

## METADATA

### DEFINITION AND METHOD OF COMPUTATION

#### Marital status of men and women

##### Definition

Marital status of men and women is presented as the percent distribution of men and women by current marital status, according to age groups. Marital status is the personal status of each individual 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 ([http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/Seriesm\\_67rev2e.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/Seriesm_67rev2e.pdf)) are: (1) single (never married); (2) married; (3) widowed and not remarried; (4) divorced and not remarried; and (5) married but separated. It is recommended that the category married but separated include both those separated legally and those living in a de facto separation, which may appear as separate categories [para 2.145]. In *World Marriage Data 2012*, the inclusion of both the legally and de facto separated in the “married but separated” category is indicated in a note. The categories of marital status presented in the *World Marriage Data 2012* are: single, married, consensual union, widowed, divorced, separated. In some cases only two categories -- either single and ever married or married and currently not married -- are available from original source.

When data on persons living in consensual unions or with a visiting partner are reported they are also included as marital status categories in the *World Marriage Data 2012*. The Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2 recommended that customary unions, such as registered partnerships and consensual unions, be listed separately when they are legal and binding under law [para 2.146]. Census data on consensual unions presented in *World Marriage Data 2012*, however, do not necessarily conform to this recommendation. Furthermore, there is a considerable variation among the definitions of consensual unions and visiting partnerships used in surveys. Information on the definitions used in surveys need to be obtained from the original source of the data. In the most recent data points for some countries, registered unions of same sex partners are reported in the consensual union category. In cases when changing definitions of consensual unions across the sources in one country preclude analysis of time trends, the difference is indicated in a note. Many censuses and surveys have made an effort to measure legal marital status and cohabitation separately and present two different tabulations based on legal marital status and partnership status, respectively. However, in *World Marriage Data 2012* these tabulations are not presented separately and consensual unions are reported as a separate category (without distinguishing the legal marital status of women and men living in consensual unions).

### **Method 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.

### **Currently married men and women**

#### **Definition**

Currently married men and women are those who have been married and are not either divorced, widowed or separated. Men and women living in consensual unions or in visiting partnerships are also included in the currently married category. This inclusion is indicated in a note.

#### **Method of computation**

The data are presented in terms of percentages of currently married men and women by age group. The numerator of each ratio is the number of currently married persons. The denominator is the total number of persons in the corresponding age group. When data on consensual unions or visiting partnerships are reported, they are added to the numerator.

### **Ever married men and women**

#### **Definition**

Ever married men and women are persons who have been married at least once in their lives although their current marital status may not be "married".

#### **Method of computation**

The data are presented in terms of percentages of ever married men and women by age group. The numerator of each ratio is the sum of the number of persons who are married and those who are either divorced, widowed or separated. The denominator is the total number of persons in the corresponding age group. When data on consensual unions or visiting partnerships are reported, they are added to the numerator. Note that the percentage of never married men and women can be obtained by subtracting the percentage of ever married women and men from 100.

## Singulate mean age at marriage

### Definition

The singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) is the average length of single life expressed in years among those who marry before age 50. It is a synthetic indicator calculated from marital status categories of men and women aged 15 to 54 at the census or survey date.

### Method of computation

The singulate mean age at marriage is calculated from the proportions single by age.

**Step 1.** Calculation of the person years lived in a single state, denoted by A:

$$A = 15 + \sum_{a=15-19}^{45-49} S_a * 5$$

where  $S_a$  is the proportion single in age group a.

**Step 2.** Estimation of the proportion remaining single at age 50, denoted by B:

$$B = (S_{45-49} + S_{50-54})/2$$

If the proportion single in age group 50-54,  $S_{50-54}$ , is not available, then

$$B = S_{45-49}$$

**Step 3.** Estimation of the proportion ever marrying by age 50, denoted by C:

$$C = 1 - B$$

**Step 4.** Calculation of the number of person-years lived by the proportion not marrying, denoted by D:

$$D = 50 * B$$

**Step 5.** Calculation of singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM):

$$SMAM = (A - D)/C$$

Note that the SMAM takes a single point in time and calculates the age at marriage from the marital status of the population aged between 15 and 50. This value is different from the mean age of marriage that is calculated from first marriage rates in a respective period (commonly used in countries with complete marriage registration systems) or cohort measures of entry into first marriage or union (based on retrospective survey questions on age at first marriage or union formation). The retrospective nature of the SMAM means that values are influenced by age and marital status specific mortality and migration.

## SOURCES OF THE DATA

Data on the population by age group, sex and marital status are generally obtained from censuses or sample surveys that include questions regarding the current marital status, age and sex of persons enumerated. Data derived from censuses are generally preferred because, when obtained through a questionnaire applied to the whole population, they are not affected by sampling variability. However, reporting errors may nevertheless bias the results.

Data derived from censuses are generally reported by National Statistical Offices to the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. Census data are also obtained from official census publications produced by National Statistical Offices. Adjusted data are only used when so reported by National Statistical Offices. Additional sources of data include survey programmes, such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) or the Reproductive Health Surveys (RHS), as well as national surveys. Estimates based on data compiled from population registers or on estimation methods using data from past censuses are used only when reported by the National Statistical Offices.

In *World Marriage Data 2012*, data are presented for five different reference dates: the years closest to 1970, 1985, 1995, 2005 and the most recent data available. In cases where more than one source could yield the required data, preference is given to data from population censuses. In cases where the data can be derived from different surveys carried out the same year, preference is given to those derived from the larger survey. Preference is also given to continuity of comparable data sources over time within one country.

For each data point included in the data set, information on the type of statistical system generating the data (census, survey or estimate) and on the source of the data (usually denoted by an acronym) is provided. The meaning of each acronym used is presented in the worksheet labeled "Sources". For surveys, the full name is provided in the field "Survey name".

## COMMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

The estimates by age may be affected by age misreporting. Marital status may be misreported, particularly in societies where divorce or separation is not socially acceptable. The differences in marital status categories included over time and their definitions limit comparability of data across time and countries. Data derived from surveys with small samples are subject to sampling error.

## DATA COVERAGE AND REFERENCE YEARS FOR THE DATA REPORTED

In *World Marriage Data 2012*, data are presented for five different reference dates: the years closest to 1970, 1985, 1995, 2005 and the most recent data available. Data for "Around 1970" pertain to the period from 1966 to 1975, data for "Around 1985" pertain to the period from 1980 to 1989, data for "Around 1995" pertain to the period from 1990 to 1999, data for "Around 2005" pertain to the period from 2000 to 2008, and data for "Latest" pertain to the latest data point available after year 2000. Only one data point per country is assigned to each period. Periods marked as ".." pertain to an additional data point in the series of five reference dates. Data on the marital status of men and women are presented for 221 countries. Among those, 63 countries have data for all five reference dates, including 48 countries with data for both men and women. SMAM is presented for 219 countries and data for all five reference dates are presented for 62 countries, including 45 countries with data for both men and women. *World Marriage Data 2012* presents data available as of January 2013.

Suggested citation:

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013). *World Marriage Data 2012* (POP/DB/Marr/Rev2012).