

# Trends in Marriage and Birth: The Fundamentals

Carol O. Rogers

Associate Director, Indiana Business Research Center, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University

States with a high estimated median age at first marriage tend to have higher proportions of unmarried-couple households and lower proportions of married-couple households. Such was the finding of a recent Census study on marriage and fertility based on results from the American Community Survey sample of three million households nationwide. The study provides state-level data on the proportion of married and unmarried partner households, age at first marriage, births to new mothers, and other characteristics. Such information can be useful in policy research and program targeting for specific services provided by the federal and state government to strengthen families.

## When Hoosiers First Tie the Knot

Indiana women tend to marry younger than women in most states, with a median age at first marriage of 24.4 years (see **Table 1**). In thirty-seven states, women marry at the

same or an older age, and the District of Columbia's women have the oldest median marrying age (30).

Indiana's male counterparts tend to marry at an older age, which won't surprise most women. Men's median age at first marriage is 26.1, with thirty states' median marrying age for men the same or older than Indiana's.

## Couples—Married and Not

The immortal Frank Sinatra tune *Love and Marriage* attested you can't have one without the other. While the majority of Indiana's households are comprised of married couples (52.8 percent), there has been an increasing proportion of unmarried partner households (5.3 percent). People living together as unmarried partners (a specific check-off on the census questionnaire) is a national trend that cannot be discounted as a significant one in our state. A measure of *coupleness* can be created when those two types of households are combined and referred to as simply "couples."

**Table 1**  
Estimated Median Age at First Marriage

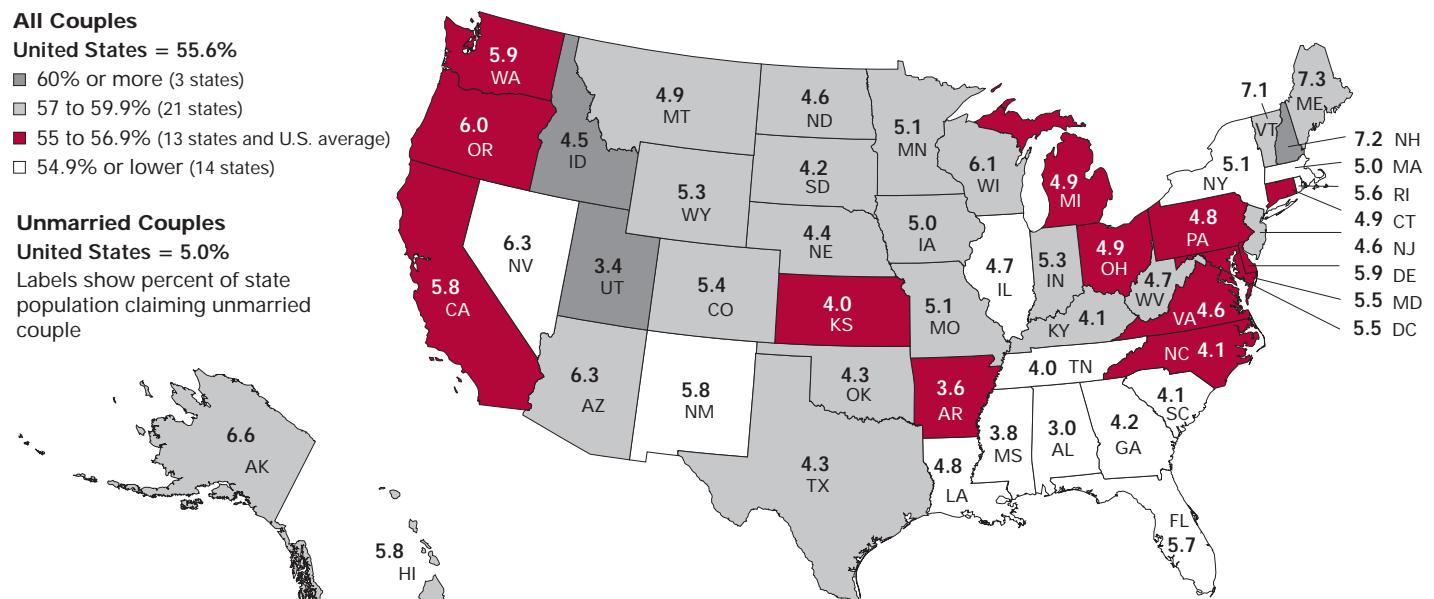
Geography	Men	Women
United States	27	25
Illinois	27	26
Indiana	26	24
Kentucky	25	23
Michigan	27	26
Ohio	27	25
Pennsylvania	28	26
Wisconsin	27	26

Note: For median age estimates shown in this table, 0.1 years provides the margin of error for each median age at the 90-percent confidence interval

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2002–2003, Census Supplementary Survey 2000–2001

