

Teenage Marriage and Divorce

United States, 1970–81

An analysis of the trends in teenage marriage and divorce in the United States for the period 1970–81 is presented. Information is included on geographic variations, marriage laws, age differences between spouses, previous marital status, race, educational attainment, duration of marriage, and children involved in divorce.

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Contents

- Introduction 1
- Highlights 2
- Marriages 3
 - Trends in teenage marriage 3
 - Seasonality 6
 - Geographic variation 6
 - Marriage laws 9
 - Age differences between spouses 9
 - Racial differences 11
 - Nativity status 12
 - Educational attainment 12
- Divorces 13
 - Regional differences 13
 - Duration of marriage before divorce 13
 - Children involved in divorces 14
 - Educational attainment of divorcing spouses 14
- References 15
- List of detailed tables 16

- Appendix: Technical notes**
- Registration areas 21
- Sources of data 22
- Sampling 22
- Demographic characteristics 22
- Estimates, rates, percents, means, and medians 23

- List of text figures**
- 1. Teenage marriage rates, by sex: Marriage-registration area, 1970–81 4
- 2. Percent distribution of first marriages by month of occurrence, according to age: Marriage-registration area, 1981 6
- 3. Percent of first marriages that involved teenage brides and grooms, by age: Marriage-registration area States grouped by geographic region, 1981 7
- 4. States ranked according to percent of all first marriages that involved teenage brides and grooms, by age: Each marriage-registration State, 1981 8
- 5. Age difference between spouses at primary marriage, by age of bride and age of groom: Marriage-registration area, 1981 9
- 6. Percent of brides and grooms who were teenagers at first marriage, by race: 32 States, 1970 and 1981 11

- List of text tables**
- A. Estimated number of teenage brides and grooms: United States, 1970–81 3
- B. Marriage rates by age of women and men with percent changes: United States and marriage-registration area, 1970 and 1980 5

C.	Percent distribution of marriages by age of bride and groom: Marriage-registration area, 1970, 1972, and 1981 . . .	5
D.	Teenage marriage rates with percent changes: United States and each region, 1970 and 1980	7
E.	Average age difference between spouses at primary marriage, by age of bride and groom: Marriage-registration area, 1970 and 1981	10
F.	Percent of brides and grooms who completed 4 years of high school or more, and 1 year of college or more, with ratio of brides to grooms and median years of school completed, by age at first marriage: 20 reporting States, 1981	12
G.	Estimated number of divorces to teenage wives and husbands: United States, 1970-81	13
H.	Average duration to decree of dissolving first marriages for wives and husbands, by age at marriage: Divorce-registration area, 1981	13
J.	Percent of wives and husbands who were parents and average number of children per decree in dissolutions of first marriages of both spouses, by age at marriage: Divorce-registration area, 1981	14
K.	Percent of divorcing wives and husbands who completed 4 years of high school or more and 1 year of college or more, with ratio of wives to husbands and median years of school completed, by age at marriage for dissolutions of first marriage: 20 reporting States, 1981	14

Symbols

- - - Data not available
 - . . . Category not applicable
 - Quantity zero
 - 0.0 Quantity more than zero but less than 0.05
 - Z Quantity more than zero but less than 500 where numbers are rounded to thousands
 - * Figure does not meet standard of reliability or precision
-

Teenage Marriage and Divorce: United States, 1970–81

by Barbara Foley Wilson,
Division of Vital Statistics

Introduction

Teenage marriage in the United States reached a peak in the early 1970's and then declined steadily for the remainder of the decade, continuing the downward trend into the early 1980's. This decline was reflected in marriage rates. The marriage rate for women 18–19 years of age declined 47 percent from a high of 157.1 per 1,000 unmarried women in 1972 to 83.8 in 1981. Falling even more sharply than the rate for women, the rate for unmarried men 18–19 years of age dropped 52 percent from 77.1 in 1972 to 36.9 per 1,000 in 1981. Marriage rates for both men and women under 18 years of age declined about 50 percent between the early 1970's and 1981. These findings are based on data reported by States that participate in the marriage-registration area (MRA). These data constitute the most complete set of information available from marriage records in the United States.

Teenage divorce rates, on the other hand, generally increased throughout the decade, peaking in 1978 for men and in 1979 for women before generally declining. The rate for women was consistently higher than the rate for men. In 1970 the estimated divorce rate for married teenage men was 15.7 per 1,000 married men; for married teenage women it was 27.0. The rate for men peaked at 48.2 in 1978 and for women at 52.9 in 1979. By 1981 the rates had declined to 33.6 and 47.4 for men and women, respectively.

This report provides an analysis of the trends in teenage marriage and divorce from 1970 through 1981. It includes information on geographic variations, marriage laws, age differences between spouses, previous marital status, race, educational attainment, duration of marriage, and children involved in divorce.

The data are based on samples of records from States that participate in the marriage-registration area (MRA) and the divorce-registration area (DRA). These are States that have central files of marriage and divorce records and sufficiently complete reporting of demographic items on their records to warrant collection, processing, and publication of the data. The marriage-registration area included 39 States in 1970 and 42 States in 1981. The District of Columbia was included in both years. The divorce-registration area included 28 States in 1970 and 31 States in 1981. In 1981 80 percent of all marriages in the United States were performed in the MRA, and 49 percent of all divorces were granted in the DRA. A more detailed description of the MRA and the DRA appears in the appendix. In addition to data from the registration areas, total counts of marriages and divorces are obtained annually from all States, and in 1970 and 1980 samples of marriage records were taken from the District of Columbia and the 47 States that keep central files of marriage records.

Highlights

- Teenage marriages dropped sharply after reaching a peak in the early 1970's. Nonetheless, the estimated 466,000 teenage brides in the United States in 1981 still constituted a large proportion (19 percent) of the 2.4 million women who married that year. For first marriages the proportion of brides who were teenagers was even larger (28 percent). Teenage marriage is much less prevalent among men than among women. In 1981 only 186,000, or 8 percent, of the grooms were teenagers.
- There are wide regional differences in the prevalence of teenage marriage. Rates were more than twice as high in the South as in the Northeast.
- Traditionally, husbands are older than their wives. In the MRA, the average age difference at first marriage of both husband and wife is 2 years. However, the age difference is greater for teenage brides than for older brides. The teenage grooms, on the other hand, generally marry women closer to their own age than older grooms do.
- Teenage marriage is more frequent for white than for black men and women or for those of other races. Teenage marriage decreased for all races between 1970 and 1981, but declined more for black than for white brides and grooms. These data are from the 32 States that recorded race on marriage certificates in both years.
- Educational attainment is highly correlated with age at marriage. The majority of brides and grooms who first married at 18–19 years of age in 1981 had finished high school, but less than one-fifth of those marrying under 18 years of age had done so.
- The average duration to divorce in 1981 for women who had been teenagers at first marriage was 10.2 years; for men the duration was shorter, 9.7 years.
- The proportion of divorcing spouses who are parents is much higher for men and women who marry as teenagers than for those marrying at older ages, and they have more children at the time of divorce.

Marriages

Trends in teenage marriage

During the 1970–81 period covered in this report, teenage marriages at first rose and then dropped sharply (table A). In 1970 an estimated 702,000 teenage women married in the United States. The annual total climbed 8 percent to 758,000 in 1972 and then dropped 39 percent to 466,000 in 1981. Teenage grooms numbered 303,000 in 1970, rose 11 percent to 337,000 in 1972, and then fell 45 percent to 186,000 in 1981. Teenage marriages could have been expected to increase during most of the seventies because an unusually large number of persons were reaching these ages. The first cohort of the post-World War II “baby boom” reached 18 years of age in 1963, and the number of 18-year-olds rose between 1965 and 1977.^{1,2} It is noteworthy that the decline in teenage marriage preceded the decrease in the teenage population.

The decline in the number of teenage marriages at a time of increase in the marriageable population is reflected in the change in teenage marriage rates; they dropped even more sharply than the number of marriages. The marriage rate declined both for those under 18 years of age who needed parental consent to marry, and for those 18–19 years of age who were of legal age to marry, who probably had completed high school, and who were able to work full time and support themselves (table 1 and figure 1). The rates declined for men as well as for women.

In the MRA the marriage rate for women 18–19 years of age began its decline in 1973. Between 1972 and 1981 it fell from 157.1 to 83.8 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women in that age group, a drop of 47 percent. The marriage rate for men 18–19 years of age dropped 52 percent between 1972 and 1981. Having increased slightly between 1970 and 1972, it declined from 77.1 in 1972 to 36.9 in 1981.

The marriage rate for very young brides, those 15–17 years of age, increased from 35.8 in 1970 to 39.3 in 1972 and then declined to 19.1 in 1981, a drop of 51 percent from the 1972 rate. The rate for grooms aged 15–17 years increased from 5.4 in 1970 to a high of 6.0 in 1972–73 and then declined 52 percent to 2.9 in 1981. The declines in marriage rates for teenagers were generally greater than were those for men and women of all other ages.

Table A. Estimated number of teenage brides and grooms: United States, 1970–81

[Based on sample data. Estimate based on proportion of brides and grooms in the marriage-registration area who were teenagers; see appendix]

<i>Year</i>	<i>Bride</i>	<i>Groom</i>
1981	466,000	186,000
1980	505,000	202,000
1979	524,000	214,000
1978	549,000	227,000
1977	561,000	235,000
1976	588,000	257,000
1975	628,000	279,000
1974	702,000	316,000
1973	734,000	330,000
1972	758,000	337,000
1971	723,000	313,000
1970	702,000	303,000

A reflection of the falling teenage marriage rate can be seen in the increasing proportion of women who were single in the United States. In 1968–70, 56 percent of women 20 years of age had never been married; by 1981 the proportion had increased to 69 percent, according to reports from the Bureau of the Census.^{3,4}

In order to see how well the rates for the marriage-registration area approximate national rates, information for 1970 and 1980 was obtained from a special sample drawn in those years from all but three of the States not in the marriage-registration area. (See appendix.) These data were combined with data from the MRA to include greater than 95 percent of all marriages performed in the United States. Comparison of rates for the MRA with rates for this expanded area shows that the patterns by sex and age and the magnitude of change between 1970 to 1980 are similar. The MRA rates are 5 to 16 percent lower than rates for the larger group of States (table B).

