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Trends in Attitudes About Marriage, Childbearing, and Sexual Behavior: United States, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013

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Abstract

Objective—This report describes attitudes about marriage, childbearing, and sexual behavior among men and women aged 15–44 in the United States based on the 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG).

Methods—Data for all three survey periods were collected through in-person interviews with nationally representative, independent samples of men and women in the household population of the United States. The overall response rate for NSFG was 79% in 2002, 77% in 2006–2010, and 73% in 2011–2013. Attitudinal items examined in this report include those related to marriage, divorce, cohabitation, parenthood, and sexual behavior. Where data from all three survey periods were available, differences were tested using trend analysis. Data from the 2002 survey were not available for some attitude items, and in these cases, comparisons were made only between the 2006–2010 and 2011–2013 surveys. Attitudinal differences by age group were analyzed using 2011–2013 data. All results are shown separately for women and men.

Results—From 2002 to 2011–2013, there was an increase in the percentages of men and women who agreed with premarital cohabitation, nonmarital childbearing, the right for gay and lesbian adults to adopt children, same-sex sexual relations, and premarital sex for those aged 18. There was a decrease in the percentages of men and women who agreed with divorce. There was no change in the percentages of men and women who agreed with premarital sex for those aged 16. There was no change from 2006–2010 to 2011–2013 in attitudes regarding marriage, cohabitation and the risk of divorce, the necessity of having children for one's happiness, and raising children in a cohabiting union. Several of the attitudinal items varied significantly by age group for both men and women.

Keywords: public opinion • family structure • fertility • National Survey of Family Growth

Introduction

The composition of families in the United States has changed significantly over the past 50 years. These changes have resulted from a delay in the age of first marriage (1), a steep rise and then decline in the divorce rate (2), a lower fertility rate (3), an increase in cohabitation (4–7), a higher proportion of births occurring outside of marriage and within cohabiting unions (8–10), and an increasing number of first births to older women (11). While research has long shown that social and cultural attitudes vary by age (12), recent studies have demonstrated that attitudes about family life have also changed with the passage of time, such as an increasing acceptance of premarital sex, cohabitation, and divorce (13–17). These attitudinal changes coincide with shifts in the demographic characteristics of the U.S. population as well as variation in reproductive and family formation behavior among individuals.

In order to determine whether and how attitudes have shifted on matters concerning marriage, childbearing, and sexual behavior among those of reproductive age in the U.S. population, and whether attitudes vary by age of respondent, this report presents data from



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the 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) on 11 attitude items asked of women and men aged 15–44 that were measured at least in the two most recent surveys (2006–2010 and 2011–2013 NSFG) in a comparable way (Tables 1–3). These 11 attitude items are grouped into three categories: marriage, divorce, and cohabitation attitudes; childbearing attitudes; and sexual behavior attitudes. The final table in this report (Table 4) focuses on attitude items broken down by age group for 2011–2013. Results are shown separately by sex and survey year. Differences in attitudes between men and women were not tested for statistical significance.

Methods

Data source

NSFG was established and first conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics in 1973. Since then, NSFG was conducted periodically in 1976, 1982, 1988, 1995, and 2002. Beginning in 2006, NSFG has been conducted continuously with periodic file releases, most recently in 2006–2010 and 2011–2013. In 1973, 1976, 1982, 1988, and 1995, NSFG only included women aged 15–44. In 2002, an independent sample of male respondents aged

15–44 was added. All interviews were conducted by female interviewers with persons in the household population of the United States. Those living on military bases or institutions were not included. See text Table for each survey's sample size, population estimate, weighted age distribution, and response rate by sex.

Further details on the sample design, fieldwork procedures, and variance estimation for the surveys used in this report were published previously (18–20). NSFG data are nationally representative for men and women aged 15–44 in the U.S. household population and were collected in similar ways across the survey periods used in this report, thus making the responses generally comparable over time.

