

Diverging Destinies: Children's Family Structure Variation by Maternal Education

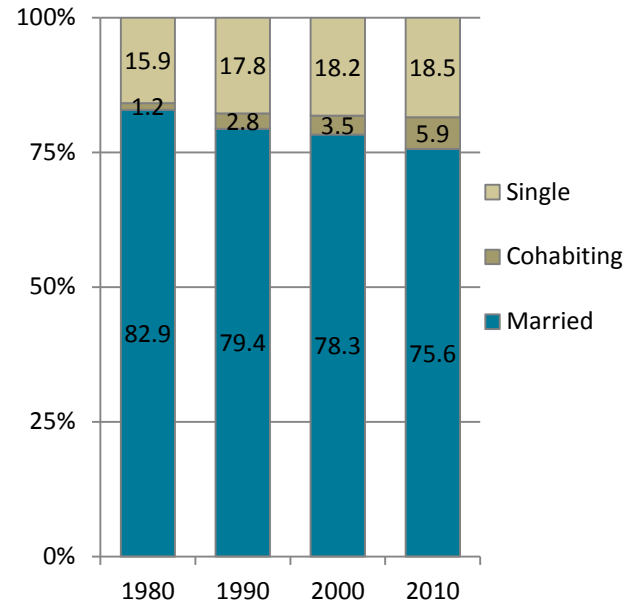
Bart Stykes & Seth Williams

The living arrangements of children appear to be diverging according to social class. Although children of college educated parents enjoy relatively stable family lives, children of less educated parents tend to have experienced more family changes in recent decades (McLanahan, 2004; Cherlin, 2010). This profile presents trends since 1980 in maternal relationship status and education from the perspective of minor children. In addition, it illustrates how changes over the past 30 years in mothers' relationship status varied depending on mothers' educational attainment.

Mothers' Relationship Status: 30 Years of Change

- In 2010, over three-fourths (75.6%) of children were living with a married mother. Approximately 1 in 5 (18.5%) lived with a single mother, and 5.9% lived with a mother who was currently cohabiting.
- The past 30 years were marked by a steady decrease in the share of children who lived with a married mother, from more than 4 in 5 (82.9%) children in 1980 to 3 in 4 (75.6%) in 2010.
- The decline in the proportion of children living with a married mother was largely driven by the five-fold increase in the share of children living with cohabiting mothers (from 1.2% to 5.9%).

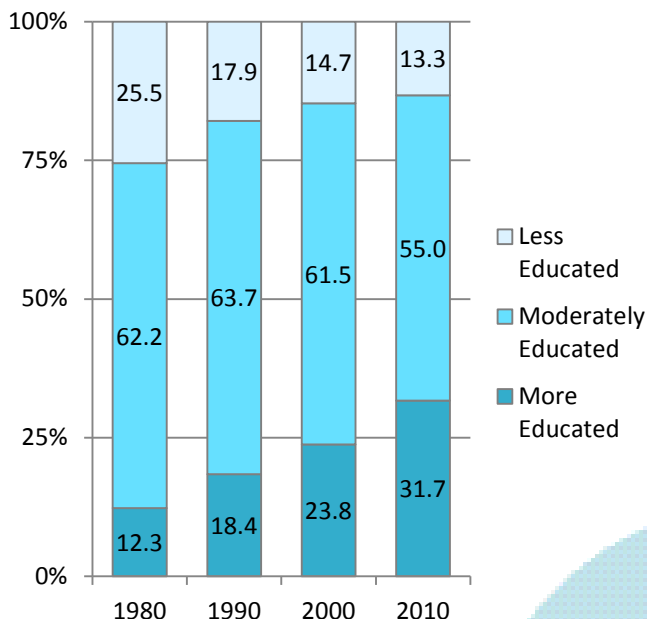
Figure 1. Mothers' Relationship Status



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement (IPUMS)

Mothers' Education: 30 Years of Change

Figure 2. Mothers' Educational Attainment



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement (IPUMS)

- Overall, the past 30 years witnessed considerable gains in mothers' education.
 - The majority of children lived with mothers who reported moderate education (a high school diploma, GED, or some college) across all time points. Although this share has decreased from 62.2% in 1980 to 55% in 2010.
 - The share of children living with more-educated (college degree or more) mothers increased by 150%, from 12.3% to almost one-third (31.7%).
 - In contrast, the share of children living with less-educated (no high school diploma or GED) mothers approached a two-fold decrease from 25.5% in 1980 to 13.3% in 2010.