According to data for the marriage-registration area, not only did the number and rate of teenage marriages decline, but teenage marriages accounted for a smaller proportion of all marriages (table C). In 1970 1 out of 3 brides was a teenager, but by 1981 the ratio had dropped to less than 1 out of 5. In 1970 1 out of 7 grooms was a teenager; by 1981 the ratio was 1 out of 14. Increasing proportions of brides married at ages 25–44 and grooms at ages 25–64.

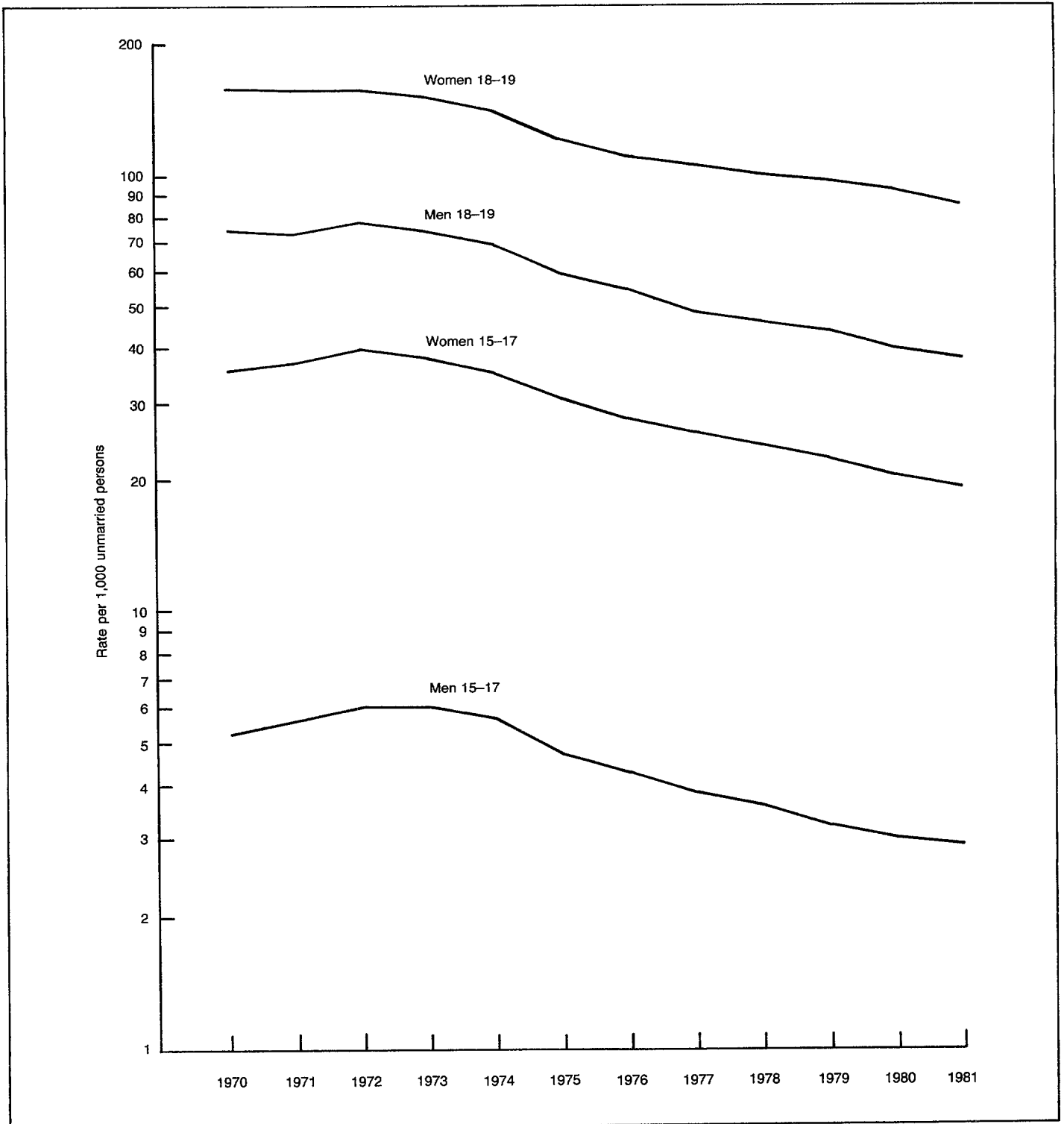


Figure 1. Teenage marriage rates, by sex: Marriage-registration area, 1970-81

Table B. Marriage rates by age of women and men with percent changes: United States and marriage-registration area, 1970 and 1980

[Based on sample data. Rates are marriages per 1,000 unmarried population in specified group]

Sex and age	United States ¹			Marriage-registration area		
	1980	1970	Percent change	1980	1970	Percent change
Women						
All ages	60.0	76.7	-21.8	54.2	69.3	-21.8
15-17 years	22.7	² 29.2	...	20.2	35.8	-43.6
18-19 years	98.2	170.5	-42.4	90.9	156.7	-42.0
20-24 years	139.1	247.4	-43.8	130.8	234.2	-44.2
25-29 years	137.5	188.6	-27.1	126.3	170.1	-25.7
30-34 years	107.3	130.4	-17.7	95.0	111.3	-14.6
35-44 years	72.1	81.5	-11.5	62.3	69.2	-10.0
45-64 years	20.3	24.8	-18.1	17.3	20.9	-17.2
65 years and over	2.5	2.6	-3.8	2.2	2.4	-8.3
Men						
All ages	73.4	96.7	-24.1	66.8	88.4	-24.4
15-17 years	3.4	² 4.8	...	3.0	5.4	-44.4
18-19 years	42.9	80.3	-46.6	39.2	74.4	-47.3
20-24 years	106.2	216.3	-50.9	100.4	205.7	-51.2
25-29 years	139.9	235.8	-40.7	131.2	217.6	-39.7
30-34 years	134.6	182.1	-26.1	122.8	160.8	-23.6
35-44 years	117.0	125.1	-6.5	102.0	107.2	-4.9
45-64 years	57.5	65.1	-11.7	49.1	54.9	-10.6
65 years and over	17.0	17.0	-	15.2	15.6	-2.6

¹Figures by age exclude data for Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.²Based on population 14-17 years of age.**Table C. Percent distribution of marriages by age of bride and groom: Marriage-registration area, 1970, 1972, and 1981**

[Based on sample data]

Age at marriage	Bride			Groom		
	1981	1972	1970	1981	1972	1970
All ages	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 20 years	19.2	33.2	32.5	7.7	14.8	14.0
20-24 years	36.5	37.3	39.7	34.2	43.3	45.9
25-29 years	19.7	11.5	10.4	24.3	17.8	16.7
30-34 years	10.3	5.2	4.7	13.3	7.2	6.6
35-44 years	8.3	6.1	5.9	11.2	7.7	7.5
45-64 years	5.0	5.8	5.8	7.7	7.4	7.3
65 years and over	1.0	0.9	0.9	1.7	1.8	1.9

Seasonality

Marriages traditionally show a seasonal cycle: Winter is the trough and summer is the peak. Every year from 1970 to 1981, first marriages in June were more than twice as numerous as those in January. However, marriages are less seasonal for teenagers than for older brides and grooms (figure 2).

Geographic variation

The special samples in 1970 and 1980, which included data from all but three States (Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma), provided data to calculate teenage marriage rates for the four regions of the United States. In 1980 the marriage rate was 51.5 per 1,000 unmarried women 15-19 years of age; that is, about 5 percent of eligible teenage women married during that year (table D). In the South the rate was 38 percent higher (71.1 per 1,000), and in the Northeast

the rate was 46 percent lower (27.6). The rates for the North Central Region (49.7) and the West (50.0) were very close to the national average. The regional variation in marriage rates for teenage men shows the same general pattern with slightly sharper differences. In 1970 the rates were higher in all regions than in 1980, but the regional patterns were similar for both men and women.

Another indication of regional differentials is the percent distribution of marriages according to age. The South had a higher proportion of first marriages in which the bride was a teenager than any other region of the United States had. In 1981 it was 36 percent in the South compared with 30 percent in the North Central Region, 25 percent in the West, and 18 percent in the Northeast (figure 3). There were also relatively more of the very young brides, those under 18 years of age, in the South. Nearly 12 percent of brides in the South were under the age of 18 in contrast to 4 percent in the Northeast.

