Married-Couple Families With Children

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Introduction

Today, the proportion of Americans who have been divorced at some point in their lives is higher than at any other time in U.S. history. As of June 1985, 16.9 percent of the total population 15 years and over and 22.7 percent of the ever-married population 15 years and over was ever divorced.[1] In addition, a record-breaking proportion of children are born to unmarried mothers—23.4 percent in 1986 (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1988). These two phenomena have led to increasing numbers of children living in families that do not contain both of their biological parents. While one of these family types—single-parent families—is discussed in another paper in this report, this paper focuses on married-couple families with children in the household, with an emphasis on families with stepchildren.

A stepchild in a married-couple family is defined as the biological child of one spouse in the married couple but not of the other spouse. Stepchildren may be only children or they may have full, half, or step siblings. Those full, half, and step siblings may live in the same household, or in another household, or in some combination of the two. For this analysis, the universe is limited to those siblings living together in the same married-couple family household.

It has been estimated that about one-quarter of children today will live with a stepparent by the time they have reached 16 years of age (Zill, 1988). Numerous scholars (including Bachrach, 1983; Bumpass, 1984; Cherlin and McCarthy, 1985; Hobart, 1988; Lutz, 1983; and Macklin, 1980) have cited the critical need for more information on the characteristics of stepfamilies as they have become a more common family type. Many of the studies on stepfamilies to date have been based on small, unrepresentative samples and/or on personal observation (for example, Fishman, 1983).

A few studies have been national in scope, but have had other limitations. Bachrach (1983) analyzed data from the 1976 National Survey of Family Growth. These data are nationally representative, but they are somewhat dated, and they only include mothers aged 15 through 44 years—a problem that Bachrach readily acknowledged. Bachrach (1986) also analyzed data from the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth, but only in regard to adoptive children. The Current Population Survey (CPS) data analyzed here show that many mothers in step and adoptive families are 45 years and over and thus would have been excluded from Bachrach's universes in both 1976 and 1982 (see table C). Most studies have focused on children as the unit of analysis. However, it is important to learn more about the family as a unit, since stepfamily and mixed family situations are becoming more common, and because many private activities and public programs are directed toward families, not individual children.

Some groundbreaking work on types of families and children was done by Moorman and Hernandez (1989) in their analysis of data from the June 1980 CPS. The same methodology is employed in this analysis, which extends the earlier analysis by including data from the June 1985 CPS. This permits a comparison of family type characteristics over a 5-year time period.

Methodology

The data analyzed in this paper are from the Current Population Survey, a monthly household survey that consisted of approximately 66,000 households in June 1980 and 60,000 households in June 1985 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986).[2] Supplements to the June 1980 and June 1985 CPS questionnaires included questions on the marital and birth history of women. In addition, limited data were collected on men's marital history.

Married-couple families with at least one "own child" under age 18 living in their household (regardless of the child's marital status) are the sole focus of this study.[3] Estimates of how many children were stepchildren, how many were adoptive children, and how many were biological children have to be derived indirectly since the CPS instrument did not distinguish between the three types of "own" children present in the household.[4] The marital and birth history data from the June

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[2] The U.S. population controls used to weight the June 1980 CPS data were based on the April 1, 1970, census counts. The June 1985 CPS data were weighted using population estimates based on the April 1, 1980, census counts. The estimates based on the 1980 census counts are somewhat larger than corresponding estimates based on the 1970 census counts. This should be kept in mind when analyzing the data.

[3] The "own child" concept combines three distinct types of children into the single category of own children: biological children, stepchildren, and adoptive children. In the present study "own children" are children of the householder and/or the householder's spouse.

In the analysis of families, "own children" usually refers only to single (never-married) children. However, for this study, children of all marital statuses are included in the analysis if they are under age 18 and living in their parents' household.

[4] "Stepchild" is now a separate relationship category on the CPS Control Card as of 1988. However, this category will only identify stepchildren of the person in column 1. It will not identify any stepchildren of the spouse of the person in column 1. Also, there is still no differentiation made in the CPS relationship categories between biological children and adopted children.

The Bureau of the Census' relatively new Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) provides the opportunity to explicitly examine household and family relationships in great depth with its detailed topical modules on household relationships. These topical modules were asked on Wave 8 of the 1984 Panel and Wave 4 of the 1985 Panel. Beginning with the 1986 Panel, the detailed household relationships are now asked as a regular part of Wave 2 of each SIPP panel.

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[1] Unpublished data from the June 1985 Current Population Survey.

supplements were used to ascertain the exact relationship of each child to each spouse in married-couple family households.

Each child who was the biological child of one of the parents but not of the other parent was classified as a step-child for the purposes of this study. If one spouse adopted the biological child of the other spouse, the child was still considered to be a stepchild. Chil-dren who were the biological children of both parents were classified as bio-logical children, while all "own" chil-dren who were not biological children of either of their parents were classified as adoptive children. A detailed state-ment on the methods used to derive the various child types is presented in a technical note at the end of this paper.

Family Type Classification

All of the married-couple family house-holds with own children were classified according to their various parent-child relationships (see figure 1). This family-group typology was drawn directly from Moorman and Hernandez (1989).

