
INTRODUCTION

EVEN THOUGH family relationships extend beyond household boundaries, household living arrangements are among the most significant aspects of everyday life. Household membership defines a set of primary relationships, a pool of resources, and a number of persons with whom those resources are shared. These arrangements have a profound effect on the economic and social well-being of individuals, and the relative prevalence of different types of arrangements, with associated differences in resources and lifestyles, affects the very character of our society.

Changes in family and household composition are a normal part of the life course of individuals. Even a life history uncomplicated by marital disruption involves many transitions: as the size of the family of childhood expands and contracts with the birth and home-leaving of siblings, as the individual leaves home to set up an independent household, as he or she marries, has children, and then experiences the departure of adult children and ultimately the spouse's death. There is great diversity in family life cycle experience: many now experience divorce and remarriage, and this may occur at diverse ages in either childhood as the parental marriage is disrupted, in adulthood, or both. In addition, increasing proportions may never marry or have children.

In the aggregate, these individual histories both reflect and affect the character of a society. Norman B. Ryder has aptly used the label

"demographic metabolism" to characterize the changing composition of society that results from the aggregation of the life histories of successive cohorts.¹ The prevalence of young single persons, of young families, of single-parent families, of remarriages, of elderly couples, or of elderly widows depends on the sizes of successive birth cohorts and on the rates at which they make various life course transitions. The "baby boom" has created an age structure characterized as analogous to a "pig in a python," which will affect the prevalence of successive life cycle stages—from unmarried singles to dependent elderly—as its members age, quite apart from whatever changes may occur in the rates of marriage or mortality. The life experiences of successive cohorts get translated into population experience in ways that reflect changes both in behavior and in the sizes of groups at risk of that behavior.

There have also been major transformations in the organization of the life course of individuals; rates of family transition have changed dramatically at virtually every stage. Rates of marriage and childbirth have declined markedly, rates of marital disruption have increased, and those who can are much more likely to maintain independent households.

In this volume we have set out to do several things with respect to family transitions and family and household structure:

1. To describe, as of around 1980, the family and household situation of the American population. This description includes several distinct components including:
 - a. the rate at which family transitions are occurring—marriage, childbearing, marital dissolution, and "leaving home" as a young adult;
 - b. the social and economic characteristics of persons in various family and household situations; and
 - c. the prevalence and characteristics of various household and family types.
2. To describe recent changes in these family and household distributions, and in the processes underlying them. The temporal focus of these comparisons is primarily the period from 1960 through 1980, although in many cases we include data back to 1940 and earlier.
3. To describe differentials within the American population. We are concerned with differential family and household structures, differential rates of family transitions, and differential trends among major population subgroups. Among the population

¹Norman B. Ryder, "Components of Temporal Variations in American Fertility," in Robert W. Hiorns, ed., *Demographic Patterns in Developed Societies*, vol. 19, Symposia of the Society for the Study of Human Biology (London: Taylor & Francis, 1980).

characteristics that differentiate family and household behavior and structure are age, sex, race and ethnicity, and education.

A brief comment on each of these characteristics may help in understanding the rationale for the structure of our analysis.

Differentials Among Racial and Ethnic Groups

In each chapter of this volume we compare and contrast the family and household situation of blacks and Mexican-Americans (the two largest minority groups in the United States) with that of majority (non-Hispanic) whites. We also devote an unusual amount of attention to other racial and Hispanic groups, such as American Indians, Asian-American groups, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. Because of the relatively small size of these groups, the decennial census is the only source of comparative information on these groups, some of which are relatively affluent (Chinese and Japanese-Americans) and others quite disadvantaged (American Indians, Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans), and each with a unique cultural tradition affecting their family structure. Except for a brief discussion of differential marriage patterns, we have not included comparisons of family and household characteristics of ancestry groups within the white population.

Differentials by Education

Although not a fixed characteristic like race, sex, or cohort membership, the educational level of adults rarely changes. Education plays an important role in differentiating the family and household patterns within the American population. Education is an indicator of long-term socioeconomic status, one which, unlike income, is not much affected by the current family situation. It is also an indicator of an individual's earning potential in the labor market. There are also value and "cultural" differences by level of educational attainment, which may affect such family transitions as childbearing or divorce.

