Growing Inequality in Family Patterns and Child Well-Being

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Fundamental Role of Families for Child Well-Being (esp. Literacy)

- Parents are children’s first teachers
- Families represent both ‘who’s there’ (family/household members) and what they can contribute (quantity and quality of investments)
- Instability and complexity blur the lines of responsibility for children and decrease investments
- Achievement gaps are already present by school entry (and persist), highlighting importance of family
Persistence of Early Achievement Gaps

Average percentile rank on Peabody Individual Achievement Test—Math score by age and family income quartile

“Early family environments are major predictors of cognitive and noncognitive abilities.”

Source: Heckman 2006, *Science*
Key Points in Today’s Talk

1) Families have changed dramatically in the last half century

2) Families have changed unequally – the less advantaged are more fragile

3) High levels of instability and family complexity

4) Concerns about parental investments (time and money) and child well-being
1) Major Changes in U.S. Family Patterns Last ~50 years

- Marriage
- Cohabitation
- Divorce
- Nonmarital births
- (Mostly stable overall fertility, post early 1970s)
Age at Marriage - U.S.

Figure 1. Median Age at First Marriage by Sex: 1890 to 2010

Source: U.S. Decennial Census (1890-2000); American Community Survey (2010). For more information on the ACS, see http://www.census.gov/acs
Cohabitation - U.S.

Percent of Women Ages 19-44 Who Have Ever Cohabited before 1st Marriage, by Marriage Cohort

Divorce Rates - U.S.

Sources: U.S. Statistical Abstract and UVA ‘State of Our Unions’ report
Fertility Rate (TFR) - U.S., 1911-2011

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, from Population Reference Bureau
Nonmarital Births (%) - U.S., 1960-2014

Source: National Center for Health Statistics
Nonmarital Childbearing

Percentage of births to unmarried women, 1960 to 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Spain</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: CDC/NCHIS Vital Statistics; Stat Canada; Eurostat, European Commission; figure by Laura Tach.

a. Earliest year available is 1974.
2) Socioeconomic Inequality in Family Patterns

- “Diverging destinies” in children’s family experiences over time (McLanahan 2004; McLanahan & Jacobsen 2014)

- Higher-educated (especially college degree) parents are more likely to:
  - Get married and stay married (not divorce)
  - Have children within marriage
  - Have children at older ages who are intended
  - Not have children with multiple partners
U.S. Marriage by Education

Share Currently Married by Education, 1960 and 2010

% 1960  2010

HS or less: 72  47
Some college: 69  48
College+: 76  64

Note: Based on adults ages 18 and older.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Census 1960 and ACS 2010, IPUMS.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
U.S. Percent Divorced within 10 Years of Entering First Marriage, by Education

Source: Martin, S. 2006
Figure 1: Percent of All Births that are Non-marital by Education, 1990-2010
Source: National Vital Statistics Birth Data Files
Smaller Educational Gradient in Nonmarital Births in European Countries (except the UK)

Family Life Course of NLSY Men (Born 1957-64) through Ages 45-52

- Married, kids ('package deal'): 36%
- Married, kids, divorced: 24%
- Nonmarital first birth: 17%
- Married, no kids: 13%
- No kids or marriage: 10%
NLSY Men by Education (Ages 45-52)

- Less than high school: 10, 9, 10, 12
- High school: 30, 22, 17, 14
- Some college: 11, 12, 13, 15
- BA degree or more: 16, 28, 35, 54

- Married, kids ('package deal')
- Married, kids, divorced
- Nonmarital first birth
- Married, no kids
- No kids or marriage
Taken Together, These Trends Suggest:

• A disconnection between marriage and childbearing/childrearing

• Rise in single parenthood

• Growing family complexity (re-partnering, and children by multiple partners)

⇒ Especially for disadvantaged groups
3) High Levels of Family Instability and Complexity

Family complexity:
“When marriage and legal ties, living arrangements, fertility, and parenting are not coterminous...” (Carlson & Meyer 2014)
Percent of Parents who Broke up by Child Age 15

U.S. Urban Nonmarital Births: Percent of Parents Who Separate by Child Age

Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study
Fraction of Youth Living with a Single Parent

### Percentage of 15-Year-Olds Living in Single-Parent Families, 2012 (Figure 1)

At nearly 21 percent, the United States is edged out only by Hungary for having the greatest percentage of 15-year-old students living in single-parent families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>20.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>17.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>16.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>16.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>15.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>15.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>13.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>13.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>13.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>12.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>12.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>11.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>8.8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Author’s calculations from the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment data

Source: Woessmann 2015
Why Worry about Children Not Living with Two Parents?

• Extensive research evidence that children do best living with their two biological parents in a stable union over their childhood
  ▫ Better cognitive outcomes, educational attainment
  ▫ Better behavioral outcomes, lower crime and delinquency
  ▫ Greater earnings, income and social mobility as adults

• In the U.S., married unions are much more likely to be stable unions; harder for fathers to be involved if living apart

Sources: Chase-Lansdale et al. 1995; Emirsch & Francesconi 2001; Thomson & McLanahan 2014; McLanahan, Tach & Schneider 2013; Lopoo & DeLeire 2014, etc.
Achievement Differences in Math, 2012 (Figure 2)

The gap in achievement between 15-year-old students living in single-parent and two-parent families in the United States is greater than average, even when controlling for other family characteristics.

