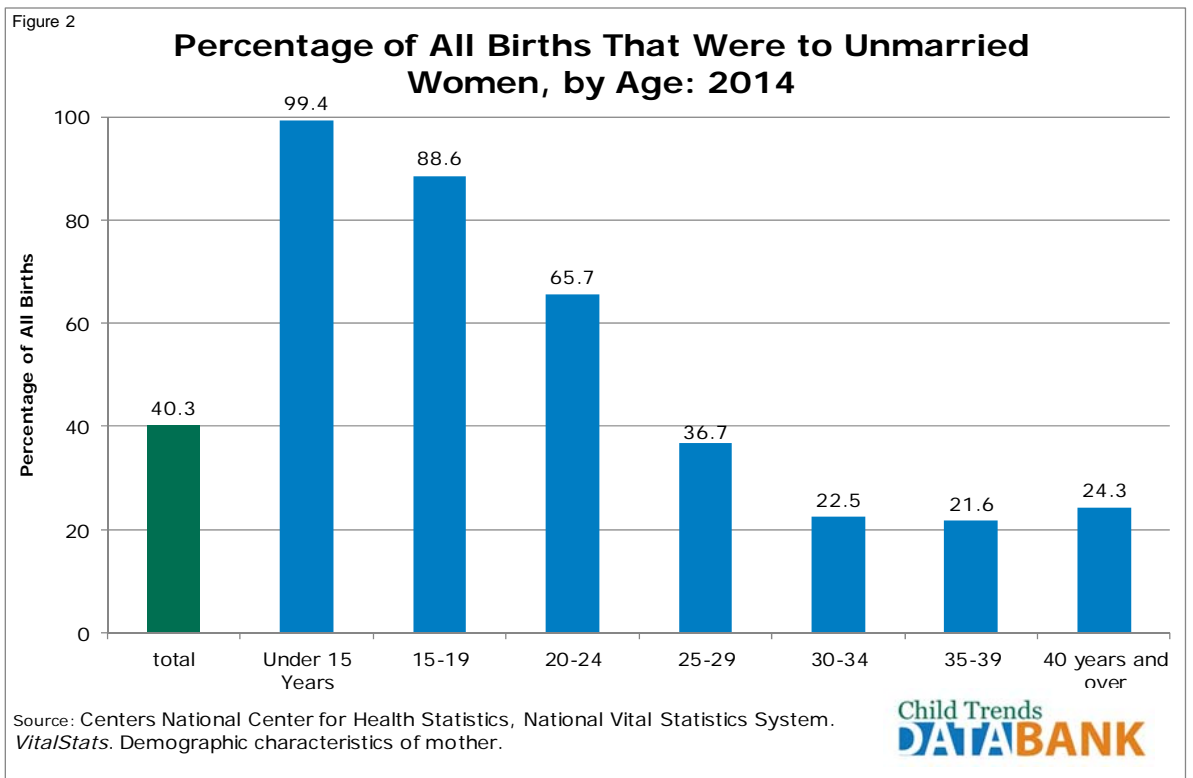
There are large differences by race and Hispanic origin in the share of births to unmarried women, with non-Hispanic white women and Asian or Pacific Islander women much less likely than women in other groups to have a nonmarital birth. In 2013, 72 percent of all births to black women, 66 percent to American Indian or Alaskan native women, and 53 percent to



Hispanic women occurred outside of marriage, compared with 29 percent for white women, and 17 percent for Asian or Pacific Islander women. (Appendix 1) However, the difference between black and white women in the percentage of births that are nonmarital has been shrinking since 1980, while the difference between white and Hispanic women has been widening. (Figure 1)

Differences by Age

Younger women who give birth are substantially more likely than older women to do so outside of marriage. In 2014, the great majority of teenage births were to unmarried women: 99 percent for teens under age 15 and 89 percent for 15- to 19-year olds. This compares with 66 percent of births to women ages 20 to 24, 37 percent to women ages 25 to 29, and between 22 and 24 percent to women in their thirties and forties. (Figure 2) Between 1960 and 1970, the fastest growth in the percentage of non-marital births was among 15- to 19-year-olds. However, between 1970 and 2000, the fastest growth was among 20- to 29-year-olds; and between 2000 and 2010, the fastest growth has been among 30- to 35-year-olds. (Appendix 1)





Nonmarital Births in Cohabiting Couples

Data from a national survey indicate that more than half (58 percent) of all non-marital births in 2006-2010 occurred within cohabiting unions, although there is substantial variation by racial and ethnic group, age, and poverty status. Among Hispanic and white women, 68 percent of all nonmarital births occurred within cohabiting unions, compared with only 35 and 45 percent, respectively, among black and Asian women. (Appendix 2)