1. Biological families—All the own children were biological children of both parents.

2. Adoptive families—All the own chil-dren were adoptive children of both parents.

3. Biological mother-stepfather fami-lies—All the own children were bio-logical children of the mother and stepchildren of the father.

4. Biological father-stepmother fami-lies—All the own children were bio-logical children of the father and stepchildren of the mother.

5. Joint biological-step families—At least one child was a biological child of both parents, at least one was a biological child of one parent and a stepchild of the other parent,

Table A. **Children Living with Biological, Step, and Adoptive Married-Couple Parents, by Race of Mother: June 1980 and 1985**

(Numbers in thousands)

Parent type and race of mother	1980		1985	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
ALL RACES				
Total own children under 18 years	47,248	100.0	45,347	100.0
Biological mother and father	39,523	83.7	37,213	82.1
Biological mother-stepfather.	5,355	11.3	6,049	13.3
Stepmother-biological father	727	1.5	740	1.6
Adoptive mother and father	1,350	2.9	866	1.9
Unknown mother or father	293	0.6	479	1.1
WHITE				
Total own children under 18 years	42,329	100.0	39,942	100.0
Biological mother and father	35,852	84.7	33,202	83.1
Biological mother-stepfather.	4,362	10.3	4,918	12.3
Stepmother-biological father	664	1.6	676	1.7
Adoptive mother and father	1,209	2.9	754	1.9
Unknown mother or father	242	0.6	391	1.0
BLACK				
Total own children under 18 years	3,775	100.0	3,816	100.0
Biological mother and father	2,698	71.5	2,661	69.7
Biological mother-stepfather.	877	23.2	952	24.9
Stepmother-biological father	46	1.2	50	1.3
Adoptive mother and father	119	3.1	76	2.0
Unknown mother or father	35	0.9	77	2.0
OTHER RACES[1]				
Total own children under 18 years	1,144	100.0	1,589	100.0
Biological mother and father	973	85.1	1,350	84.9
Biological mother-stepfather.	116	10.1	179	11.3
Stepmother-biological father	17	1.5	13	0.8
Adoptive mother and father	22	2.0	36	2.3
Unknown mother or father	16	1.4	11	0.7

[1]"Other races" is a category principally comprising American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asians, and Pacific Islanders.
Source: Current Population Survey.

and no other type of child was pre-sent; or a stepchild of each parent and no other type of child was pre-sent.

6. Joint biological-adoptive families— At least one child was a biological child of both parents, at least one was an adopted child of both par-ents, and no other type of child was present.

7. Joint step-adoptive families—At least one child was a biological child of one parent and a stepchild of the other parent, at least one

was an adopted child of both par-ents, and no other type of child was present.

8. Joint biological-step-adoptive fami-lies—At least one child was a bio-logical child of both parents, at least one was the biological child of one parent and the stepchild of the other, and at least one was an adopted child of both parents.

9. Type-unknown families—At least one child had at least one parent for whom the nature of the relation-ship could not be designated.

Analysis

Children in Married-Couple Families

The number of own children under age 18 in married-couple families declined by 4.0 percent between June 1980 and June 1985, from 47,248,000 to 45,347,000 (see table A). Similarly, the number of children living with both of their biological parents in married-couple family situations dropped from 39,523,000 in 1980 to 37,213,000 in 1985 – a 5.8-percent decline. In striking contrast, the number of children living with either a stepmother or a stepfather increased by 11.6 percent, from 6,082,000 in 1980 to 6,789,000 in 1985. Stepchildren made up 15.0 percent of all children in married-couple families in 1985, up from 12.9 percent in 1980.

The trends in the number of own children in White married-couple families closely mirrored those for all races.[5] The story was quite different for children in Black married-couple families, however. There was no significant change in the number of own children in Black married-couple families between 1980 and 1985 (see table A). In June of 1980, there were 3,775,000 such children, while in June of 1985 they numbered 3,816,000. There were also no significant changes in the number of children living with two biological parents or with one stepparent in Black married-couple families between 1980 and 1985.

In 1985, only 69.7 percent of children in Black married-couple families lived with both biological parents, while about 26.3 percent lived with a stepparent (see table A and figure 2). In contrast, 83.1 percent of children in White families lived with both biological parents, while only 14.0 percent were stepchildren.

[5] Race, in this study, always refers to the race of the mother. In a small number of cases either or both the race of the father and/or the race of the child(ren) will be different than that of the mother.

Prevalence of Types of Married-Couple Families

The number (and proportion) of married-couple families with children that had at least one stepchild living in the household increased between 1980 and 1985 (family types 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8). In June of 1985, 4,469,000 married-couple families had at least one stepchild living in the household (see table B and figure 1). This was 18.7 percent of all married-couple families with children. In 1980, there were only 3,888,000 such families (or 16.1 percent of all married-couple families with children).

Married-couple families with stepchildren were closely divided between those that contained the biological children of only one of the parents (family types 3 and 4) and those that contained a "yours-ours" mix of children (family types 5, 7, and 8). In 1985, stepchildren of one or the other parent were the only children in 2,387,000 married-couple families, while 2,082,000 married-couple families contained a "yours-ours" mix of children (see figure 1). Stepchild-only families were 10.0 percent of all married-couple families with children in 1985, while mixed stepfamilies were 8.7 percent of all such families. The comparable figures for 1980 were slightly lower – 8.3 percent and 7.9 percent, respectively.

