National Health Statistics Reports

A Demographic, Attitudinal, and Behavioral Profile of Cohabiting Adults in the United States, 2011–2015

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Abstract

Objective—This report provides a profile of sexually experienced, cohabiting adults aged 18–44 in the United States based on 2011–2015 data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). Additionally, this report compares these cohabiting adults with those sexually experienced adults who are currently married and those who are unmarried and not currently cohabiting. Data are shown by selected demographic characteristics, attitudes, and family formation behaviors.

Methods—NSFG data used in this report were collected through in-person interviews from September 2011 through September 2015 with nationally representative samples of 6,674 men and 8,292 women aged 18–44 who were sexually experienced. The overall response rate for the 2011–2015 NSFG was 71%: 72% for women and 70% for men.

Results—Overall, 17.1% of women and 15.9% of men aged 18–44 who were sexually experienced were cohabiting at the time of interview. Compared with those who were married or unmarried and not cohabiting, cohabiting women and men were more likely to have no high school diploma or GED. Both cohabiters and unmarried, noncohabiting individuals reported lower household incomes than married persons. Cohabiting women and men were more supportive of premarital cohabitation, the idea that living together before marriage may help prevent divorce, and of raising children in cohabiting unions, compared with married and unmarried, noncohabiting adults. Cohabiting individuals were more likely to report having had their first sexual intercourse before the age of 18 and having cohabited two or more times in the past than both married and unmarried, noncohabiting individuals. They were also more likely than married men and women to have had an unintended birth.

Keywords: cohabitation • marital status • attitudes • family formation • National Survey of Family Growth

Introduction

According to recent data, more than one-half of U.S. adults of reproductive age have cohabited at some point in their lives, and this percentage has increased steadily over the last 2 decades (1–5).

During this same time period, a rise in the rates of serial cohabitation—having multiple cohabiting relationships in sequence—has also occurred (6,7). Cohabitation is currently the most common first coresidential union among young adults, and it is a partnering behavior that now precedes most marriages (8–10). In addition, national data show that births to unmarried women are currently more likely to occur in a cohabiting union than in a noncohabiting union, a pattern that has accelerated in recent years (11–15). Alongside these shifts, changes have occurred in how Americans define family, with some variation by sociodemographic subgroup in the cultural significance of marriage and attitudes about family formation (16). However, there is limited knowledge regarding how current cohabiters are different from other marital or cohabiting status groups in terms of their demographic characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors. This is an important gap to fill, given that cohabitation is an increasingly common stage of union formation and context for childbearing.

This report describes selected demographic characteristics; attitudes about sexual behavior, cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and childbearing; as well as indicators of fertility and family formation related to sexual behavior, household structure, and childbearing across three groups of women and men—currently cohabiting; currently married; and unmarried, not cohabiting. Using 2011–2015 data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), this report presents nationally representative estimates based on sexually experienced

women and men aged 18–44 in the United States.

Methods

Data source

NSFG is a nationally representative in-person survey of the U.S. household population. Interviews were conducted by female interviewers with men and women aged 15–44. Further details on sample design, fieldwork procedures, and interview content are available elsewhere (17–19). This report is based on combined NSFG data for 2011–2013 and 2013–2015, resulting in a data file of 4 years of interviews spanning 2011–2015. The combined data set contains a total of 20,621 interviews—11,300 with women and 9,321 with men. The overall response rate for the 2011–2015 NSFG was 71%: 72% for women and 70% for men. This analysis is restricted to 8,292 women and 6,674 men aged 18–44 who were sexually experienced, defined as having ever had vaginal intercourse with a partner of the opposite sex. The 18–44 age range was chosen because the focus of this report is on comparing those currently in a cohabiting union with other marital status groups, and the prevalence of cohabitation or marriage among U.S. teenagers aged 15–17 is low (20). For example, for 2011–2015, only 1% of male teens and 0.3% of female teens had ever been married (20). Additionally, cohabiting and marital unions in NSFG presume the respondents are in a sexual relationship, so the comparison group of unmarried, noncohabiting persons is similarly limited to only sexually experienced adults.

Measurement of marital or cohabiting status and other key variables

The analyses in this report highlight differences among three marital or cohabiting status groups, with a special focus on comparing current cohabiters with those who are currently married and those who are neither currently married nor cohabiting. Marital or cohabiting status reflects the respondent's status at the time of interview, and as with all interviewer-administered items in NSFG, it is defined in relation to opposite-sex partners or spouses.

