

*M. Khachikyan and S. Gharibyan*

Given the biological capacity to reproduce, the social environment in which people live largely determines whether couples will have children, and if so, how many and with what kind of spacing. This chapter addresses the principal factors, other than contraception and abortion, that influence fertility. These factors include marriage (including consensual unions), sexual activity, postpartum amenorrhea and abstinence from sexual relations, and menopause.

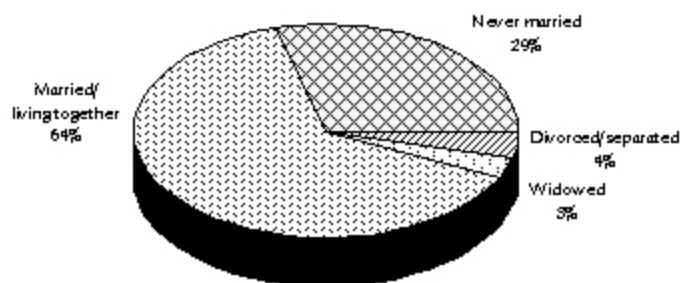
Marriage is a primary indicator of a woman’s exposure to the risk of pregnancy. More direct measures of exposure are age at first sexual intercourse and the frequency of intercourse. Postpartum amenorrhea and abstinence affect the interval between births. Menopause is important since it marks the end of a woman’s period of exposure to the risk of pregnancy. None of these determining factors are independent; they interact and influence each other and affect fertility levels and trends. Their contribution varies from person to person, from region to region, and from time to time.

## 7.1 MARITAL STATUS

Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1 show the distribution of all women age 15-49 by current marital status at the time of the survey. The term “married” refers to legal or formal marriages (civil or religious), while “living together” refers to informal unions. In subsequent tables, these two categories are merged and referred to collectively as “currently married.” Persons who are widowed, divorced, or separated are considered to be “formerly married.” According to the ADHS, two-thirds of respondents (64 percent) are either formally married or cohabiting, 3 percent are widowed, 2 percent are divorced, and another 2 percent are separated. It is notable that the proportion of women in informal unions is less than 1 percent. Twenty-nine percent of women have never been married.

Age	Marital status						Total	Number of women
	Never married	Married	Living together	Widowed	Divorced	Separated		
15-19	91.4	8.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	100.0	1,160
20-24	47.5	50.5	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.7	100.0	1,007
25-29	13.5	80.9	0.4	1.3	1.6	2.1	100.0	769
30-34	5.3	85.9	0.7	2.6	2.2	3.3	100.0	763
35-39	5.8	84.2	0.6	4.4	3.1	2.0	100.0	962
40-44	6.9	81.2	0.5	5.7	3.3	2.4	100.0	947
45-49	5.7	77.2	0.6	9.8	3.5	3.1	100.0	822
Total	28.8	63.7	0.4	3.3	2.0	1.8	100.0	6,430

**Figure 7.1 Marital Status of Respondents**



Armenia DHS 2000

These data confirm the near universality of marriage in Armenia. The proportion of women currently married increases with age up to age 30-34 and then begins to decline as proportions of women widowed, divorced, or separated increase. Among women age 45-49, only 6 percent have never married, 78 percent are married or cohabiting with a man, and 16 percent are formerly married. The main reason for marital disruption among this age group is widowhood (10 percent).

## 7.2 AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE AND SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Marriage is an important demographic and social indicator; it generally marks the point in a person's life when parenthood becomes welcome. Information on age at first marriage was obtained by asking all ever-married respondents the month and year they started living together with their first spouse. The ADHS also asked women to state the age at which they first had sexual intercourse.

Overall, the ADHS results indicate that among Armenian women, age at first marriage and age at first intercourse correspond almost exactly. Tables 7.2 and 7.3 indicate that by age 20 virtually the same proportion have married (44 percent) as have had sexual intercourse (45 percent). By age 25, 82 percent of women have married and 81 percent have had sexual intercourse. The relationship between first marriage and first sexual intercourse is also observed in the decreasing ages of each over the last several decades. The median age of both first marriage and first intercourse decreased slightly from just over 21 among women age 45-49 to just under 20 among women age 25-29.