The vast majority of stepchildren in married-couple families were living with their biological mothers and stepfathers (see table A and figure 2). Only 740,000 (or 10.9 percent) of the 6,789,000 stepchildren in the United States in 1985 were living with their biological fathers and stepmothers. This was not significantly different than the 727,000 stepchildren living with their biological fathers in 1980. The latter figure was 12.0 percent of all stepchildren in 1980.

Marital History of Parents

The mix of children in a married-couple family is obviously greatly affected by the number of times each spouse has been married. If each member of the couple has only been married once, most of the children will be either biological or adoptive.[6] In almost 9 out of 10 families where there are only biological children, both parents have been married once, while in only about 3 out of 100 families with only biological children have both parents been married more than once (see table C). The marital histories of married-couple families in which the children have a biological mother and a stepfather stand in stark contrast to the totally biological families. Both parents had been married once in only 24.5 percent of biological mother-stepfather families in 1980 and 28.3 percent of such families in 1985, while the proportions with both parents married more than once were 46.8 percent in 1980 and 37.6 percent in 1985.

A significant number of the biological mother-stepfather families contain children who were born to the women prior to their first marriage. In 1985, 33.8 percent of these women were only married once, but their husbands were stepfathers to the children in the family.[7] There is some evidence that this was up slightly from the 30.9 percent figure for 1980.[8] The actual proportions of women who had children prior to their first marriage would be higher to

[6] Stepchildren may be found in married-couple families in which both spouses have only been married once if the children were born out of wedlock to the mother. Our methodology does not allow men to have biological children before their first marriage (although this is obviously possible) because most such children are living with their mothers.

[7] The methodology used to identify child-type classifies all biological children of the mother who were born before her current marriage as stepchildren of her current husband. It is probable that some of these children may, in fact, be the biological children of the woman's current husband.
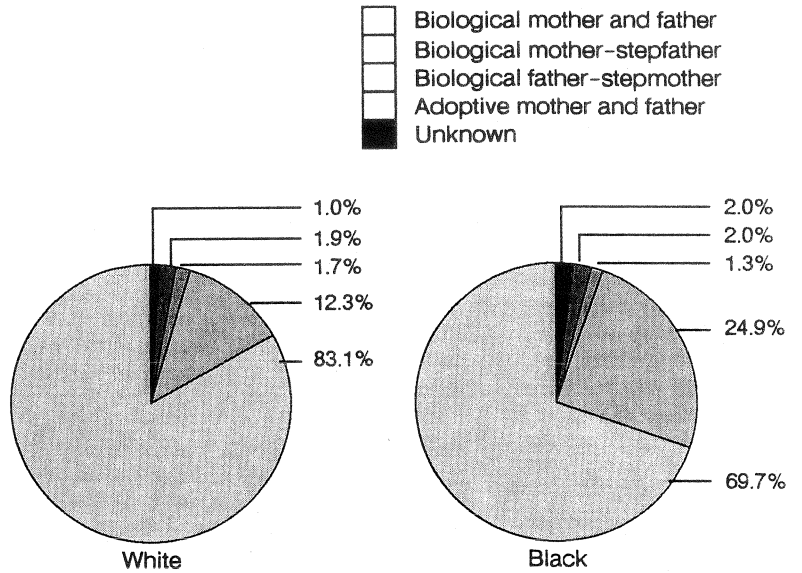
[8] The increase between the 1980 (30.9 percent) and the 1985 (33.8 percent) estimates is significant at the 88–percent level of confidence. The usual minimum level of confidence accepted by the Bureau of the Census is 90 percent.