The data presented in this report are shown with respect to several key background or demographic characteristics, including age, Hispanic origin and race, educational attainment, and poverty-level income. Hispanic origin and race are classified according to 1997 Office of Management and Budget guidelines for the presentation of race and ethnic-origin data in federal statistics (21). In this report, the categories Hispanic; non-Hispanic white, single race; non-Hispanic black, single race; and non-Hispanic other, single or multiple race, are shown. Poverty-level income is based on household size and household income. The questions on household income ask married or cohabiting respondents to include income from their spouses or cohabiting partners and any other family members living in the household.

Selected attitudes described in this report include agreement with statements about the appropriateness of sexual intercourse among teenagers, couples living together before marriage, divorce as a solution to marital problems, and raising children as an unmarried person (while cohabiting with a partner or not). Key fertility and family formation indicators include: age at first sexual intercourse, number of biological children, currently living with children or not, ever having had an unintended birth, future birth intentions, total number of cohabitations, and contraceptive use at last sexual intercourse. These measures are described in detail in the Definition of terms.

Statistical analysis

Statistics for this report were produced using SAS version 9.4 software (SAS Institute, Cary, N.C.). SAS survey procedures were used to account for the complex sample design of NSFG to produce standard errors. All estimates in this report were based on sampling weights designed to produce unbiased estimates that were nationally representative of the reproductive-aged household population of the United States. These analyses were conducted using the 4-year sample weights constructed for 2011–2015 data; population size estimates in this report reflect the approximate midpoint of 2011–2015 interviewing (July 2013).

All estimates presented meet the National Center for Health Statistics guidelines for presentation of proportions (22). Distributions of demographic characteristics, attitudes, and fertility behaviors among marital or cohabiting status groups may vary significantly for men compared with women. Therefore, estimates were stratified by sex, and comparisons between cohabiting men and women were made where appropriate. When percentages between groups were compared, statistical significance was determined by using two-tailed t tests at the 5% level. No adjustments were made for multiple comparisons. Terms such as ''greater than'' and ''less than'' indicate that a statistically significant difference was found. Terms such as ''similar'' or ''no difference'' indicate that the estimates being compared were not significantly different. In addition to the cross-sectional nature of the survey data precluding valid causal inferences, the data presented in this report are bivariate associations that may be explained by other factors not controlled for.

Results

Selected demographic characteristics by marital or cohabiting status

Table 1 presents a profile of selected demographic characteristics by marital or cohabiting status for sexually experienced women and men aged 18–44. Educational attainment is shown based only on respondents aged 22–44, because large percentages of those aged 18–21 are still attending school.

- Overall, 17.1% of women and 15.9% of men aged 18–44 are currently cohabiting. These percentages are significantly lower than the percentages of women and men who are currently married (44.9% and 43.5%, respectively) and unmarried and not cohabiting (38.0% and 40.6%, respectively).

- Nearly one-half (46.3%) of cohabiting women were aged 25–34, while 30.1% were aged 18–24 and 23.6% were aged 35–44. In contrast, one-half of married women (51.9%) were in the oldest age category. Unmarried, noncohabiting women were more evenly spread across the age categories, with 37.3% aged 18–24, 33.2% aged 25–34, and 29.5% aged 35–44. One-half of cohabiting men (50.5%) were aged 25–34, 21.7% were aged 18–24, and 27.8% were aged 35–44. A similar pattern of distributions exists for married and unmarried, noncohabiting men compared with women in these marital status groups.
- Among female cohabiters, 56.7% were non-Hispanic white. This was lower than the percentage of married women who were non-Hispanic white (63.9%) but higher than the percentage of unmarried, noncohabiting women who were non-Hispanic white (47.2%). Among male cohabiters, one-half (50.3%) were non-Hispanic white. This percentage was similar to unmarried, noncohabiting men but was lower than married men (61.1%). There were no differences between cohabiting men and women by Hispanic origin and race.
- Among cohabiting women aged 22–44, one-quarter had a bachelor's degree or higher. This was similar to unmarried, noncohabiting women but lower than married women, where more than 4 in 10 had a bachelor's degree or higher. Among men aged 22–44, the percentage of cohabiters with a bachelor's degree or higher (16.2%) was lower than both married men (36.5%) and unmarried, noncohabiting men (23.3%). For both women and men aged 22–44, a higher percentage of cohabiters had no high school diploma or GED (15.3% and 21.2%, respectively) compared with those who were married (8.3% and 12.5%) or unmarried and not cohabiting (10.7% and 10.6%).
- Nearly one-half (47.9%) of cohabiting women had household incomes less than 150% of poverty

