



INSTITUTE *for*
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POVERTY

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Causes of Poverty: Family Structure?

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Poverty 101 Workshop
May 2015

Research | Training | Policy | Practice

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?

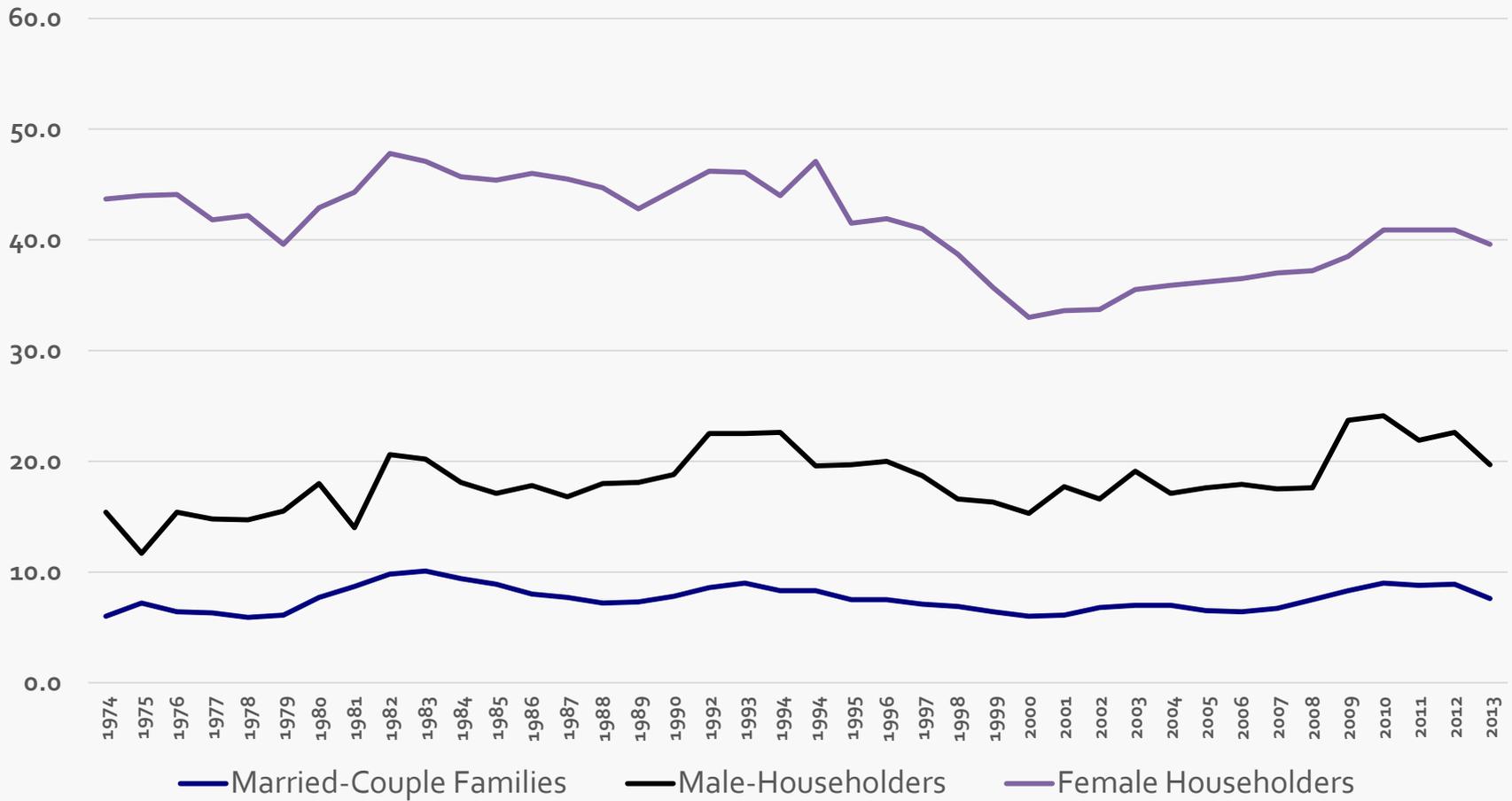
- Single-parent families have only one earner
 - Minimum wage $\$7.25 \times 2000 \text{ hours} = \$14,500$.
Poverty threshold 2013 family of 2 = $\$15,679$
 - ALMOST BY DEFINITION, ANY FAMILY IN WHICH A SINGLE PARENT HAS LIMITED LABOR MARKET SKILLS WILL BE POOR
- Those who are poor have more stress in their lives; stress creates relationship difficulties
 - Relationship difficulties can lead to union dissolution, single-parent families