Figure 1
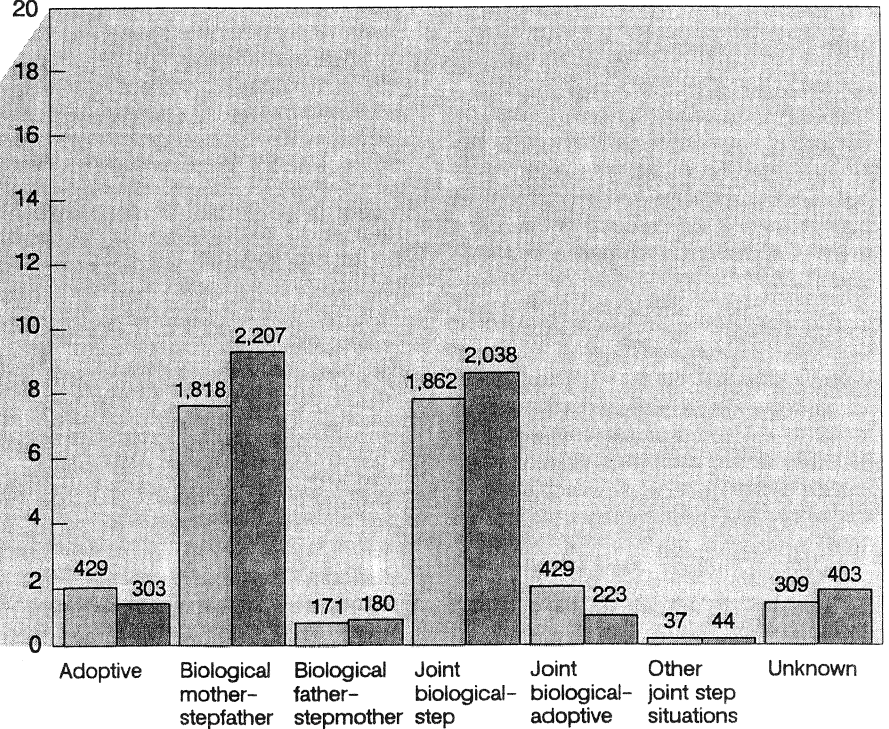**Married–Couple Families With Children, by Type of Family: June 1980 and 1985**
(Numbers in thousands)
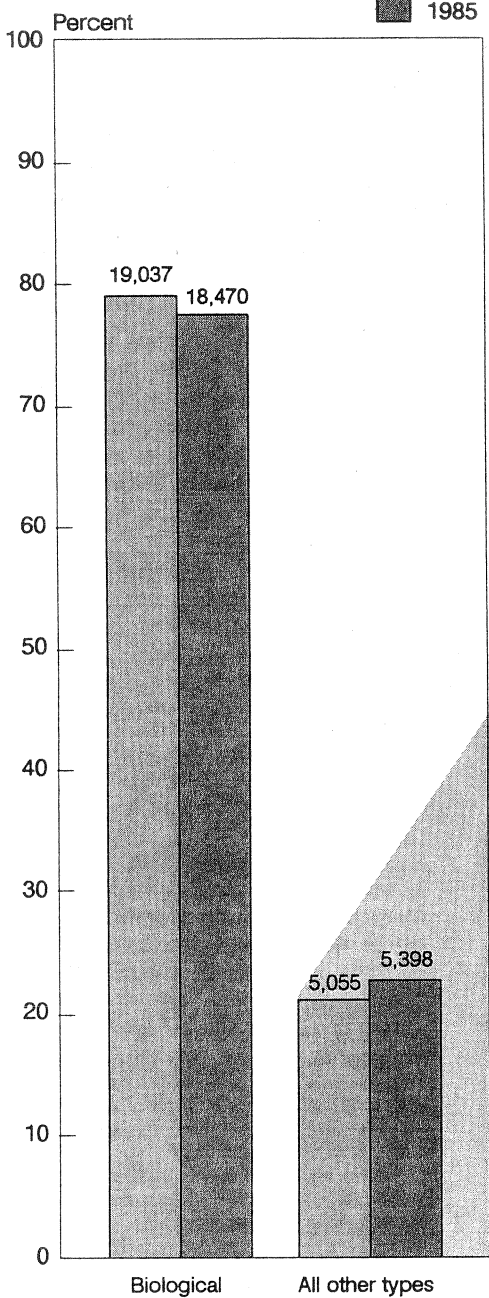
1980
1985

Figure 2
Distributions of Children for White and Black Mothers in Married–Couple Families, by Type of Child: June 1985

Biological mother and father
Biological mother-stepfather
Biological father-stepmother
Adoptive mother and father
Unknown

White

1.0%
1.9%
1.7%
12.3%
83.1%

Black

2.0%
2.0%
1.3%
24.9%
69.7%

All other types
Percent

Adoptive — 429, 303
Biological mother-stepfather — 1,818, 2,207
Biological father-stepmother — 171, 180
Joint biological-step — 1,862, 2,038
Joint biological-adoptive — 429, 223
Other joint step situations — 37, 44
Unknown — 309, 403

Biological — 19,037, 18,470
All other types — 5,055, 5,398

Table B. Married-Couple Families With Children, by Type of Family and Race of Mother: June 1980 and 1985

(Numbers in thousands)

Family type and race of mother	1980		1985	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
ALL RACES				
Total	24,091	100.0	23,868	100.0
1. Biological	19,037	79.0	18,470	77.4
2. Adoptive	429	1.8	303	1.3
3. Biological mother-stepfather	1,818	7.5	2,207	9.2
4. Biological father-stepmother	171	0.7	180	0.8
5. Joint biological-step	1,862	7.7	2,038	8.5
6. Joint biological-adoptive	429	1.8	223	0.9
7. Joint step-adoptive	12	-	15	0.1
8. Joint bio-step-adoptive	25	0.1	29	0.1
9. Unknown	309	1.3	403	1.7
WHITE				
Total	21,713	100.0	21,199	100.0
1. Biological	17,471	80.5	16,725	78.9
2. Adoptive	387	1.8	272	1.3
3. Biological mother-stepfather	1,523	7.0	1,865	8.8
4. Biological father-stepmother	160	0.7	164	0.8
5. Joint biological-step	1,500	6.9	1,623	7.7
6. Joint biological-adoptive	376	1.7	195	0.9
7. Joint step-adoptive	7	-	13	0.1
8. Joint bio-step-adoptive	24	0.1	20	0.1
9. Unknown	264	1.2	324	1.5
BLACK				
Total	1,820	100.0	1,873	100.0
1. Biological	1,122	61.6	1,109	59.2
2. Adoptive	33	1.8	24	1.3
3. Biological mother-stepfather	263	14.5	285	15.2
4. Biological father-stepmother	8	0.4	11	0.6
5. Joint biological-step	310	17.0	349	18.6
6. Joint biological-adoptive	42	2.3	17	0.9
7. Joint step-adoptive	5	0.3	2	0.1
8. Joint bio-step-adoptive	1	0.1	8	0.4
9. Unknown	36	2.0	69	3.7
OTHER RACES[1]				
Total	558	100.0	796	100.0
1. Biological	444	79.6	637	80.0
2. Adoptive	8	1.4	7	0.9
3. Biological mother-stepfather	32	5.7	58	7.3
4. Biological father-stepmother	3	0.5	5	0.6
5. Joint biological-step	51	9.1	66	8.3
6. Joint biological-adoptive	11	2.0	11	1.4
7. Joint step-adoptive	-	-	-	-
8. Joint bio-step-adoptive	-	-	2	0.3
9. Unknown	10	1.8	11	1.4