level, and roughly one-quarter were distributed in both 150%–299% (26.9%) and 300% (25.2%) or more of poverty level. This pattern was similar to unmarried, noncohabiting women, but for married women, nearly one-half (48.1%) had household incomes at 300% or more of poverty level. Among cohabiting men, roughly one-third fell into each poverty-level income category—36.1% had household incomes less than 150% of poverty level, 31.5% were at 150%–299% of poverty level, and 32.4% were at 300% or more of poverty level. The 32.4% of cohabiting men at 300% or more of poverty level was a smaller percentage compared with both married (52.4%) and unmarried, noncohabiting (40.0%) men.

Selected attitudes about fertility and family formation by marital or cohabiting status

Table 2 shows attitudes about sexual behavior, cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and childbearing by marital or cohabiting status among sexually experienced women and men aged 18–44. In this report, "agreed" means respondents either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" to each attitude statement.

- Roughly 70.0% of cohabiting women agreed with the statement, "It is all right for unmarried 18 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other." This percentage was higher compared with both married and unmarried, noncohabiting women (49.1% and 63.8%, respectively). Among men, the percentage of those in agreement with the statement was higher for cohabiters (73.1%) than for married men (54.3%) but similar to unmarried, noncohabiting men (76.9%).
- For women and men, the percentage who agreed, "A young couple should not live together unless they are married," was lower among cohabiters (12.2% for women and 12.3% for men) than both married

and unmarried, noncohabiting women (29.0% and 24.7%, respectively) and men (31.3% and 18.3%).
- The percentage of those who agreed with the statement, "Living together before marriage may help prevent divorce" was higher among cohabiting women (81.3%) than among married women (58.3%) and unmarried, noncohabiting women (65.2%). The same pattern was seen for men.
- For both men and women, the percentage who agreed that "Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems" was higher among cohabiters than among other marital or cohabiting status groups. For example, one-half of male cohabiters agreed with this statement about divorce, while 3 in 10 married men and more than 4 in 10 unmarried, noncohabiting men agreed.
- A higher percentage of cohabiting women and men agreed with the statement, "It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married." (90.0% for women and 89.1% for men) compared with both married (72.7% for women and 72.5% for men) and unmarried, noncohabiting persons (81.3% for women and 82.5% for men).
- Among cohabiting women, 86.3% agreed, "It is okay for an unmarried female to have and raise a child." This percentage was higher compared with married women (79.3%) but similar to unmarried, noncohabiting women (83.5%). Agreement with this statement did not differ by marital status for men.
- Male and female cohabiters were similar to each other in agreement with all selected attitudes except, "It is okay for an unmarried female to have and raise a child." Among cohabiters, the percentage of those who agreed with this statement was higher for women (86.3%) than for men (76.4%).

Selected fertility and family-formation behaviors by marital or cohabiting status

Table 3 shows the total number of cohabitations, age at first sexual intercourse, number of biological children, whether the respondent is currently living with any children under age 18, experience with unintended birth, future birth intentions, and contraceptive use at last sex in the past 3 months, by marital or cohabiting status among sexually experienced women and men aged 18–44.

- A higher percentage of cohabiting women had their first sexual intercourse before age 18 (74.5%) than both married (53.1%) and unmarried, noncohabiting (67.2%) women. The same pattern was seen for men. Male and female cohabiters were not different from each other on this indicator.

- For both men and women, the percentage who have had one or more biological children among cohabiters was higher than among unmarried, noncohabiters but lower than married persons. For example, 6 in 10 female cohabiters have had at least one biological child. This was the case for just under one-half of unmarried, noncohabiting women and 8 in 10 married women. Cohabiting women were not different from cohabiting men on this measure.

