



U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

www.fatherhood.gov

Responsible Fatherhood Spotlight

March 2008



Fathers and Multiple-Partner Fertility

Approximately one in seven men father children with more than one partner by the age of 40. This pattern of multiple-partner fertility varies by fathers' age, race, socioeconomic status, marital status, family of origin, history of problem behaviors, and characteristics of previous children that they fathered. Read more....

Definition

Multiple-partner fertility refers to the pattern of a man or a woman having biological children with more than one partner.^{i,ii,iii} In the past, this pattern generally occurred as the result of widowhood or widowerhood and remarriage.^{iv} Today, however, increases in divorce and childbearing outside of marriage are the main factors contributing to multiple-partner fertility.^v

Importance and Implications of Multiple-Partner Fertility

The limited body of research on multiple-partner fertility suggests that it can have negative consequences for fathers, partners, and children.^{vi}

Implications for Fathers and Their Partners

- Fathers who have children with more than one woman may find it difficult to balance their financial and social responsibilities with more than one family.^{vii,viii,ix}
- Men and their partners report lower relationship quality and higher conflict in their relationships in which either the mother or the father has had children with previous partners.^x
- Although true especially for women, fathers who have had children with multiple partners reduce their chances of marrying in the future.^{xi,xii,xiii} If these fathers do subsequently marry, they are likely to do so with women who also have children from previous relationships, which may increase the complexity of and strain on the new family and the marriage.^{xiv}

Implications for Children

Children whose fathers experience multiple-partner fertility may experience both social and financial hardships. This is especially the case for children from fathers' previous relationships, as fathers may invest more time and money in the children from their current relationship and reduce child support payments and time spent with their children who live in other households.^{xv,xvi,xvii}

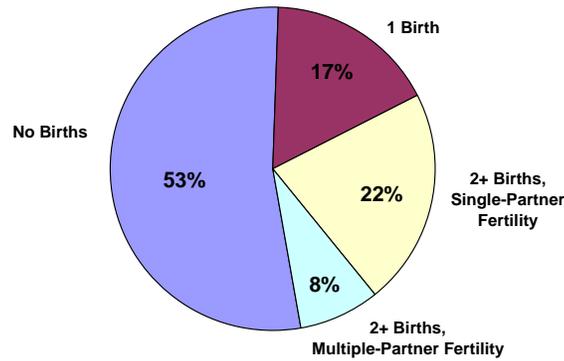
Prevalence and Trends in Multiple-Partner Fertility Over Time

Figure 1 shows that eight percent of all men aged 15 to 44 in 2002 have had children with multiple partners. In certain subsamples, however, the prevalence of men's multiple-partner fertility may be much higher.^{xviii}

See page 2

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Figure 1. Eight Percent of All Men Aged 15-44 in 2002 Have Had Children With Multiple Partners



Source: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6, 2002^{xix}

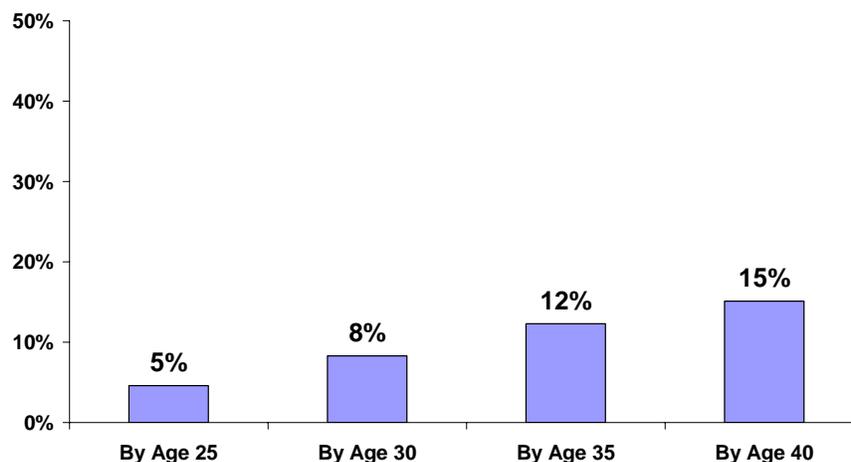
Differences in Multiple-Partner Fertility by Subgroups

Multiple-partner fertility is not limited to specific groups. This trend can be seen in individuals of all ages, races, marital statuses, education levels, and residency status. However, certain factors have been found to be more common among fathers who have children with multiple partners.