- Represents zero.
[1]"Other races" is a category principally comprising American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asians, and Pacific Islanders.
Source: Current Population Survey.

the extent that women who had been married more than once bore children before their first marriage.

Married couples who have only stepchildren are more likely to have entered into their current marriage less than 10 years ago than those with other types of children or with combinations of child types. Eight or 9 out of every 10 couples with only stepchildren have been married (currently) less than 10 years. In contrast, about one-third of married couples with only biological children have been married less than 10 years. Couples in families which contain both biological children and stepchildren (i.e., a "yours-ours" mix) are less likely than their stepchild-only counterparts to have been married less than 10 years. About three-quarters of these "yours-ours" couples have been married less than a decade.

These data confirm, then, what common sense would lead one to believe: married-couple families which contain only biological and/or adoptive children are more likely to contain parents who have been married only to each other and who have been in their current marriage for a longer period of time than parents in families which contain stepchildren. For there to be a stepchild in a family, at least one of the parents had to be married twice or the mother had to have a birth prior to her first marriage. Married couples who have adopted children have to have been married long enough to have both made the decision to adopt and to have waited for a baby to become available for adoption. This would suggest that adoptive families would be more likely to have intact first marriages and to have been married longer than stepfamilies. Both of these conditions are, in fact, true.

Age of Mothers

Mothers in stepfamily situations are younger than those in other family types. The average age for a mother in a married-couple family with own children (under 18) in the household was 35.2 years old in 1985 (see table C).

Mothers in joint biological-step families had the youngest mean age (31.9 years) while those in stepfather-only families had the second youngest age on average (34.1 years). The oldest mothers in married-couple households with own children were those in adoptive-only families (44.7 years) followed by those in joint biological-adoptive families (39.3 years).

It is not surprising that mothers with adoptive children were the oldest on average, for the same reasons that they were likely to have only been married once and for a relatively long time. Many of the adoptive-only mothers probably adopted children only after spending a long period of time trying to conceive their own child followed by a period of time on a waiting list to adopt a child. Bachrach (1986), in her analysis of data from the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth, found that women in families that adopt children were more likely to be older, (otherwise) childless, and have fecundity problems. Some mothers in joint biological-adoptive families may have adopted because they had problems conceiving a child or an additional child, while others may have felt that they had enough biological children but still wanted more children. Any of the above joint biological-adoptive scenarios would have led to an elongated period with own children in the household.

Age of Fathers
The mean age of fathers in the various family types resembled that of their wives, on average. However, the male distribution was uniformly 2 to 3 years older with the exception of stepmother-biological father families, where in 1985 the difference between the average ages of the parents showed the husband to be 5.5 years older than the wife.[9] These differences in average ages were to be expected since women tend to marry older men. The U.S. National Center for Health Statistics (1989) reported that in 1983 all grooms had a mean age at marriage

that was 2.7 years older than all brides. Previously divorced grooms were 6.8 years older on average than their never-married brides, while previously widowed grooms were 11.3 years older on average than their never-married brides. Almost 52 percent of the stepmother-biological father families in the June 1985 CPS involved marriages between previously divorced or widowed men and never-married women.

Education of Parents
Stepfathers generally had less formal education than all fathers in married-couple families. In 1985, only 18.3 percent of all married-couple fathers had failed to graduate from high school, while 22.1 percent of fathers in joint biological-step families and 22.7 percent of fathers in stepfather-only families had left school without earning a high school diploma. Fathers in joint biological-step families (35.3 percent) and stepfather-only families (35.5 percent) were also less likely than the average father (43.9 percent) to have had any college education at all.[10]

All types of mothers in married-couple families (except for those in stepmother-only families) were less likely to have had any college education than their male counterparts in both 1980 and 1985.[11] This was not true at the other end of the educational spectrum, however; mothers in some family types

were more likely than the fathers in those family types to have completed high school. In other family types, they were equally or less likely to have completed high school.

Within the typology of mothers in married-couple families, mothers in stepfamilies (like their male counterparts) were more likely than the average mother to be educationally deprived, at least as far as their formal education was concerned. In 1985, only 16.7 percent of all mothers in married-couple families were not high school graduates, but 22.7 percent of mothers in joint biological-step families and 19.7 percent of those in stepfather-only families had not earned a high school diploma. Mothers in joint biological-step families (25.6 percent) and stepfather-only families (29.1 percent) were also less likely to have had any college education than the average mother in married-couple families (36.6 percent).

