WORLD MARRIAGE DATA 2019

METADATA

The Population Division provides comparable and up-to-date sets of data on the marital status of the population and produces estimates and reports analysing levels and trends of marriage and union indicators. These data and analyses inform, in turn, how broader social, economic and cultural changes bear upon inclusiveness and equality. These data form the basis of a series of annual, model-based estimates and projections of family planning indicators for married or in-union women of reproductive age, also produced by the Population Division.

World Marriage Data 2019 updates the previous edition of these data (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017)[1] and presents comparable information, available as of September 2019, on the marital status of the population by age and sex for 232 countries or areas of the world, from around 1950 to the present. For this edition, new data were added for 90 countries or areas of the world. This data set builds on the historical repository of demographic data, including census and survey reports collected over the past 50 years by the Population Division and Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. A data source (census, survey or registration data) for a given year constitutes a data point. The time series are available and viewable online in organized formats for users to query interactively, download the data (in Excel format), and visualize graphics of ever married and currently married population by age group, sex and time period.

The marital status of men and women is presented here as the percentage distribution of men and women by current marital status, according to age groups. Marital status is defined in relation to the marriage laws or customs of a country. The categories of marital status identified in the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* are[2]: (1) single (never married); (2) married; (3) widowed and not remarried; (4) divorced and not remarried; and (5) married but separated (United Nations, 2008). The *Principles and Recommendations* just cited recommends that the category "married but separated" include both those separated legally and those separated *de facto*, which in the original data source are sometimes coded or reported as distinct categories [para 2.145]. The categories of marital status presented in the World Marriage Data 2019 include: currently married, ever married, single (never married), consensual union (living together), widowed and not remarried, divorced and not remarried, separated (not living together), and variants of these categories as reported in the data sources.[3] Also presented is the singulate mean age at marriage, i.e., the mean age at marriage among men and women who ever marry before the age of 50 years.

When data on persons living in consensual unions or other types of customary unions are available in the original data source, they are reported in the present database. The *Principles and Recommendations* cited above recommended that customary unions, such as registered partnerships and consensual unions, be listed separately when they are legal and binding under the law [para 2.146]. The available census data on consensual unions presented in World Marriage Data 2019, however, do not always conform to this recommendation. Furthermore, there is a considerable variation among the definitions of consensual or other customary unions used in surveys. For some countries, registered unions of same sex partners are reported in the consensual union category. Changing definitions of consensual unions across sources and over time that preclude analysis of time trends are indicated in a note. Many censuses and surveys have made an effort to measure legal marital status and consensual unions separately and present two different tabulations. In this database, consensual unions or other types of customary unions are presented as separate

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[1] See http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/marriage-unions/WMD2017.asp
[2] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/Seriesm_67rev2e.pdf.
[3] In some cases, the original data source collapses some of these categories into broader groupings.

categories as reported by National Statistical Offices or as obtained from official census publications and other data-generating agencies.

Possible sources of error and accurate categorisation in the data on marital status include inaccurate responses to questions on marital status and age. In some cases, individuals self-describe as married or divorced whether or not they have been through formal civil procedures or religious or customary ceremonies. In other cases, unknown marital status may be reported when the marital status of the individual is uncommon or illegal, or is not among the categories in the census or survey questionnaire or in the enumerator's instructions. Marital status is often reported conjointly, e.g., married/consensual union or widowed/divorced or widowed/separated. Also, marital status or age may be misreported where child marriage is common but against secular law, or where particular forms of union are considered as socially and morally unacceptable. Furthermore, data on marital status may be affected when the data for all individuals in the household are based on reports by only one household member. For example, persons who are divorced or separated from their spouses may be erroneously reported as single, or persons who are separated may be reported as divorced.

In World Marriage Data 2019, notes on data points indicate when data on the marital status are conjointly reported, when non-standardized age groups are reported, or when confidential data on partnership status are excluded. Where persons are categorized as previously married and there are no distinct categories for divorced, separated or widowed, data have been categorised as "divorced, separated or widowed". Open-ended age groups with a lower bound below the reference age group of "75 years or over" are noted. When the open-ended age group reported in a data source starts at an age older than 75 years and the marital status data are percentages, the data value for the age group 70 to 74 years is presented as the upper bound of the age groups. Information on the definitions used in a census or survey need to be obtained from the original source of the data.