Poverty Rates in 2013: By Family Type

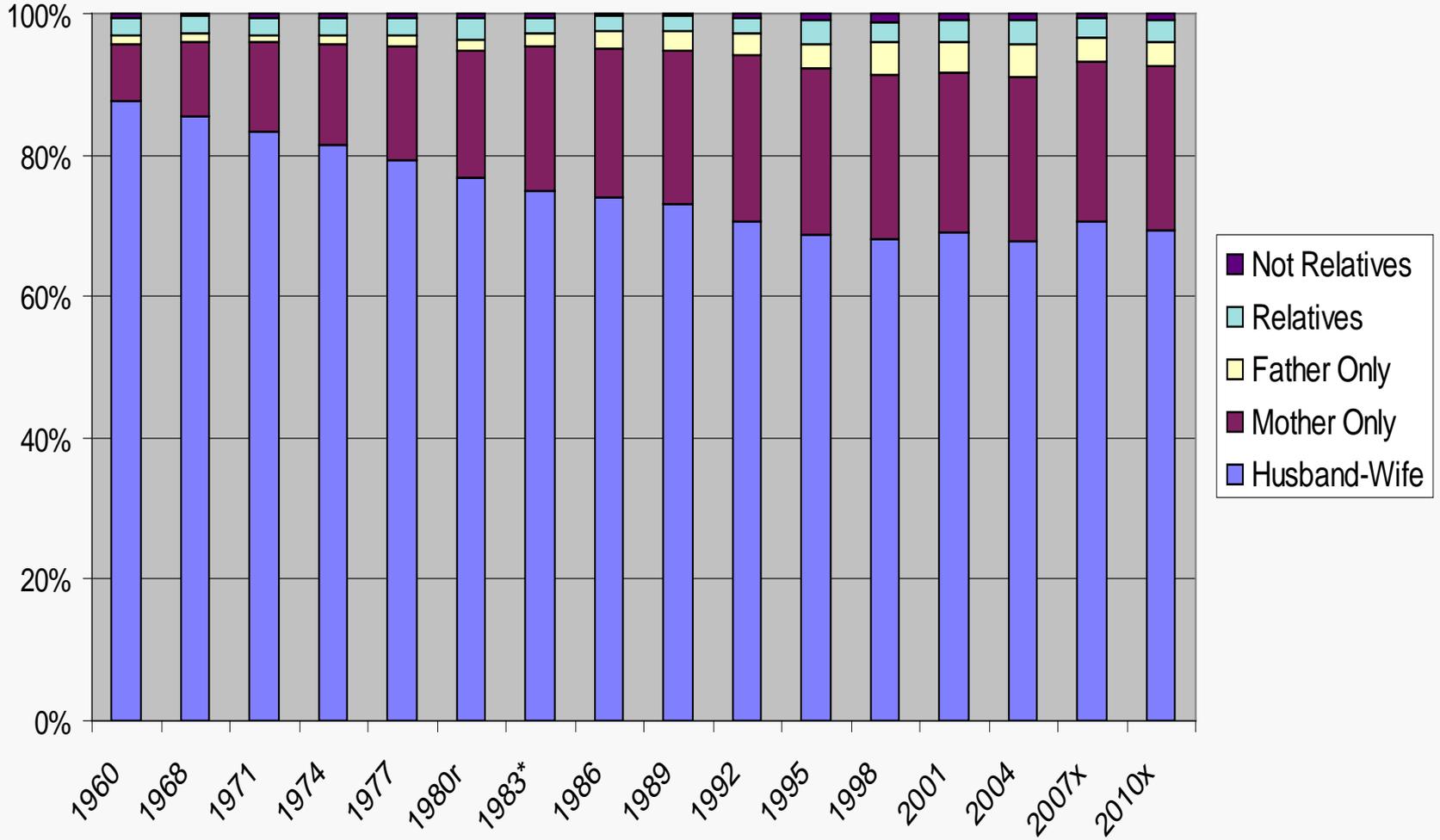
Group	Official	SPM
By family type		
Married couple	6.8%	9.6%
Cohabiting couple	Na	16.4%
Male headed family	17.8%	21.5%
Female headed family	33.3%	30.0%
Male nonfamily	21.7%	24.2%
Female nonfamily	25.8%	26.0%