Differences by Age

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of men who have fathered children with more than one woman increases with age. An estimated 5 percent of men will experience multiple-partner fertility by age 25, and this proportion increases to an estimated 15 percent by age 40 (or more than 1 in 7).^{xx}

Figure 2. Prevalence of Multiple-Partner Fertility Among Men Increases With Age*

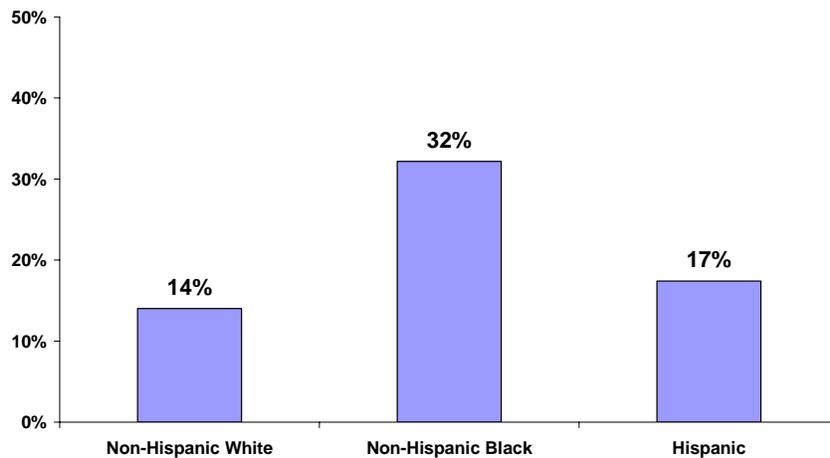


Source: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6, 2002^{xxi}

Differences by Race

Multiple-partner fertility has been found to vary by race/ethnicity, with evidence suggesting that the prevalence is highest among Non-Hispanic African-American men.^{xxii, xxiii} Nearly one-third (32 percent) of African-American men report having fathered children by more than one woman, compared with 17 percent of Hispanic men and 14 percent of non-Hispanic white men (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Multiple-Partner Fertility Is More Prevalent Among African-American Fathers Aged 15-44



Source: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6, 2002

Differences by Socioeconomic Status

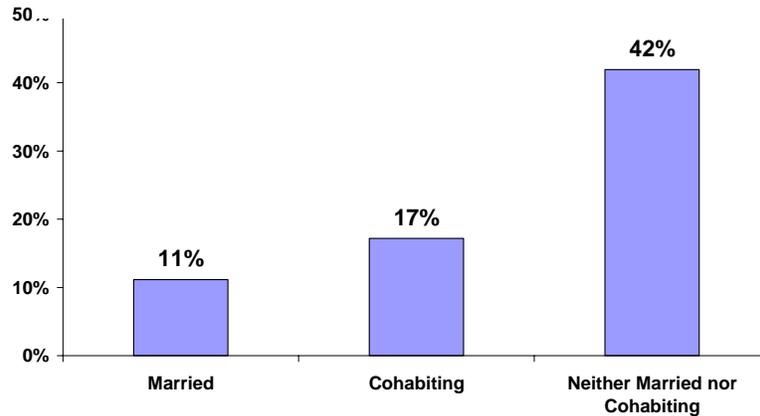
Studies have found that the prevalence of multiple-partner fertility is two-thirds lower among fathers who have a college degree than among fathers with less than a college education.^{xxiv} Income and poverty status are also significantly related to the prevalence of multiple-partner fertility. Poor men are nearly twice as likely as men who are not poor to father children with multiple partners.^{xxv}

Differences by Marital Status

Figure 4 shows that married individuals are less likely to have children with multiple partners than are unmarried individuals.^{xxvi} Among all fathers, those who are neither married nor cohabiting experience much higher rates of multiple-partner fertility, compared with cohabiting fathers and married fathers.