Attitudes and selected demographic variables

The data on attitudes in this report are based on a series of questions asked of all survey respondents. The 11 attitude items presented in Tables 1–4 were chosen because they were asked in 2011–2013 and in at least one earlier time period; all items were also asked in 2006–2010 and seven were asked in 2002. NSFG respondents were asked to answer each item with “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” If the respondent

did not provide one of these response categories to answer the question, after probing for an initial response, the interviewer could select the midpoint response option, “neither agree nor disagree.” As with all NSFG questions, the respondent could refuse to answer or say “don't know.” The wording for a few questions changed over the survey periods. These exceptions are described in the Technical Notes and table footnotes of this report. Some attitude items observed in 2006–2010 had not yet been introduced in 2002 (Technical Notes). In these cases, only data from 2006–2010 and 2011–2013 were compared. The demographic variables included in this report are sex and age at interview in years. In the results section, women and men are reported as “agreeing” with a statement if they either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement and as “disagreeing” with a statement if they either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with it. The results are presented in terms of agreement with each item to maintain consistency. Close attention should be paid to the wording of the attitude statement because agreement with the item could indicate either a positive direction (e.g., “It is all right for unmarried 16 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for one another”) or a negative direction (e.g., “A young couple should not live together unless they are married”).

Table. Sample sizes, population estimates, weighted age distributions, and response rates, by sex: National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013

Characteristic	Survey year					
	2002		2006–2010		2011–2013	
Sample size						
Men	4,928		10,403		4,815	
Women	7,643		12,279		5,601	
Population estimate (in millions)						
Men	61.1		62.1		60.5	
Women	61.6		61.8		60.9	
Weighted age distribution, by sex (percent)						
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
15–24	32.9	32.0	34.1	33.8	34.0	32.7
25–34	31.7	31.7	32.2	31.9	33.8	34.1
35–44	35.5	36.3	33.7	34.3	32.2	33.2
Response rate (shown as whole percentages)						
Men	78		75		72	
Women	80		78		73	
Total	79		77		73	

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013.

Statistical analysis

All of the estimates and percentages in this report are based on sampling weights that were designed to produce unbiased national estimates representing men and women aged 15–44 at the time of each respective survey. The statistical package SAS version 9.3 was used to produce all estimates of numbers and percentages in this report (<http://www.sas.com>). The SURVEYFREQ procedure was used to estimate the sampling errors of the statistics. This procedure takes into account the use of weighted data and the complex sampling design of the survey in calculating standard errors. Each table in this report includes standard errors as a measure of the precision of the point estimates and percentages.

Significance of difference between any two estimates, whether survey years or age groups, was determined by standard two-tailed *t* tests at the 0.05 level using percentages and their standard errors. For *t* tests, terms such as “increased” and “decreased” indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between the two estimates. A weighted least-squares regression method was used to test the significance of trends that involved more than two time points or more than two age groups. When this method was used, terms that refer to percentages that “increased” or “decreased” across the three survey periods (2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013) or across the three age groups (15–24, 25–34, and 35–44) indicate that there was a significant difference over time. Terms such as “similar” or “no difference” were used when the statistics being compared did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference. Lack of comment regarding any difference does not mean that significance was tested and ruled out. All analyses are stratified by sex.

Results

Tables 1–3 show the distributions of women and men on 11 marriage, cohabitation, divorce, childbearing, and sexual behavior attitude items for the 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013 NSFG.

Attitudes related to marriage, cohabitation, and divorce

- In 2011–2013, 60% of women and 67% of men agreed, “Living together before marriage may help prevent divorce.” The percentage of respondents who agreed with this statement was similar between 2006–2010 and 2011–2013 (Table 1).
- The percentages of women and men who agreed, “Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can’t seem to work out their marriage problems,” decreased between 2002 and 2011–2013. The percentage of women who agreed with this statement was 46.7% in 2002, 43.0% in 2006–2010, and 38.0% in 2011–2013. The percentage of men who agreed with this statement was 44.3% in 2002, 42.8% in 2006–2010, and 39.3% in 2011–2013.
- The percentages of women and men who agreed, “A young couple should not live together unless they are married,” decreased between 2002 and 2011–2013. The percentage of women who agreed with this statement decreased from 34.7% in 2002 to 30.8% in 2006–2010, and to 28.0% in 2011–2013. The percentage of men who agreed with this statement decreased from 32.0% in 2002 to 28.0% in 2006–2010, and to 24.8% in 2011–2013.
- In 2011–2013, 36% of women and 32% of men agreed, “Marriage has not worked out for most people I know.” The percentages of women and men who agreed with this statement were similar between 2006–2010 and 2011–2013.

