

A National Portrait of Parenthood among Middle Aged Adults: 1992-2010

Cassandra Cupka (cjcupka@bgsu.edu) and Huijing Wu (huijinw@bgsu.edu)
 Department of Sociology, Bowling Green State University



Background

- Through increases in divorce, remarriage, and childlessness, American family forms have become progressively diverse (Livingston, Parker, & Rohal 2015; Schoen & Standish 2001).
- Childlessness reduces the size of social networks and stepparenthood is characterized by weak family ties (Cherlin & Furstenburg 1994; Dykstra 2006).
- Individuals from diverse family forms may be at high risk of low support when they enter old age.

Research Questions

- How diverse are family forms for today's middle-aged adults in comparison to adults of the same age nearly two decades ago?
- How do demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that could protect individuals in old age differ across cohorts?

Data and Sample

- Health and Retirement Study, 1992 and 2010.
- Analytic Sample: Non-institutionalized individuals ages 51-61. Sample size for 1992 is 8,345, and sample size for 2010 is 7,863.
- Sample weights were used in all analyses to account for the complex survey design.

Measures

- Parenthood Status:** childless individuals, parents with biological or adoptive children (biological parents), stepparents without biological or adoptive children (stepparents), and stepparents with biological or adoptive children (blended parents).
- Demographic Characteristics:** gender, race and ethnicity, marital status, living arrangement, religiosity, and region.
- Socioeconomic Characteristics:** education, labor force status, and wealth.