Table 7.2 Age at first marriage

Percentage of women who were first married by specified exact ages, and median age at first marriage, according to current age, Armenia 2000

Current age	Percentage of women who were first married by exact age:					Percentage who were never married	Number of women	Median age at first marriage
	15	18	20	22	25			
15-19	0.6	na	na	na	na	91.4	1,160	-
20-24	0.8	19.1	37.2	na	na	47.5	1,007	-
25-29	0.3	22.1	53.1	70.0	82.4	13.5	769	19.8
30-34	0.3	16.8	48.8	69.9	87.7	5.3	763	20.1
35-39	0.0	12.9	43.6	66.0	83.2	5.8	962	20.5
40-44	0.2	11.9	38.9	59.2	78.2	6.9	947	21.0
45-49	0.4	15.2	39.4	58.6	77.7	5.7	822	21.1
25-49	0.2	15.5	44.4	64.5	81.7	7.3	4,263	20.5

Note: The medians for cohorts 15-19 and 20-24 could not be determined because less than 50 percent of the women had married for the first time by the lower boundary of the age interval.  
na = Not applicable

Table 7.3 Age at first sexual intercourse

Percentage of women who had first sexual intercourse by specified exact ages and median age at first intercourse by current age, Armenia 2000

Current age	Percentage of women who had first sexual intercourse by exact age:					Percentage who never had intercourse	Number of women	Median age at first intercourse
	15	18	20	22	25			
15-19	0.6	na	na	na	na	91.4	1,160	-
20-24	0.8	19.2	37.1	na	na	47.4	1,007	-
25-29	0.4	22.7	53.5	69.4	82.0	13.4	769	19.7
30-34	0.3	17.4	50.0	70.4	87.5	4.9	763	20.0
35-39	0.0	13.1	44.0	65.5	82.5	5.6	962	20.5
40-44	0.2	12.3	39.9	59.8	78.7	6.3	947	20.9
45-49	0.1	15.4	39.4	58.3	77.0	5.6	822	21.1
25-49	0.2	15.9	45.0	64.4	81.4	7.0	4,263	20.5

Note: The medians for cohorts 15-19 and 20-24 could not be determined because less than 50 percent of the women had intercourse for the first time by the lower boundary of the age interval.  
na = Not applicable

Among all women age 25-49, the median age at both first marriage and first intercourse was 20.5 years (Tables 7.4 and 7.5). The median ages at first marriage and first intercourse were higher among urban women than rural women. As expected, there is a positive relationship between education and age at first marriage (and first intercourse). Among women with a primary/middle school education, the median age at first marriage is approximately 19. The median age increases steadily with increasing education to just over 23 among women with higher education.

**Table 7.4 Median age at first marriage**

Median age at first marriage among women age 25-49, by current age and background characteristics, Armenia 2000

Background characteristic	Current age					Women age 25-49
	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	20.6	20.7	21.1	21.4	21.6	21.1
Rural	18.9	19.4	19.7	20.5	19.9	19.7
<b>Region</b>						
Yerevan	21.3	21.4	21.2	21.7	22.1	21.5
Aragatsotn	18.6	19.2	20.6	21.6	21.6	20.1
Ararat	18.9	19.2	19.3	20.6	20.1	19.5
Armavir	18.9	20.1	20.7	20.8	20.2	20.1
Gegharkunik	18.4	19.0	19.5	19.9	19.7	19.3
Lori	20.1	20.0	20.9	19.9	20.6	20.3
Kotayk	19.8	19.5	19.6	20.7	20.7	20.0
Shirak	19.8	20.3	20.7	21.5	20.9	20.8
Syunik	19.5	19.5	20.2	21.1	20.1	20.2
Vayots Dzor	19.9	20.1	20.3	20.7	20.9	20.4
Tavush	19.8	19.4	21.4	20.6	20.9	20.5
<b>Education</b>						
Primary/middle	17.9	17.9	18.8	20.0	18.3	18.8
Secondary	18.3	18.8	19.5	19.8	19.3	19.1
Secondary-special	20.1	20.3	20.6	21.1	21.1	20.6
Higher	22.9	22.3	23.6	23.3	24.3	23.3
Total	19.8	20.1	20.5	21.0	21.1	20.5

Note: The medians for cohorts 15-19 and 20-24 could not be determined because less than 50 percent of the women had married for the first time by the lower boundary of the age interval.