Attitudes related to childbearing

- In 2011–2013, three-quarters of women (74.7%) and men (75.9%) agreed, “It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married.” Percentages were similar in 2006–2010 (Table 2).

- The percentage of respondents who agreed, “It is okay for an unmarried female to have and raise a child,” increased over time. Among women, 69.5% agreed in 2002, 78.4% agreed in 2006–2010, and 78.3% agreed in 2011–2013. Among men, 58.9% agreed in 2002, 70.1% agreed in 2006–2010, and 69.2% agreed in 2011–2013.
- The percentages of women and men who agreed, “Gay or lesbian adults should have the right to adopt children,” increased between 2002 and 2011–2013. The percentage of women who agreed with this statement increased from 55.4% in 2002 to 65.6% in 2006–2010, and to 74.8% in 2011–2013. The percentage of men who agreed with this statement increased from 46.9% in 2002 to 55.0% in 2006–2010, and to 67.5% in 2011–2013.
- In 2011–2013, 6.4% of women and 9.4% of men agreed, “People can’t be really happy unless they have children.” The percentages of women and men who agreed with this statement were similar in 2006–2010.

Attitudes related to sexual behavior

- There was an increase in the percentages of women and men who agreed, “It is all right for unmarried 18 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other,” over time. Among women, 50.6% agreed with the statement in 2002, 55.4% agreed in 2006–2010, and 54.2% agreed in 2011–2013. Among men, 59.8% agreed in 2002, 62.3% agreed in 2006–2010, and 64.1% agreed in 2011–2013 (Table 3).
- In 2011–2013, 14.7% women and 20.9% of men agreed, “It is all right for unmarried 16 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other.” The percentages of women and men who agreed with this statement were similar across all three survey time periods within sex groups.

- The percentages of women and men who agreed, “Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are all right,” increased over the survey periods, from 42.3% in 2002 to 51.2% in 2006–2010, and to 60.2% in 2011–2013 among women, and from 39.7% in 2006–2010 to 48.9% in 2011–2013 among men.

Attitudes by age

Table 4 presents attitudinal items related to marriage, cohabitation, divorce, childbearing, and sexual behavior by age for women and men in the 2011–2013 NSFG. The age groups shown include those aged 15–24, 25–34, and 35–44.

Attitudes related to marriage, divorce, and cohabitation by age group

- Regardless of age group, about two-thirds of men agreed, “Living together before marriage may help prevent divorce.” More variation was observed among women, with a higher percentage of those aged 25–34 (64.2%) agreeing with the statement compared with those aged 35–44 (55.7%).
- The percentage of women who agreed with the statement, “Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can’t seem to work out their marriage problems,” did not vary by age. However, men aged 35–44 (43.6%) were more likely to agree with the statement compared with men aged 25–34 (36.2%).
- A higher percentage of women aged 15–24 (30.7%) and women aged 35–44 (30.0%) agreed, “A young couple should not live together unless they are married,” compared with women aged 25–34 (23.4%). Among men, the only difference in agreement for this statement was among those aged 25–34 (22.4%) and those aged 35–44 (28.2%).

- There were few differences in the percentages of men and women who agreed with the statement, “Marriage has not worked out for most people I know.” About one in three respondents agreed with this statement across sex and age groups. However, women aged 25–34 were more likely to agree with this statement (38.6%) compared with women aged 35–44 (32.7%).