It would appear, then, that the marital stability exhibited by members of married-couple families was related to their level of (formal) educational attainment (i.e., parents in stepfamilies were more likely to have been married more than once and were likely to be more poorly educated than parents in general). This conclusion is supported by similar findings reported by the National Center for Health Statistics (1989). Vital statistics for 1983 from marriage and divorce registration states showed that men and women dissolving first marriages had a lower level of educational attainment than men and women marrying for the first time. NCHS (1989) also compiled data for 1983 for the 20 states that collected both previous marital status and educational attainment on their marriage records. These data showed that among persons under age 45, persons remarrying had a lower level of educational attainment than those marrying for the first time. Wilson (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1989) concludes that "The lower education of previously divorced persons may well reflect the relatively

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[9] The difference between the mean ages of mothers (44.7 years) and fathers (46.7 years) in adoptive-only families is significant at the 88-percent level of confidence. The usual minimum level of confidence accepted by the Bureau of the Census is 90 percent.

[10] There is no statistically significant difference between the proportions of fathers with any college education in joint biological-step families and in stepfather-only families.

[11] The difference in 1985 between the proportion of mothers (30.7 percent) and fathers (39.5 percent) in joint biological-adoptive families who have any college education is only significant at the 86-percent level of confidence. The usual minimum level of confidence accepted by the Bureau of the Census is 90 percent.

Table C. Distribution of Married-Couple Families With Children, by Type of Family and Selected Characteristics: June 1980 and 1985

Characteristic	All family types[1] 1980	1985	1. Biological 1980	1985	2. Adoptive 1980	1985	3. Stepfather 1980	1985	4. Stepmother 1980	1985	5. Joint biological-step 1980	1985	6. Joint biological-adoptive 1980	1985
Number (thousands)	24,091	23,868	19,037	18,470	429	303	1,818	2,207	171	180	1,862	2,038	429	223
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Times parents married:														
Both once	78.7	76.1	88.0	86.3	82.0	84.1	24.5	28.3	(X)	(X)	39.6	38.3	91.6	92.2
Mother once	7.1	7.7	6.6	7.1	7.3	5.5	6.4	5.5	39.6	51.6	11.2	13.3	4.7	5.5
Father once...........	6.0	7.8	3.1	3.9	5.5	5.3	22.3	28.6	(X)	(X)	19.9	21.0	2.3	1.0
Both more than once	8.2	8.4	2.3	2.7	5.2	5.1	46.8	37.6	60.4	48.4	29.3	27.4	1.4	1.3
Age of mother:														
Under 35 years	50.2	49.7	49.5	48.8	17.7	18.6	52.9	53.5	45.9	45.4	71.2	67.1	14.7	16.2
35 to 44 years..........	33.4	37.6	33.5	37.9	24.9	38.1	38.3	38.8	24.7	36.7	26.2	30.8	58.0	66.7
45 years and over.......	16.3	12.7	17.0	13.3	57.6	43.3	8.8	7.8	29.4	17.9	2.6	2.1	27.3	17.1
Mean age (years)	35.3	35.2	35.5	35.3	46.6	44.7	33.9	34.1	37.4	37.0	31.4	31.9	41.0	39.3
Age of father:														
Under 35 years	39.9	38.6	39.7	38.3	9.8	16.9	42.6	41.8	22.7	13.9	53.3	49.5	10.7	8.1
35 to 44 years..........	34.7	39.8	34.8	40.0	26.3	30.8	33.6	37.7	40.7	51.1	36.3	40.0	43.4	57.4
45 years and over.......	25.4	21.7	25.5	21.7	63.6	52.3	23.9	20.5	36.6	35.0	10.4	10.5	45.7	34.5
Mean age (years)	38.2	37.9	38.2	37.9	48.9	46.7	37.5	37.3	42.0	42.5	34.7	35.1	44.2	42.0
Duration of current marriage:														
Under 10 years	40.3	41.9	33.4	33.8	10.3	15.1	88.3	87.6	79.5	79.2	73.5	74.1	5.1	1.9
10 to 19 years..........	36.3	38.8	40.2	43.7	28.0	30.9	11.6	12.4	16.4	15.3	26.2	25.7	42.4	59.6
20 to 29 years..........	18.7	15.9	21.5	18.8	35.9	33.5	-	-	2.3	3.5	0.2	0.2	43.6	37.1
30 years or more........	4.7	3.5	4.9	3.7	25.6	20.5	-	-	1.8	1.9	-	-	8.9	1.4
Number of children:														
Total own children.......	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.3	1.2	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.4	2.8	2.8	3.8	3.9
Biological children	1.6	1.6	1.9	1.8	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	1.3	1.3	2.4	2.5
Adoptive children.......	0.1	-	(X)	(X)	1.3	1.2	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	1.4	1.4
Stepchildren...........	0.3	0.3	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.5	(X)	(X)
Mother's education:														
Less than 12 years	21.2	16.7	18.7	15.0	24.5	24.7	30.2	19.7	22.8	14.9	30.9	22.7	31.9	24.5
Exactly 12 years	48.0	46.8	48.3	46.0	41.7	43.4	47.5	51.2	43.9	45.8	49.9	51.7	43.4	44.9
More than 12 years	30.8	36.6	33.0	39.0	33.8	31.9	22.3	29.1	33.3	39.4	19.1	25.6	24.9	30.7
Father's education:														
Less than 12 years	22.9	18.3	20.9	16.8	26.8	24.2	27.2	22.7	27.6	17.3	30.3	22.1	34.0	22.9
Exactly 12 years	37.2	37.9	36.8	37.2	29.1	35.1	41.6	41.8	35.3	34.8	42.7	42.6	29.1	37.6
More than 12 years	39.9	43.9	42.3	46.1	43.8	40.7	31.1	35.5	37.1	47.9	27.0	35.3	37.1	39.5
Parents' labor force status:														
Both in labor force.......	41.2	46.0	40.5	45.0	40.6	37.4	50.4	56.3	53.7	55.9	41.0	47.1	34.5	34.8
Father in labor force.....	54.7	49.5	55.9	51.0	47.2	45.9	43.8	38.5	40.3	37.5	54.7	48.2	58.9	59.5
Mother in labor force.....	1.5	1.8	1.4	1.7	2.2	4.3	1.8	2.4	2.2	2.8	1.7	1.8	1.9	-
Both not in labor force ...	2.6	2.7	2.3	2.3	10.0	12.3	4.0	2.7	3.8	3.9	2.6	2.9	4.8	5.8
Family Income:[2]														
Low income............	27.5	29.2	25.4	27.1	24.9	28.1	35.7	36.0	25.9	19.7	38.7	39.9	29.8	26.0
Middle income..........	35.0	34.3	35.8	35.0	31.9	30.0	30.8	30.9	28.8	31.4	33.9	34.6	28.8	33.2
High income...........	32.4	32.9	33.7	34.3	41.0	36.6	26.7	28.4	39.4	48.8	22.6	22.1	35.8	38.1
Not reported	5.1	3.6	5.1	3.5	2.3	5.0	6.8	4.7	5.9	0.1	4.8	3.4	5.6	2.7
Median income (dollars)[3].	20,697	28,162	21,095	29,132	22,484	28,389	18,133	25,272	21,621	34,850	16,985	22,932	21,121	30,867