Median age at first marriage and first intercourse varies little by region. The highest median age is in Yerevan (21.5 for first marriage and first sexual intercourse) and the lowest is in Gegharkunik (19.3 for first marriage and 19.2 for first intercourse).

Table 7.5 Median age at first intercourse

Median age at first sexual intercourse among women age 25-49, by current age and background characteristics, Armenia 2000

Background characteristic	Current age					Women age 25-49
	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	20.6	20.7	21.1	21.3	21.6	21.1
Rural	18.9	19.3	19.7	20.5	20.0	19.6
<b>Region</b>						
Yerevan	21.2	21.3	21.2	21.6	22.0	21.5
Aragatsotn	18.7	19.0	20.6	21.6	22.0	20.1
Ararat	18.8	19.2	19.3	20.6	20.3	19.5
Armavir	18.9	19.9	20.7	20.2	20.1	19.9
Gegharkunik	18.4	19.0	19.5	19.7	19.7	19.2
Lori	20.1	19.9	20.7	19.9	20.4	20.2
Kotayk	19.8	19.5	19.7	20.5	20.7	20.0
Shirak	19.9	20.4	20.6	21.5	21.3	20.8
Syunik	19.8	19.4	20.3	21.0	20.3	20.2
Vayots Dzor	19.9	20.4	20.3	20.9	21.1	20.5
Tavush	19.7	19.3	21.4	20.6	20.8	20.5
<b>Education</b>						
Primary/middle	17.9	17.7	18.8	19.9	18.0	18.7
Secondary	18.3	18.8	19.5	19.7	19.4	19.1
Secondary-special	20.1	20.3	20.6	21.1	21.2	20.6
Higher	22.8	22.0	23.6	23.2	24.3	23.3
Total	19.7	20.0	20.5	20.9	21.1	20.5

Note: The medians for cohorts 15-19 and 20-24 could not be determined because less than 50 percent of women had intercourse for the first time by the lower boundary of the age interval.

### 7.3 RECENT SEXUAL ACTIVITY

In the absence of contraceptive use, frequency of sexual intercourse is a direct determinant of pregnancy; therefore, knowledge of frequency is a useful indicator of exposure to pregnancy. The ADHS asked women the timing of their last sexual intercourse. Table 7.6 shows the percent distribution of women by time since their last sexual intercourse. Respondents are considered to be sexually active if they have had sexual intercourse at least once in the four weeks prior to the survey.

In the four weeks preceding the survey, more than half of women were sexually active (52 percent). Among the remaining women, 10 percent had sexual intercourse in the year preceding the survey and 9 percent reported sexual intercourse more than a year before. At the time of the survey 29 percent of all respondents had never had sexual intercourse. Among recently married women, some of the lack of recent sexual activity may be attributed to the fact that approximately 10 percent of married women reported that their husband was residing elsewhere (data not shown—see Chapter 2).

**Table 7.6 Recent sexual activity**

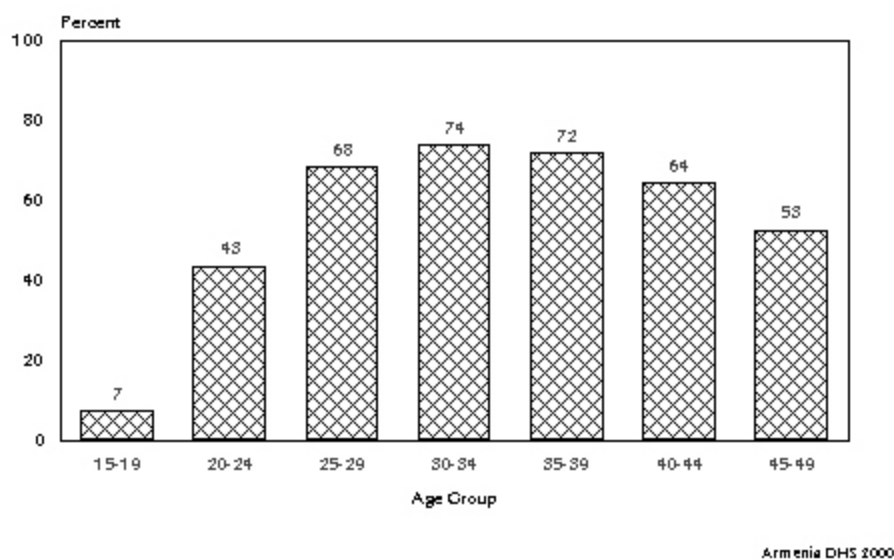
Percent distribution of women by timing of last sexual intercourse, according to background characteristics, Armenia 2000