Attitudes related to childbearing by age group

- The majority of women and men agreed, “It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married.” Women aged 25–34 were more likely to agree with this statement (78.1%) compared with women aged 35–44 (71.4%), and the percentage of women aged 15–24 who agreed (74.4%) did not differ significantly from the other two age groups. There were no significant differences among the age groups for men.
- A higher percentage of women aged 25–34 (81.6%) agreed with the statement, “It is okay for an unmarried female to have and raise a child,” compared with those aged 15–24 (76.5%), but the difference in percentages between women aged 15–24 (76.5%) and 35–44 (76.8%) was not significant. A different pattern by age was observed among men—there was an increase in agreement across age groups, with 60.2% of men aged 15–24 agreeing with this statement, followed by 74.2% of men aged 25–34, and 73.5% of men aged 35–44.
- The percentages of women and men who agreed, “Gay or lesbian adults should have the right to adopt children,” decreased from 83.1% for women aged 15–24 to 74.3% for women aged 25–34, and to 67.3% for women aged 35–44. The percentage of men who agreed with this statement decreased from 74.9% for those aged 15–24 to 66.0% for those aged 25–34, and to 61.4% for those aged 35–44.

- Between 6% and 11% of women and men agreed, “People can’t be really happy unless they have children.” No differences in responses to this statement were observed by age group for men or women.

Attitudes related to sexual behavior by age group

- The percentages of women and men who 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,” decreased with age. Among women, 60.3% of those aged 15–24, 55.5% of those aged 25–34, and 46.8% of those aged 35–44 agreed with this statement. Among men, 71.1% those aged 15–24, 64.1% of those aged 25–34, and 56.6% of those aged 35–44 agreed with the statement.
- For both women and men, agreement with the statement, “It is all right for unmarried 16 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other,” decreased with age. For women, 25.4% of those aged 15–24 agreed with the statement, which decreased to 11.8% for those aged 25–34, and to 7.3% for those aged 35–44. For men, 33.5% of those aged 15–24 agreed with the statement compared with 19.7% of those aged 25–34 and 9.0% of those aged 35–44.
- Finally, there was a decrease across age groups in agreement with the statement, “Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are all right.” Among women, 64.6% of those aged 15–24, 62.2% of those aged 25–34, and 53.7% of those aged 35–44 agreed with the statement. Among men, 52.3% of those aged 15–24, 48.3% of those aged 25–34, and 46.0% of those aged 35–44 agreed with the statement.

Discussion

This report presents attitudes about marriage, divorce, cohabitation, childbearing, and sexual behavior among men and women aged 15–44 in the United States using questions from the 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013 NSFG. Some attitudinal items were not available in 2002 and could only be analyzed in 2006–2010 and 2011–2013. The percentages of men and women who agreed with statements about the acceptability of premarital cohabitation, nonmarital childbearing, the right for gay and lesbian adults to adopt children, same-sex sexual relations, and premarital sex among those aged 18 increased between 2002 and 2011–2013. There was a decrease in the percentages of men and women who agreed with the acceptability of divorce. No change was seen in attitudes regarding whether most marriages end in divorce, whether cohabitation decreases the risk of divorce, whether children are necessary for one's happiness, the acceptability of raising children in a cohabiting union, and the approval of premarital sex among those aged 16. Higher percentages of younger women and men agreed with many of these statements compared with older adults. These findings, based on NSFG, align with data from the General Social Survey, which showed age- and cohort-based variation on attitudinal items related to sexual activity and relationships (15, 21–23). However, these changes cannot be attributed to a shift in the age structure of the survey samples because the age distribution of NSFG has remained relatively constant between 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013.

Similar to all survey data, NSFG is subject to sources of nonsampling error. Sensitive information, such as attitudes, are subject to social desirability biases. Attitudes toward family life and sexuality do not necessarily account for demographic and behavioral changes related to family life that have been observed. Attitudes regarding marriage, childbearing, and sexuality may either precede or follow certain behaviors and demographic changes. Therefore, no casual inferences can be drawn from these cross-sectional data regarding attitudinal change and fertility and

family formation behaviors. In short, these findings indicate that there is variability in attitudes regarding marriage and cohabitation, childbearing, and sexual behavior in the U.S. household population. These changes should be viewed in light of the shifts in family structure and composition over the past half century.