- For both women and men, the percentage of cohabiters living with children under age 18 was lower than that of married persons but higher than that of unmarried, noncohabiters. For example, 57.5% of cohabiting women were currently living with children under age 18 compared with 77.1% of married women and 43.2% of unmarried, noncohabiting women. A higher percentage of female cohabiters (57.5%) were currently living with children under age 18 compared with male cohabiters (48.4%).

- For women who have had a live birth, the percentage of cohabiters who had one or more unintended

births (43.5%) was higher compared with married women (23.9%) but lower compared with unmarried, noncohabiting women (55.2%). On the other hand, among men who have fathered at least one biological child, the percentage of cohabiters who ever had an unintended birth (63.0%) was higher than that of married men (40.6%) but similar to that of unmarried, noncohabiting men (65.4%).

- Roughly one-half of cohabiting and unmarried, noncohabiting women intended to have children in the future (53.2% for both groups). This percentage was higher compared with married women (32.1%). The percentage of cohabiting men who intended to have children in the future (56.1%) was also higher than that of married men (34.5%) but lower than that of unmarried, noncohabiting men (72.4%). Female and male cohabiters did not differ in their intent for future children.

- For women and men, the percentage of those who had cohabited two or more times was higher among cohabiters than among married or unmarried, noncohabiting persons. For example, roughly 4 in 10 currently cohabiting women had cohabited two or more times compared with 2 in 10 married and unmarried, noncohabiting women. Currently cohabiting men and women did not differ from each other on the total number of times they have cohabited.

- One-quarter of cohabiting women reported not using any contraception at last sexual intercourse in the past 3 months, and 2 in 10 reported using the least effective methods. This pattern was similar to married women. The percentage of those who reported use of the most effective methods among cohabiting men (19.7%) was lower than among married men (28.9%) but higher than among unmarried, noncohabiting men (9.2%).

Discussion and Conclusions

Using nationally representative data from the 2011–2015 NSFG, this report presents a profile of how cohabiting adults of reproductive age differ from those in other marital status groups on selected demographic characteristics, as well as attitudes and behaviors related to fertility and family formation. Previous research on demographic differences tends to focus on those who have ever cohabited (1,23), but this report examines those who are currently cohabiting. Among sexually experienced men and women aged 18–44, cohabiting adults in 2011–2015 were less likely than married persons to be non-Hispanic white and more likely than married persons to be Hispanic or non-Hispanic black. Current cohabiters were more likely than both currently married and unmarried, noncohabiting men and women to have not received a high school diploma or GED, which is similar to prior research finding that those with lower education were more likely to have ever cohabited (23) and to have cohabited for their first union (3). Cohabiters were more similar to unmarried, noncohabiting persons in having lower household incomes than married persons. Overall, the higher socioeconomic status and resources that may be gained by those in a marital union (24,25) were not seen for cohabiting unions in these data.

In terms of attitudes about sexual behavior and family life, cohabiting men and women were more likely than other marital status groups to agree with statements about the acceptability of premarital cohabitation and raising children in a cohabiting union, as well as whether cohabitation decreases the risk of divorce. It is not known whether these attitudes existed before the current living situation. Nevertheless, these findings are aligned with previous research showing that those who are currently living a less traditional family life (e.g., cohabiting) are more supportive of nontraditional family living arrangements (16).

These descriptive analyses also demonstrated that cohabiting men and women differed from other groups in key fertility and family formation indicators. Cohabiting men and women were more

likely than other marital status groups to have had their first sexual intercourse before the age of 18. Similar to findings from previous research about higher rates of unintended pregnancy among cohabiting women and men (26–28), cohabiters were more likely than married persons to have had an unintended birth, although not necessarily within that same union. Cohabiting men and women were also more likely to have cohabited two or more times than other marital status groups. In terms of recent contraceptive use, cohabiting women were more like married women in their nonuse of contraception at last sexual intercourse within the past 3 months, and both cohabiting men and women were more like married people in their use of less effective contraceptive methods.

As previously described, these analyses are cross-sectional and therefore imply correlational and not causal relationships. In addition, it is possible that the bivariate associations described above may be explained by additional factors not controlled for in these analyses. Results demonstrate differences across marital or cohabiting status groups by demographic characteristics, such as age, race and ethnicity, education, and income. However, these differences in demographic characteristics could reflect selection effects, such that those individuals who choose to cohabit compared with those who enter into a marriage may be in some ways qualitatively different. Similarly, observed differences between marital or cohabiting status groups in both attitudes and family formation outcomes may reflect differences between the groups on characteristics such as age, education, and other demographic factors.