Slide from Geoffrey Wallace

Family Structure and (Official) Poverty Rates for Families with Children

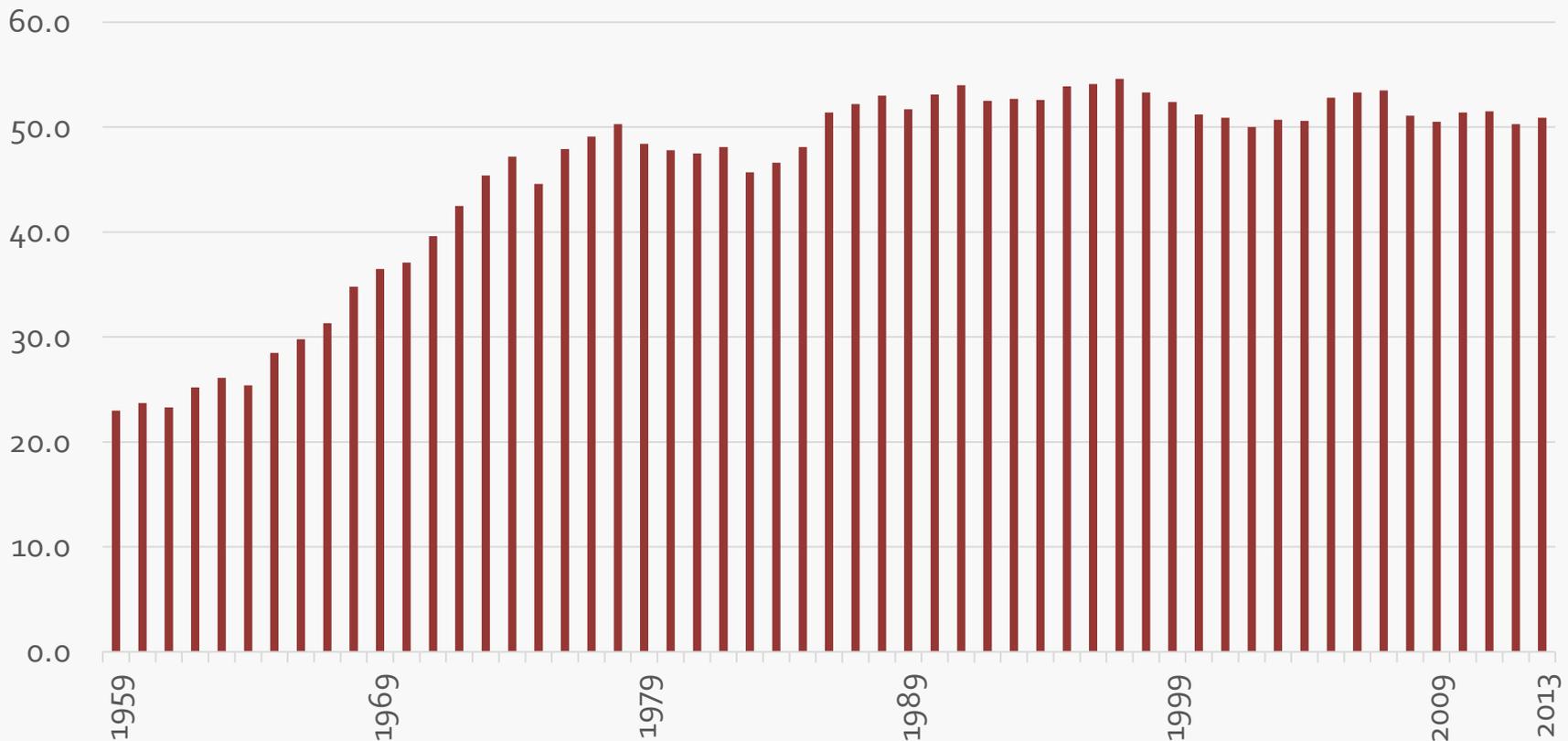


Children's Living Arrangements



Family structure and poverty composition

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

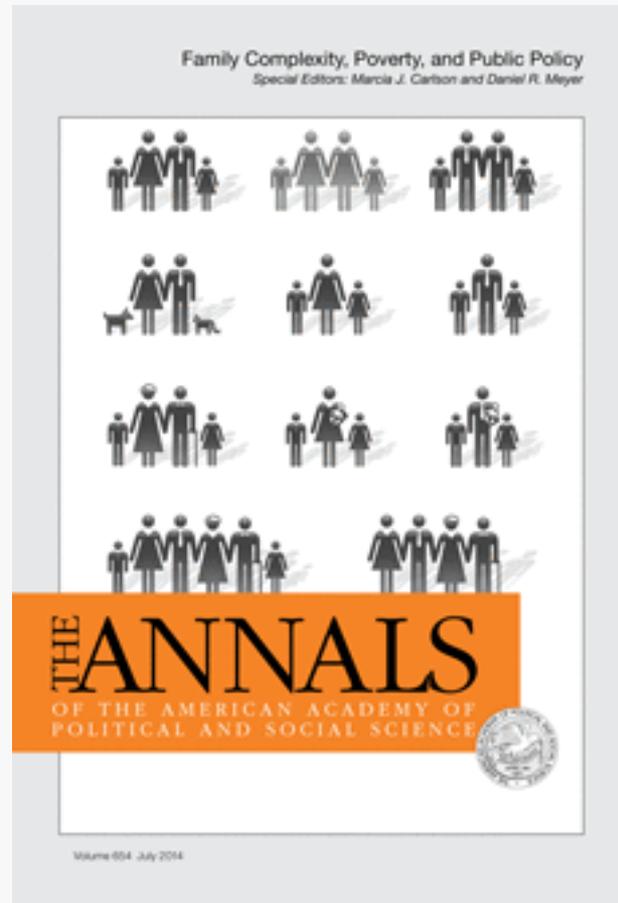
(Aughinbaugh et al., 2013)

	Less than High School Diploma	High School Graduate, No College	College Graduate
Ever Married	81%	87%	89%
Of those married, average age at 1 st marriage	24	25	27
Of those married, ever divorced	48%	43%	27%
Percent remarrying	61%	68%	66%
Of those who remarry, % divorce	41%	39%	26%