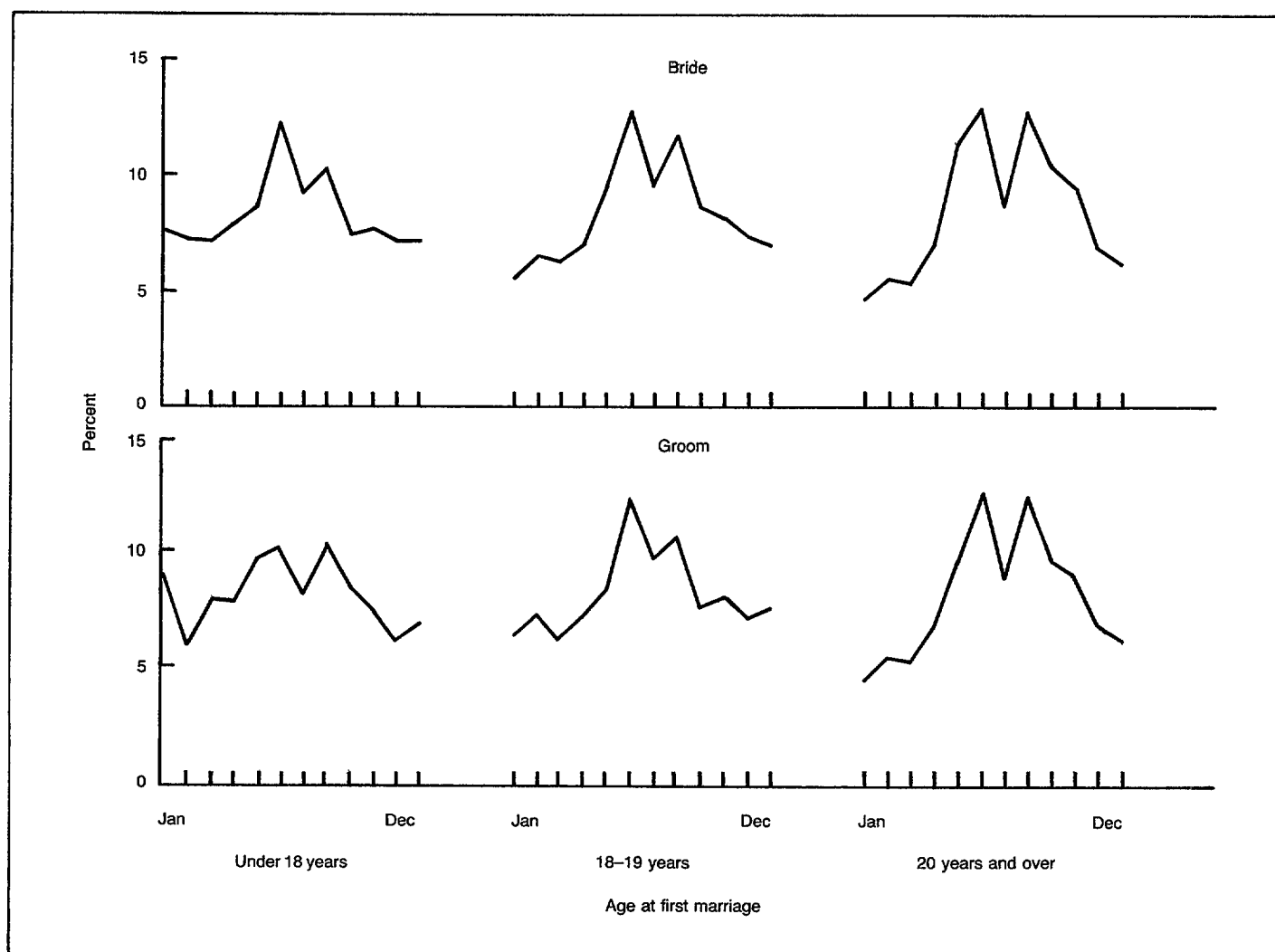


Figure 2. Percent distribution of first marriages by month of occurrence, according to age: Marriage-registration area, 1981

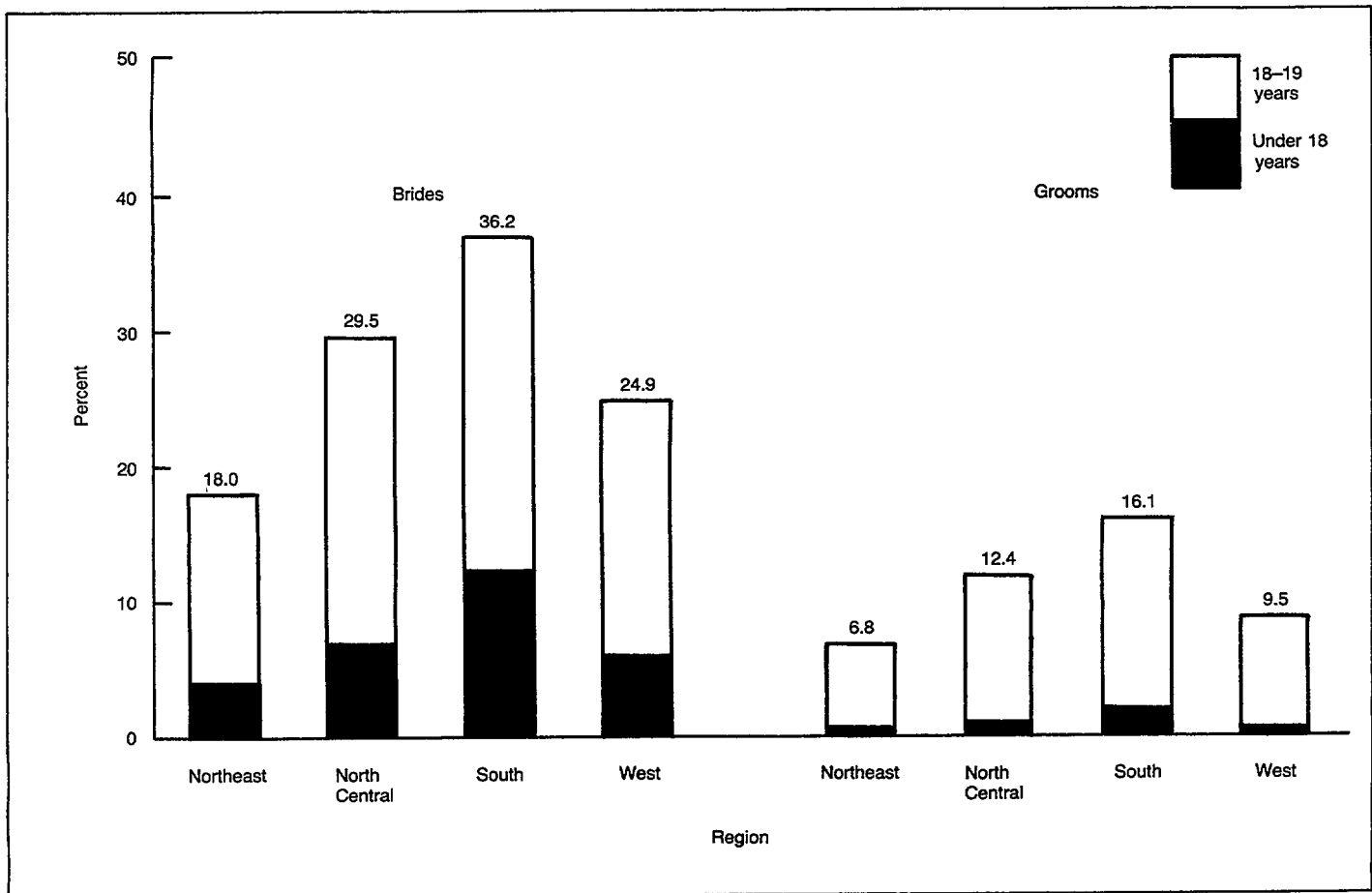


Figure 3. Percent of first marriages that involved teenage brides and grooms, by age: Marriage-registration area States grouped by geographic region, 1981

Table D. Teenage marriage rates, with percent changes: United States and each region, 1970 and 1980

[Based on sample data. Rates per 1,000 unmarried population 15-19 years of age]

Area	Women			Men		
	1980	1970	Percent change	1980	1970	Percent change
United States ¹ ..	51.5	84.0	-38.7	19.1	32.9	-41.9
Northeast	27.6	52.2	-47.1	9.8	18.5	-47.0
North Central ..	49.7	77.0	-36.5	18.3	31.6	-42.1
South ²	71.1	115.8	-38.6	27.5	45.8	-40.0
West ³	50.0	86.7	-42.3	16.0	31.2	-48.7

¹Excludes data for Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.

²Excludes data for Oklahoma.

³Excludes data for Arizona and New Mexico.

States ranked according to the percent of brides and grooms who were first married as teenagers in 1981 show

wide variation, ranging from 7 percent in the District of Columbia to 45 percent in Kentucky (figure 4). In Kentucky almost 20 percent of the brides were under 18 years of age. The percent of grooms who were teenagers at first marriage ranged from 2 percent in the District of Columbia to 22 percent in Tennessee. The rank order of States by percent of grooms who were teenagers was very highly correlated to that of brides; the rank order correlation was 0.97.

There are many factors associated with age at first marriage that vary among States and could be expected to contribute to the interstate variation. The most basic factor is the age structure of populations in different States. A State with a greater proportion of teenagers could be expected to have a greater proportion of teenage brides and grooms. Other characteristics that have been shown to have strong associations with age at marriage and that vary among States are educational attainment,⁵ race,⁶ ethnicity,⁷ and religion.⁷

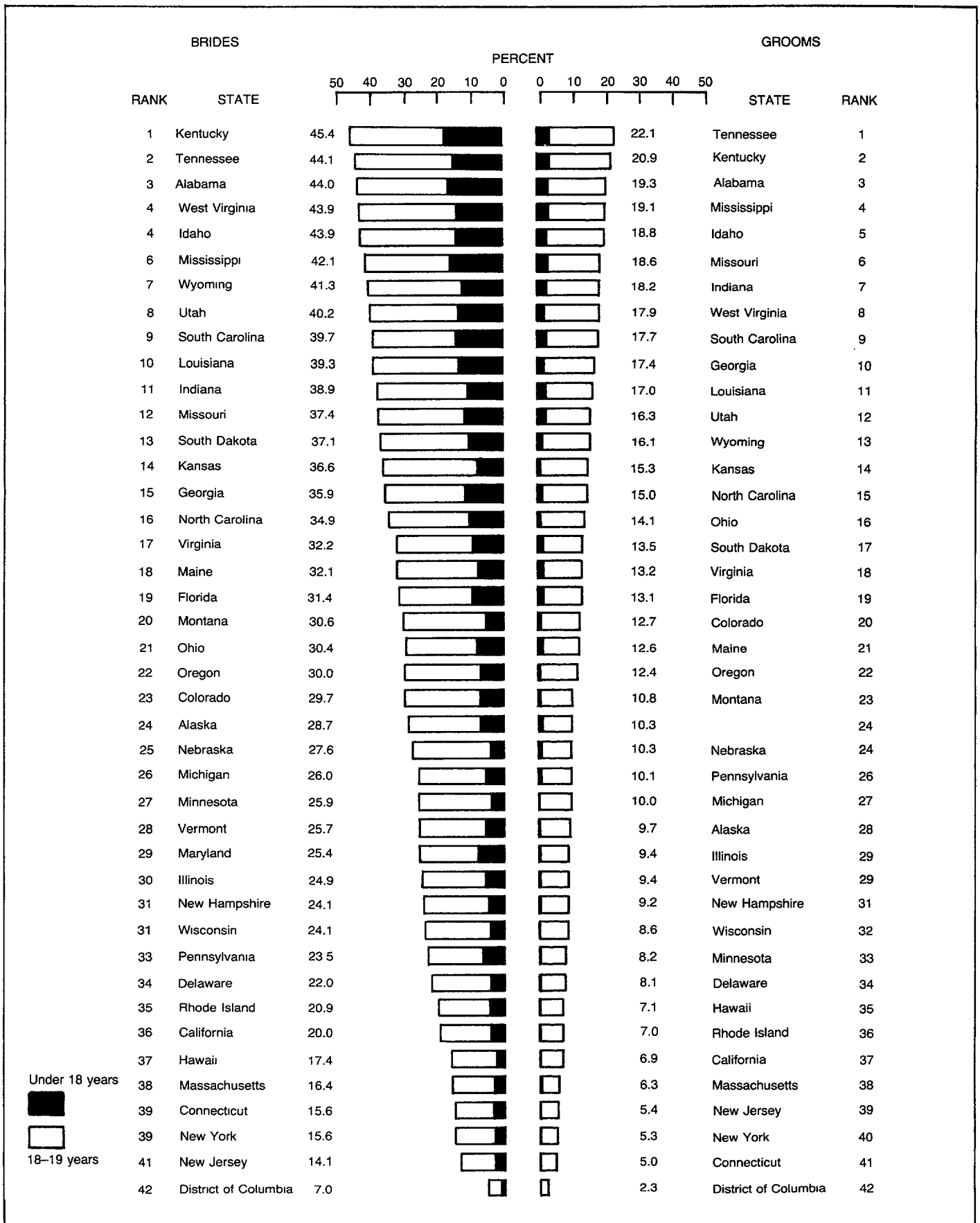


Figure 4. States ranked according to percent of all first marriages that involved teenage brides and grooms, by age: Each marriage-registration State, 1981