These analyses also do not control for other possible important confounders, such as whether respondents are currently pregnant, postpartum, or are open to or actively seeking pregnancy, which may be important for outcomes related to future birth intentions and contraceptive use in particular. Another limitation is that NSFG is subject to sources of nonsampling error, similar to all survey data. Sensitive information, such as attitudes, are susceptible to social desirability biases. Finally, it is important to recognize that while many

of the differences between groups listed were statistically significant, they are not necessarily large or meaningful.

Previous research shows that being in a cohabiting union is becoming more prevalent among U.S. adults and is more commonly the context of births to unmarried women in this country (1–7). This report offers further insight into the currently cohabiting population and their demographic makeup, as well as their attitudes and behaviors with respect to fertility and family formation.

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Table 1. Percent distribution, by selected demographic characteristics, according to marital or cohabiting status among women and men aged 18–44 who had ever had sexual intercourse: United States, 2011–2015

Demographic characteristic	Women			Men		
	Currently cohabiting	Currently married	Unmarried, not cohabiting	Currently cohabiting	Currently married	Unmarried, not cohabiting
Total number in thousands (weighted)	8,913	23,335	19,776	8,067	22,041	20,598
Sample size (unweighted)	1,557	3,408	4,435	1,045	2,423	3,871
Total percent (standard error)	17.1 (0.67)	44.9 (1.01)	38.0 (0.87)	15.9 (0.71)	43.5 (1.19)	40.6 (0.99)
	Percent distribution (standard error)					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Age group						
18–24	30.1 (1.82)	6.4 (0.62)	37.3 (1.14)	21.7 (1.82)	4.1 (0.67)	43.3 (1.31)
25–34	46.3 (1.85)	41.7 (1.17)	33.2 (1.04)	50.5 (2.23)	39.2 (1.36)	35.2 (1.16)
35–44	23.6 (1.56)	51.9 (1.27)	29.5 (1.13)	27.8 (2.13)	56.7 (1.56)	21.5 (0.90)
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino.	24.5 (2.08)	18.2 (1.26)	19.8 (1.47)	28.1 (2.50)	20.2 (1.73)	19.2 (1.45)
Non-Hispanic or Latino:						
White, single race	56.7 (2.39)	63.9 (1.60)	47.2 (1.78)	50.3 (2.86)	61.1 (1.94)	55.4 (1.74)
Black, single race	10.0 (1.09)	7.3 (0.62)	23.1 (1.50)	13.3 (1.64)	8.8 (0.92)	15.0 (1.31)
All other single race and multiple race	8.8 (1.89)	10.6 (1.14)	9.9 (1.34)	8.4 (1.84)	9.9 (1.20)	10.4 (1.04)
Education[1]						
No high school diploma or GED	15.3 (1.44)	8.3 (0.76)	10.7 (0.75)	21.2 (1.92)	12.5 (1.09)	10.6 (0.82)
High school diploma or GED	28.1 (1.85)	21.0 (1.16)	27.0 (1.35)	33.6 (1.73)	24.9 (1.37)	31.3 (1.46)
Some college, no bachelor's degree	31.3 (1.75)	27.7 (1.23)	34.7 (1.17)	29.1 (2.10)	26.1 (1.31)	34.9 (1.29)
Bachelor's degree or higher	25.3 (1.90)	43.0 (1.85)	27.6 (1.46)	16.2 (1.68)	36.5 (2.04)	23.3 (1.32)
Poverty-level income						
0%–149%	47.9 (2.16)	25.6 (1.28)	47.7 (1.42)	36.1 (2.03)	21.2 (1.19)	31.9 (1.26)
150%–299%	26.9 (1.73)	26.3 (1.10)	24.1 (1.00)	31.5 (1.95)	26.3 (1.34)	28.2 (1.16)
300% or more.	25.2 (1.85)	48.1 (1.65)	28.2 (1.42)	32.4 (2.24)	52.4 (1.69)	40.0 (1.48)

[1]Limited to respondents aged 22–44 at the time of interview.

NOTE: All three marital or cohabiting status groups contain respondents who were formerly married (i.e., divorced, separated, or widowed).