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

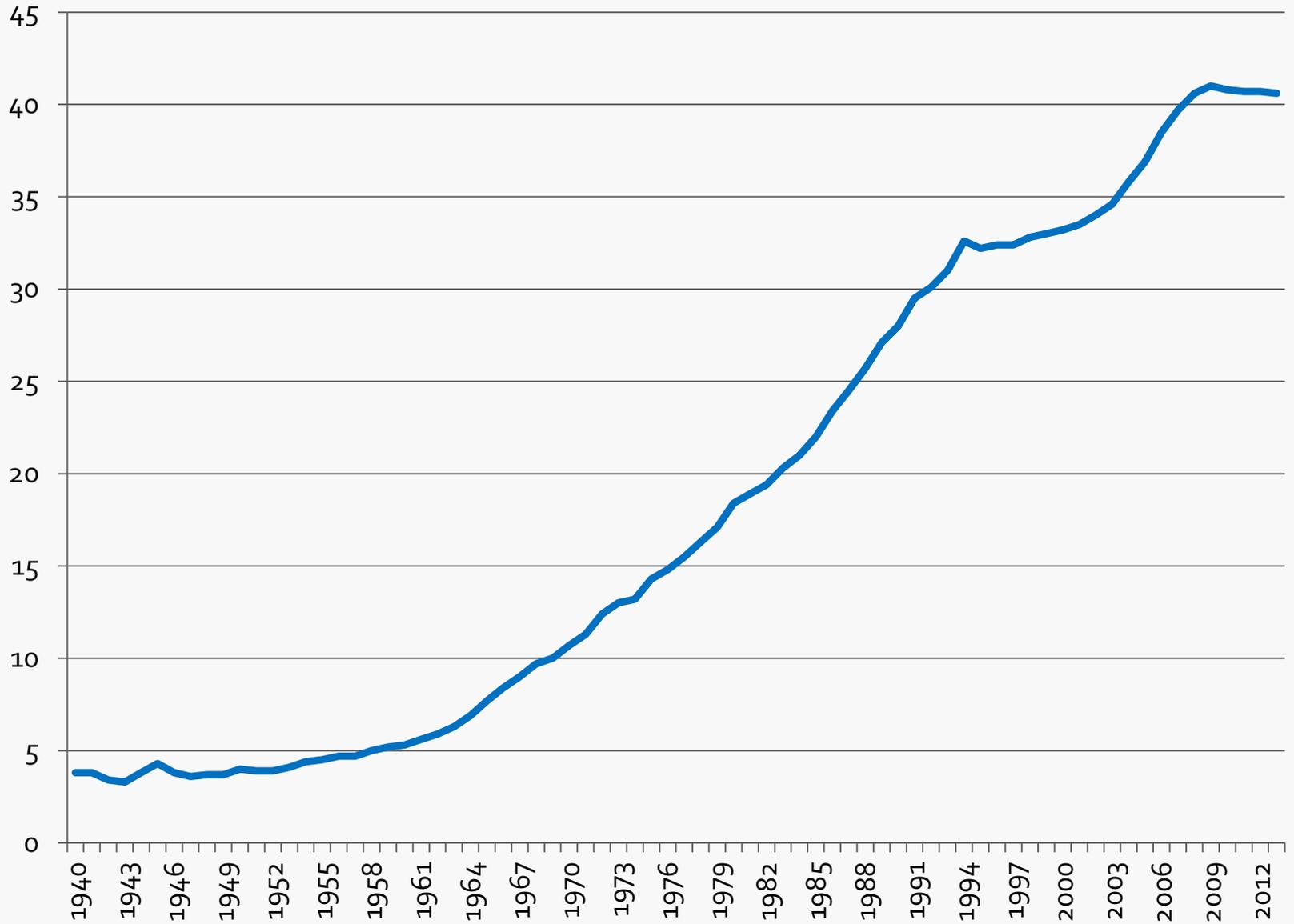
One resource



Two-Tiered Family Formation

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

Percentage of Births to Unmarried Women