Marriage laws

Among the factors affecting interstate variations in teenage marriage are State marriage laws. Each State has its own laws on marriage, which may include medical requirements and a maximum period between the examination and issuance of the license. The medical requirements may involve tests for venereal disease, sickle cell anemia, rubella immunity, Tay-Sachs disease, Rh factor, tuberculosis, and mental competence. There are waiting periods of various lengths before and after issuance of the license.⁸

The State laws most relevant to this report are the ones involving minimum ages for marriage. In 1970 marriage with parental consent was permitted in most States if the groom was at least 18 years old and the bride was at least 16 years old. Generally, the legal age without parental consent was different for the two sexes—21 years for men and 18 years for women. The traditional differences in the number of women and men marrying as teenagers reflected in part the different legal restrictions on men and women. The 1970's were a time of change that included a movement toward more uniform treatment of the sexes. Already there was a trend toward equalizing age requirements for marriage without parental consent when the 26th amendment to the Constitution was adopted in July 1971. This amendment guaranteed the right to vote to citizens who were 18 years or older. It also tended to establish 18 as the age of majority for men as well as for women. In one State after another the legislatures changed the marriage laws. In 1969 teenage men could not marry without parental consent in 43 States and the District of Columbia. By 1981 only Mississippi had such a restriction. Nebraska and Wyoming set 19 as the minimum age without consent for both men and women, and in the other 47 States and the District of Columbia, it was 18 years of age. Typically an initial increase in the number of teenage grooms followed the change in a State's law. For example, the law in Pennsylvania changed June 16, 1972, and the number of teenage grooms increased 15 percent that year. The Ohio law changed January 1, 1974, and the number of teenage grooms jumped 20 percent. The surge in the number of teenage grooms passed quickly. In 1975 every reporting State except Alaska, Kentucky, and Vermont recorded a decline from 1974.

Age differences between spouses

Age differences between spouses have been shown to vary according to the combined marital histories of the couple.⁹ Because most teenage brides or grooms are marrying for the first time, the following analysis will be restricted to primary marriages, that is, marriages in which both the man and the woman were never married before.

In general, women first marry at younger ages than men, they do so over a shorter span of years, and they marry older men. Men are older at marriage than women, they marry over a longer span of years, and they marry women younger than themselves. The net result of these

customs is that the average age difference between spouses narrows with increased age for brides, but increases with increased age for grooms. For example, among the primary marriages of 1981 (first marriage for both spouses), women 18 years old married men 2.7 years older on the average; women 20 years old married men 2.3 years older; women 25 years old married men 1.3 years older; and women 30 years old married men 0.2 years younger. A reverse pattern appears when the data are averaged according to the age of groom. In 1981 grooms aged 18 in primary marriages were the same age as their brides; grooms aged 20 were 0.8 years older; grooms aged 25 were 2.2 years older; and grooms aged 30 were 4.3 years older than their brides. Thus, the older a groom is, the greater the age difference

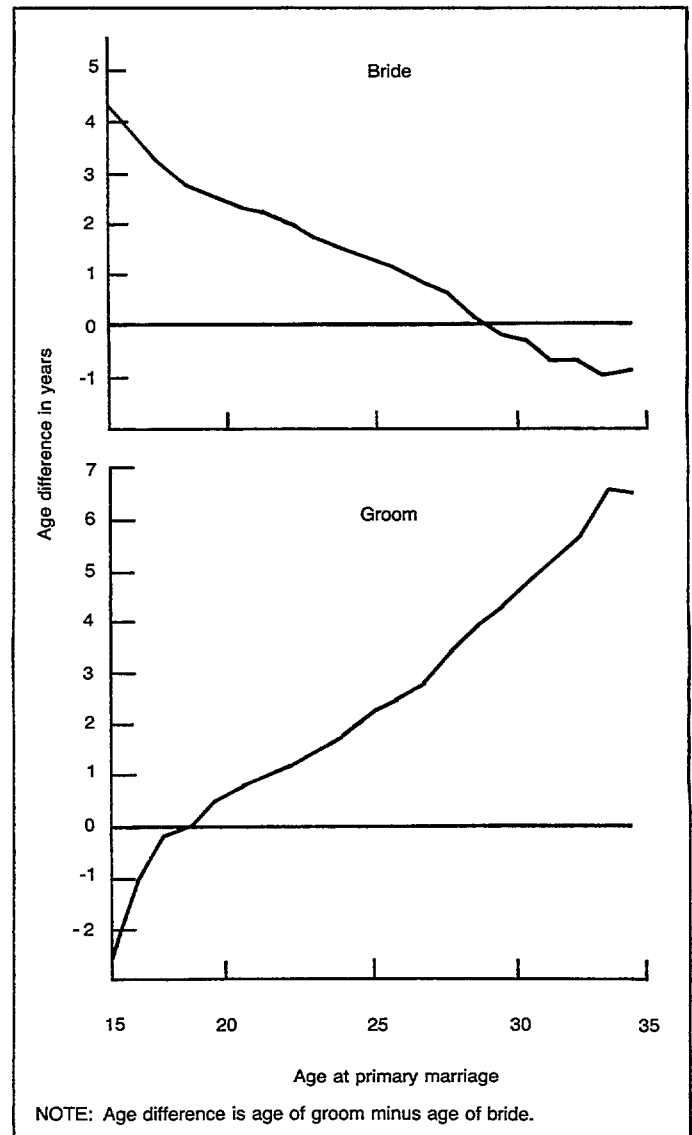


Figure 5. Age difference between spouses at primary marriage, by age of bride and age of groom: Marriage-registration area, 1981

Table E. Average age difference between spouses at primary marriage, by age of bride and groom: Marriage-registration area, 1970 and 1981

[Based on sample data. Age difference is age of groom minus age of bride]

Age	Bride		Groom	
	1981	1970	1981	1970
All ages ¹	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
15 years	4.3	4.0	-2.6	-0.9
16 years	3.7	3.5	-1.0	-0.5
17 years	3.1	2.9	-0.2	0.0
18 years	2.7	2.5	0.0	0.4
19 years	2.5	2.2	0.5	0.8
20 years	2.3	1.9	0.8	1.1
21 years	2.2	1.7	1.0	1.3
22 years	2.0	1.5	1.2	1.7
23 years	1.7	1.5	1.5	2.1
24 years	1.5	1.7	1.8	2.5
25 years	1.3	1.5	2.2	2.9
26 years	1.1	1.5	2.5	3.5
27 years	0.8	1.1	2.8	3.9
28 years	0.6	1.3	3.4	4.5
29 years	0.1	0.5	3.9	4.8
30 years	-0.2	1.3	4.3	5.3
31 years	-0.3	1.2	4.8	5.3
32 years	-0.7	1.2	5.2	6.0
33 years	-0.7	0.5	5.6	6.5
34 years	-1.0	1.2	6.5	7.5
35 years	-0.9	-0.7	6.4	7.0

¹Includes ages not shown separately.

between spouses; however, the older a bride is, the smaller the age difference, until finally, the spouses are the same age or the bride is older (figure 5).

It is apparent that in primary marriages teenage grooms marry teenage women, while many teenage brides marry men in their twenties. In 1981, 82 percent of the teenage grooms married teenage women, while only 18 percent married women over twenty. Teenage brides, on the other hand, were married to teenage men in 38 percent of the marriages and to men over twenty in 65 percent of the marriages (data not shown).

There was a small shift between 1970 and 1981 in the pattern of age differences between spouses in primary marriages (table E). For brides 23 years of age and younger there was an increase in the age difference; that is, they were marrying older grooms in 1981 than in 1970. Brides 24-35 years, on the other hand, were marrying younger grooms. The pattern of change in the age differences for grooms at all ages 35 years and under was such that they were marrying older brides in 1981 than in 1970.

Racial differences

Data from 32 States that reported race both in 1970 and 1981 show that racial differentials in age at first marriage increased during the 1970's. In 1970 almost the same proportion of black and white brides and grooms were teenagers: 47 percent of white and 43 percent of black brides were under 20 years of age; 21 percent of white and 20 percent of black grooms were under 20. By 1981 there was a pronounced drop in the proportion of black brides and grooms

who were teenagers and smaller declines for white brides and grooms and those of other races (figure 6). For example, at first marriage the proportion of black brides who were teenagers was 43 percent in 1970 and dropped to 20 percent by 1981. The proportion of white brides who were teenagers at first marriage was 47 percent in 1970 and dropped to 33 percent by 1981. The data for the grooms show a similar pattern.