Teens are less likely than older women to have nonmarital births within cohabiting unions. Forty-six percent of nonmarital teen births occurred within cohabiting situations, compared to 63 percent among women aged 20 to 24, and about 60 percent among women aged 25 and older (including 61 percent for women aged 25-29, and 60 percent for women aged 30-44). (Appendix 2)

Women whose family incomes were between 150 and 299 percent of the federal poverty line (at the time of interview, up to five years after the birth) were the most likely to be cohabiting at the time of a non-marital birth (67 percent); among women living below 150 percent of the poverty line, or at 300 percent and above, 57 percent of non-marital births occurred within cohabiting unions. (Appendix 2)

State and Local Estimates

- 2013 state-level estimates for the percentage of births to unmarried mothers by race and Hispanic origin are available from: Martin J. A., Hamilton B. E., Osterman, M. J. K., Curtin, S. C., & Mathews, T. J. (2015). Births: Final data for 2013: Supplemental tables. *National vital statistics reports*, 64(1). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_01_tables.pdf (Table I-4)
- Estimates for the percentage of births to unmarried women 1990-2013 are available for all states and the 50 largest cities in the U.S. from the KIDS COUNT Data Center: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7-births-to-unmarried-women?loc=1&loct=2>.



International Estimates

- International estimates for the number and percentage of births to unmarried women from 1990-1998 are available from the UN Statistics Division at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dybnat.htm> (See Table 13)
- Estimates for European countries are available from EuroStat: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00018&plugin=1>
- Estimates for the percentage of births to unmarried women in select countries are also available from “Changing patterns of nonmarital childbearing in the United States”; see Figure 6. www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db18.pdf.

National Goals

Reducing the number of out-of-wedlock births was one of the goals of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PROWRA). Although specific targets were not set, annual bonuses were awarded to states that reduced the percentage of births to unmarried women by the largest amount (without increasing abortions).

More information is available at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/law-reg/finalrule/aspesum.htm under Title IX: Miscellaneous.

What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator

See: Ball, V. & Moore, K. A. (2008). *What works for adolescent reproductive health: Lessons from experimental evaluations of programs and interventions*. Child Trends. Available at www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Child_Trends-2008_05_20_FS_WhatWorksRepro.pdf.

Also, see the U.S. Office of Adolescent Health’s list of interventions meeting its criteria for effectiveness in pregnancy prevention: http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/db/tpp-searchable.html



Related Indicators

- Unintended Births: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=unintended-births
- Family Structure: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=family-structure
- Birth and Fertility Rates: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=fertility-and-birth-rates
- Teen Births: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=teen-births
- Child Support Receipt: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=child-support-receipt

Definition

In 49 states and the District of Columbia, births to unmarried women are identified by a question such as “Mother married?” on the birth certificate. In New York, marital status is inferred. For more detailed information, see the User Guide to the 2010 Natality Public Use File at

ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Health_Statistics/NCHS/Dataset_Documentation/DVS/natality/UserGuide2010.pdf

Data Sources

- Data for 1990-2010, and 2014: Centers National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System. *VitalStats*. Demographic characteristics of mother. Available at <http://205.207.175.93/VitalStats/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx>.
- Data for 2011-2013: National Center for Health Statistics, *CDC WONDER* online tool. <http://wonder.cdc.gov/natality-current.html>.
- Cohabiting data for 2006-2010: Martinez, G.M., Daniels, K., Chandra, A. (2012). Fertility of men and women aged 15-44 years in the United States: National Survey of Family Growth, 2006-2010. *National Health Statistics Reports*, 51. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Table 12. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr051.pdf>
- Cohabiting data for 2002: Chandra, A., Martinez, G.M., Mosher, W. D., Abma, J. C., Jones, J. (2005). Fertility, family planning, and



reproductive health of U.S. women: Data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital Health Statistics, 23(25)*. National Center for Health Statistics. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_025.pdf

- Data by Race and Hispanic Origin for 1980-1989: National Center for Health Statistics. (2014). *Health, United States, 2013*. Hyattsville, Maryland. Table 5. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus/previous.htm#tables>.
- All other data for 1960-1989: Ventura, S. J., & Bachrach, C. A. (2000). Nonmarital childbearing in the United States, 1940-1999. *National Vital Statistics Reports, 48(16)*. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. Table 4. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr48/nvs48_16.pdf

