Causes of Poverty: Family Structure?

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Overview

- Family structure as cause of poverty – or poverty as cause of family structure?
- Family structure and its connection to poverty rates and poverty composition
- Changes to families over ~50 years
  - Kinds of changes
  - Connection to poverty
Cause or consequence?

• Single-parent families have only one earner
    • ALMOST BY DEFINITION, ANY FAMILY IN WHICH A SINGLE PARENT HAS LIMITED LABOR MARKET SKILLS WILL BE POOR

• Those who are poor have more stress in their lives; stress creates relationship difficulties
  • Relationship difficulties can lead to union dissolution, single-parent families
### Poverty Rates in 2013: By Family Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Official</th>
<th>SPM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Married couple</strong></td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohabitating couple</strong></td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male headed family</strong></td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female headed family</strong></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male nonfamily</strong></td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female nonfamily</strong></td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slide from Geoffrey Wallace
Family Structure and (Official) Poverty Rates for Families with Children

- 1974-2013

Married-Couple Families
- Male-Householders
- Female Householders
Children's Living Arrangements

- Not Relatives
- Relatives
- Father Only
- Mother Only
- Husband-Wife
What % of Poor Families have Female Heads?
How Have Families Changed?

- Well-known rise in single-parent families
- Births: dramatic increase in % nonmarital births, fewer children, born to older parents
- Partnering: dramatic rise of cohabitation/decline of marriage; rise in divorce, then plateau; highly unstable cohabitations; multiple partnerships over life course. Probable rise of same-sex couples with children
- Living arrangements: children living with grandparents or other kin
- Complicated families: children living with half-siblings and step-siblings (multiple-partner fertility of parents), with bio parents, step parents, social parents, some of whom are not living there, living there full-time, or living there part-time; and some children who spend overnights with both parents after the parents split (shared placement/custody)
Contrasting Outcomes by Age 46 for Women Born 1958-1965

(Aughinbaugh et al., 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than High School Diploma</th>
<th>High School Graduate, No College</th>
<th>College Graduate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever Married</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those married, average age at 1\textsuperscript{st} marriage</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those married, ever divorced</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent remarrying</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those who remarry, % divorce</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Change and Poverty

• Some changes linked to increased poverty
  – Increased single-parent families; increased nonmarital births; partnership instability

• Some changes linked to decreased poverty
  – Fewer children, births to older parents

• Some changes unclear
  – Increased cohabitation (compared to what?), potential increases in extended families (for what reasons?), increased partnership instability (“trading up”)

• Some changes complicate measurement
  – Increases in shared placement/custody; incomplete cohabitation
One resource
## Two-Tiered Family Formation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Educated, Higher-Income Couples</th>
<th>Less-Educated, Lower-Income Couples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couples wait until 30s-40s to marry and have kids</td>
<td>Couples become parents in their 20s and never marry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage usually follows a period of cohabitation that tests compatibility</td>
<td>Cohabitation tends to occur shortly before or after conception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage is a celebration of commitment</td>
<td>Many couples feel marriage is out of their reach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage signals readiness to have children</td>
<td>Pregnancy leads to cohabitation, most unions do not last</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having children with more than one partner happens after divorce and remarriage, but greater resources improve odds of success</td>
<td>Having children with more than one partner occurs outside marriage, and may be unintended, or may be intent to cement commitment, which often fails</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cohabitation

• Cohabitation rapidly expanded in last 25 years. Share of women aged 19-44 who cohabited prior to marriage:
  – 11% in 65-74, 41% in 80-84, 56% in 90-94, now 69%
  – But how is this related to families with children?

• Common patterns:
  – Cohabitation – pregnancy –? marriage
  – Cohabitation – marriage – pregnancy
  – Pregnancy –? cohabitation

• In the US, cohabitation frequent and particularly unstable
US cohabitating families less stable

For those born to cohabiting couple,
% who experienced their parents’ split by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Age 1</th>
<th>Age 3</th>
<th>Age 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Andersson (2002)
Figure 2. Age of mother at first birth, by birth cohort of mother: United States, 1910, 1935, and 1960

NOTE: Access data table for Figure 2 at: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db68_tables.pdf#2.

Children Living with Grandparents, Kin, or Nonrelatives

• Between 2001 and 2012, 30% increase in the proportion of children living in three-generation households (Dunifon et al., 2014)

• About 11% of households with children contain a grandparent (not only 3-generation, sometimes custodial grandparents) (Kreider & Ellis, 2011)

• Another 4% contain kin (not parent, grandparent or sibling); another 5% contain a nonrelative (Kreider & Ellis, 2011)
Result: Most children born to unmarried parents will be part of complex families.
References


Curtin, Sally C., Stephanie J. Ventura, and Gladys M. Martinez. “Recent Declines in Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States.” NCHS Data Brief No. 162.


