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Premarital conceptions, postconception ("shotgun") marriages, and premarital first births: Education gradients in U.S. cohorts of white and black women born 1925-1959

By [Paula England](#), [Emily Fitzgibbons Shafer](#), [Lawrence L. Wu](#)

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Abstract

Background: In the U.S. today, premarital first births occur disproportionately to women with low education and income. We lack studies of whether this education gradient was present in cohorts born earlier.

Objective: We examine education differences in the proportion of U.S. white and black women who: (a) experienced a premarital conception taken to term resulting in a first birth, and (b) had a premarital first birth by age 35. Among those experiencing a premarital conception, we examine the association between education and whether women married before the birth. We examine these patterns for birth cohorts born between 1925 and 1959.

Methods: We use the 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995 June Fertility Supplements from the U.S. Current Population Survey to examine cohorts of women born between 1925 and 1959. The survey asked women the dates of their first marriage and their first birth, allowing us to determine premarital conceptions taken to term, and whether the resulting first births occurred within or outside of first marriage. We present descriptive information on the proportion of black and white women in each cohort who experienced the events of interest by age 35.

Results: For all cohorts, women with low education were generally more likely than their more educated counterparts to experience premarital conceptions and premarital first births. For blacks, but not whites, who experienced a premarital conception that was taken to term, those with more education were more likely to marry before the birth.

Conclusions: In the U.S., the concentration of premarital conceptions and premarital first births among less educated women was present for cohorts extending back to those born in 1925.

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