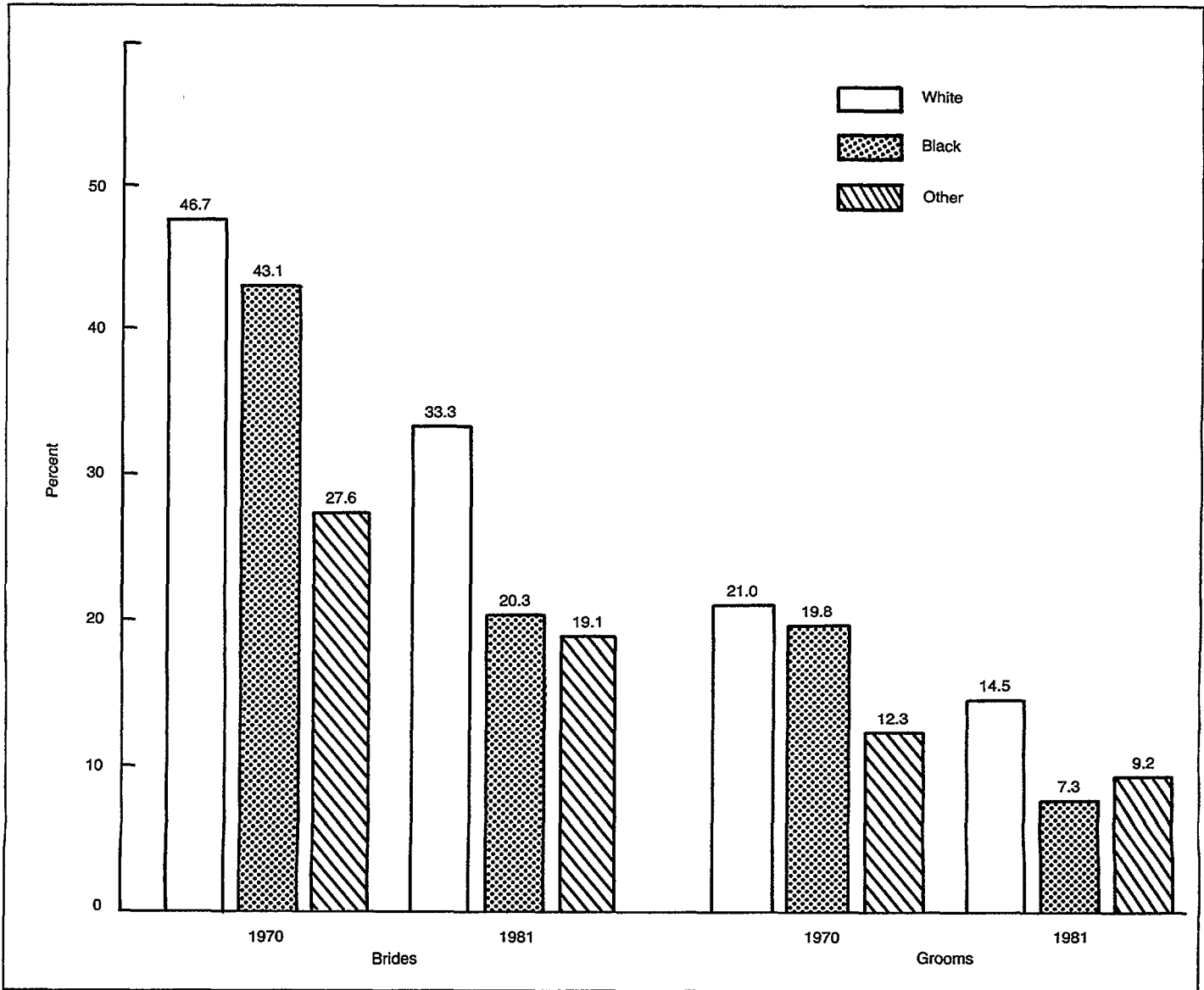


Figure 6. Percent of brides and grooms who were teenagers at first marriage, by race: 32 States, 1970 and 1981

Nativity status

State of birth is included on marriage records of most MRA States. Information for 1981 first marriages shows that the proportion of brides and grooms married in their State of birth generally decreases up to age 55. About 2 out of 3 teenage brides and grooms marry in their State of birth compared with 2 out of 5 for those first married at ages 45–54. The proportion marrying in States adjacent to their State of birth declined from 14–15 percent for brides and grooms under 18 years of age to 9–11 percent for those 20–24 years; some of the teenage couples may have crossed State lines specifically to marry where laws were more lenient (data not shown).

Educational attainment

In 1981 an item showing completed years of school was on the marriage records of 20 States. Education is, of course, highly correlated with a person's age, because admission into a public school system is determined by the student's date of birth. Most brides and grooms who married after 18 years of age, therefore, had time to complete 12 years of school; that is, to graduate from high school. As expected, a majority of brides and grooms first marrying at 18–19 years of age had finished high school, on average, and many had been to college. The median for brides was

12.4 years of school, and for grooms, 12.3 years. Again, as expected, most brides and grooms who married under 18 years of age had not graduated. The median years of schooling was 10.8 for brides and 10.9 for grooms (table F and table 2).

In addition to median years of school completed, table F also shows the proportion of brides and grooms who had completed high school or 1 or more years of college. According to these data, teenage brides had more education than grooms of the same age. Twenty percent more brides than grooms who first married before the age of 20 had completed high school. In contrast, the differential was less than 5 percent for brides and grooms first married in their twenties. The proportion completing high school was about the same for brides as for grooms first marrying through 45–54 years of age.

A pattern of higher educational attainment of teenage brides is also seen in the proportions that completed at least 1 year of college. At ages 18–19 years the proportion was 74 percent higher for brides. The differential decreased with age until ages 30–34 years, when the proportions were about the same for brides and grooms. Although grooms first marrying at specified ages under 30 had less education than brides of the same specified ages, most men had more education, on the average, than their *own* brides, who were generally younger (data not shown).

Table F. Percent of brides and grooms who completed 4 years of high school or more, and 1 year of college or more, with ratio of brides to grooms and median years of school completed, by age at first marriage: 20 reporting States, 1981

[Based on sample data. For a list of reporting States see table 2]

Age at first marriage	Completed 4 years of high school or more			Completed 1 year of college or more			Median years of school completed	
	Percent of brides	Percent of grooms	Ratio of brides to grooms	Percent of brides	Percent of grooms	Ratio of brides to grooms	Bride	Groom
All ages	83.2	83.6	1.00	41.6	42.2	0.99	12.8	12.8
Under 18 years	16.6	13.9	1.19	16.6	13.9	1.19	10.8	10.9
18–19 years	78.0	65.0	1.20	13.8	7.9	1.75	12.4	12.3
20–24 years	92.1	85.0	1.08	49.9	37.0	1.35	13.0	12.7
25–29 years	93.7	90.9	1.03	66.5	59.4	1.12	14.8	14.2
30–34 years	91.0	90.9	1.00	65.7	68.1	0.96	15.0	15.3
35–44 years	78.6	80.2	0.98	48.1	54.1	0.89	12.9	14.1
45–54 years	60.8	61.4	0.99	30.2	32.8	0.92	12.4	12.4
55–64 years	61.2	48.0	1.28	27.9	19.2	1.45	12.3	11.5
65 years and over	53.2	33.0	1.61	12.8	15.7	0.82	12.1	9.2

Divorces

Relatively few teenagers divorce. In 1970 an estimated 29,000 teenage women and 6,000 teenage men divorced. The numbers increased irregularly, peaked in 1975 for women and in 1978 for men, then dropped (table G). In 1981 an estimated 36,000 teenage women and 8,000 teenage men divorced.

Although the numbers of divorces to teenagers are low, the divorce rate for teenage wives is high (table 3). In 1981 the rate for married women 15–19 years of age was second only to the rate for those 20–24. The 1981 divorce rate for married men 15–19 years of age, although higher than average, was lower than the divorce rates for those in age groups 20–24, 25–29, and 30–34.

Table G. Estimated number of divorces to teenage wives and husbands: United States, 1970–81

[Based on sample data. Estimate based on proportion of divorcing wives and husbands in the divorce-registration area; see appendix]

Year	Wives	Husbands
1981	36,000	8,000
1980	40,000	9,000
1979	43,000	10,000
1978	45,000	12,000
1977	41,000	10,000
1976	45,000	11,000
1975	46,000	10,000
1974	45,000	11,000
1973	41,000	10,000
1972	36,000	8,000
1971	34,000	8,000
1970	29,000	6,000

In 1970 the divorce rate for teenage men was 15.7 per 1,000 married men 15–19 years of age. It rose irregularly to 48.2 in 1978, then dropped to 33.6 in 1981. The rate for married women 15–19 years of age was 27.0 per 1,000 in 1970. It rose irregularly until 1979 when it reached 52.9, then dropped to 47.4 in 1981. The divorce rate for teenage wives was consistently higher than the divorce rate for teenage husbands, probably because the teenage men were married for shorter periods before they turned 20 than the women were. The relative instability of teenage marriages is seen not only by the high divorce rates for women while still teenagers, but also by the cumulative experience of these women as they move through their twenties. McCarthy calculated cumulative probabilities of divorce and found that after 10 years women married at ages 14–17 had 3 times the probability (.266), and women married at ages 18–19 had

twice the probability (.173) of being divorced as had women married at ages 20–24 (.089).¹⁰

Regional differences

Divorces of persons who married as teenagers were more common in some regions of the country than in others. Grouping the DRA States by region shows that the proportion of women divorced in 1981 who had first married at ages under 20 years was highest in the South (57 percent), next highest in the North Central Region (52) and the West (50), and lowest in the Northeast (39). This is the same order as was found for the proportion of marriages that involve teenagers.

Most (73 percent) of the spouses divorcing in 1981 had been first married in the same State where they were divorcing. The proportion was slightly higher (75 percent) for men and women who had married as teenagers (data not shown).

Duration of marriage before divorce

The average length of time from first marriage to decree is shown in table H. In general, duration shortens with increased age at first marriage. For women who had been teenage brides, duration to decree in 1981 was 10.2 years compared with 9.8 for women first married at 20–24 years, 8.6 years for women married at ages 25–29, and 8.0 years for women married in their thirties. In contrast, duration of dissolving first marriages of men who had been teenage grooms (9.7 years) was shorter than the duration for men first married at ages 20–24. After that, duration shortened for each older age group. Thus, paradoxically, even though

Table H. Average duration to decree of dissolving first marriages for wives and husbands, by age at marriage: Divorce-registration area, 1981

[Based on sample data]

Age at first marriage	Wife	Husband
All ages	9.8	9.9
Under 20 years	10.2	9.7
20–24 years	9.8	10.2
25–29 years	8.6	9.7
30–34 years	8.0	8.8
35–39 years	8.0	8.4
40–44 years	7.1	7.8
45 years and over	5.8	5.6

marriages of men and women married as teenagers have higher dissolution rates, more time elapses before the marriages break up.