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Table 1. Percent distribution of marriage, divorce, and cohabitation attitudes among women and men aged 15–44: United States, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013

Attitude	Women						Men					
	Total	Percent distribution (standard error)			Total	Percent distribution (standard error)						
		Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree		Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree				
Living together before marriage may help prevent divorce												
2002.	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
2006–2010 ¹	100.0	58.5 (1.28)	2.0 (0.43)	39.5 (1.33)	100.0	68.0 (1.41)	1.3 (0.27)	30.7 (1.43)	100.0	67.4 (1.46)	1.2 (0.28)	31.4 (1.50)
2011–2013.	100.0	60.3 (1.52)	1.2 (0.30)	38.4 (1.57)	100.0	67.4 (1.46)	1.2 (0.28)	31.4 (1.50)	100.0	67.4 (1.46)	1.2 (0.28)	31.4 (1.50)
Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems ²												
2002.	100.0	46.7 (0.77)	2.8 (0.29)	50.5 (0.80)	100.0	44.3 (1.11)	1.9 (0.21)	53.9 (1.11)	100.0	42.8 (0.95)	0.9 (0.16)	56.4 (0.95)
2006–2010.	100.0	43.0 (0.91)	1.1 (0.18)	55.9 (0.92)	100.0	42.8 (0.95)	0.9 (0.16)	56.4 (0.95)	100.0	39.3 (1.36)	0.7 (0.28)	60.0 (1.37)
2011–2013.	100.0	38.0 (1.15)	0.3 (0.10)	61.7 (1.17)	100.0	39.3 (1.36)	0.7 (0.28)	60.0 (1.37)	100.0	39.3 (1.36)	0.7 (0.28)	60.0 (1.37)
A young couple should not live together unless they are married ²												
2002.	100.0	34.7 (0.85)	2.8 (0.23)	62.6 (0.83)	100.0	32.0 (1.05)	2.1 (0.30)	65.9 (1.05)	100.0	28.0 (1.17)	1.0 (0.18)	71.0 (1.16)
2006–2010.	100.0	30.8 (1.38)	0.8 (0.14)	68.4 (1.39)	100.0	28.0 (1.17)	1.0 (0.18)	71.0 (1.16)	100.0	24.8 (1.32)	0.5 (0.11)	74.7 (1.34)
2011–2013.	100.0	28.0 (1.39)	0.6 (0.17)	71.4 (1.39)	100.0	24.8 (1.32)	0.5 (0.11)	74.7 (1.34)	100.0	24.8 (1.32)	0.5 (0.11)	74.7 (1.34)
Marriage has not worked out for most people I know												
2002.	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
2006–2010 ¹	100.0	36.8 (1.06)	1.1 (0.27)	62.1 (1.05)	100.0	34.8 (1.10)	1.0 (0.22)	64.2 (1.09)	100.0	31.9 (1.18)	1.0 (0.24)	67.1 (1.19)
2011–2013.	100.0	36.4 (1.31)	0.6 (0.18)	63.0 (1.34)	100.0	31.9 (1.18)	1.0 (0.24)	67.1 (1.19)	100.0	31.9 (1.18)	1.0 (0.24)	67.1 (1.19)

--- Data not available because this attitude item was not asked in 2002.

¹Question was only asked in the last 2 years of data collection, from July 2008 to June 2010.

²Test of trend was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level across the three survey time periods.

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013.

Table 2. Percent distribution of childbearing and parenting attitudes among women and men aged 15–44: United States, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013