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:**

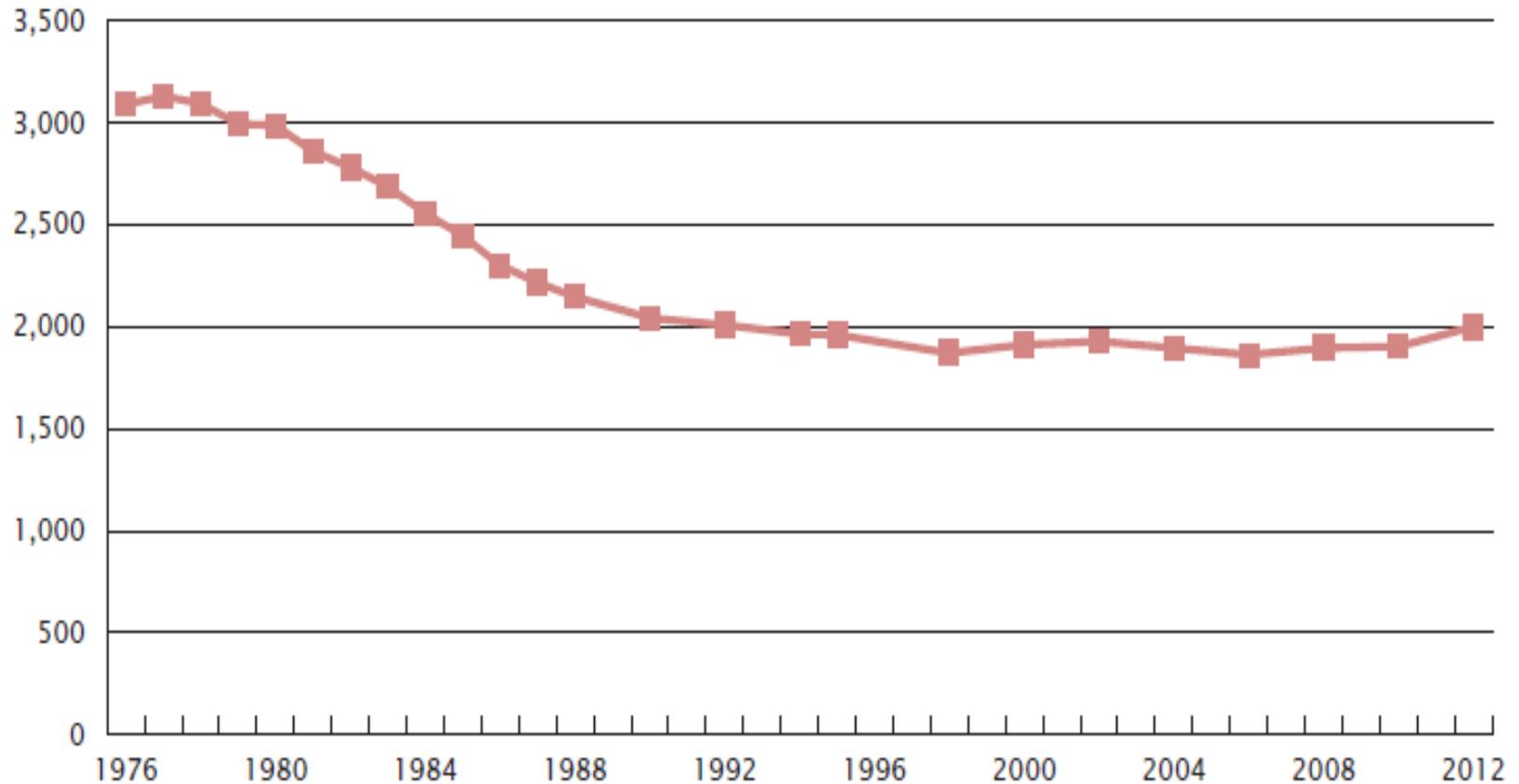
	Age 1	Age 3	Age 9
USA	18	39	64
Finland	4	19	35
Sweden	4	13	27
Norway	8	18	30
Austria	6	13	31
France	5	16	35

Andersson (2002)

Figure 1.