Results

Figure 1. Percentage of Adults Aged 51-61 by Parenthood Status in 1992 and 2010

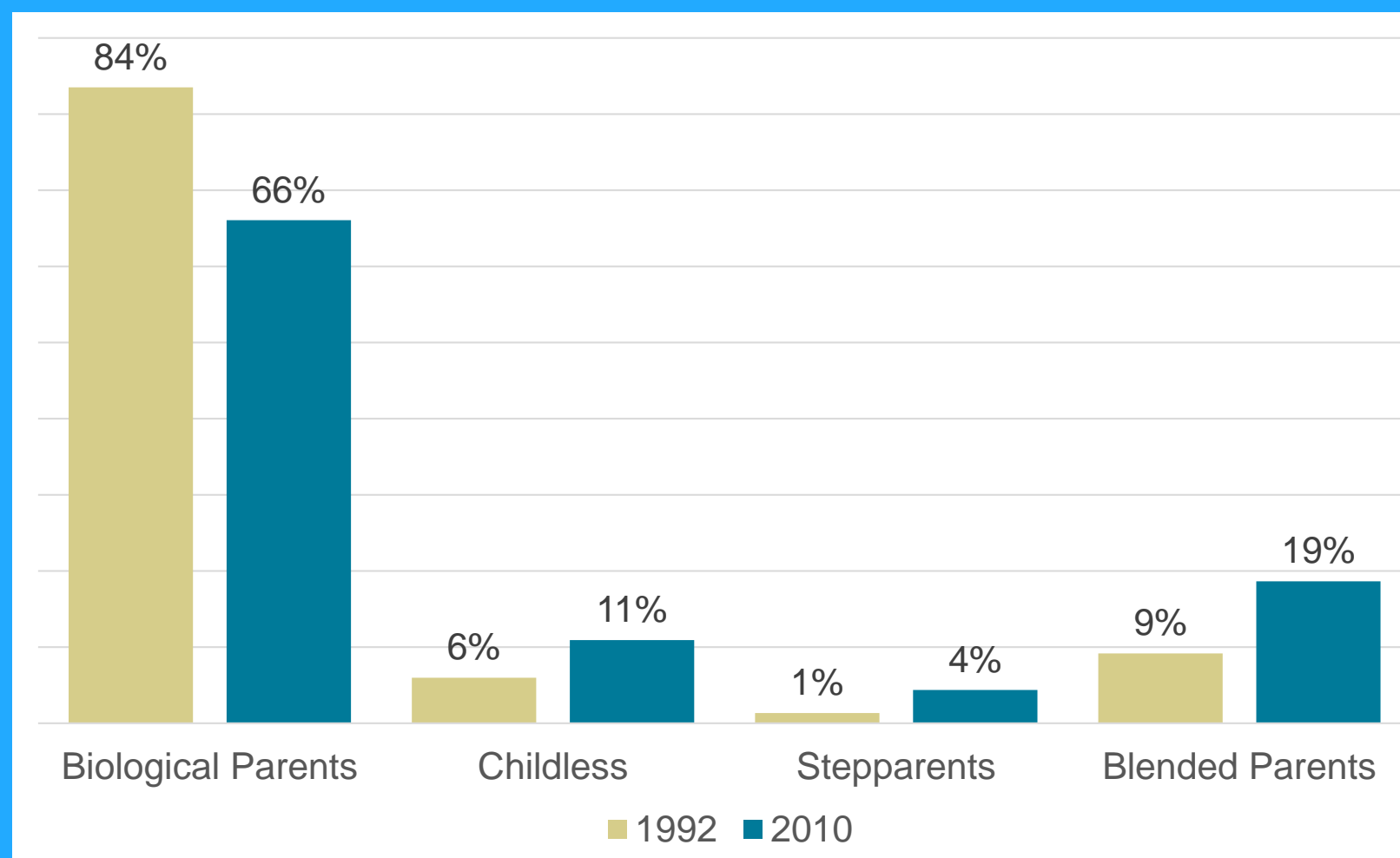


Figure 2. Distribution of Parenthood Status by Marital Status in 1992 and 2010 (%)