Raw Data Sources

Cohabiting data: National Survey of Family Growth

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg.htm>

All other data: Birth Data, National Vital Statistics System

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm>



Appendix 1 - Percentage of All Births that Were to Unmarried Women, by Race and Hispanic Origin and Age: Selected Years, 1960-2014

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Births	5.3	7.7	10.7	14.3	18.4	22.0	28.0	32.2	33.2	35.8	36.9	38.5	39.7	40.6	41.0	40.8	40.7	40.7	40.6	40.3
Race/Hispanic origin¹																				
White	2.3	4.0	5.7	7.3	11.2	14.7	20.4	25.3	27.1	30.5	31.7	33.3	34.8	35.7	36.0	35.9	35.7	35.9	35.8	35.7
White, non-Hispanic	-	-	-	-	9.5	12.4	16.9	21.2	22.1	24.5	25.3	26.6	27.8	28.7	29.0	29.0	29.0	29.3	29.3	29.2
Black	-	-	37.6	48.8	56.1	61.2	66.5	69.9	68.5	68.8	69.3	70.2	71.2	71.8	72.3	72.1	71.8	71.6	71.0	70.4
Black, non-Hispanic	-	-	-	-	57.2	62.0	66.7	70.0	68.7	69.3	69.9	70.7	71.6	72.3	72.8	72.5	72.3	72.1	71.5	70.9
Hispanic²	-	-	-	-	23.6	29.5	36.7	40.8	42.7	46.4	48.0	49.9	51.3	52.6	53.2	53.4	53.3	53.5	53.2	52.9
Asian or Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-	7.3	9.5	13.3	16.3	14.8	15.5	16.2	16.5	16.6	16.9	17.2	17.0	17.2	17.0	17.0	16.4
American Indian or Alaskan Native³	-	-	22.4	32.7	39.2	46.8	53.6	57.2	58.4	62.3	63.5	64.6	65.3	65.8	65.4	65.6	66.2	66.9	66.4	65.7
Age																				
Under 15 Years	67.9	78.5	80.8	87.0	88.7	91.8	91.6	93.5	96.5	97.4	98.0	98.3	98.8	99.1	99.0	99.3	99.1	99.0	99.2	99.4
15-19	14.8	20.8	29.5	38.2	47.6	58.0	67.1	75.2	78.8	82.4	83.3	84.2	85.5	86.7	87.2	88.1	88.5	88.7	88.7	88.6
20-24	4.8	6.8	8.9	12.3	19.4	26.3	36.9	44.7	49.5	54.8	56.2	57.9	59.6	60.9	62.1	63.1	64.0	64.8	65.4	65.7
25-29	2.9	4.0	4.1	5.4	9.0	12.7	18.0	21.5	23.5	27.8	29.3	31.0	32.2	33.2	33.8	33.9	34.4	35.0	35.9	36.7
30-34	2.8	3.7	4.5	5.3	7.5	9.7	13.3	14.7	14.0	16.1	17.0	18.3	19.3	20.2	20.7	21.1	21.6	21.9	22.3	22.5
35-39	3.0	4.0	5.2	7.0	9.4	11.2	13.9	15.7	14.3	15.2	15.7	16.4	17.3	18.2	19.0	19.6	20.1	20.7	21.2	21.6
40 years and over	3.1	4.3	5.7	8.2	12.1	14.0	17.0	18.1	16.8	18.2	18.8	19.4	20.0	20.8	21.4	21.7	22.4	23.2	23.7	24.3



¹ Data for estimates before 1980 are based on the race/ethnicity of the child, from 1980 on estimates are based on the race/ethnicity of the mother. Before 1980 data for the mother's marital status was estimated for the United States from data for registration areas in which marital status of mother was reported. For 1980 on, data for States in which the mother's marital status was not reported were inferred from other items on the birth certificate and included with data from the reporting States.

² Excludes data for New Hampshire and Oklahoma which did not report Hispanic origin on the birth certificate before 1990.

³ Includes births to Aleuts and Eskimos.

Sources: Data by Race and Hispanic Origin for 1980-1989: National Center for Health Statistics. (2014). *Health, United States, 2013*. Hyattsville, Maryland. Table 5. Available at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus/previous.htm#tables>. All other data for 1960-1989: Ventura, S. J., & Bachrach, C. A. (2000). Nonmarital childbearing in the United States, 1940-1999. *National Vital Statistics Reports, 48*(16). Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. Table 4. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr48/nvs48_16.pdf. Data for 2011-2013: National Center for Health Statistics, *CDC WONDER* online tool. <http://wonder.cdc.gov/nativity-current.html>. Data for 1990-2010 and 2014: Centers National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System. *VitalStats*. Demographic characteristics of mother. Available at <http://205.207.175.93/VitalStats/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx>.