Family Profiles examine topics related to NCFMR's core research themes. Data are presented at both the national and state levels using new data sources. Written for both researchers and broad communities, these profiles summarize the latest statistics on U.S. families.

Considering Inequalities: Trends in Mothers' Relationship Status by Mothers' Education

- Consistent with McLanahan's (2004) "diverging destinies" and Cherlin's (2010) "bifurcation of the American family," Figure 3 illustrates that from 1980 to 2010, there was less variation in mothers' relationship status among children with more-educated mothers compared to children with moderately and less-educated mothers.

Children Living with Married Mothers

- Between 1980 and 2010, the share of children living with more-educated mothers who were married approximated 90% (ranging from 91.6% in 1980 to 88.9% in 2010). In contrast, although the majority of children living with less-educated mothers were married at each time point, this proportion decreased by approximately 10% between 1980 and 2010.

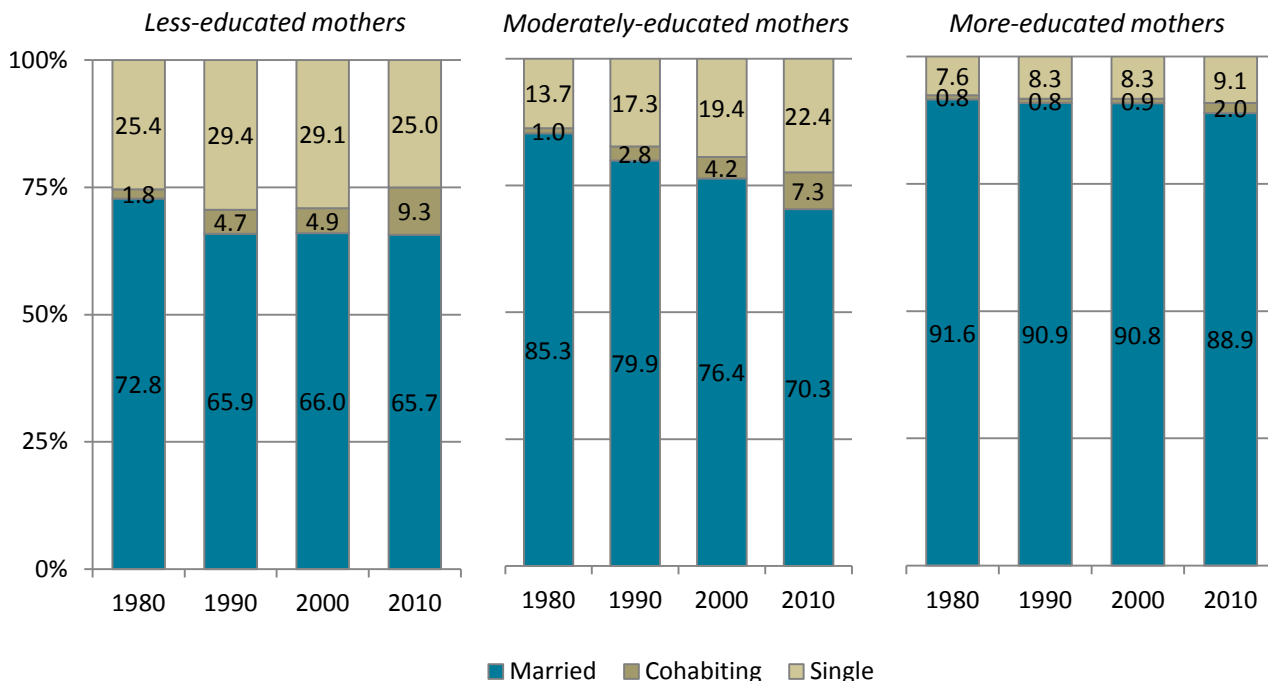
Children Living with Single Mothers

- There was little change in the proportion of children with a single mother who was either less or more-educated, whereas children with moderately-educated mothers experienced a 64% increase between 1980 and 2010. In 2010, approximately 1 in 4 children of less and moderately-educated mothers lived in single-mother families.

Children Living with Cohabiting Mothers

- There was a steady increase in the shares of children living with a cohabiting mother having less or moderate-levels of education, whereas the increase among children with a more-educated mother occurred between 2000 and 2010. Since 1980, children having less and moderately-educated mothers experienced five- and seven-fold increases in the share living with cohabiting mothers, respectively. From 2000 to 2010 alone, the share of children who lived with a cohabiting mother doubled for children with more-educated mothers and increased by 90% and 74% for children with less and moderately educated mothers, respectively.

Figure 3. Mothers' Relationship Status by Mothers' Educational Attainment



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement (IPUMS)

References

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