Variation in Stepfamilies among Currently Cohabiting and Married Men and Women Under 50

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Among women, an increasing proportion of current unions are stepfamilies—unions in which one or both partners had children from a prior relationship (FP-21-21). In this profile, we consider how the share of men’s and women’s coresidential unions that are stepfamilies varies by union type and marital history, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity. We examine men and women under age 50 who are currently living with a partner (married or cohabiting) using data from the 2015-2019 cycles of the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), which represent the year 2017 when weighted.

- Overall, the share of women’s unions that are stepfamilies (35%) was higher than the share among men (25%), not shown.
- This holds true regardless of union type and marital history, educational attainment, or race/ethnicity.

Variation across Union Type and Marital History, by Gender

- For union type and marital history, the absolute gender gap was largest for those in a higher-order marriage, with 54% of men in a 2nd or later marriage in a stepfamily compared to 83% of women—a difference of 29 percentage points.
- Stepfamilies were least common among 1st marriages and most common among previously married cohabiting men and women.
- Among never married cohabiting men and women, 33% and 41%, respectively, were in stepfamilies.
- Partnered women with a previous marriage had high shares living in a stepfamily, at 83% of those in a remarriage and 87% of those in a cohabitation.

Variation across Education, by Gender

- Across education levels, the absolute gender gap in stepfamilies was largest among those with an associate degree—among partnered men, 26% were living in stepfamilies compared to 41% among women.
- Of unions among those without a high school degree, four in ten were stepfamilies for men and one half were stepfamilies for women.
- Less than one fifth of currently cohabiting or married men and women with a college degree or more were in a stepfamily, at 11% and 18% respectively.
Variation across Race-Ethnicity, by Gender

- The absolute gender gap varied little by race-ethnicity, with the share of cohabiting and married women in a stepfamily about 10 percentage points higher than their male counterparts across groups.
- The share of stepfamily unions across race-ethnicity and gender was highest for Black women, at 56%, and lowest for ‘Other’ race men, at 18%.
- Stepfamily prevalence by gender was similar among Whites and Hispanics – about one fourth of men and about one third of women were in a stepfamily.
- Less than one fifth of ‘Other’ race men in a union were in a stepfamily compared to just over one fourth of ‘Other’ race women.

Figure 3. Stepfamily Share of Unions, by Race-Ethnicity and Gender

Overall, the share of women’s unions that are stepfamilies (35%) was higher than the share among men (25%).

Data Sources:

References:

Suggested Citation:

This project is supported with assistance from Bowling Green State University. From 2007 to 2013, support was also provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the state or federal government.