Children Ever Born Per 1,000 Women Aged 40 to 44: 1976-2012

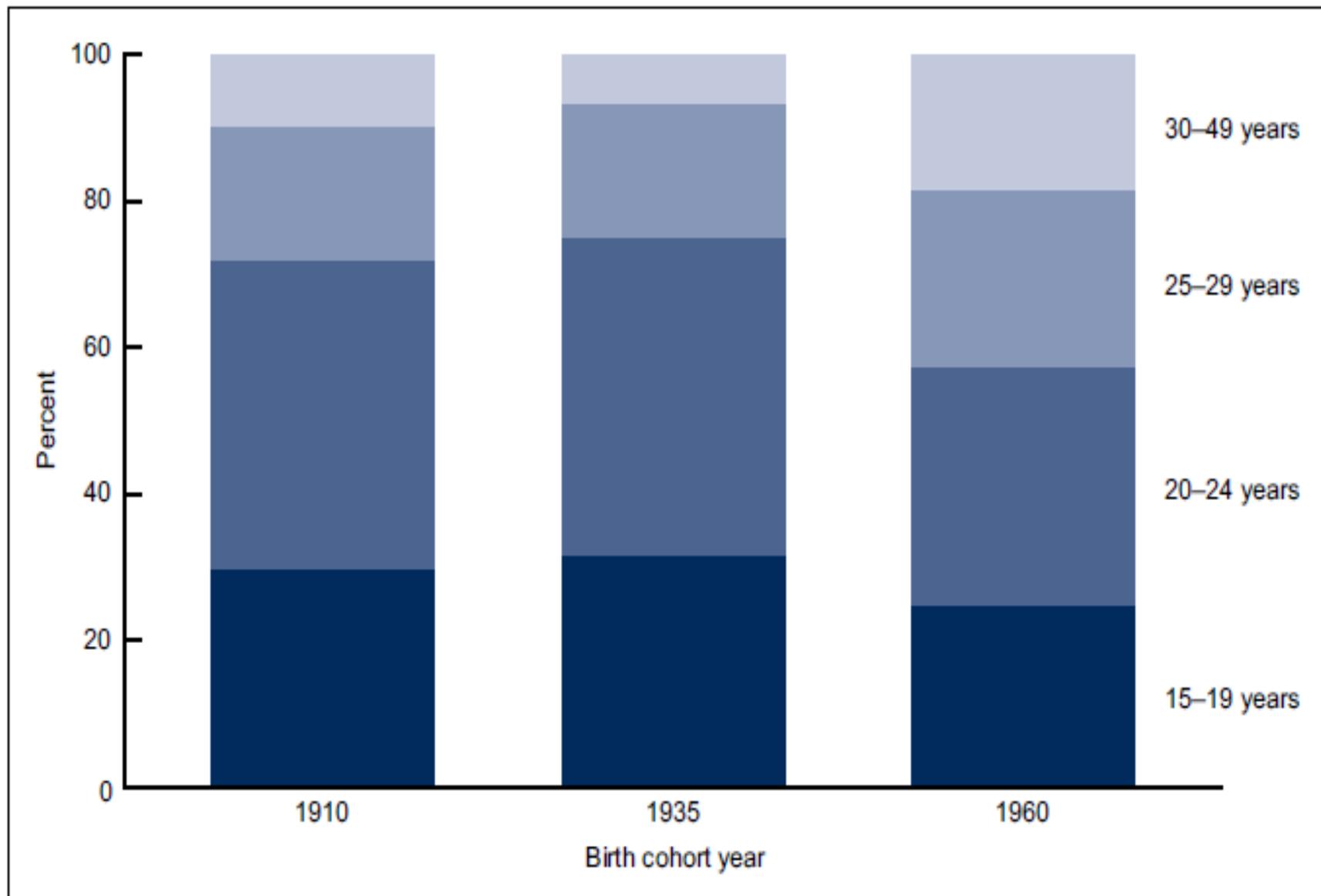
Children born per 1,000 women



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1976-2012.