Attitude	Women								Men					
	Total	Percent distribution (standard error)						Total	Percent distribution (standard error)					
		Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree			Strongly agree or agree		Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree				
It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married														
2002.....	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
2006–2010.....	100.0	72.8 (1.03)	0.9 (0.23)	26.3 (1.07)	100.0	72.4 (1.34)	1.3 (0.30)	26.3 (1.31)						
2011–2013.....	100.0	74.7 (1.45)	0.7 (0.19)	24.6 (1.43)	100.0	75.9 (1.19)	0.3 (0.14)	23.8 (1.18)						
It is okay for an unmarried female to have and raise a child ^{1,2}														
2002.....	100.0	69.5 (0.78)	3.2 (0.26)	27.3 (0.77)	100.0	58.9 (1.11)	3.1 (0.45)	38.0 (1.07)						
2006–2010.....	100.0	78.4 (1.12)	1.3 (0.18)	20.3 (1.10)	100.0	70.1 (1.04)	1.7 (0.30)	28.2 (1.06)						
2011–2013.....	100.0	78.3 (0.96)	0.8 (0.21)	20.9 (0.95)	100.0	69.2 (1.31)	0.8 (0.18)	30.0 (1.29)						
Gay or lesbian adults should have the right to adopt children ²														
2002.....	100.0	55.4 (0.85)	5.3 (0.33)	39.3 (0.90)	100.0	46.9 (1.19)	3.7 (0.32)	49.4 (1.19)						
2006–2010.....	100.0	65.6 (1.41)	2.3 (0.20)	32.1 (1.44)	100.0	55.0 (1.42)	1.9 (0.25)	43.1 (1.50)						
2011–2013.....	100.0	74.8 (1.22)	1.7 (0.30)	23.5 (1.19)	100.0	67.5 (1.34)	1.1 (0.22)	31.3 (1.35)						
People can't be really happy unless they have children														
2002.....	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---						
2006–2010.....	100.0	7.6 (0.55)	0.5 (0.10)	91.9 (0.56)	100.0	11.0 (0.62)	0.9 (0.26)	88.1 (0.62)						
2011–2013.....	100.0	6.4 (0.53)	0.3 (0.09)	93.3 (0.56)	100.0	9.4 (0.70)	0.3 (0.10)	90.2 (0.75)						

--- Data not available because this attitude item was not asked in 2002.

¹In 2002 and 2006–2010, the wording for this item was "It is okay for an unmarried female to have a child," which changed in 2011–2013 to "It is okay for a young, unmarried woman to have and raise a child."

²Test of trend was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level across the three survey time periods.

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013.

Table 3. Percent distribution of sexual behavior attitudes among women and men aged 15–44: United States, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013

Attitude	Women						Men					
	Total	Percent distribution (standard error)			Total	Percent distribution (standard error)						
		Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree		Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree				
It is all right for unmarried 18 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other ¹												
2002.....	100.0	50.6 (0.84)	2.6 (0.20)	46.8 (0.86)	100.0	59.8 (1.14)	2.4 (0.40)	37.8 (1.18)	100.0	62.3 (1.16)	0.9 (0.17)	36.7 (1.18)
2006–2010.....	100.0	55.4 (1.28)	0.9 (0.13)	43.8 (1.28)	100.0	64.1 (1.61)	0.9 (0.26)	35.0 (1.60)	100.0	62.3 (1.16)	0.9 (0.17)	36.7 (1.18)
2011–2013.....	100.0	54.2 (1.35)	0.8 (0.20)	45.0 (1.35)	100.0	64.1 (1.61)	0.9 (0.26)	35.0 (1.60)	100.0	64.1 (1.61)	0.9 (0.26)	35.0 (1.60)
It is all right for unmarried 16 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other												
2002.....	100.0	13.4 (0.53)	1.5 (0.15)	85.2 (0.60)	100.0	19.9 (0.84)	1.9 (0.27)	78.2 (0.88)	100.0	20.9 (0.66)	1.0 (0.18)	78.2 (0.70)
2006–2010.....	100.0	14.7 (0.57)	0.8 (0.11)	84.5 (0.58)	100.0	20.9 (0.66)	1.0 (0.18)	78.2 (0.70)	100.0	20.9 (0.66)	1.0 (0.18)	78.2 (0.70)
2011–2013.....	100.0	14.7 (0.94)	0.6 (0.18)	84.7 (0.95)	100.0	20.9 (0.83)	0.7 (0.18)	78.4 (0.88)	100.0	20.9 (0.83)	0.7 (0.18)	78.4 (0.88)
Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are all right ¹												
2002.....	100.0	42.3 (0.94)	5.2 (0.33)	52.6 (0.94)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
2006–2010.....	100.0	51.2 (1.58)	2.1 (0.22)	46.7 (1.55)	100.0	39.7 (1.32)	1.8 (0.22)	58.5 (1.34)	100.0	48.9 (1.80)	1.2 (0.28)	49.8 (1.77)
2011–2013.....	100.0	60.2 (1.58)	2.1 (0.41)	37.7 (1.59)	100.0	48.9 (1.80)	1.2 (0.28)	49.8 (1.77)	100.0	48.9 (1.80)	1.2 (0.28)	49.8 (1.77)

--- Data not available. In 2002, this item was unintentionally stated as "Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex is always wrong." Therefore, the responses from this year are omitted from the table because they are not comparable with the following survey periods.

