

U.S. marriage trends stabilize in 1990s

Less than 10 percent divorced

By Cheryl Wetzstein
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Marriage and other family trends stabilized in the 1990s after undergoing sweeping changes in previous decades, researchers said yesterday as new marriage data were released by the Census Bureau.

More than 54 percent of adult Americans said they were married and less than 10 percent said they were divorced, the bureau said in the report "Marital Status: 2000." The data were collected on the Census 2000 long

form, which went to one in every six households in the nation.

About 6.6 percent of adults were widowed, 2.2 percent were separated and 27.1 percent had never been married.

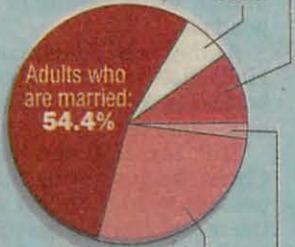
When compared with Census 1990 figures, the 2000 marital statistics "barely changed — really, the changes were only about 1 percent. Very, very slight shifts," said Rose M. Kreider, lead author of the 2000 report.

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FAMILY PORTRAIT 2000

Census 2000:
Total adult population
(ages 15 and older):
221 million

Adults who are divorced: **9.7%**
Adults who are widowed: **6.6%**



Adults who have never married: **27.1%**
Adults who are separated: **2.2%**
Source: Census Bureau

The Washington Times

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For instance, when the 1990 census was taken, 54.8 percent of adults said they were married and 8.5 percent said they were divorced. In addition, 7.4 percent were widowed, 2.3 percent were separated and 26.9 had never married.

The changes during the 1990s are insignificant compared with family trends in the 1970s and 1980s, when divorces, separations and the number of never-married people rose rapidly and, in some age groups, doubled.

"The big news" in the 2000 report "is that there has been a strong slowing down of most marriage-weakening trends," said David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, a nonpartisan think tank in New York City.

Trends such as divorce, unwed childbearing, teen pregnancy and teen sexual activity have either "stopped getting worse or actually started getting better," he said.

Despite this, "we should cer-

tainly recognize that marriage is a weakened institution in our society," Mr. Blankenhorn said. Recent media reports about the country's new "unmarried majority" haven't been helpful, he said. As the 2000 data show, "the overwhelming majority of people get married."

Earlier this month, BusinessWeek ran a cover story titled "Unmarried America" that suggested that marriage "is on the wane" and the country's 86 million single adults "could soon define the new majority."

Thomas Coleman, executive director of Unmarried America, a singles-rights group in Los Angeles, made a similar point in an editorial yesterday in USA Today.

Unmarried adults head nearly half the nation's households "and will soon constitute a new 'unmarried majority,'" wrote Mr. Coleman. Married-with-kids families should be treated fairly, but so should unmarried citizens, he said.

David Popenoe, co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University, said yesterday that arguments pitting married people against unmarried people are "a very

dangerous trend, in my view."

It can't be overemphasized that marriage is the best environment for children, Mr. Popenoe said. Yet, he said, the parenting aspects of the institution have been sidelined in favor of an image of marriage as a long-term romantic relationship for soul mates. A renewed "marriage culture" must revive the ties between marriage and childbearing, he said.

Other highlights of the 2000 report:

- Whites and Asians were most likely to be married.

- Black men and women were least likely to be married — 42 percent of the former and 31 percent of the latter were married.

- The Northeast had the lowest percentage of married people (52.7 percent) and the highest percentage of those never married (29.3 percent).

- Naperville, Ill., had the most married people — 67.7 percent of its population — while Gary, Ind., had the most "formerly married" people, with 27.2 percent of its population divorced, separated or widowed.