SOURCE: NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table 2. Percentage who agreed or strongly agreed with attitude statements about sexual behavior, cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and childbearing among women and men aged 18–44 who had ever had sexual intercourse, by current marital or cohabiting status: United States, 2011–2015

Attitude statement	Women			Men		
	Currently cohabiting	Currently married	Unmarried, not cohabiting	Currently cohabiting	Currently married	Unmarried, not cohabiting
	Percent (standard error)					
It is all right for unmarried 18 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other	70.4 (1.86)	49.1 (1.54)	63.8 (1.17)	73.1 (1.81)	54.3 (1.85)	76.9 (1.21)
A young couple should not live together unless they are married	12.2 (1.14)	29.0 (1.50)	24.7 (1.08)	12.3 (1.67)	31.3 (1.62)	18.3 (0.98)
Living together before marriage may help prevent divorce	81.3 (1.59)	58.3 (1.52)	65.2 (1.29)	82.9 (1.53)	65.1 (1.61)	73.9 (1.23)
Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems	45.4 (1.92)	29.7 (1.40)	42.2 (1.21)	50.8 (2.40)	30.5 (1.43)	43.7 (1.55)
It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married	90.0 (1.20)	72.7 (1.41)	81.3 (0.98)	89.1 (1.01)	72.5 (1.45)	82.5 (0.93)
It is okay for an unmarried female to have and raise a child	86.3 (1.16)	79.3 (1.09)	83.5 (0.86)	76.4 (2.00)	73.3 (1.34)	73.7 (1.12)

NOTE: All three marital or cohabiting status groups include respondents who were formerly married (i.e., divorced, separated, or widowed).

SOURCE: NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table 3. Selected fertility and family formation indicators, by marital or cohabiting status among women and men aged 18–44 who had ever had sexual intercourse: United States, 2011–2015

Fertility behavior	Women			Men		
	Currently cohabiting	Currently married	Unmarried, not cohabiting	Currently cohabiting	Currently married	Unmarried, not cohabiting
	Percent (standard error)					
Had first sexual intercourse before age 18	74.5 (1.63)	53.1 (1.48)	67.2 (1.25)	73.9 (2.05)	58.8 (1.53)	66.9 (1.17)
Has had one or more biological children	60.1 (1.98)	80.4 (1.14)	47.5 (1.40)	54.6 (2.25)	80.0 (1.20)	22.2 (1.13)
Currently living with children under age 18[1]	57.5 (2.03)	77.1 (1.13)	43.2 (1.37)	48.4 (2.33)	77.4 (1.23)	9.3 (0.61)
Ever had an unintended birth[2,3]	43.5 (2.10)	23.9 (1.24)	55.2 (1.68)	63.0 (2.73)	40.6 (1.52)	65.4 (2.15)
Intends to have a child in the future	53.2 (1.73)	32.1 (1.15)	53.2 (1.12)	56.1 (2.19)	34.5 (1.31)	72.4 (1.30)
	Percent distribution (standard error)					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cohabitations						
None.	–	34.0 (1.37)	48.6 (1.42)	–	32.3 (1.47)	57.1 (1.21)
One.	58.7 (1.91)	45.4 (1.52)	31.7 (1.17)	53.4 (2.30)	44.8 (1.47)	22.1 (0.91)
Two or more	41.3 (1.91)	20.7 (1.07)	19.7 (1.04)	46.6 (2.30)	23.0 (1.33)	20.8 (1.00)
Contraceptive method use at last sex in past 3 months[4,5]						
No method[6].	25.5 (1.82)	23.4 (0.99)	12.4 (0.93)	29.5 (2.08)	35.0 (1.37)	12.6 (1.17)
Least effective.	22.5 (1.69)	20.4 (0.98)	30.6 (1.15)	23.3 (1.79)	19.7 (1.31)	38.7 (1.61)
Moderately effective	25.2 (1.71)	15.6 (0.96)	32.8 (1.44)	27.5 (1.95)	16.4 (1.22)	39.6 (1.80)
Most effective	26.8 (1.75)	40.6 (1.09)	24.2 (1.28)	19.7 (1.79)	28.9 (1.60)	9.2 (0.90)

– Quantity zero.

[1]Includes biological, adopted, or step children; partner's child; grandchild; niece or nephew; legal ward; or foster child if it is the child's usual residence.

[2]Among those who have had a live birth.