Children involved in divorces

In this discussion the word “childless” is used to describe husbands and wives whose divorce records showed no minor children at the time of divorce. The expression “parents” is used where records indicated that there were children under 18 involved in the divorce. The children could have been adopted, or they could be foster children. The discussion is restricted to first marriages and the children of such unions.

Data collected from 1981 dissolutions of first marriage indicate that divorces of persons married as teenagers are more likely to involve children than are divorces of those married at older ages. Table J shows the percent of husbands and wives who were parents at divorce, according to age at first marriage. Seventy-three percent of the divorcing women who had married as teenagers were mothers compared with 55 percent of women married at 20–24 years and 42 percent of women married at 25–29 years. Seventy-six percent of the divorcing men who married as teenagers were fathers compared with 63 percent of men married at 20–24 and 49 percent of those who married at 25–29.

Divorcing men and women who married as teenagers are not only more likely to be parents, they also tend to

have larger families. Thirteen percent of divorcing women who married as teenagers had three or more children compared with 9 percent of women married at 20–24 years of age and 6 percent of women married at 25–29 years. The trend by age of husband at marriage was similar. Thus, the average number of children per decree falls regularly as age at marriage increases (table J), being greatest (1.4 children per decree) for men who were teenage grooms.

Educational attainment of divorcing spouses

The number of years of school completed by divorcing husbands and wives was an item reported by 20 DRA States in 1981. The data show an increasing level of education with increased age at marriage for those first married under 30 years of age (tables K and 4). Divorcing men and women who had married as teenagers had less education than those married in their twenties. For example, in dissolutions of first marriage, divorcing women who had married at ages under 18 years had a median of 12.0 years of school, women married at 18–19 years of age had 12.5 years, and women married at 20–24 years and 25–29 years had 12.9 years of school at the time they were divorced. Furthermore, only 7 percent of divorcing women first married under 18 years of age had education beyond high school compared with 20 percent of women first married at ages 18–19 and 45 percent of women married at ages 20–24.

Divorcing women who had first married at ages under 30 generally had more education than men married at the same ages. Seven percent more divorcing wives than husbands who first married before the age of 18 had completed high school by the time of their divorce. For those who had first married at 18–19 years, 17 percent more wives than husbands had completed high school and 18 percent more had completed at least 1 year of college. The data in table K suggest that marriage at early ages is less disruptive to women’s education than it is to men’s.

Table J. Percent of wives and husbands who were parents and average number of children per decree in dissolutions of first marriages of both spouses, by age at marriage: Divorce-registration area, 1981

[Based on sample data]

Age at first marriage	Percent who were parents		Average number of children per decree	
	Wives	Husbands	Wives	Husbands
All ages	63.1	63.0	1.1	1.1
Under 20 years	72.7	75.6	1.3	1.4
20–24 years	55.4	62.8	1.0	1.1
25–29 years	41.7	48.8	0.7	0.9
30–34 years	33.0	44.1	0.5	0.8
35–39 years	23.4	41.3	0.4	0.8
40–44 years	12.1	33.1	0.2	0.6
45 years and over	11.4	24.7	0.2	0.5

Table K. Percent of divorcing wives and husbands who completed 4 years of high school or more and 1 year of college or more, with ratio of wives to husbands and median years of school completed, by age at marriage for dissolutions of first marriage: 20 reporting States, 1981

[Based on sample data. For a list of reporting States, see table 4]

Age at first marriage	Completed 4 years of high school or more			Completed 1 year of college or more			Median years of school completed	
	Percent of wives	Percent of husbands	Ratio of wives to husbands	Percent of wives	Percent of husbands	Ratio of wives to husbands	Wife	Husband
All ages	80.5	78.6	1.02	30.3	32.9	0.92	12.6	12.6
Under 18 years	49.8	46.4	1.07	7.0	9.3	0.75	12.0	11.7
18–19 years	83.5	71.1	1.17	19.8	16.7	1.18	12.5	12.4
20–24 years	90.6	82.1	1.10	45.2	35.9	1.25	12.9	12.7
25–29 years	87.3	83.8	1.04	47.4	45.8	1.03	12.9	12.9
30–34 years	76.2	77.3	0.99	35.9	38.0	0.94	12.7	12.7
35–44 years	66.5	64.6	1.03	24.3	23.9	1.02	12.4	12.4
45–54 years	56.3	60.5	0.93	16.6	18.3	0.91	12.2	12.2

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List of detailed tables

1. Marriage rates for all marriages and first marriages, by sex and age: Marriage-registration area, 1970–81 . . . 17
2. Percent distribution of all marriages and first marriages by education of bride and groom, with median years of school completed, according to age at marriage: 20 reporting States, 1981 18
3. Estimated divorce rates, by age of wife and husband at decree: United States, 1970–81 19
4. Percent distribution of all dissolutions and dissolutions of first marriages by education of wife and husband, with median years of school completed, according to age at marriage: 20 reporting States, 1981 20

Table 1. Marriage rates for all marriages and first marriages, by sex and age: Marriage-registration area, 1970-81

[Based on sample data. Rates for all marriages are based on the unmarried population; for first marriages, on the never-married population. Rates per 1,000 population in specified group enumerated as of April 1 for 1970 and 1980 and estimated as of July 1 for all other years. Beginning in 1977 figures exclude data for Iowa]

<i>Previous marital status, sex, and age</i>	1981	1980	1979	1978	1977	1976	1975	1974	1973	1972	1971	1970
All marriages												
Women, all ages	54.3	54.2	56.4	56.2	56.8	58.4	60.5	65.0	69.3	71.2	69.8	69.4
15-17 years	19.1	20.2	22.1	23.6	25.2	27.2	30.1	34.8	37.7	39.3	36.7	35.8
18-19 years	83.8	90.9	94.8	99.2	103.6	110.1	119.6	138.9	150.4	157.1	156.6	156.7
20-24 years	121.7	130.8	134.6	136.0	140.1	148.2	157.5	174.6	194.1	209.4	216.6	234.2
25-44 years	99.9	96.5	102.0	102.3	104.8	109.2	113.5	116.7	125.2	124.6	120.6	111.3
25-29 years	129.2	126.3	135.5	137.0	139.3	143.3	152.7	158.9	176.2	175.5	172.4	170.1
30-34 years	98.2	95.0	102.5	103.0	105.4	114.1	114.1	117.8	125.6	130.2	126.2	111.3
35-44 years	65.9	62.3	64.7	64.2	66.9	69.4	73.0	75.2	79.6	78.4	76.5	69.2
45-64 years	17.8	17.3	19.0	19.1	19.4	20.8	20.6	21.4	22.8	22.4	21.4	20.9
65 years and over	2.2	2.2	2.7	2.0	2.2	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4
Men, all ages	66.8	66.8	69.4	69.4	69.9	71.8	74.4	80.0	85.5	87.9	85.9	88.4
15-17 years	2.9	3.0	3.2	3.6	3.8	4.3	4.7	5.7	6.0	6.0	5.6	5.4
18-19 years	36.9	39.2	42.7	45.0	47.6	52.4	58.5	67.9	73.7	77.1	73.0	74.4
20-24 years	96.0	100.4	109.0	112.2	115.4	121.5	129.6	150.9	165.0	176.1	177.5	205.7
25-44 years	118.3	121.2	129.5	134.5	138.3	141.2	146.3	148.4	160.3	160.5	156.4	164.0
25-29 years	129.4	131.2	142.6	146.2	150.8	156.0	168.1	176.1	190.6	206.2	201.2	217.6
30-34 years	119.8	122.8	129.0	136.9	143.4	143.0	145.6	154.0	169.6	158.2	143.9	160.8
35-44 years	98.7	102.0	107.8	112.6	112.5	114.8	113.4	105.5	113.5	107.4	110.0	107.2
45-64 years	51.4	49.1	51.4	50.6	50.8	53.7	52.7	54.3	60.8	62.8	58.4	54.9
65 years and over	14.8	15.2	16.2	13.2	14.2	15.6	16.8	17.2	16.6	16.4	16.7	15.6
First marriages												
Women, all ages	64.9	66.0	67.8	68.2	69.2	72.0	75.9	83.5	90.9	95.1	93.3	93.1
15-17 years	18.7	19.8	21.6	23.0	24.6	26.5	29.3	33.9	36.8	38.4	35.6	35.0
18-19 years	80.7	87.3	91.7	95.6	99.6	105.1	115.0	133.5	144.8	151.9	150.3	151.4
20-24 years	110.0	119.8	121.9	123.0	125.6	133.4	143.8	159.5	177.1	192.9	197.7	220.1
25-44 years	79.3	74.9	76.8	77.1	78.6	81.8	81.7	85.7	94.8	94.2	89.2	82.5
25-29 years	102.6	101.6	104.3	106.7	105.7	109.1	114.6	122.3	135.7	134.8	131.2	132.8
30-34 years	62.7	56.3	60.1	60.0	64.3	67.2	62.4	66.2	74.5	76.5	75.0	66.5
35-44 years	31.6	27.1	28.4	27.0	29.6	30.0	31.8	35.0	41.1	39.9	37.6	31.4
45-64 years	7.9	7.0	7.8	7.9	8.6	9.3	9.2	9.6	11.3	10.8	9.5	8.8
65 years and over	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	0.8	1.0	1.1	1.4	1.1
Men, all ages	53.8	54.7	56.3	56.4	56.7	58.2	61.5	68.0	73.9	77.2	75.2	80.4
15-17 years	2.9	2.9	3.2	3.5	3.7	4.2	4.6	5.6	6.0	5.9	5.5	5.2
18-19 years	36.2	38.4	41.9	44.3	46.7	51.0	57.4	66.6	72.2	75.6	71.2	73.0
20-24 years	89.6	94.5	102.4	105.2	107.7	113.0	121.7	141.8	155.6	166.2	165.6	195.7
25-44 years	83.7	87.9	89.5	91.1	91.9	91.7	96.7	100.4	109.9	111.6	106.9	119.6
25-29 years	106.5	109.9	115.5	118.5	119.3	119.8	132.3	141.0	153.1	167.1	158.5	181.5
30-34 years	70.8	75.5	74.2	76.8	76.0	72.8	78.2	83.3	98.0	87.3	80.6	98.8
35-44 years	35.5	37.2	36.8	37.0	37.3	39.3	37.2	37.4	41.4	41.9	43.8	44.7
45-64 years	12.5	11.6	10.8	10.3	11.8	12.4	13.0	12.6	15.6	16.5	14.6	14.1
65 years and over	2.8	2.9	3.0	2.5	2.5	3.1	3.0	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.2	3.4

Table 2. Percent distribution of all marriages and first marriages by education of bride and groom, with median years of school completed, according to age at marriage: 20 reporting States, 1981

[Based on sample data.]