X Not applicable.   - Represents zero.
[1]Includes the three family types—joint step-adoptive, joint biological-step-adoptive, and unknown—for which data are not shown separately in this table.
[2]The income intervals are as follows:

Interval	1980	1985
Low.	Under $15,000	Under $20,000
Middle.	$15,000-24,999	$20,000-34,999
High	$25,000 or more	$35,000 or more

The after-inflation values of the 1980 and 1985 intervals are comparable, to the extent possible, given the limitations of the intervals available on the survey form.
[3]For the median computations, the universe was restricted to families with reported incomes.
Source: Current Population Survey.

higher instability of the first marriages of women and men with lower education."

Labor Force Participation of Parents

The proportion of married-couple families with children in which both parents were in the labor force increased from 41.2 percent in 1980 to 46.0 percent in 1985 (see table C). Concomitantly, the proportion of such families in which only the father was in the labor force dropped from 54.7 percent to 49.5 percent over the same period. One can see that a significant milestone was passed between 1980 and 1985. In 1980, only the father was in the labor force in the majority of married-couple families with children (54.7 percent). By 1985, this was no longer true: it was only slightly less common for both parents to be in the labor force (46.0 percent) than it was for the father alone to be in the labor force (49.5 percent).

The proportion of married-couple families with children in which only the mother was in the labor force rose slightly between 1980 and 1985, while the proportion in which neither parent was in the labor force did not change significantly. In 1985, 2 out of every 100 married-couple families with children had only the mother in the labor force, while neither parent was in the labor force in about 3 out of every 100 married-couple families with children.

Families which contain only stepchildren were the most likely of the family types to have mothers in the labor force. In 1985, mothers were in the labor force in 58.7 percent of biological mother-stepfather, married-couple families. This higher-than-average labor force participation rate by mothers in families with stepfathers may be related to 1) the likelihood of their being in the labor force before their current marriage, suggesting an attachment to their work life and a desire to continue working; 2) an unwillingness to be economically dependent on a man after the relationship with their child's father

did not work out; 3) some feeling of obligation to help support their biological child; and 4) economic necessity (see the income section below). Davis (1984) argues that fear of divorce and of subsequent impoverishment has led to a general increase in labor force participation among American women with children. One might expect that if this, in fact, were true, the fear would be greatest among those women who had already experienced a disrupted relationship.

In biological father-stepmother families, the stepmothers also are more likely to be in the labor force than the average wife in a married-couple family with children (58.7 percent versus 47.8 percent). These women may not be as likely to feel compelled or to want to stay at home with their stepchildren; or the children may be older, allowing more time for labor force participation by both spouses.

Family Income

The majority of stepfamilies are at an economic disadvantage relative to other family types. Median family income for all married-couple family households with children in 1985 was $28,162 (see table C).[12] The family type with the lowest median family income was the joint biological-step family. These families had a median family income of only $22,932. The second

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[12] Family income was transcribed from information first obtained at the time a household entered the Current Population Survey and updated when it reentered the survey. For about one-quarter of the sample the data are for the year ending June 30, while for the other quarters the data are for the years ending March 31, April 30, and May 31, respectively. Income is based on the respondent's estimate of total family money income in broad, fixed income levels. Previous research has shown that the use of broad income levels to record money income tends to reduce the rate of nonreporting while increasing the likelihood that the amounts reported will be significantly understated as compared with results from more detailed questions.

lowest median income belonged to stepfather-biological mother families. Their median family income in 1985 was $25,272.