[3]Due to differences in measurement of this variable, direct comparisons between men and women should be made with caution.

[4]Because men may not have knowledge of female partner's use of contraception, this may represent an underestimate of actual use for men.

[5]Methods categorized by effectiveness: most effective (i.e., sterilization, contraceptive implant, and intrauterine device); moderately effective (i.e., oral contraceptive pill, injectable [e.g., Depo–Provera], contraceptive patch, contraceptive ring, and diaphragm); and least effective (i.e., condom, withdrawal, rhythm method or natural family planning, female condom, foam, jelly, suppository, emergency contraception, and other).

[6]May include those who are currently pregnant, seeking pregnancy, or otherwise not in need of contraception at the time of interview.

NOTE: All three marital or cohabiting status groups contain respondents who were formerly married (i.e., divorced, separated, or widowed).

SOURCE: NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Technical Notes

Definition of terms

Age at first sexual intercourse—The recode variable VRY1STAG indicates the age at first vaginal intercourse for both male and female respondents.

Attitudes related to sexual behavior, cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and childbearing—This series of items asks respondents' agreement or disagreement with various statements related to sexual behavior and family life. Response options for the items were "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The response option "neither agree nor disagree" was coded by interviewers only after initial probing for one of these response options and, in general, the percentages in this category were small, never exceeding 1.7%. This report treats "neither agree nor disagree" as missing information because it permits showing the percentage who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement as the binary opposite of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. The six statements featured in this report (with variable name included) are:

1. It is all right for unmarried 18 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other (SXOK18)
2. A young couple should not live together unless they are married (OKCOHAB)
3. Living together before marriage may help prevent divorce (PRVNTDIV)
4. Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems (STAYTOG)
5. It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married (CHCOHAB)
6. It is okay for a young, unmarried woman to have and raise a child (CHSUPPOR)

Birth intentions—The recode variable INTENT was used to create a dichotomous indicator showing whether respondents intend to have children or any additional children in the future. The few cases in the category "Does not know intent" were treated as missing.

Contraceptive use at last sexual intercourse within past 3 months—Use of contraception at last sexual intercourse within the past 3 months (among those who have had sexual intercourse in the past 3 months) is based on the recode series METH3M1–METH3M4, which indicates up to four method types used at last sex in the past 3 months, as well as the recode variable MTHUSE3 for women, which indicates any use or nonuse of contraception at last sex in the past 3 months. This measure groups method types into the following categories: no method, least effective (i.e., condom, withdrawal, rhythm method or natural family planning, female condom, foam, jelly, suppository, emergency contraception, and "other"), moderately effective (i.e., oral contraceptive pill, injectable [e.g., Depo–Provera], contraceptive patch, contraceptive ring, and diaphragm), and most effective (i.e., sterilization, contraceptive implant, and intrauterine device).

Ever had an unintended birth—For women, this measure is based on the recode series WANTRPnn indicating the intendedness of each reported pregnancy at the time of conception. For men, this measure is based on the recode series WANTBnn, classifying the intendedness of the pregnancy for each of his biological children aged 18 or under. A pregnancy that resulted in live birth is classified as unintended at conception if it was reported as either "too soon, mistimed" or "unwanted." Respondents are classified as ever having had an unintended birth if any of their births (by time of interview) were unintended. These births may have occurred in prior relationships for those who are currently married or cohabiting.

Living with children under age 18—The recode variable NUMKDHH was used to define a dichotomous indicator showing whether respondents are currently living with children under age 18 at the time of interview, including any biological, adopted, or step children; a partner's child; grandchild; niece or nephew; legal ward; or foster child, if it is the child's usual residence.

Marital or cohabiting status—The recode variable RMARITAL indicates the respondent's marital or cohabiting status at the time of interview. Marital and cohabiting unions are classified only for opposite-sex relationships. All three marital or cohabiting status groups (i.e., currently cohabiting, currently married, and unmarried but not cohabiting) contain respondents who are formerly married (i.e., widowed, divorced, or separated for reasons of marital discord).

Number of biological children—The recode variable PARITY for women indicates how many total live births they have had by the time of interview. The computed variable biokids for men indicates the total number of biological children they have fathered by the time of interview.

Total number of cohabitations—The recode variable TIMESCOH indicates the total number of cohabitations with an opposite sex partner at the time of interview. Current cohabitations are included in this total number.

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