MEAN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE, SINGULATE MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE AND PERCENTAGE EVER MARRIED BY AGE GROUP

DEFINITIONS AND METHODS OF COMPUTATION

Mean age at first marriage

Definition

The mean age at first marriage is the mean age of men or women at first marriage if subject throughout their lives to the age-specific marriage rates of first marriages only in a given year.

Method of computation

It is derived from the distribution of first marriages by age group of husband or wife.

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.

Percentage ever married by age group

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.

SOURCES OF THE DATA

Data on the mean age at first marriage are from two sources: civil registration systems and sample surveys. For civil registration systems, the mean age at first marriage is obtained from reports and other analytical publications produced by national statistical offices.

If countries lack a civil registration system or have a registration system whose coverage is too low, then surveys can be utilized to estimate the mean age at first marriage. Such information is generally obtained from a question regarding woman's age at first marriage. In this case, the data are presented as the median age at first marriage for women or men aged 25-29 at the time of a survey. Notes are used to indicate any differences between the data presented and the definition of the mean age at childbearing given above.

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.

Whenever the estimates are available in the survey report they are directly taken from the report. The main surveys utilized are the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), the Reproductive Health Surveys (RHS), the World Fertility Survey (WFS), the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), the Contraceptive Prevalence Surveys (CPS) 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.

For each data point, information is provided on the source type (registration, census or survey) and the source (usually denoted by an acronym). A description of each acronym is given in the table labelled "Sources". For surveys, the full name is provided in the field "Survey name".

COMMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

Estimates from civil registration are subject to limitations that depend on the completeness of marriage registration. Estimates by age, regardless of the data source, 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 Fertility Report 2012* data are provided, when available, for three reference dates: the closest years to 1970 (period 1965 to 1989), 1995 (period 1990 to 1999) and the most recent available year after 1999. Detailed distributions for each indicator by number of observations by reference dates are presented in the table labelled "Data availability".

Data on the mean age at first marriage among women are provided for 150 countries or areas and among men for 119 countries or areas of the world with a total population of 100,000 or more inhabitants in 2011. Data are available for all three reference dates for the mean age at first marriage among women for 80 countries or areas and among men for 33 countries or areas.

Data on the singulate mean age at marriage are provided for 195 countries or areas with a total population of 100,000 or more inhabitants in 2011. Data on the female singulate mean age at marriage are available for all three reference dates for 129 countries or areas and on the male singulate mean age at marriage for 116 countries or areas.

Data on the percentage of ever married women and men are provided for 195 countries or areas with a total population of 100,000 or more inhabitants in 2011. Data are available for all three reference dates for ever married women for 130 countries or areas and ever married men for 121 countries or areas.

Suggested citation:

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013). *World Fertility Report 2012* (United Nations publication).