Background characteristic	Time since last sexual intercourse			Never had intercourse	Missing	Total	Number of women
	Within the past 4 weeks	Within 1 year	One or more years ago				
<b>Age</b>							
15-19	7.5	1.0	0.0	91.4	0.1	100.0	1,160
20-24	43.4	6.7	2.3	47.4	0.2	100.0	1,007
25-29	68.3	10.6	6.5	13.4	1.3	100.0	769
30-34	73.7	10.4	9.7	4.9	1.3	100.0	763
35-39	71.8	9.2	12.3	5.6	1.0	100.0	962
40-44	64.2	13.4	14.5	6.3	1.6	100.0	947
45-49	52.5	18.8	21.4	5.6	1.6	100.0	822
<b>Marital duration (years)</b>							
Never married	0.1	0.2	0.4	99.3	0.0	100.0	1,851
Currently married	80.8	14.0	4.4	0.0	0.8	100.0	4,125
0-4	84.3	13.7	1.1	0.1	0.8	100.0	598
5-9	84.3	11.3	3.8	0.0	0.6	100.0	738
10-14	85.2	10.8	2.9	0.0	1.1	100.0	760
15-19	81.4	12.5	5.1	0.0	1.0	100.0	797
20-24	79.0	14.6	5.7	0.0	0.7	100.0	743
25+	66.5	25.1	8.1	0.0	0.3	100.0	489
Formerly married	1.1	6.1	86.2	0.0	6.6	100.0	455
<b>Residence</b>							
Urban	48.4	9.3	10.1	31.1	1.1	100.0	3,942
Rural	57.6	9.8	7.2	24.7	0.7	100.0	2,488
<b>Region</b>							
Yerevan	46.8	8.9	9.9	33.1	1.4	100.0	2,206
Aragatsotn	56.8	11.0	5.4	26.2	0.6	100.0	279
Ararat	58.0	10.1	5.7	25.5	0.7	100.0	642
Armavir	57.2	9.7	8.3	24.2	0.6	100.0	553
Gegharkunik	58.3	9.8	6.7	24.3	0.8	100.0	484
Lori	54.5	9.8	10.5	24.2	1.0	100.0	489
Kotayk	46.7	11.5	9.7	31.7	0.4	100.0	505
Shirak	48.2	8.9	13.6	28.3	1.0	100.0	611
Syunik	56.9	5.9	8.5	27.3	1.4	100.0	271
Vayots Dzor	56.6	12.2	6.1	24.9	0.2	100.0	113
Tavush	59.5	9.9	6.5	23.8	0.4	100.0	278
<b>Education</b>							
Primary/middle	36.3	8.4	9.3	45.3	0.7	100.0	593
Secondary	53.0	10.3	7.0	28.7	1.0	100.0	2,341
Secondary-special	56.1	10.0	11.7	21.3	1.0	100.0	2,295
Higher	49.8	7.5	7.6	34.0	1.1	100.0	1,201
<b>Current contraceptive method</b>							
No method	26.6	11.1	14.1	46.8	1.3	100.0	3,922
Pill	(92.1)	(7.9)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)	47
IUD	88.7	8.8	1.6	0.0	0.8	100.0	391
Condom	94.5	4.6	0.4	0.0	0.5	100.0	285
Female sterilization	66.8	19.2	11.8	1.0	1.2	100.0	117
Periodic abstinence	95.4	3.3	0.6	0.0	0.7	100.0	199
Withdrawal	93.5	6.1	0.2	0.0	0.2	100.0	1,317
Other	91.8	7.3	0.0	0.0	0.9	100.0	153
Total	52.0	9.5	9.0	28.6	1.0	100.0	6,430

Note: Figures in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases.

Figure 7.2 shows recent sexual activity by age. The proportion of women who were recently sexually active increases with age to peak at 74 percent among women age 30-34 and then declines to 53 percent among women age 45-49. Only 8 percent of women age 15-19 reported recent sexual activity; the majority (91 percent) have never had sexual intercourse. As previously noted, very few women reported sexual activity outside of marriage: 99 percent of never married women reported that they never had intercourse.