DEFINITIONS

Currently married men and women are persons who have been married and are not either divorced, widowed or separated. When data on consensual unions or other types of customary unions are reported, they are included in the currently married category to allow comparison with series where the currently married are reported together with consensual unions or other types of customary unions. This inclusion is indicated in a note. Also, categories of marital status are presented separately as reported by the National Statistical Offices or as obtained from official census publications and other data-generating agencies.

Ever married men and women are those who have been married at least once in their lives, regardless of their current marital status. The percentage of never married persons can be obtained by subtracting the percentage of ever married persons from 100.

The singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) is the mean age at first marriage among persons who ever marry by a certain age limit, usually before the age of 50 years. It measures the average number of years lived as single or "never married" by a hypothetical cohort of individuals for which the proportions never married at each age are the same as those observed at a moment in time for a given population.

METHODS OF COMPUTATION

The number of men and women in a particular marital status category and age group is divided by the total number of men and women in that age group. The result is expressed in percentage terms. Men and women in the category of unknown marital status are disregarded, thus effectively assuming that they have the same distribution as those reporting a marital status. The sum of the percentages in all marital

status categories is equal to 100 per cent[4], except when confidential data on partnership status are excluded or totals do not add up to the sum of the respective components because of rounding. When the sum of the percentages in all marital status categories is not equal to 100, it is indicated in a note.

The SMAM is calculated using the proportion of persons that are single or "never married" in each age group. Several assumptions are made in calculating the SMAM. It is assumed that if the proportions single have been fairly constant over time, i.e., among successive cohorts, the proportions of single persons recorded for successive ages at a census or survey for a given year (data point) may approximate the experiences of a single cohort passing through life with no deaths or migration among persons of marriageable age. The proportions single by age for a given data point are taken to represent the experience of a hypothetical cohort and used to compute the average number of years lived as single or "never married" by members of that cohort. Also, in calculating the SMAM, it is assumed that no person marries before the age of 15 years and that no person marries for the first time after age 50.

Deviations from these assumptions may affect the SMAM, for example, when a marriage pattern is changing over time, when the rates of mortality and migration at each age are different from those of the married or total population or where child marriage is common. Details of the computation methods are provided elsewhere (United Nations, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, 1983).[5]

SOURCES OF DATA

Major sources of data on marital status are censuses, sample surveys and national estimates based on population register data or on estimation methods using census data. Censuses usually cover the whole country or include representative samples of households and individuals for certain topics. Most surveys are nationally representative. A note is indicated where the data are excluded for certain areas and population subgroups.

Census data are generally reported by National Statistical Offices to the Statistics Division of the United Nations or they are obtained from official census publications produced by National Statistical Offices. Estimates based on data compiled from population registers are generally obtained from National Statistical Offices.

Additional sources of data include survey programmes, such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Reproductive Health Surveys (RHS), Pan-Arab Project for Child Development Surveys (PAPCHILD), Pan-Arab Project for Family Health Survey (PAPFAM) as well as national surveys. Tabulations for several countries are based on census microdata samples provided by National Statistical Offices to the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International (Minnesota Population Center, 2019)[6] and survey microdata provided by the DHS and MICS. In order to maximize the availability of data on consensual unions and a wider range of age groups, two series of data on marital status are presented from the Demographic and Health Surveys and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys: marital status data generated from the individual questionnaire for men and women of reproductive age that include consensual unions as a separate data point, and marital status data generated from the household questionnaire that pertain to age groups up to 75 years and over. Data generated from the household questionnaire are differentiated by designating them as such in the Data Source field.

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[4] In the case of empirical data, Data were randomly rounded by the source to protect confidentiality. Totals may not add up to 100%.
[5] Available from https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/manual/estimate/demographic-estimation.asp
[6] Available from https://international.ipums.org/international/index.shtml

In the case of DHS data, as available, two values are presented from the same survey: 1) The survey raw data (data as they were collected, without any structural changes). 2) Survey data made available via STATcompiler, a Web-based tool provided by DHS that allows users to build customized tables for DHS countries based on hundreds of indicators. The original country raw data is converted into a standardized format allowing easy comparison among countries or different DHS phases in the same country. The values from both sources may differ slightly due to the conversion of the raw data into the standardized format provided by the STATcompiler.

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