

The Washington Post | Ezra Klein's
WONKBLOG

Nine Facts about Marriage and Childbirth in the United States

Some fascinating facts, graphs and insights from Knot Yet: The Benefits and Costs of Delayed Marriage in America, a new report from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, and the RELATE Institute.

- 1) The average age for childbearing is now younger than the average age for marriage. “By age 25, 44 percent of women have had a baby, while only 38 percent have married.”
- 2) We are very near the “tipping point” when most births will happen out of wedlock. “48 percent of all first births are now to unmarried women. Thus, the nation is at a tipping point, on the verge of moving into a new demographic reality where the majority of first births in the United States precede marriage.”
- 3) Most unwed mothers are not teen mothers. “Many people continue to think of ‘unwed mothers’ as more or less synonymous with ‘teen pregnancy,’ but these numbers show that it’s well past time to retire that idea, particularly when we consider all births rather than just first births. Today, only 23 percent of all unmarried births are to teenagers. Sixty percent are to women in their twenties.”
- 4) Women who wait until age 30 to marry make much more money. “Women with a college degree who wait to marry until at least thirty, and high-school-educated women without a degree who also wait until thirty, earn more than those who marry at younger ages. In fact, this report finds that they earn \$18,152 and \$4,052 more per year, compared to their sisters who marry before twenty.”
- 5) That’s not true for men, however. “Among men in their midthirties, those who had married in their twenties had the highest level of personal income, though the precise pattern varies by education...Men who had never married had some of the lowest levels of personal income—lower even than those who married before age twenty.”
- 6) Cohabitation has skyrocketed. “One of our most startling findings is that today’s young people of all education levels are entering their first coresidential relationship at about the same age as in the past; it’s just that now they are far more likely to be “living together” than married.”
- 7) 39 percent of cohabitating couples who have a child break up within 5 years. “Nearly 40 percent of cohabiting twentysomething parents who had a baby between 2000 and 2005 split up by the time their child was five; that’s three times higher than the rate for twentysomething parents who were married when they had a child.”
- 8) It used to be only that college-educated women waited to marry. Now it’s everyone. “Whereas in the past, women from Vassar to the University of North Carolina were always known for marrying later than their less-educated sisters, that is no longer the case. Women doctors, teachers, medical technicians, or waitresses are now all equally likely to postpone marriage to their late twenties.”
- 9) Culturally, marriage has moved from “cornerstone” to “capstone”. “Culturally, young adults have increasingly come to see marriage as a ‘capstone’ rather than a ‘cornerstone’—that is, something they do after they have all their other ducks in a row, rather than a foundation for launching into adulthood and parenthood...Ninety-one percent of young adults believe that they must be completely financially independent to be ready for marriage, and over 90 percent of them believe they should finish their education before taking the big step. Fifty-one percent also believe that their career should be underway first. In fact, almost half say that it is ‘very important’ to work full-time for a year or two prior to getting married.”