**Figure 7.2 Recent Sexual Activity (in the Past 4 Weeks) among Women 15-49**



Women with a primary/middle education are the least likely to have been sexually active in the recent period (36 percent) and women with a secondary-special education the most likely (56 percent). The proportion of sexually active women is significantly higher in rural communities (58 percent) than in urban areas (48 percent). There are also differences in recent sexual activity by region. Sexual activity was comparatively lower in Yerevan (47 percent), Kotayk (47 percent), and Shirak (48 percent), while the highest level of sexual activity was reported in Tavush (60 percent).

The ADHS also analyzed sexual activity according to current contraceptive use. The data show that the majority of women who had sexual intercourse in the four weeks preceding the survey were either not using a method of contraception or were using withdrawal, which is considered to be an unreliable method.

#### **7.4 POSTPARTUM AMENORRHEA, ABSTINENCE, AND INSUSCEPTIBILITY**

Postpartum amenorrhea refers to the interval between childbirth and the return of menstruation. During this period, the risk of pregnancy is reduced. The duration of reduced risk of conception largely depends on two factors: the length and intensity of breastfeeding, which tends to suppress the resumption of ovulation, and the length of time before the resumption of sexual intercourse. Women who are either amenorrheic or abstaining (or both) are considered insusceptible to the risk of pregnancy.

Among births that occurred in the three years preceding the survey, the percentage of mothers who were postpartum amenorrheic, abstaining, or insusceptible at the time of the survey is shown in Table 7.7. At the time of the survey, 15 percent of women who had given birth during the three years preceding the survey were amenorrheic and 7 percent were abstaining. Overall, 17 percent of these women were insusceptible. During the first year after birth, there is a rapid decline in postpartum amenorrhea from 100 percent during the first two months after birth to 8 percent

**Table 7.7 Postpartum amenorrhea, abstinence, and insusceptibility**

Percentage of births in the three years preceding the survey for which the mother is postpartum amenorrheic, abstaining, and insusceptible, by number of months since birth, and median and mean durations, Armenia 2000

Months since birth	Percentage of births for which the mother is:			Number of births
	Amenorrheic	Abstaining	Insusceptible	
< 2	100.0	78.2	100.0	35
2-3	57.4	18.2	60.6	59
4-5	40.5	5.3	43.7	55
6-7	27.8	5.6	27.8	40
8-9	13.5	0.0	13.5	59
10-11	8.2	4.1	10.0	57
12-15	6.2	1.2	7.4	111
16-19	2.1	8.1	8.7	91
20-23	6.0	5.7	9.4	102
24-29	3.0	1.6	4.6	150
30-35	1.4	0.8	2.2	145
Total	15.1	7.0	17.2	905
Median	3.8	1.7	4.0	-
Mean	6.0	3.3	6.8	-

of women 10 to 11 months after giving birth. Postpartum abstinence declines rapidly after birth from 78 percent of women in the first two months to 18 percent of women after 2-3 months to 5 percent of women after 4-5 months. Overall, the median duration of insusceptibility after birth is 4 months.

## 7.5 MENOPAUSE

After age 30, the risk of pregnancy declines as increasing proportions of women become menopausal. Although the onset of menopause is difficult to determine for an individual woman, methods are available for estimating the proportion of women who are menopausal for the population as a whole. Table 7.8 presents data on the percentage of women age 30 and older who are menopausal, that is, who are not pregnant or postpartum amenorrheic and who have not menstruated for six months or longer in the period preceding the survey.

According to the ADHS, 7 percent of women age 30-49 are menopausal. The proportion of women menopausal increases with age from less than 1 percent of women age 30-34 to 32 percent of women age 48-49.

**Table 7.8 Menopause**

Percentage of nonpregnant and non-postpartum amenorrheic women age 30-49 who are menopausal, Armenia 2000

Age	Percentage menopausal <sup>1</sup>	Number of women
30-34	0.8	718
35-39	0.7	941
40-41	3.9	414
42-43	5.7	357
44-45	13.4	353
46-47	16.6	363
48-49	31.8	276
Total	7.1	3,422

<sup>1</sup> Women whose last menstrual period occurred six or more months before the survey.