Source: Woessmann 2015
To Age 15: Years with Two-Biological Parent Families, by Education

Source: Generations & Gender Survey.
To Age 15: Years with Two-Biological Parent Families, by Education

Children in the US with highly educated mothers spend 4.2 more years with both biological parents than those with less educated mothers.

The average gap in all other countries is just over 2 years.
Percent of All Separated Parents Who Enter a New Union within 3 Years

New Partners

• By 5 years after a nonmarital birth, 22% of urban mothers have a new partner (Bzostek et al. 2012)

• Biological fathers intend to stay involved with their children, but fathers’—and especially mothers’—new relationships diminish fathers’ involvement with children (Edin & Nelson 2013; Tach et al. 2010)

• Social fathers are often highly involved, but will the relationships last?
Pathways to Family Complexity

Birth to Single Mother

Birth in Union

Source: Thomson 2016
Pathways to Family Complexity

Birth to Single Mother

Birth in Union

Separation

Source: Thomson 2016
Pathways to Family Complexity

Birth to Single Mother

Birth in Union

Separation

Re-partner

Source: Thomson 2016
Pathways to Family Complexity

Birth to Single Mother

Birth in Union

Separation

Re-partner

New-Partner Birth

Source: Thomson 2016
Pathways to Family Complexity

Birth to Single Mother

Birth in Union

Separation

Re-partner

New-partner Birth

Complex Families

Source: Thomson 2016
Complex Family Situations: Multi-Partnered Fertility (MPF)

Non-complex Nuclear Family

Father has Child by New Partner

Mother has Child by New Partner
Complex Family Situations (cont.)

Father has children by 2 mothers

Mother has children by 2 fathers
Conceptual Ideas: MPF May Affect Child Well-Being by Diminishing Parental Investments

- **Social**: Blurs obligations due to blood ties, co-residence and legal responsibility

- **Economic**: Greater transaction costs, reduced economies of scale and incentives to invest when children spread across households

- **Evolutionary**: Biology motivates parental investment

- **Social selection**: Due to other characteristics

→ Key issue: What is the counterfactual or comparison group?
Urban U.S. Births: Children with at Least One Half-Sibling over 15 Years, by Parents’ Marital Status at Birth

Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study
Most Children Born to Unmarried Parents Will Be in a Complex Family by Age 10 (WI state data)

Most Children Born to Unmarried Parents Will Be in a Complex Family by Age 10 (WI state data)

Percent of Mothers Who Have Children with Two or More Fathers

4) Concerns about Parental Investments (Time and Money) and Child Well-Being
Parenting Resources by Family Type at Child Age 5 (Fragile Families Study)

Urban Parents: Biological-Father Contact at 9 Years by Parents’ Marital Status at Birth

Source: Fragile Families Study
Differences in Fathering by Residence Status

The Activities of Daily Life

% of fathers saying they participated in each activity at least several times a week over the past month

- Living with child
- Living apart from child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Living with child</th>
<th>Living apart from child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk with child about child’s day</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have meal with child</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help child with homework</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take child to or from activities</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on fathers of children ages 5-18.
Source: Pew Research Center calculations of the 2006-08 National Survey of Family Growth
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High-SES Fathering

• Growing attention to ‘new’ father role – wide range of activities, including direct caregiving
• High involvement within stable union, or ‘package deal’ (Lamb, Pleck, Townsend, etc.)
• Time with children went up among married fathers
Low-SES Fathering

• Typically non-resident, infrequent contact, and involved with unrelated children of new partners (Liebow; Edin & Nelson; Mincy, Smeeding et al., Garfinkel; Tach et al., etc.)

• Growing recognition of family complexity and high levels of ‘multi-partnered fertility,’ and that men are father-figures to children of new partners
Externalizing behavior: means by age and MPF status
Internalizing behavior: means by age and MPF status
PPVT Score: means by age and MPF status
Implications - What Can Be Done to Enhance Child Well-Being?

• Recognize multiple sources of disadvantage:
  1) Low economic resources
  2) Unstable/complex families
  3) Public policies not well-suited to diverse family forms

• Two basic options for policy change re families:
  1) Change the families we have/create
     • Change family structure directly (not likely)
     • Decrease unintended fertility (Sawhill 2014), and/or
  2) Better support the children/families we have (which is not only economically)
Implications (cont.)

• Capitalize on early commitment to (co)parenting
  ▫ Parental leave policies, nurse home-visiting programs, co-parenting interventions

• Make programs more responsive to ‘complex families’
  ▫ Recognize multiple actors, roles, and relationships within and across family ‘units’ (biological, marital, and co-residential ties)
  ▫ Consider the needs, capabilities, and well-being of mothers and fathers as well as children, particularly in a context of multi-partnered fertility
  ▫ Expect fluidity in these factors over time
Thank You!