

Fertility Trends: What Utahns Need to Know

RESEARCH SUMMARY

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

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Families in Utah are evolving. Women are marrying and having children later, more remain unmarried, and divorce rates are relatively steady. Women are also having fewer children. Utah's fertility rate — the number of children born per woman — has declined below population replacement levels. The number of children a woman has reflects several considerations including the Utah's cultural values, the cost of childcare, norms around work-life balance, the division of labor in the home, and other issues. Understanding these trends in childbearing and its impact on the labor force, school enrollment, and other social resources is essential to improving planning and providing for the needs of women, families, and communities across the state.

FERTILITY TRENDS

Over the past 50 years, Utah's total fertility rate (TFR) has consistently been higher than the national average, though both have declined. Utah women had the largest gap in 1980, but by 2023, that difference narrowed to just 0.2. Overall, Utah's TFR is now 45.5% lower than it was five decades ago, compared to a 36% decline nationally.

EARLY MARRIAGE

In addition to Utah women having higher total fertility rates, they generally marry earlier and have their first child at a younger age than the average American woman. For example, from 2010 to 2023, Utah women, on average, married 3.5 years earlier than American women. Still, in the last 50 years, women's ages at first marriage and first birth have risen both nationally and in Utah. In 1980, women in Utah and across the U.S. married in their early 20s. In 2023, Utah women are marrying, on average, in their mid-20s, while U.S. women are marrying in their late 20s.



WHY THIS MATTERS

"A sub-replacement level of fertility can result in economic strain. If fertility rates continue their downward trend and lead to population decline, there will be fewer workers, spenders, and savers to fuel the economy... At the same time, the share of the U.S. population over 65 is growing rapidly and increasingly tapping into social services, like Social Security and Medicare, with a declining population of younger, working adults unable to shoulder the costs."

*Rachel Walsh, Johns Hopkins
Bloomberg School of Public Health*

MARRIAGE RATES

Marital patterns in Utah have shifted with fertility trends. The share of women who have never married rose from 22% in 1980 to 28.8% in 2023, while overall marriage rates declined by 8.1% in Utah and 15.4% nationally. Divorce rates followed national patterns, rising from 3.8% to 10.1% over the same period. Most Utah children still grow up in two-parent households, and single-mother households have remained relatively low, peaking at 8.1% in 1990 and falling to 6.5% in 2023.

THE FERTILITY RATE:

- is higher in Utah than the U.S.
- is falling nationwide.
- reflects age at first marriage and birth of first child.
- determines future workforce size.

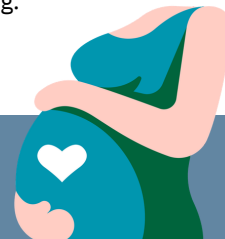
TRENDS BY DECADE

1970s: Utah women averaged 3.3 children and gave birth at approximately age 21. Most (62.9%) were married, while divorce was low (3.8%). Social changes like birth control access, no-fault divorce laws, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act shaped family choices.

1980s: Fertility declined slightly to 3.1 children, with average first birth at 21.9. Divorce peaked (6.6%), and more women entered higher education and the workforce. Family dynamics shifted, with more working mothers and later childbearing.

1990s: Fertility dropped to 2.7 children, and the average age at first birth rose to 22.9. Marriage declined (60.6%), divorce rose (8.7%), and single-mother households peaked. The Family and Medical Leave Act expanded protections for working parents.

2000s: Fertility stabilized around 2.8, with first births at 23.3. Marriage continued to fall (59.4%), and Utah became more racially diverse (about 11% non-White). The Great Recession contributed to delayed childbearing.



THIS CENTURY

2010s: Fertility fell to 2.5 children, and the average age at first birth rose to 24.5. Marriage rates dropped to 58.3%, while divorce rates peaked at 10.1%. Rising housing costs and student debt delayed family formation.

2020s: Fertility fell below replacement levels for the first time (1.9 in 2020; 1.8 in 2023). Utah women married later (median 25.2), with rising rates of never-married (28.8%) and divorce (~10%). The pandemic disrupted short-term fertility, while long-term declines reflected financial pressures like housing and childcare.

LOOKING AHEAD

Families in Utah are evolving. Utah historically relied on births for population growth, but declining fertility rates have shifted growth to migration. Social changes, including same-sex marriage and state-level abortion laws, may influence fertility patterns. If fertility rates continue to decline, Utah's population will have more older adults, increasing pressure on social services and other state resources.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

Policymakers can reduce costs that shape family decisions. Utah leaders can expand access to affordable childcare, strengthen prenatal and postnatal care, improve mental health supports, and consider targeted tax credits or other financial supports for families with young children. Because housing costs are closely tied to delayed family formation, policies that increase affordable housing options near jobs, schools, and transportation can also help families plan for children with greater confidence.

Employers can help. Family-friendly workplace policies such as flexible scheduling, hybrid workplaces, paid leave, and equitable wages can help reduce financial and logistical barriers to having children. Employers can also normalize caregiving for both women and men by encouraging parental leave use, offering phased returns after birth or adoption, and making advancement compatible with family responsibilities.

Communities can strengthen support networks. As more young adults live farther from extended family, neighborhoods, faith communities, schools, healthcare providers, and nonprofit organizations can create practical supports such as parent groups, childcare cooperatives, respite care, mentoring for new parents, and easier referrals to food, health, and family services. These local networks can reduce isolation, ease caregiving pressures, and help Utah families access resources before challenges become crises.

SUPPORT MOTHERS IN UTAH

You can help Utah women and families by strengthening community support networks, reducing barriers, and advocating for family friendly workplaces. See below for calls to action and resources that can help ensure that all families in Utah can grow, excel, and thrive.

Data Source: [UWLP Snapshot No. 62 \(2025\)](#)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Learn More:** Explore resources in the UWLP Health Across the Lifespan [Resource Kit](#).
- **Review:** Find goals, perceptions, and community partners on the Health Across the Lifespan Spoke [webpage](#).
- **Get Involved:** Connect to grassroots movement happening within [A Bolder Way Forward](#).
- **Take Action:** Help move the needle and discover additional [Calls to Action](#) for individuals, groups, organizations and communities.



Look for opportunities to support caregivers in your family and community. Consider forming a support network at your church, school, or community center.



Encourage your company or organization to adopt family-friendly workplace policies.



Work with political, nonprofit, and business leaders to pass meaningful legislation supporting Utah's aging population.

Learn more at www.utwomen.org

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