

Gender Differences in Teens' Cohabitation, Marriage, and Childbearing Expectations

Karen Benjamin Guzzo (kguzzo@bgsu.edu), Susan L. Brown, Wendy Manning, Katherine Graham, and Krista K. Payne
Bowling Green State University

Background

The uneven recovery of the post-Recession years has affected many families, which may influence teens' attitudes toward unions and childbearing. Further, differences in gender socialization may affect how teen girls and boys think about future family formation.

Current Investigation

We examined expectations of future family formation among teens:

- **cohabitation expectations**
- **marriage expectations**
- **childbearing expectations**

We consider change over time, explore gender difference, and account for socioeconomic and demographic factors linked to family behaviors and attitudes.

Data and Sample

National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)

- Nationally representative survey of men and women aged 15-44 (49 starting in 2015)

Sample (n=7,943)

- Four cycles (2011-2019)
- Teens aged 15-19

Focal Measures

Expectations of Cohabitation

- "Do you think you will live together with your future husband/wife before getting married?"
- "What is the chance that you will ever live with a man/woman to whom you are not married?"

Expectations of Marriage

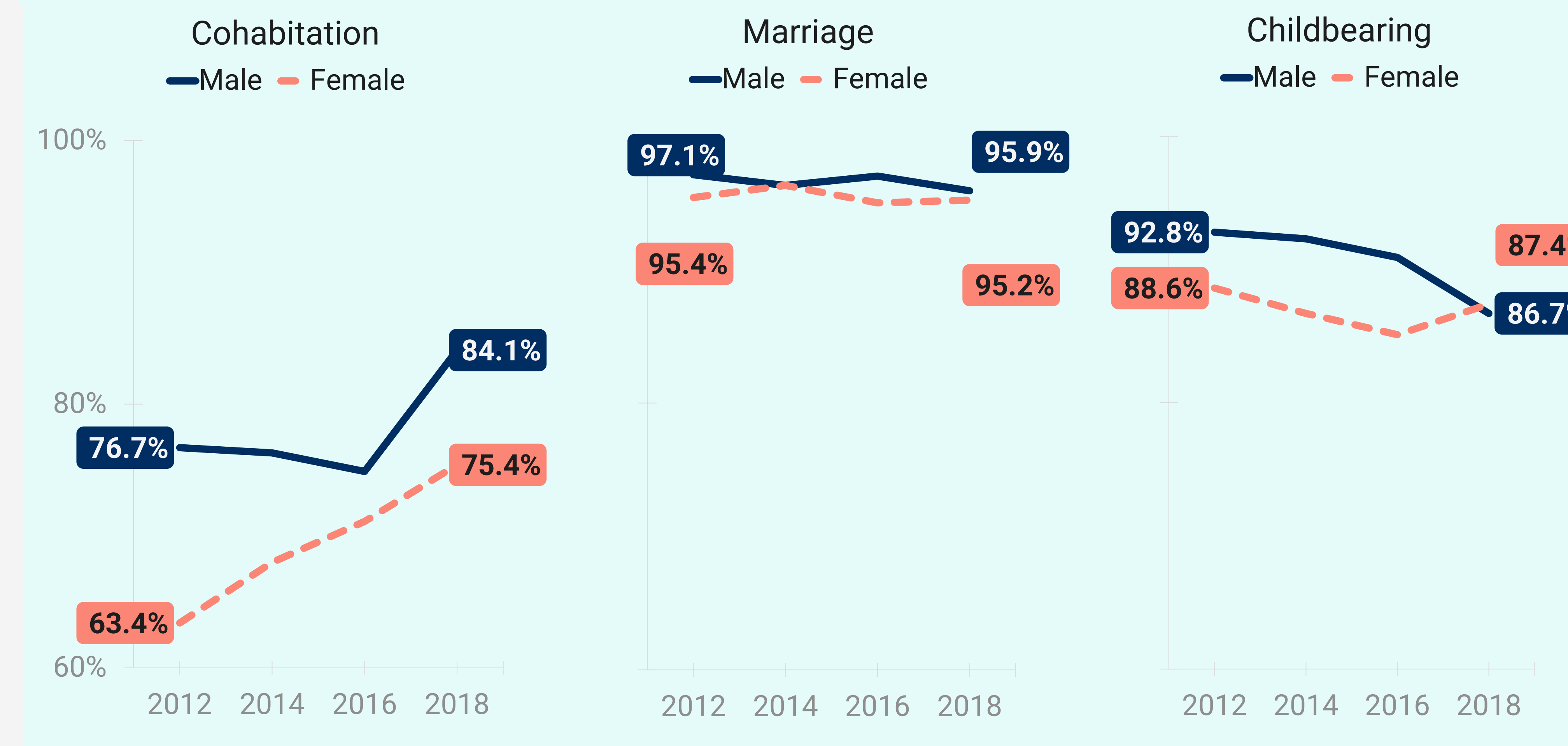
- "What are the chance you will get married someday?"

Childbearing Intentions

- "Looking to the future, do you intend to have a baby at some time?"

Descriptive Results

Figure 1. Teens' Expectations to Cohabit, Marry, and Have Children



Key Findings

- Most teens expect to cohabit, marry, and have children, with modest change over the past decade.
- Significant differences across gender for cohabitation and childbearing expectations but not marriage.

Discussion

Most teens expect to engage in family behaviors. More than nine in ten expect to marry, and just under nine in ten expect to have a child. The majority also expect to live with a partner at some point. Thus, there is little evidence that post-Recession changes have weakened teens' family goals. This is true even despite modest declines in childbearing expectations, which occurred only among young men.

Whether these teens will actually engage in these behaviors remains to be seen. Expectations at these ages may reflect abstract ideas and social norms rather than personal preferences. Future work should examine how teens' intentions ultimately line up with their behavior.

Multivariable Results

Table 1. Regression Estimates of Teens' Expectations to Cohabit, Marry, and Have Children

	Cohabitation	Marriage	Childbearing
Female	-		-
Age	+	+	
Race/Ethnicity (White)			
Black			
Hispanic		-	
Other	-		
Family Background (2 Bio)			
Step	+		
Other	+	-	
Mom's Education	-		
Weekly Religious Attendance	-	+	
Public Assistance	-		
Survey Year	+		-

Analyses also control for nativity and urbanicity. All descriptive and multivariate analyses are weighted.

Key Findings

- The odds of expecting to cohabit increased over time, with expectations to have children declining.
 - Declining childbearing expectations are limited to young men (not shown).
- Young women are less likely than young men to expect to cohabit or have children.
- Relative to White teens, 'other' race teens are less likely to expect to cohabit and Hispanic teens are less likely to expect to marry.
- Having a mother with a high school degree is linked to higher odds of expecting to cohabit relative to both higher and lower levels of education.
- Expectations of cohabitation are higher among those who lived outside of a two-parent biological family.
 - Expectations of marriage are also lower for those who lived in 'other' family types.
- Religious attendance is positively related to marriage expectations but negatively associated with cohabitation expectations.
- Being on public assistance is negatively associated with expectations of cohabitation.



<https://mastresearchcenter.org/>



National Center for Family & Marriage Research

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

<https://www.bgsu.edu/ncfmr.html>

The MAST Center is made up of a team of national experts in marriage and relationship research and practice, led by Child Trends in partnership with Public Strategies and the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University. The MAST Center is supported by grant #90PR0012 from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The MAST Center is solely responsible for the contents of this brief, which do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The NCFMR is supported with assistance from Bowling Green State University. From 2007 to 2013, support was also provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the state or federal government.