Two other features of educational level are especially important to the analyses reported in this volume. First, going to school is an activity that is concentrated in the early adult (as well as pre-adult) years, during which family transitions—leaving the parental home, marriage, child-birth—are occurring at a high intensity. Education, especially college education, serves to delay the process of reaching full adulthood (eman-

cipation from the parental household, economic independence, marriage, parenthood).

Second, there has been an extremely rapid educational upgrading. Each successive cohort has a larger proportion who have attended college and a smaller proportion who have not completed high school. An adequate understanding of recent change in the rate at which each of the family transitions is occurring and of changes in each of the dimensions of family and household structure, requires consideration of the effect of changing education composition. For example, educational upgrading implies rising marriage ages, quite apart from any change in education-specific marriage behavior. Note that differentials in education are also relevant to understanding differences in family behavior among racial and ethnic subgroups.

Differentials Between Men and Women

In many analyses we have included both men and women, and have contrasted the patterns of the two sexes. Much of the prior work in family demography, as well as family sociology and economics, has had an almost exclusive focus on women. This emphasis on women, and exclusion of men, probably derives from several sources, including: the dominant interest of social demographers in reproductive patterns, the idea that men are "breadwinners" and that women are "homemakers," and the fact that most of the data on family and household phenomena focus on women. Since there are identical census data for all persons, irrespective of sex, and since the family and household experience of men is of similar substantive interest, we pay much more attention to men than has been customary.

Differentials by Age

In order to make substantive interpretations, most comparisons of the incidence of family transitions and of the characteristics of persons in different family and household statuses must be age-specific or age-standardized. Particularly important is the effect of the large baby boom cohorts on aggregate marriage and household patterns.

Data Sources

For a volume in a census monograph series, it seemed reasonable to us to make the decennial censuses our primary source of data. We have

made extensive use of the public use microdata tapes produced by the United States Bureau of the Census from the 1960, 1970, and 1980 censuses. With these data files, we have been able to construct identical tabulations at several points in time. We have been able to extend the analysis backward in time to 1950 and 1940, thanks to the microdata files created by a project directed by our Wisconsin colleagues Hal Winsborough, Karl Taeuber, and Robert Hauser (funded by the National Science Foundation), which has created comparable microdata files from the 1940 and 1950 decennial censuses. In a few instances we have also used the microdata file for 1900, created by a group at the University of Washington.

The major shortcoming of the census data for our purposes is that they include little information on the incidence of family transitions. In Chapters 2 and 5, which deal with the incidence of first marriage and marital disruption, respectively, we have made extensive use of two additional data sources: the vital registration system data on marriage and divorce and the June 1980 Current Population Survey (CPS), which gathered marriage histories of a large sample of American adults.

We have resisted the temptation to use other data sets such as the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Force Behavior, or various CPS supplements (such as those on child support and child care) and the temptation to update the analysis by replicating many of the tables and analyses with, for example, the March 1985 Current Population Survey. We have tried to maintain our focus on the general question, "What do recent decennial censuses tell us about American family and household structure?" We have departed from this principle only in Chapters 2, 5, and 7, where crucial parts of the picture were not available in the census.

Overview

This book takes advantage of the large samples provided by the decennial censuses and Current Population Surveys to document in detail the changing prevalence of different family and household living arrangements. Attention is given to the differences in both rates of transition and population composition that underlie these trends and differentials. Our intent is explicitly to provide a reference work that will be useful to persons desiring more detailed information than is generally available on some of the most important dimensions of these domains. In so doing, we have constantly had to make decisions about what variables, and what level of detail, to include. Within the limits of available data, such decisions have been informed by what we understand to be

the major theoretical and substantive issues in family and household research. At the same time, statistical modeling and extensive theoretical discussions are beyond the objectives of this volume—not because we do not care about them but because we judge the present format most likely to be of value to a wide community of scholars over a substantial time period. This is a work in the social demography tradition that regards a careful understanding of what has happened as a necessary condition for explanation.