Age at marriage	Total	Years of school completed						Median years
		Elementary and high school			College			
		0-8 years	9-11 years	12 years	1-3 years	4 years	5 years or more	
		Percent distribution						
All marriages								
Brides, all ages	100.0	3.6	15.1	42.9	22.1	11.2	5.1	12.7
Under 18 years	100.0	10.0	73.4	16.5	0.2	—	—	10.8
18-19 years	100.0	2.2	21.0	63.4	13.4	0.1	—	12.4
20-24 years	100.0	1.7	9.1	43.9	29.0	13.8	2.7	12.9
25-29 years	100.0	2.1	8.3	36.5	23.9	18.8	10.4	13.4
30-34 years	100.0	2.9	10.2	37.9	23.1	14.1	11.8	13.0
35-44 years	100.0	5.5	15.1	41.7	20.9	9.0	7.8	12.7
45-54 years	100.0	13.2	18.1	41.7	16.2	5.9	5.0	12.5
55-64 years	100.0	21.0	17.5	38.9	13.5	6.4	2.9	12.3
65 years and over	100.0	29.8	19.9	29.0	11.4	6.6	3.3	12.0
Grooms, all ages	100.0	4.9	13.2	40.6	20.9	12.4	8.1	12.8
Under 18 years	100.0	10.4	75.6	13.8	—	—	—	10.9
18-19 years	100.0	4.3	31.0	56.8	7.8	0.1	0.0	12.3
20-24 years	100.0	2.6	13.4	48.5	22.9	10.0	2.7	12.7
25-29 years	100.0	2.5	9.0	36.3	23.6	17.4	11.2	13.3
30-34 years	100.0	3.4	7.9	30.8	24.9	17.5	15.5	14.1
35-44 years	100.0	6.2	11.2	35.2	20.2	12.9	14.4	12.9
45-54 years	100.0	13.8	13.4	33.9	15.3	12.2	11.4	12.7
55-64 years	100.0	22.9	14.7	32.0	11.8	10.3	8.4	12.4
65 years and over	100.0	37.7	14.6	25.0	10.0	6.9	5.8	11.4
		Percent distribution						
First marriages								
Brides, all ages	100.0	2.6	14.2	41.6	23.0	13.3	5.3	12.8
Under 18 years	100.0	9.8	73.6	16.4	0.2	—	—	10.8
18-19 years	100.0	2.0	20.1	64.2	13.7	0.1	—	12.4
20-24 years	100.0	1.4	6.4	42.2	31.2	15.7	3.0	13.0
25-29 years	100.0	2.0	4.3	27.2	24.3	26.9	15.3	14.8
30-34 years	100.0	3.0	5.9	25.4	21.2	23.1	21.4	15.0
35-44 years	100.0	8.9	12.6	30.5	13.8	16.0	18.3	12.4
45-54 years	100.0	24.5	14.7	30.6	11.8	8.8	9.6	12.4
55-64 years	100.0	25.3	13.4	33.3	12.3	11.3	4.3	12.3
65 years and over	100.0	35.2	11.6	40.4	3.2	5.2	4.4	12.1
Grooms, all ages	100.0	3.2	13.2	41.4	21.3	13.3	7.6	12.8
Under 18 years	100.0	10.4	75.7	13.7	0.2	—	—	10.9
18-19 years	100.0	4.3	30.7	57.1	7.8	0.1	—	12.3
20-24 years	100.0	2.5	12.4	48.0	23.6	10.6	2.8	12.7
25-29 years	100.0	2.4	6.7	31.5	24.1	21.2	14.1	14.2
30-34 years	100.0	3.2	5.9	22.8	22.1	23.4	22.6	15.3
35-44 years	100.0	8.9	10.9	26.1	18.0	14.9	21.2	14.1
45-54 years	100.0	22.3	16.2	28.6	13.8	9.9	9.1	12.4
55-64 years	100.0	32.4	19.5	28.8	7.7	6.6	4.9	11.5
65 years and over	100.0	47.8	19.2	17.3	5.4	9.0	1.3	9.2

NOTE: The 20 reporting States are California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Table 3. Estimated divorce rates, by age of wife and husband at decree: United States, 1970-81

[Based on sample data. Rates per 1,000 married population in specified group. For method of estimation, see appendix]

<i>Age at decree</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1978</i>	<i>1977</i>	<i>1976</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1974</i>	<i>1973</i>	<i>1972</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1970</i>
<i>Wife</i>												
15 years and over	22.6	22.5	22.8	21.9	21.1	21.1	20.3	19.3	18.2	17.0	15.8	14.9
15-19 years	47.4	45.9	52.9	47.8	41.6	41.1	42.0	37.0	33.5	34.3	33.5	27.0
20-24 years	50.2	52.2	51.6	52.1	47.7	46.6	43.7	42.3	39.6	36.8	35.2	35.0
25-29 years	43.9	43.3	44.0	41.9	39.6	39.3	38.8	36.4	33.7	31.1	28.2	27.4
30-34 years	33.9	33.2	33.3	31.4	30.5	30.2	28.3	26.8	25.3	23.4	21.9	20.2
35-44 years	23.8	23.2	22.8	21.3	20.8	20.8	19.5	18.3	17.6	16.5	15.2	14.1
45-54 years	10.7	10.1	10.2	9.8	9.8	9.9	9.8	9.3	9.2	8.9	8.4	7.7
55-64 years	2.8	3.8	4.2	3.8	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.2	3.9	3.7	3.4	3.1
65 years and over	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.4	1.4
<i>Husband</i>												
15 years and over	23.0	22.7	23.1	22.2	21.5	21.4	20.7	19.7	18.5	17.3	16.4	15.1
15-19 years	33.6	31.4	38.6	48.2	35.0	28.6	30.9	30.8	23.6	24.2	24.9	15.7
20-24 years	50.1	51.0	52.8	52.2	47.6	47.9	44.1	41.3	40.3	37.9	37.9	34.8
25-29 years	46.6	47.2	48.7	46.9	44.0	43.6	42.8	40.9	37.4	34.6	33.8	31.8
30-34 years	39.1	38.2	39.1	36.8	35.0	35.4	33.7	32.0	30.0	28.7	26.3	23.7
35-44 years	28.7	27.6	27.6	25.7	25.6	25.1	23.6	22.6	21.1	19.9	18.4	16.9
45-54 years	14.5	14.0	13.9	13.2	13.2	13.2	13.0	12.1	12.0	11.2	11.0	9.9
55-64 years	5.9	5.6	5.7	5.6	5.9	5.9	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.1	4.8	4.6
65 years and over	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.1	2.0	1.9	2.0

Table 4. Percent distribution of all dissolutions and dissolutions of first marriages by education of wife and husband, with median years of school completed, according to age at marriage: 20 reporting States, 1981

[Based on sample data]

Age	Total	Years of school completed						Median years
		Elementary and high school			College			
		0-8 years	9-11 years	12 years	1-3 years	4 years	5 years or more	
All divorces		Percent distribution						
Women, all ages	100.0	5.5	15.8	50.1	17.3	7.3	3.9	12.6
Under 18 years	100.0	10.0	40.4	42.7	5.5	1.0	0.4	12.0
18-19 years	100.0	3.1	14.4	63.0	15.6	2.8	1.1	12.5
20-24 years	100.0	3.2	9.0	46.9	23.0	12.0	5.8	12.8
25-29 years	100.0	5.3	11.5	45.9	19.3	11.0	6.9	12.7
30-34 years	100.0	8.0	16.2	46.0	17.2	7.3	5.4	12.6
35-44 years	100.0	11.9	16.9	47.4	14.5	5.3	3.9	12.4
45-54 years	100.0	18.5	19.3	43.6	11.7	3.8	3.1	12.3
55-64 years	100.0	23.3	17.9	42.7	8.0	5.0	3.1	12.2
65 years and over	100.0	35.8	20.8	30.2	7.7	2.7	2.8	11.2
Men, all ages	100.0	7.8	15.3	45.4	16.2	9.3	6.1	12.6
Under 18 years	100.0	12.2	41.2	37.4	6.6	1.9	0.8	11.7
18-19 years	100.0	5.9	23.3	54.4	11.8	3.3	1.4	12.4
20-24 years	100.0	5.2	13.7	46.5	18.0	10.2	6.4	12.7
25-29 years	100.0	7.2	11.1	41.0	18.9	12.9	8.8	12.8
30-34 years	100.0	9.6	13.4	42.8	16.0	10.3	7.8	12.6
35-44 years	100.0	15.3	14.7	43.0	12.8	8.2	6.1	12.5
45-54 years	100.0	21.3	14.2	39.4	11.4	7.6	6.2	12.4
55-64 years	100.0	31.6	13.3	35.5	9.6	5.9	4.1	12.2
65 years and over	100.0	42.0	14.0	27.4	7.3	4.9	4.4	10.5
Dissolutions of first marriages								
Women, all ages ¹	100.0	4.8	14.7	50.2	17.7	8.3	4.3	12.6
Under 18 years	100.0	9.8	40.4	42.8	5.6	1.0	0.4	12.0
18-19 years	100.0	2.9	13.5	63.7	15.8	2.9	1.1	12.5
20-24 years	100.0	2.8	6.6	45.4	24.6	13.8	6.8	12.9
25-29 years	100.0	6.0	6.6	39.9	19.1	17.2	11.1	12.9
30-34 years	100.0	12.7	11.0	40.3	14.0	11.7	10.2	12.7
35-44 years	100.0	22.4	11.0	42.2	10.1	7.3	6.9	12.4
45-54 years	100.0	27.1	16.7	39.7	4.9	6.4	5.3	12.2
Men, all ages ¹	100.0	6.6	14.9	45.7	16.4	10.0	6.5	12.6
Under 18 years	100.0	12.3	41.3	37.1	6.7	1.8	0.8	11.7
18-19 years	100.0	5.9	23.1	54.4	11.9	3.3	1.5	12.4
20-24 years	100.0	5.0	12.8	46.2	18.3	10.8	6.8	12.7
25-29 years	100.0	7.4	8.8	38.0	18.7	15.9	11.2	12.9
30-34 years	100.0	12.1	10.5	39.3	13.7	13.3	11.0	12.7
35-44 years	100.0	22.7	12.6	40.7	8.9	9.0	6.0	12.4
45-54 years	100.0	28.7	10.8	42.2	8.8	5.7	3.8	12.2

¹Includes ages not shown separately.