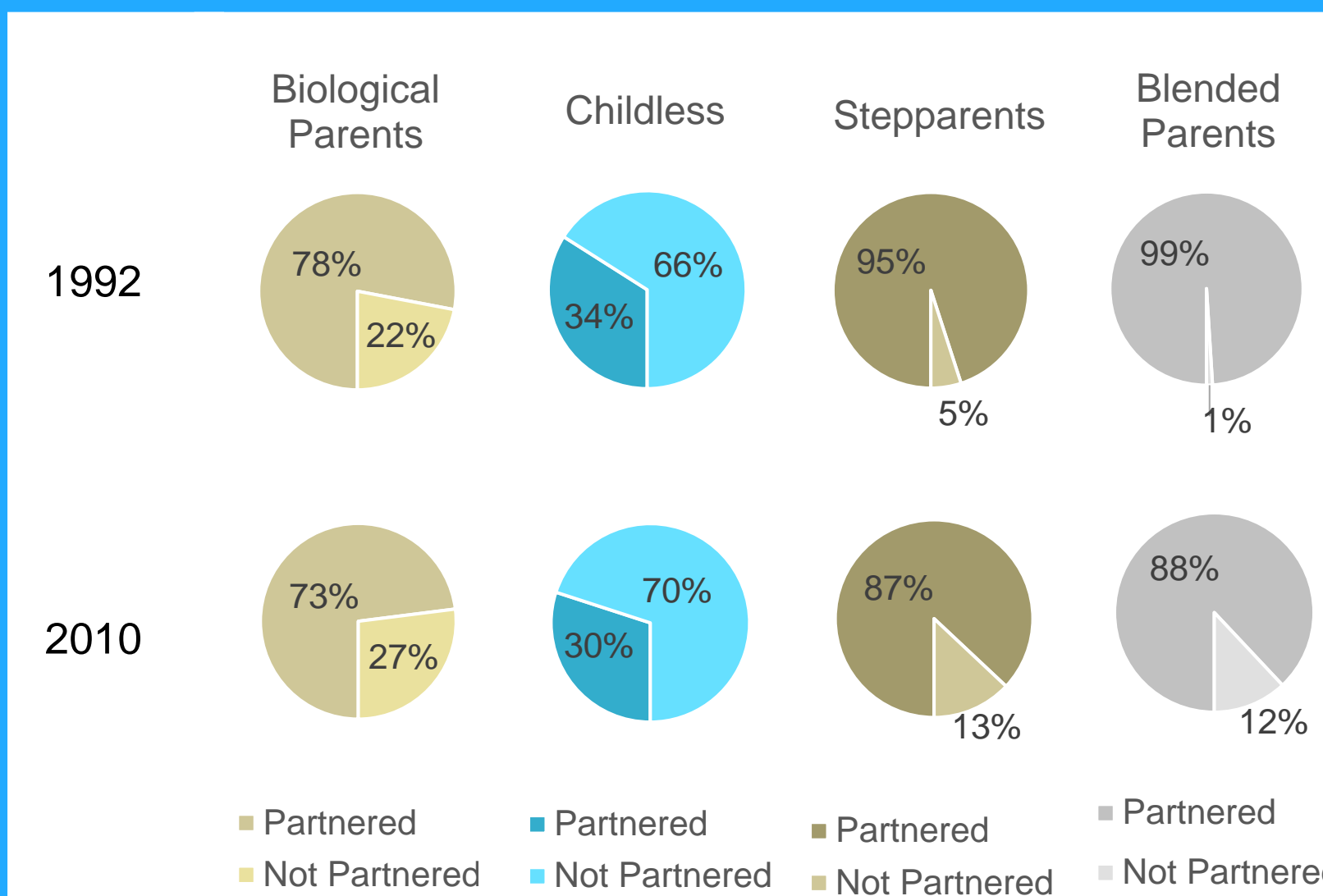


Figure 3. Distribution of Parenthood Status by Gender in 1992 and 2010 (%)

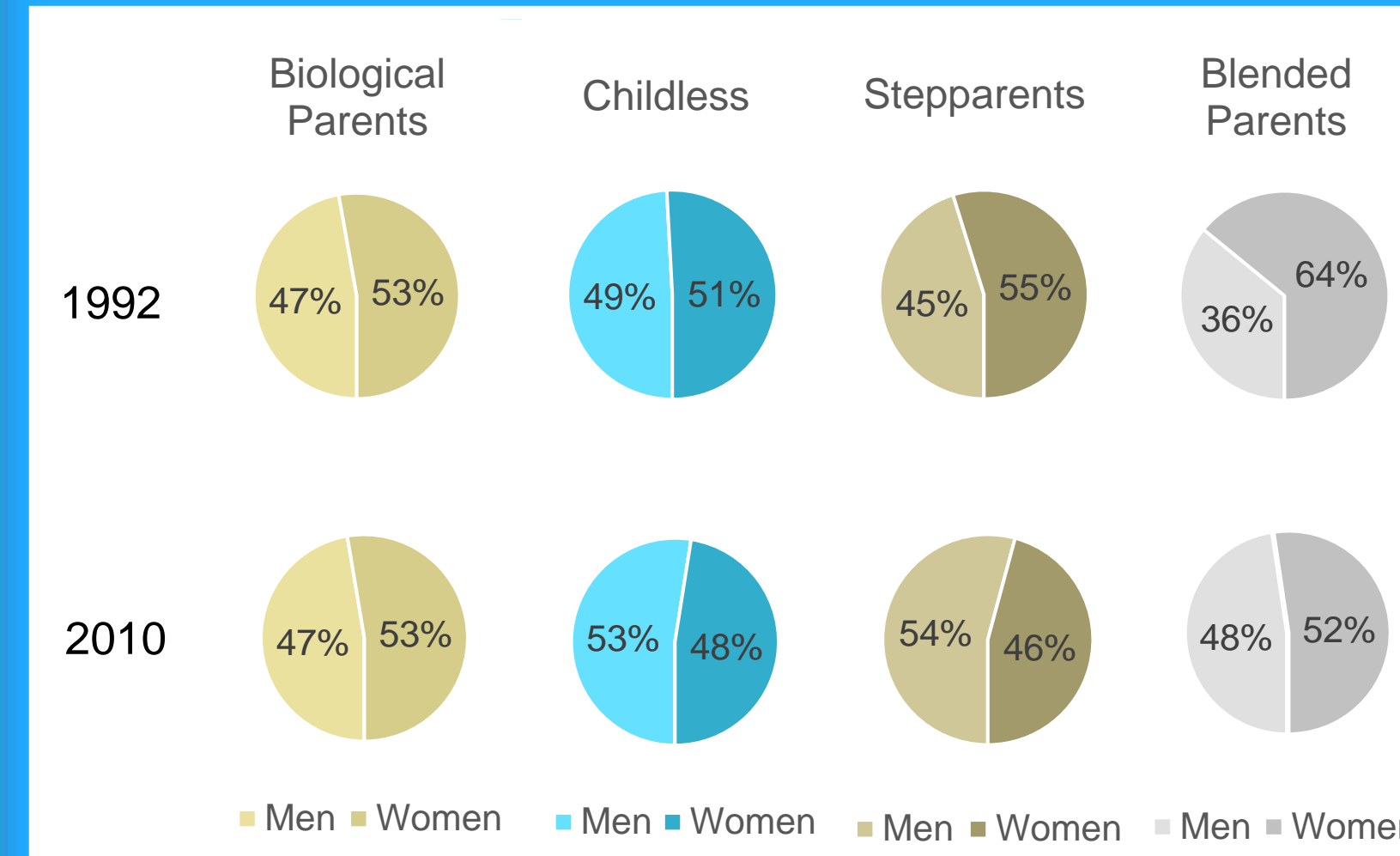


Figure 4. Distribution of College Education or More by Parenthood Status in 1992 and 2010 (%)