Strikingly, stepmother-biological father families had the highest median family income in 1985— $34,850.[13] While instances in which the father retains custody of a child from a previous marriage are still quite unusual, they are more likely to occur when the father's financial circumstances are good. But causality is not at all clear.[14]

Conclusion

Two-parent families are becoming increasingly heterogeneous. The number of families with just biological children (under age 18)—the so-called "traditional family"—dropped between 1980 and 1985. During the same 5-year period, however, both the number of step-parent-only families (family types 3 and 4) and the number of joint biological-step families (family type 5) increased. As families involving step situations increase, so do the complexities with which members of these families must deal. Children, parents, and other family members are having to adapt to varied family structures ever more frequently. If these alternative family types become embedded enough in our social structure, society will define roles for the family members.

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[13] The difference between the median family incomes of stepmother-biological father families ($34,850) and joint biological-adoptive families ($30,867) is significant at the 86-percent level of confidence. The usual minimum level of confidence accepted by the Bureau of the Census is 90 percent.

[14] Widowhood may have accounted for some of the fathers in biological father-stepmother families retaining custody of their children. These fathers have a higher mean age than the average father in a married-couple-with-children family. Also, since they are still in their prime working years, we can reasonably expect that these older than average fathers will have higher than average incomes.

The families we have focused on here—stepfather-biological mother and joint biological-step—represent the vast majority of stepfamilies and account for most of the recent growth in stepfamilies. The formation of these types of families usually involves pre-marital pregnancy and birth and subsequent marriage and/or divorce and re-marriage. These are behaviors that more frequently occur to people who have relatively low educational attainment and low incomes, characteristics that are carried over to the stepfamilies they form. Thus, in addition to the burdens of dealing with complex familial relationships, many stepfamilies must also cope with social and economic disadvantages as well.

The recent striking growth in step-families has left little time for individuals, families, and society to develop ways of coping with problems associated with living in families where step relationships exist. Researchers are beginning to study more intensely the characteristics of stepfamilies as their numbers increase and they distinguish themselves from other families in their uniquenesses.

Technical Note

A specific child-type was assigned to almost every child by applying the Moorman and Hernandez method as follows. The first set of procedures matched data from the record of each own child in the household with data from the birth history of either the householder (for female householders) or the householder's wife. Required data from the birth history, which lists the biological children ever born to the female householder or to the male householder's spouse, included the child's birth date (from which age was calculated), sex, and whether or not the child currently lived with its mother. If the age and sex of an own child listed on the household roster corresponded exactly with the age and sex of a child listed on the birth history as present in the household, then the own

child was classified as the biological child of the woman.

For some of the remaining own children in the sample, a perfect match to a child listed on the birth history was not possible, because the birth history was missing data pertaining to the child's sex, presence in the household, or both. If the age of an own child was identical to the age of a child listed on the birth history, but data on the child's sex and/or presence in the household were missing from the birth history, then that child was designated to be a biological child of that woman.

The next tier of matching was performed on the remaining unmatched own children under age 18 in the household, if there also were un-matched children under age 18 on the birth history who were reported to be present in the household. The oldest unmatched child (under age 18) on the birth history was designated to be the same child as the oldest unmatched own child (under age 18) in the household. That child was designated as having a biological mother in the household. This procedure was repeated until there were no more unmatched children on the birth history (who were listed as present in the household), or no more unmatched own children in the household, or both.

A possible source of a failure to match an own child to a child listed on the birth history arises from the need to impute the number of children ever born, when it was missing from the birth history. In order to account for the possibility that the imputed value was too small, all as yet unmatched own children in the household were designated as being the biological children of a mother, if the mother had an imputed value for her number of children ever born.

An own child who was still unmatched to a child on the birth history at this point in the matching procedure might be unmatched because birth history information was collected only for a maximum of five births. Therefore,

when the number of children ever born exceeded five, the additional children ever born were distributed equally across the span of years separating the fourth child from the youngest child, and the number of these children who were under age 18 was then estimated. This estimated number of own children (under age 18) in the household was then designated as living with their biological mother.

In order to identify step and adoptive mothers as well as type of father, birth dates of own children were compared to their parents' marriage date.[15] Biological children of the mother who were born after the parents' marriage were designated as having a biological father, while those born before the parents' marriage were designated as having a stepfather. Own children not living with a biological mother who were born before the parents' marriage were designated as living with their biological father and their stepmother if that father had been married previously. Children not living with a biological mother who were born after the parents' current marriage were designated as living with two adoptive parents.

Moorman and Hernandez (1989) evaluated this methodology by comparing their results for children from the June 1980 CPS with data on the distribution of children by parent-type from the 1981 Child Health Supplement to the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). They conclude that "Overall . . . the results from the CPS and corresponding results from the NHIS are generally similar."

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[15] Birth dates of own children ages 14 to 17 were compared to their parents' marriage date. For own children under age 14 with an exact age match, birth date from the mother's birth history was compared to the marriage date. This was necessary because only age (not birth date) was collected on the survey form for children under age 14. If no birth date was available, age from the child's record was compared to the calculated duration of the parents' marriage.

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