We begin in Chapter 2 with an examination of trends in the timing of marriage across successive birth cohorts, paying attention to marriage rates, median marriage age, and measures of the dispersion of marriage ages. Here, as throughout, differences by race, education, and ethnicity are documented. The changing composition of marriages is noted with respect to both previous marriage and prior fertility. For persons who first married in the year preceding the census, we examine homogamy with respect to a number of characteristics including marital history, race/ethnicity, education, and age.

Chapter 3 examines the consequences of these trends, in conjunction with changing cohort sizes, for the prevalence of single young adults in the population. Attention is given to the changing major activities of this population in terms of school enrollment, employment, and armed forces participation. Living arrangements are described with particular attention to the proportion living with their parents, in dorms or with roommates, or in their own households. Childbearing patterns of the single population are reviewed, and the living arrangements of never-married women with children are also described. Finally, we briefly consider the population that has still never married by ages 35–44 and is likely to remain unmarried throughout their lives.

The analysis then turns to the characteristics of currently married couples. Chapter 4 documents trends and differentials in the prevalence of married couples in the population, and examines the composition and circumstances of such couples. Particular attention is given to the changing family size that has resulted from variations in fertility. Fertility expectations are considered, and differentials in recent fertility are examined for small groups using census data on the number of own children. The presence of children at various durations of marriage is described as a critical factor affecting married life, including the prevalence of “empty nests” among middle-age and older couples who have had children. Other topics considered are the previous marital status of the spouses, current school enrollment, patterns of wife’s employment, and trends and differentials in homeownership.

Thus Chapters 2, 3, and 4 attend to rates of marriage formation and then the prevalence and characteristics of the single and currently mar-

ried populations, respectively. In a parallel fashion, Chapters 5 and 6 turn to rates of marital disruption, and then to the prevalence and composition of the formerly married population.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of alternative measures of marital disruption, and the advantages and disadvantages of various available data sources. Trends in marital disruption are documented for both periods and cohorts. Differentials by age at marriage, education, and race are examined using Current Population Survey data, with a measure that includes separations as well as divorces in the definition of disruption. In addition, a cruder measure from the census—proportion no longer in intact first marriages—makes it possible to consider differences for more detailed ethnic groups. Again based on the CPS, patterns of divorce and of remarriage after separation are described. Finally, patterns of widowhood by age, sex, race, and education are documented.

The prevalence and composition of the formerly married population is the subject of Chapter 6. Topics considered include the proportions currently separated, divorced, or widowed; duration since separation; and presence and ages of children. For formerly married women with children, attention is given to employment patterns, the receipt of public assistance, poverty levels, and whether living in own household or the household of others. There are also sections of this chapter concerned with smaller groups of interest such as those who are cohabiting and those who are married but report that their spouse is absent for reasons other than marital discord. The chapter concludes with a description of the population of formerly married men.

In Chapter 7 our attention turns to the implications of the previously described patterns of marriage, marital disruption, and childbearing for the family circumstances of children. The parental composition of children's families are detailed, and special attention is given to children in mother-only and father-only families. Other compositional variables considered are the number of children present in the household, the presence of nonnuclear relatives and whether or not the child's family lives in someone else's household. Differences in poverty, parental education, and mother's employment are described for children in various types of families. This section includes a description of family type differences in the high school dropout rate of 16–17-year-olds.

The elderly are the focus of Chapter 8. We begin by considering the age and educational composition of the population over age 60 and then turn to the proportions widowed or married and living with a spouse. Next, we discuss trends and differentials in the living arrangements of the elderly. Separately for the widowed and the currently married, we examine the proportions of men and women living alone, with a spouse, with relatives, or in institutions. Levels of homeownership, employ-

ment, disability, and receipt of social security and pension income are considered.

The unit of analysis shifts from persons to households in Chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 9 begins with a description of the changing number of households and their changing composition by type (married couples with and without children, one-parent families, other families, nonfamily households), and also by family life cycle stage of the householder. In addition, variation in average household size and its components are discussed. Chapter 10 examines a number of subtypes of households: female-headed families, male-headed families other than married couples, and nonfamily households. In addition, attention is given to secondary and subfamilies and to the population in group quarters.

The final chapter seeks to put the major trends and differentials described in this monograph into a broader perspective. Implications for future patterns are drawn from a perspective that sees the recent trends as continuous with long-term changes in Western society.