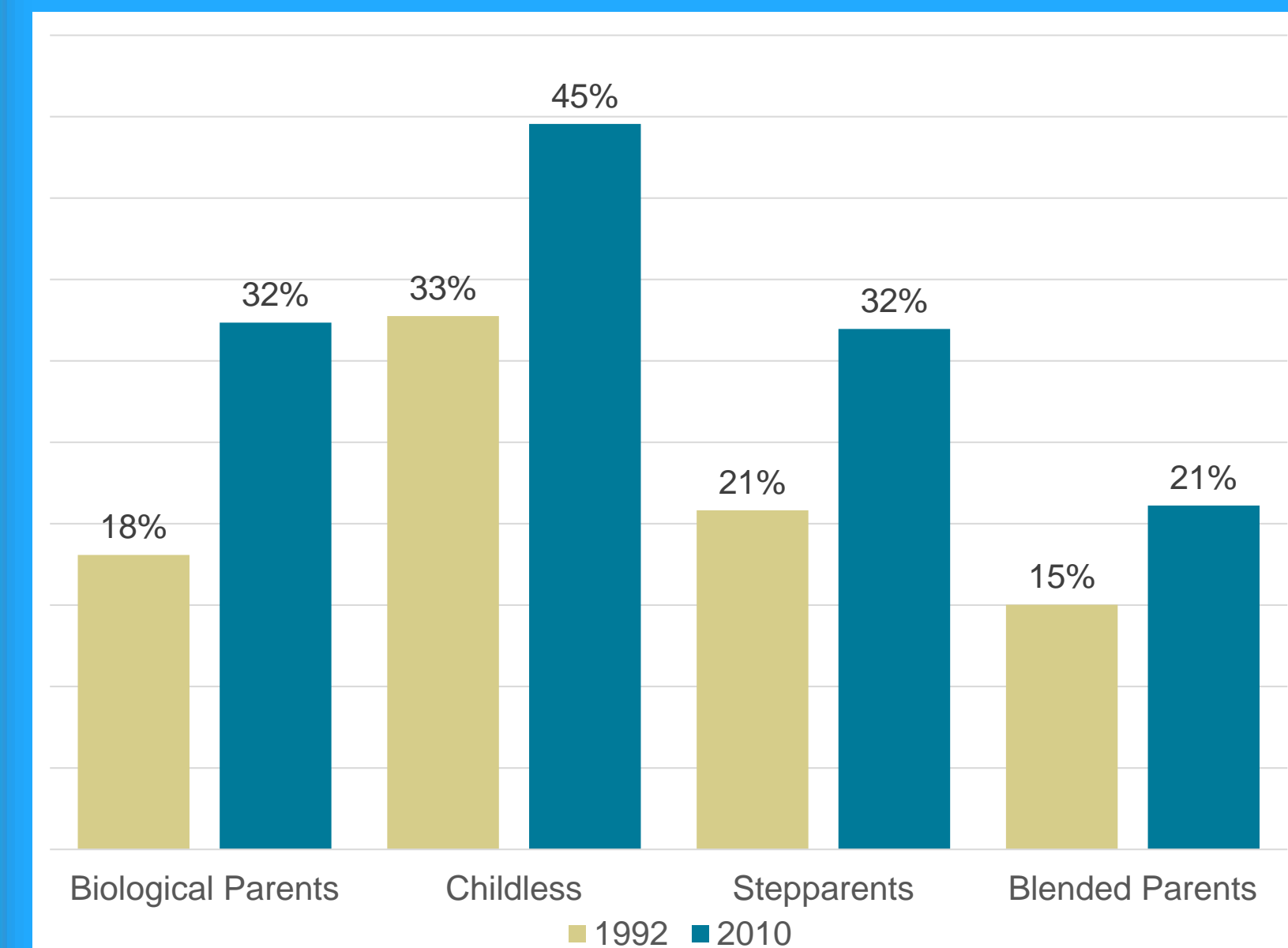
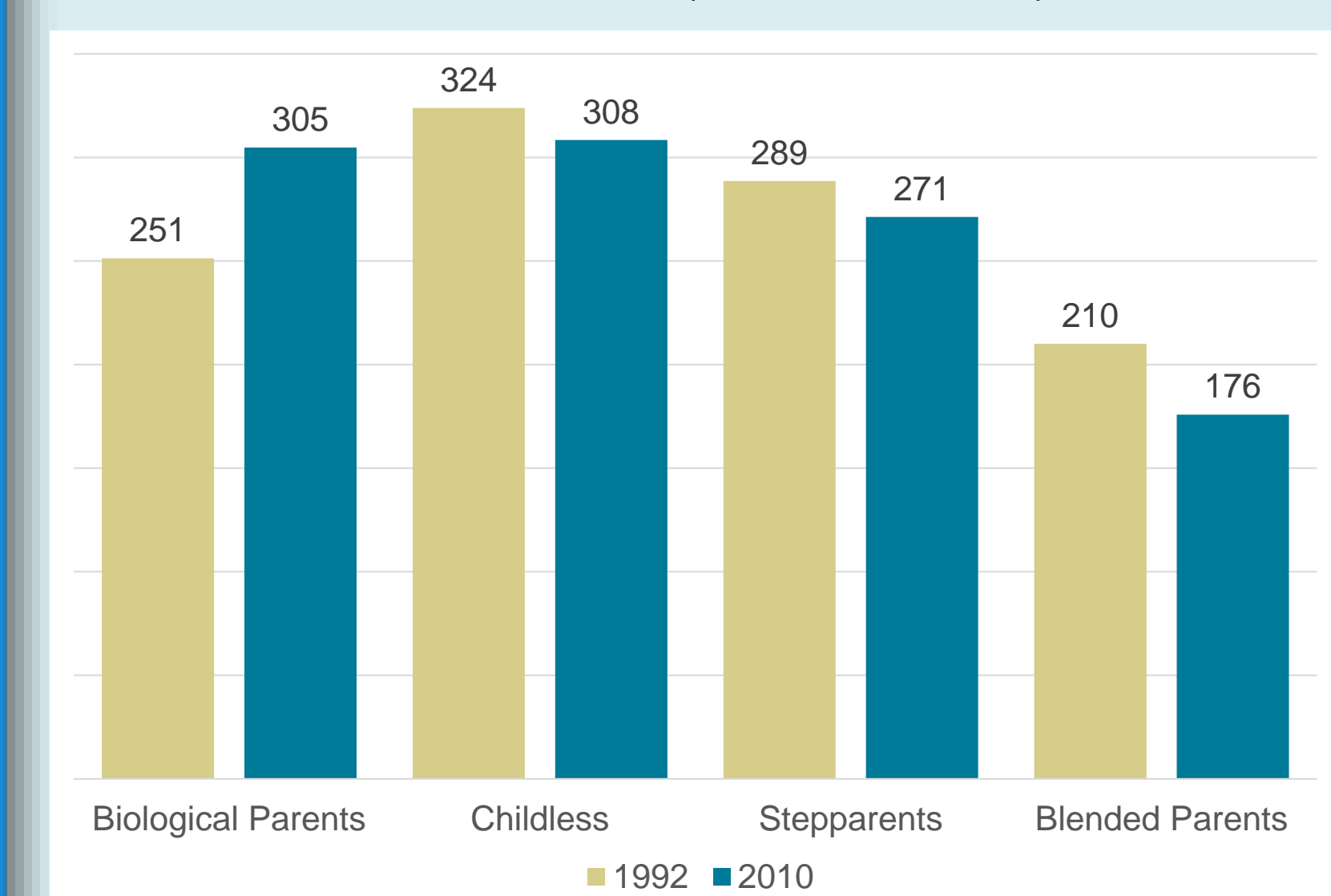


Figure 5. Distribution of Wealth by Parenthood Status in 1992 and 2010 (in \$1,000, 2010)



Conclusion

- Diverse family forms have doubled over time.
- A greater share of men than women live in diverse family forms today than 18 years ago.
- Blended parents are socioeconomically disadvantaged compared to other parenthood status groups.
- Childless individuals are at risk of lacking social support in comparison to other parenthood status groups.

Future Directions

Scholars should examine the psychological and physical consequences of diverse family forms, particularly for men, the childless, and blended parents.

This research was supported in part by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (R24HD050959).