Appendix 2 - Of Births to Unmarried Women, Percentage Where Mother Was Cohabiting at Time of Birth, by Race and Hispanic Origin, Age, and Poverty Status at Interview: 2002 and 2006-2010¹

	2002	2006-2010
Total	40.2	58.1
Race/Hispanic origin		
White, non-Hispanic	40.2	67.8
Black, non-Hispanic	29.0	34.7
Hispanic	51.4	67.8
Asian	-	44.8
Age		
15-19	35.1	45.6
20-24	42.7	63.2
25-29	42.3	60.6
30-44	37.8	60.3
Poverty status (at interview)²		
0-149% of FPL	41.0	56.8
150-299% of FPL	43.0	67.3
300% or more of FPL	29.7	57.0

"-" Data not available.

¹ Analyses based on questions to mothers about any birth in the past 5 years.

² FPL is the Federal poverty level.

Sources: Data for 2002: Chandra, A., Martinez, G.M., Mosher, W.D., Abma, J.C., Jones, J. (2005). Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: Data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital Health Statistics, 23(25)*. National Center for Health Statistics. Available at:

http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_025.pdf. Data for 2006-2010:

Martinez, G.M., Daniels, K., Chandra, A. (2012). Fertility of men and women aged 15–44 years in the United States: National Survey of Family Growth, 2006–2010. *National Health Statistics Reports, 51*. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

Table 12. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr051.pdf>.



Endnotes

- ¹ Thomas, A. and Sawhill, I. (2005). For love and money? The impact of family structure on family income. *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 57-74.
- ² Haveman, R., Wolfe, B., & Pence, K. (2001). Intergenerational effects of nonmarital and early childbearing. In L. L. Wu, & B. Wolfe (Eds.), *Out of wedlock: causes and consequences of nonmarital fertility*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- ³ Demo, D., and Cox, M. (2000). Families with young children: A review of research in the 1990s. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 62(4), 876-895.
- ⁴ McLanahan, S. and Sandefur, G. (1994). *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- ⁵ Carlson, M and Corcoran, M. (2001) Family structure and children's behavioral and cognitive outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 63(3), 779-792.
- ⁶ Musick, K. (2002). Planned and unplanned childbearing among unmarried women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 64(4), 915-929.
- ⁷ Aquilino, W. S. (1996). The life course of children born to unmarried mothers: Childhood living arrangements and young adult outcomes. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 58(2), 293-310.
- ⁸ McLanahan, S. and Sandefur, G. (1994). Op. cit.
- ⁹ Amato, Paul. (2005). The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 75-96. Available at: http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/05_FOC_15-2_fall05_Amato.pdf
- ¹⁰ Lichter, D., Graefe, D., & Brown, J. (2003). Is marriage a panacea? Union formation among economically disadvantaged unwed mothers. *Social Problems*, 50(1), 60-86.
- ¹¹ Terry-Humen, E., Manlove, J., & Moore, K. A. (2001). Births outside of marriage: Perceptions vs. reality. *Child Trends Research Brief*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/rb_032601.pdf
- ¹² Driscoll, A. K., Hearn, G. K., Evans, V. J., Moore, K. A., Sugland, B. W., & Call, V. (1999). Nonmarital childbearing among adult women. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 61(1), 178-187.
- ¹³ Moore, K. A. (1995). *Executive summary: Report to Congress on out-of-wedlock childbearing*. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/misc/wedlock.pdf>



¹⁴ Lichter, D. & Graefe, D. (2001). Finding a mate: The marital and cohabitation histories of unwed mothers. In L. Wu and B. Wolf, *Out of wedlock: Causes and consequences of nonmarital fertility*. New York, NY, US: Russell Sage Foundation: 317-343.

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¹⁶ Kennedy, S. & Bumpass, L. (2008). Cohabitation and children's living arrangements: New estimates from the United States. *Demographic Research*, 19(47), 1663-1692.

¹⁷ Martinez, G.M., Daniels, K., Chandra, A. (2012). Fertility of men and women aged 15-44 years in the United States: National Survey of Family Growth, 2006-2010. *National Health Statistics Reports*, 51. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Table 12. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr051.pdf>

¹⁸ Carlson, M., McLanahan, S., & England, P. (2004). Union formation in fragile families. *Demography*, 41(2), 237-261.

¹⁹ Brown, S. (2004). Family structure and child well-being: The significance of parental cohabitation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 66(2), 351-367.

²⁰ Hispanics may be any race. Estimates for whites and blacks in this report exclude Hispanics.