

First-time divorce rate tied to education, race

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New research from the National Center for Family and Marriage Research (NCFMR) at Bowling Green State University shows there is substantial variation in the first-time divorce rate when it is broken down by race and education. But, there is also evidence that a college degree has a protective effect against divorce among all races.

The data for the family profile, "First Divorce Rate, 2010" were gathered by the U.S. [Census Bureau](#) in 2010. At that time, the rate of first divorce in the U.S. was 17.5 per 1,000 women 18 years old and older in a first marriage. According to the research, recent declines in the probability of divorce largely reflect an increase in marital stability among the more educated.

Among women in a first marriage, the rate of first divorce is highest for those who received some education after [high school](#), but have not earned a bachelor's degree -- 23 per 1,000. The association between education and divorce is also curvilinear. The least (no high school diploma or GED) and the highest ([college degree](#)) educated women share the lowest rate of first divorce, with 14.4 and 14.2 per 1,000, respectively.

Broken down by race and ethnicity, the study found Asian women have the lowest first divorce rate at 10 divorces per 1,000 women in a first marriage. The first divorce rates of white and [Hispanic women](#) were similar at 16.3 and 18.1, respectively. African-American women have substantially higher rates of first divorce compared to all other racial and ethnic groups, at 30.4 divorces per 1,000 women in a first marriage.

Once education was factored in, the NCFMR found, with the exception of Asians, the highest rate of first divorce was among women with some college, regardless of race or ethnicity.

"Contrary to the notion that women with a college degree face the lowest chances of divorce, those without a high school degree actually have similar low odds of divorce," explained Dr. Susan Brown, NCFMR co-director. "The relationship between education and divorce is not straightforward."

However, according to co-director Dr. Wendy Manning, these patterns are consistent with patterns they are finding in other national data sources.

The association between education and the first-divorce rate held up even when race was factored in. Among African-Americans, Asians and Hispanics, women with less than a high school degree had a similar [divorce rate](#) to women who graduated from college. Among African-American and Hispanic women, the lowest first-divorce rates were found among women with less than a [high school diploma](#).

"Among white [women](#), there were few differences according to education, but those with a college degree experienced lower divorce rates than any other education group," Manning said. "These findings showcase that the association between education and [divorce](#) differs for racial and ethnic groups, and it is important to consider this variation."

Provided by Bowling Green State University

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