



National Stepfamily  
Resource Center

DEMOGRAPHY OF  
STEPFAMILIES



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# CHANGES IN AMERICAN FAMILIES

- Marry later
- Fewer marriages
- More cohabitation
- More premarital births; fewer children overall
- More relationship transitions
- More economic hardship



# WHAT IS A STEPFAMILY?

Couple (married or unmarried) in which one of the adults has a child or children from a prior union...

- Unmarried mother/father, her/his child, and her/his partner/spouse (not the father/mother of the child)
- Divorced mother/father, her/his child, and her/his new partner/spouse
- Widowed mother/father, her/his child, and her/his new partner/spouse



# PROBLEMS WITH DATA SOURCES

- Referents change from data source to data source
- Some valuable data no longer available
- Estimates may not reflect the populations (e.g., diversity)
- Cross-sectional vs. longitudinal sources



# ESTIMATES FROM MARRIAGE/DIVORCE DATA

- About 72% of all men and women eventually marry
- About 63% marry only once (13% marry twice, 3% marry 3+ times)
- Of those women 15-44 years...
  - 46% currently married and 20% of spouses had been married before; 19% had children from prior relationship
  - 9% cohabiting and 32% of partners had been married before; 32% had children from prior relationship



# MORE ESTIMATES...

- Less than 50% of first marriages end in divorce
- About 75% will remarry (65% bring children from prior union)
- About 60% redivorce



# THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

Child = < 18 years

*Our best estimates =*

- 70% live with 2 married parents; 23% with single mother; 5% with single father
- 17% reside with stepparent via parent's remarriage or repartnering
- Of these, 71% reside with half-sibling



# ISSUES OF UNDERESTIMATION

- Estimates based on data from resident households only
- No estimate for those with only adult stepchildren (18 years and older)





# CHARACTERISTICS OF STEPFAMILIES

Established typically when children  
**are young**

Common stepfamily forms are:

- Simple structure = One resident stepparent only
- Complex structure = One resident stepparent and one nonresident stepparent combination



# CHARACTERISTICS OF STEPFAMILIES

## Race

- Divorce is more common among Blacks follow by repartnering rather than remarriage
- Remarriage more common among whites

## Education

## Number of children



# OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

## Family background

- Early parental divorce
- Less religiosity

## Cohabitation experience

## Premarital births



# STABILITY OF STEPFAMILIES

## Remarriages

- About 63% intact at 10 years
- Constraints or barriers to leaving

## Repartnerships

- Short lived
- Variations by race



# SUMMARY

- Stepfamilies are not new; only structure has changed
- Much of what applies to one applies to the other
- Presentations in this series address knowledge and strategies for establishing stability



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