Monte & Ellis, 2014. *Fertility of Women in the United States: 2012*

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



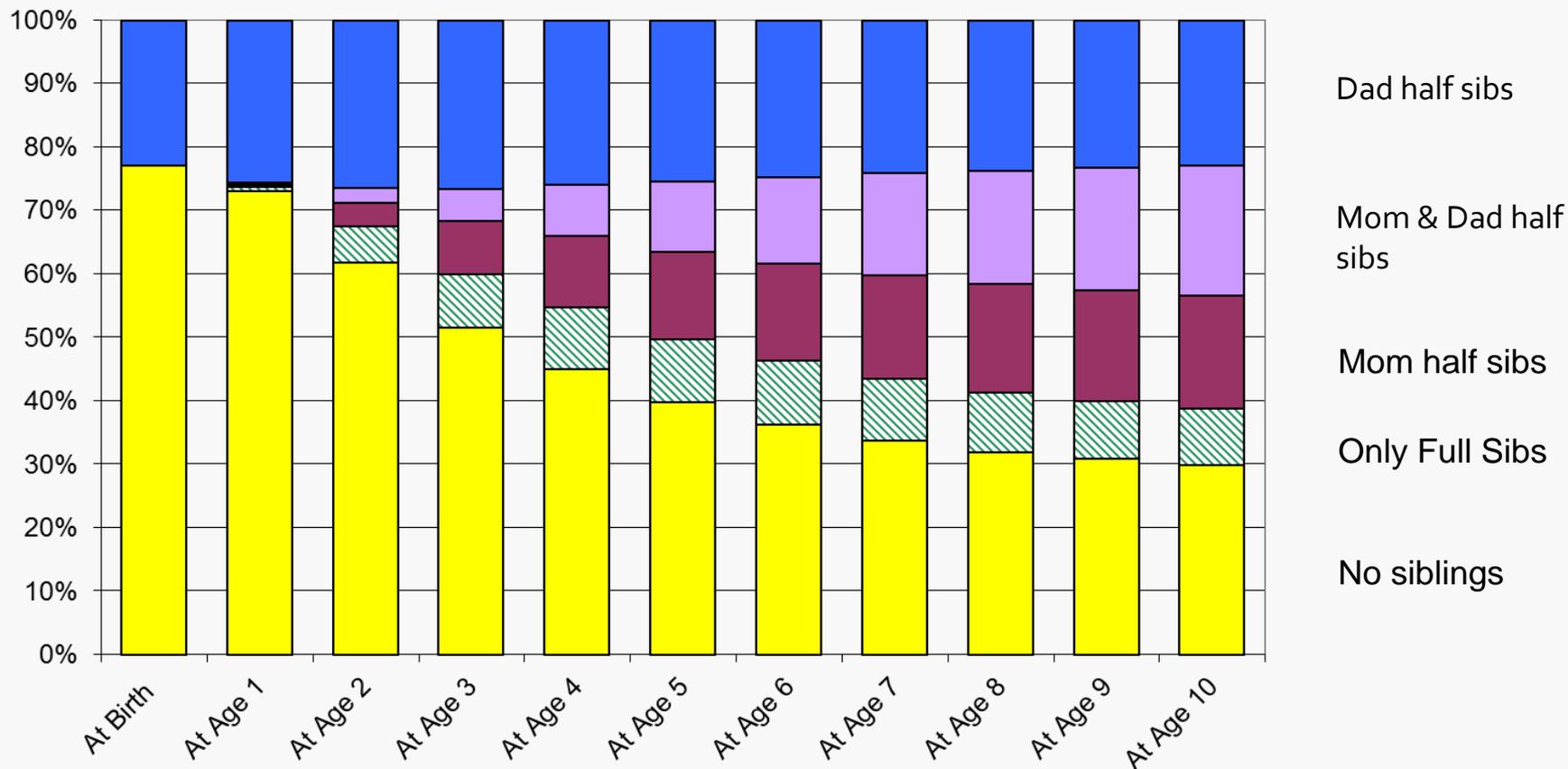
NOTE: Access data table for Figure 2 at: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db68_tables.pdf#2.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System.

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



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