¹Test of trend was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level across the survey time periods.

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013.

Table 4. Percent distribution of attitudes of women and men aged 15–44, by age: United States, 2011–2013

Attitude	Women						Men					
	15–24		25–34		35–44		15–24		25–34		35–44	
Weighted sample size (in thousands)	19,885		20,790		20,212		20,553		20,453		19,514	
	Percent	(Standard error)	Percent	(Standard error)	Percent	(Standard error)	Percent	(Standard error)	Percent	(Standard error)	Percent	(Standard error)
Total	100.0	...	100.0	...	100.0	...	100.0	...	100.0	...	100.0	...
Marriage, cohabitation, divorce												
Living together before marriage may help prevent divorce: ¹												
Strongly agree or agree	61.0	(2.33)	64.2	(1.69)	55.7	(2.13)	68.3	(1.81)	68.3	(1.58)	65.5	(2.36)
Strongly disagree or disagree	38.0	(2.35)	34.0	(1.72)	43.5	(2.15)	30.3	(1.84)	30.4	(1.64)	33.6	(2.39)
Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems: ²												
Strongly agree or agree	35.5	(1.93)	39.6	(2.01)	38.8	(1.82)	38.2	(1.52)	36.2	(1.68)	43.6	(2.38)
Strongly disagree or disagree	64.1	(1.97)	60.2	(2.03)	60.7	(1.80)	60.9	(1.63)	63.5	(1.66)	55.5	(2.33)
A young couple should not live together unless they are married: ^{1,2}												
Strongly agree or agree	30.7	(1.84)	23.4	(1.72)	30.0	(2.06)	23.9	(1.47)	22.4	(1.87)	28.2	(1.96)
Strongly disagree or disagree	68.8	(1.89)	76.2	(1.72)	69.0	(2.05)	75.8	(1.47)	77.2	(1.89)	71.1	(1.97)
Marriage has not worked out for most people I know: ¹												
Strongly agree or agree	37.7	(1.91)	38.6	(1.86)	32.7	(2.15)	33.6	(1.69)	31.9	(1.56)	30.1	(2.21)
Strongly disagree or disagree	61.9	(1.93)	60.9	(1.89)	66.2	(2.13)	65.3	(1.71)	66.8	(1.55)	69.2	(2.25)
Childbearing												
It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married: ¹												
Strongly agree or agree	74.4	(1.84)	78.1	(1.94)	71.4	(1.83)	73.9	(1.63)	77.8	(1.69)	76.0	(1.74)
Strongly disagree or disagree	25.2	(1.82)	21.4	(1.94)	27.4	(1.80)	26.1	(1.63)	21.5	(1.61)	23.8	(1.72)
It is okay for an unmarried women to have and raise a child: ^{1,2}												
Strongly agree or agree	76.5	(1.41)	81.6	(1.56)	76.8	(1.64)	60.2	(1.75)	74.2	(1.68)	73.5	(1.86)
Strongly disagree or disagree	23.1	(1.41)	17.8	(1.57)	21.8	(1.64)	38.6	(1.76)	25.4	(1.67)	25.8	(1.84)
Gay or lesbian adults should have the right to adopt children: ^{1,2}												
Strongly agree or agree	83.1	(1.33)	74.3	(1.54)	67.3	(2.14)	74.9	(1.80)	66.0	(2.04)	61.4	(1.88)
Strongly disagree or disagree	16.0	(1.32)	24.0	(1.48)	30.4	(2.14)	24.6	(1.81)	32.8	(2.01)	36.9	(1.81)
People can't be really happy unless they have children:												
Strongly agree or agree	5.9	(0.97)	6.9	(0.75)	6.3	(0.78)	8.0	(1.41)	9.8	(1.04)	10.6	(1.33)
Strongly disagree or disagree	93.8	(0.94)	92.8	(0.76)	93.4	(0.83)	91.8	(1.40)	89.7	(1.04)	89.1	(1.34)
Sexual behavior												
It is all right for unmarried 18 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other: ^{1,2}												
Strongly agree or agree	60.3	(1.93)	55.5	(1.97)	46.8	(2.14)	71.1	(1.99)	64.1	(2.16)	56.6	(2.60)
Strongly disagree or disagree	38.9	(1.95)	43.5	(1.97)	52.5	(2.15)	28.0	(1.96)	35.4	(2.14)	42.0	(2.51)
It is all right for unmarried 16 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other: ^{1,2}												
Strongly agree or agree	25.4	(1.82)	11.8	(1.42)	7.3	(1.20)	33.5	(1.97)	19.7	(1.28)	9.0	(0.89)
Strongly disagree or disagree	73.5	(1.87)	87.9	(1.41)	92.3	(1.21)	65.7	(1.99)	79.5	(1.33)	90.6	(0.92)
Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are all right: ^{1,2}												
Strongly agree or agree	64.6	(1.82)	62.2	(2.28)	53.7	(2.46)	52.3	(2.20)	48.3	(2.31)	46.0	(2.18)
Strongly disagree or disagree	34.2	(1.95)	35.9	(2.15)	43.1	(2.47)	46.9	(2.16)	50.2	(2.31)	52.5	(2.13)