NOTE: The 20 reporting States are Alabama, Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Appendix

Technical notes

Registration areas

Registration areas for the collection of marriage and divorce statistics were established in 1957 and in 1958, respectively. The registration areas include States with adequate programs for collecting marriage and divorce statistics. Criteria for participation in the registration areas are:

1. A central file of marriage or divorce records.
2. A statistical report form conforming closely in content to the U.S. Standard Certificate of Marriage or the U.S. Standard Certificate of Divorce, Dissolution of Marriage, or Annulment.

3. Regular reporting to the State office by all local areas in which marriages or divorces are recorded.
4. Tests for completeness and accuracy of marriage or divorce registration carried out in cooperation with the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

In 1970 the marriage-registration area (MRA) included 39 States and the District of Columbia while the divorce-registration area (DRA) included 28 States. By 1981 the MRA had grown to 42 States and the District of Columbia and the DRA to 31 States. Table I shows the States and the years they were admitted to the registration areas.

Table I. Years central files of marriage and divorce records were established and years areas were admitted to the marriage- and divorce-registration areas: 1981

[The marriage-registration area (MRA) was established January 1, 1957, and the divorce-registration area (DRA), January 1, 1958]

Area	Marriages		Divorces		Area	Marriages		Divorces	
	Central files established	Admitted to the MRA	Central files established	Admitted to the DRA		Central files established	Admitted to the MRA	Central files established	Admitted to the DRA
Alabama	1908	1957	1908	1958	Nebraska	1909	1957	1909	1958
Alaska	1913	1957	1949	1958	Nevada	1968	(²)	1968	(²)
Arizona	(¹)	(²)	(¹)	(²)	New Hampshire	1858	1957	1881	1979
Arkansas	1917	(²)	1923	(²)	New Jersey	1848	1957	1795	(²)
California	1905	1957	1962	(³)	New Mexico	(¹)	(²)	(¹)	(²)
Colorado	1968	1979	1968	(²)	New York (excl. N.Y.C.)	1880	1957	1963	1969
Connecticut	1897	1957	1947	1968	New York City	1847	1965	1963	
Delaware	1913	1957	1935	1981	North Carolina	1962	1964	1958	(²)
District of Columbia	1811	1961	1802	(²)	North Dakota	1925	(²)	1949	(²)
Florida	1927	1957	1927	(²)	Ohio	1949	1957	1949	1962
Georgia	1952	1957	1952	1958	Oklahoma	(¹)	(²)	(¹)	(²)
Hawaii	1896	1957	1951	1958	Oregon	1907	1957	1925	1958
Idaho	1947	1957	1947	1958	Pennsylvania	1906	1957	1943	1958
Illinois	1962	1964	1962	1968	Rhode Island	1852	1957	1962	1963
Indiana	1959	1961	(¹)	(²)	South Carolina	1950	1971	1962	1971
Iowa	1880	1957	1914	1958	South Dakota	1905	1957	1905	1958
Kansas	1913	1957	1951	1959	Tennessee	1945	1957	1945	1958
Kentucky	1958	1959	1958	1969	Texas	1966	(²)	1968	(²)
Louisiana	1937	1957	1942	(²)	Utah	1919	1957	1953	1958
Maine	1892	1957	1892	(²)	Vermont	1857	1957	1896	1968
Maryland	1914	1957	1914	1959	Virginia	1853	1957	1918	1958
Massachusetts	1841	1961	1882	1979	Washington	1968	(²)	1968	(²)
Michigan	1867	1957	1897	1961	West Virginia	1921	1965	1967	(²)
Minnesota	1958	1971	1970	(²)	Wisconsin	1907	1957	1907	1958
Mississippi	1926	1957	1926	(²)	Wyoming	1941	1957	1941	1958
Missouri	1948	1968	1948	1961					
Montana	1943	1957	1943	1958					

¹Not yet established.

²Not yet admitted.

³California was admitted to the DRA in 1968 but ceased to participate in 1978.

In 1970 and 1980 efforts were made to obtain national marriage data to use with the detailed population bases available from the decennial censuses. In 1970 marriage records were sampled for eight States not in the MRA: Arkansas, Colorado, Minnesota, Nevada, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington. With the addition of these States, marriage data by age and States of residence for the bride and groom are available for the entire United States with the exception of three States without central files of marriage records (Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma). In 1980 marriage records were sampled for Arkansas, Nevada, North Dakota, Texas, and Washington; Colorado, Minnesota, and South Carolina had joined the MRA between 1970 and 1980.

Sources of data

The marriage and divorce statistics presented in this report were derived primarily from data collected annually by NCHS and published in *Vital Statistics of the United States*, Volume III, Marriage and Divorce. They are based on information from two sources: (1) Complete counts of events obtained from all States, and (2) samples of marriage and divorce certificates from the MRA and DRA. Statistical information obtained by NCHS from the certificates of States that constitute the MRA and DRA includes data on the characteristics of marriages and divorces and of the persons involved in them, such as date and place of marriage, age, race, and number of previous marriages.

Marriage and divorce statistics for the United States, for the registration areas, and for individual States are tabulated by place of occurrence and include marriages of nonresidents. Marriages or divorces of members of the Armed Forces or of other U.S. nationals that occur outside the United States are excluded. United States refers to the 50 States and the District of Columbia. The term "divorce" as used in this report includes absolute divorces and annulments and decrees of marriage dissolution, which recently replaced divorces in several States. Various types of limited divorce are excluded. The words "divorce" and "dissolution of marriage" are used interchangeably.

Sampling

Marriage and divorce records were sampled at different rates to give a minimum sample of approximately 2,500 records for each State, producing a 4-percent relative variance on a 1-percent estimate. All records were sampled for States with fewer than 5,000 records and for New York City marriages. All records were also used for States in the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program (VSCP). These participating States supplied State-coded data. Beginning in 1973 with Florida, the number of States that supplied marriage records through VSCP grew to 9 in 1975 with the addition of Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Vermont. Virginia was added in 1976, and Illinois and Montana brought the total to 12 VSCP States for the 1977-81 period. State-coded data tapes of divorce records were used starting in 1975 for 6 States—

Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Vermont. Virginia was added in 1976 and Illinois in 1977, bringing the total to 8 States for the 1977-81 period.

Estimates computed from the samples (except where the sample included all records) are subject to sampling error. Because all cases in the samples were selected with known probabilities, the sampling error can be calculated for each estimate. Table II shows sampling errors for the MRA and the DRA in 1981. These are the amounts which, when added to and subtracted from the estimates, give the intervals where the quantity being estimated would fall, in approximately 68 out of 100 similarly selected samples.

Table II. Sampling error of estimated frequency, expressed as a percent of area total: Marriage- and divorce-registration areas, 1981

Percent of total registration area events in subclass	Sampling error	
	Marriage-registration area	Divorce-registration area
1 or 99	417	176
2 or 98	586	248
3 or 97	714	303
4 or 96	821	348
5 or 95	913	387
7 or 93	1,069	453
10 or 90	1,256	532
15 or 85	1,495	633
20 or 80	1,675	709
25 or 75	1,814	768
50	2,094	887

Demographic characteristics

Most of the items tabulated for marriages and divorces were on the certificates of nearly all areas in the MRA or in the DRA. For marriages, items on age at marriage or date of birth were included by every MRA State and the District of Columbia and were well reported. For divorces, date of marriage and number of children were included on the certificate of every DRA State and were well reported.

National estimates of marriages and divorces by age and sex were obtained by assuming that the age distributions of brides and grooms and of husbands and wives were the same in the United States as in the MRA and DRA. The percent distributions from the registration areas were applied to the total count of marriages and divorces for the United States.

Certificates vary among States in the way that information on marriage order is collected. The item may be number of this marriage, number of previous marriages, previous marital status, or a combination of the items.

Not all States record race on marriage and divorce certificates. During the late 1960's and early 1970's, the question was removed from marriage records of several States, and in some other jurisdictions the item was ignored. By 1981 the item appeared on the marriage forms of 34 registration States but in this report is analyzed only for the 32 States for which data were available both in 1970 and 1981. Race

appears as an item on the 1981 divorce certificates of 27 States in the DRA. Race was not reported on more than 10 percent of the certificates for Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Utah in 1981. For other States that included this item on their certificates, race was reported fairly well.

Beginning in 1977 items on race, previous marital status, number of marriage, and education were no longer reported on Iowa marriage certificates.

In California nonlicensed marriages are performed under section 4213 of the California Civil Code, which allows unmarried couples who have been living together to be married confidentially without obtaining a marriage license or health certificate. (Ordinarily a physician's examination and tests for syphilis and rubella are required.) In March 1972 this section was amended to require county clerks to keep sealed records of these marriages and periodically to report the total number to the California State Department of Health Services. These records may not be opened to inspection without a court order. Since reporting began, nonlicensed marriages have increased rapidly, totaling 2,857 in 1973; 10,555 in 1974; 19,061 in 1975; 30,125 in 1976; 32,008 in 1977; 37,462 in 1978; 41,961 in 1979; 48,040 in 1980;

and 54,057 in 1981. Beginning in 1978 these marriages are included in the national and geographical totals.

Estimates, rates, percents, means, and medians

National estimates of marriages and divorces in the United States by age were derived by applying the percent distributions by age in the MRA and DRA to the total number of marriages and divorces in the United States. These estimates for teenagers are shown in tables A and G. The age-specific divorce rates shown in table 3 use these national estimates as the numerators.

Marriage rates for 1970 and 1980 and divorce rates for 1970 are based on the complete count of persons enumerated as of April 1 of those years. Divorce rates for 1980 are based on a sample of the population enumerated as of April 1. All other rates are based on estimates of the resident population as of July 1. Estimates of the resident population by age, marital status, and sex for the United States and for the MRA were prepared by the Bureau of the Census. Percents, means, and medians were computed excluding cases with information not stated.

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