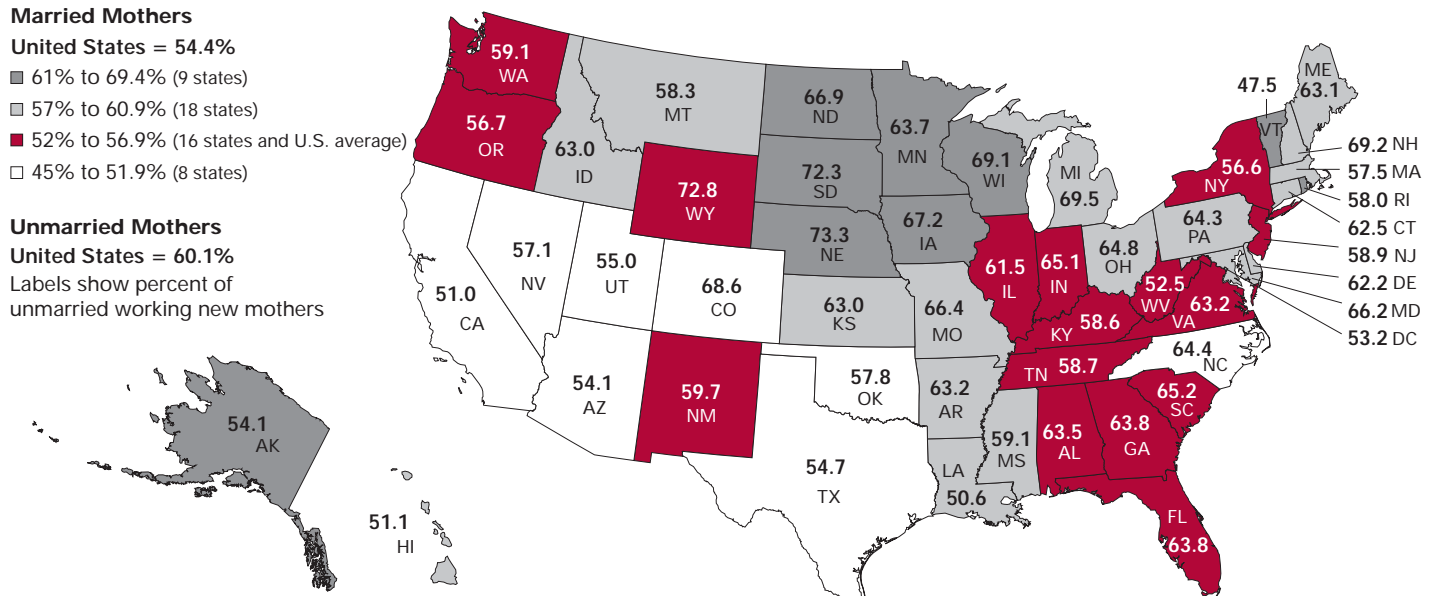
Indiana's proportion of couples is a striking 58.2 percent, higher than the national proportion of 55.6 percent (see **Figure 1**). Put another way, nearly three out of five Indiana households are comprised of couples in committed relationships (through marriage or as self-defined partners). Compared to all other states, Indiana ranks twelfth on the coupleness measure, but is far outdistanced by Utah with a high of 66.2 percent and

**Figure 1**  
Couples as a Percent of Total Households, Four-Year Average, 2000 to 2003



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2002–2003

**Figure 2**  
**Proportion of New Mothers in the Labor Force, Four-Year Average, 2000 to 2003**



Note: New mothers are women who have given birth within the last year  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2002–2003

the District of Columbia with a very low 27.2 percent, or less than two out of five households.

**Married and Unmarried Mothers of New Babies**

Nearly a third of mothers giving birth to a baby within the “past year” (as measured by the American Community Survey) in Indiana were unmarried at the time. Of those, half had income that placed them at or below the federally measured poverty level (based on their family size). Being married with a new baby meant a lower incidence of poverty, with 11.2 percent of married new mothers living in poverty (see **Table 2**).

**A New Baby and Back to Work**

Most of us know new mothers who went back to work within the first twelve months after having a new baby. The Census Bureau estimates that 57.4 percent of such new mothers rejoined the labor force within the first year (or sooner). As seen in **Figure 2**, that percentage is lower for new mothers who are married (54 percent) and much higher for unmarried new mothers (65.1 percent). The study does not provide information about those unmarried mothers with new

babies and whether they are living on their own or are part of a larger family household or are living with the father.

**Conclusions**

Indiana’s family structure continues to be dominated by that of the married couple, although a significant share (when compared nationally) of households are comprised of unmarried partners. Indiana women who are married are much less likely to live in poverty than their unmarried counterparts. The majority of our newborns’ mothers are in the labor force, whether married or not. The median marrying age for Hoosier men and women is in their mid-twenties, although that specific demographic in our state is projected to decline over the coming decades as our population continues to age. The implications of this impact housing, consumption, and ultimately tax

revenues. While many in economic development focus on job creation and industry trends, it is worth noting these fundamental demographic trends since family creation is critical to population growth, which in turn fuels labor supply. ■

**Notes**

These estimates are based on a four-year average of sample data from the new American Community Survey. Currently, state and large county and metro area data are available from that survey. By the end of the decade, all counties, major cities, and small areas will have data available. Source: Tallese Johnson and Jane Dye, Indicators of Marriage and Fertility in the United States from the American Community Survey: 2000 to 2003, U.S. Census Bureau (Washington, D.C., May 2005). Available at: [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/fertility/mar-fert-slides.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/fertility/mar-fert-slides.html).

**Table 2**  
**Percent of New Mothers in Poverty, Four-Year Average, 2000 to 2003**

Geography	All Women	Married	Unmarried
United States	23.2	12.2	50.0
Illinois	20.8	11.2	48.2
Indiana	20.8	11.2	49.6
Kentucky	26.9	15.5	59.4
Michigan	22.4	12.9	49.2
Ohio	22.2	12.9	49.5
Pennsylvania	20.9	12.8	47.9
Wisconsin	20.1	11.0	49.9

Note: New mothers are those who have given birth within the last year  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2002–2003; Census Supplementary Survey 2000–2001