... Category not applicable.

¹T test between age groups for women were significantly different at the $p < 0.05$ level.²T test between age groups for men were significantly different at the $p < 0.05$ level.

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding or because respondents who answered "neither agree nor disagree" were not included in the table.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2013.

Technical Notes

The wording for questions about the 11 attitude items featured in this report and asked in the 2011–2013 National Survey of Family Growth are listed below, followed by the variable name.

Response options for the items were “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” The response option, “neither agree nor disagree,” was coded only after initial probing for one of these response options.

Marriage, divorce, and cohabitation attitude items

- Living together before marriage may help prevent divorce (PRVNTDIV).
- Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can’t seem to work out their marriage problems (STAYTOG).
- A young couple should not live together unless they are married (OKCOHAB).
- Marriage has not worked out for most people I know (MARRFAIL).

Childbearing attitude items

- It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married (CHCOHAB).
- It is okay for a young, unmarried woman to have and raise a child (CHSUPPORT). NOTE: In the 2002 and 2006–2010 surveys, the wording for this item was, “It is okay for an unmarried female to have a child.”
- Gay or lesbian adults should have the right to adopt children (GAYADOPT).
- People can’t be really happy unless they have children (CHUNLESS).

Sexual behavior attitude items

- It is all right for unmarried 18 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other (SXOK18).
- It is all right for unmarried 16 year olds to have sexual intercourse if they have strong affection for each other (SXOK16).
- Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are all right (SAMESEX).

The [Table](#) displays which attitudes items were asked in each survey period. The “---” symbol indicates that the item was not asked in that survey period.

Table. Attitude items asked in each survey time period: National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013

2002 (n = 12,571)	2006–2010 (n = 22,682)	2011–2013 (n = 10,416)
Marriage, divorce, and cohabitation		
---	PRVNTDIV	PRVNTDIV
STAYTOG	STAYTOG	STAYTOG
OKCOHAB	OKCOHAB	OKCOHAB
---	MARRFAIL	MARRFAIL
Childbearing and parenthood		
---	CHCOHAB	CHCOHAB
CHSUPPORT	CHSUPPORT	CHSUPPORT
GAYADOPT	GAYADOPT	GAYADOPT
---	CHUNLESS	CHUNLESS
Sexual behavior		
SXOK18	SXOK18	SXOK18
SXOK16	SXOK16	SXOK16
SAMESEX	SAMESEX	SAMESEX

--- This attitude item was not asked in 2002.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013.

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