See page 4

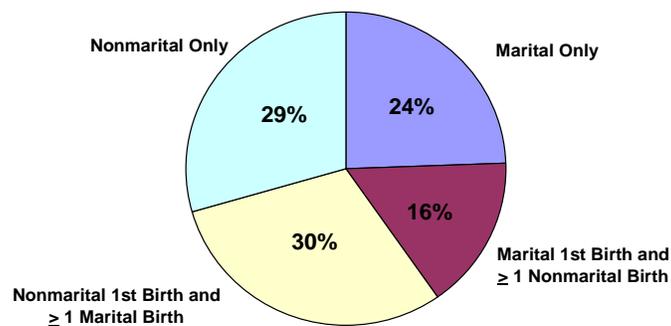
Figure 4. Multiple-Partner Fertility Is Most Prevalent Among Unmarried, Noncohabiting Fathers



Source: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6, 2002

Figure 5 shows that most men who have children with more than one partner were married to at least one of those partners at the time of their first child's birth. Approximately one-quarter only fathered children outside of marriage and 59 percent were not married at the time of their first child's birth. Nearly half (46 percent) of fathers with multiple-partner fertility had at least one child within a marriage and one child outside a marriage.

Figure 5. Fathers' Multiple-Partner Fertility Occurs Within Marital and Nonmarital Unions

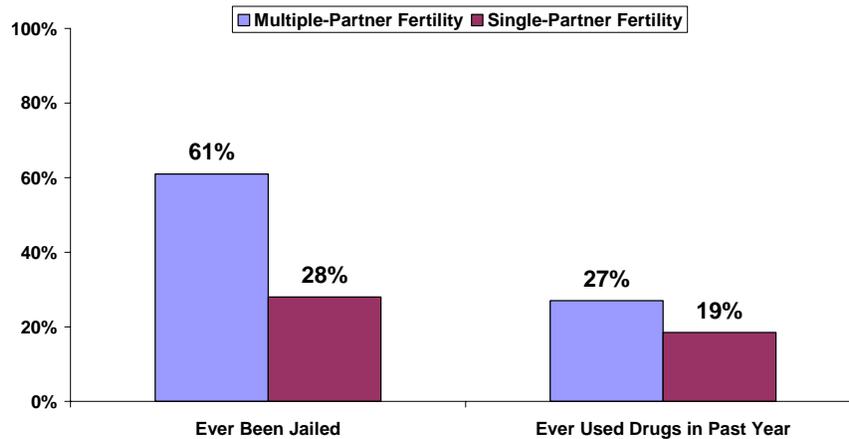


Source: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6, 2002^{xxvii}

Differences by Fathers' Problem Behaviors

Studies have found that fathers who have a history of incarceration or illegal drug use exhibit higher rates of multiple-partner fertility, compared with men who have no history of these behaviors.^{xxviii} **Figure 6** shows that larger proportions of men who had children with more than one woman reported ever having served time in jail and report higher illegal drug use.

Figure 6. Fathers' Multiple-Partner Fertility Is Linked to Incarceration and Drug Use

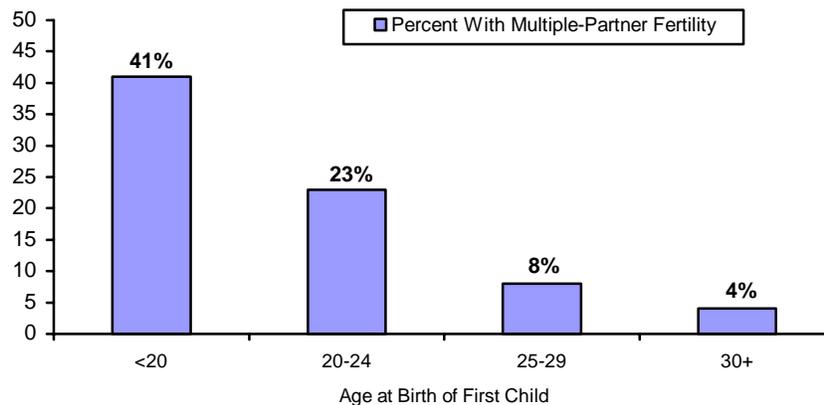


Source: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6, 2002^{xxix}

Differences by First Birth Characteristics

Figure 7 shows that multiple-partner fertility has also been found to vary according to men's prior experience fathering a child. For example, the age of entry into fatherhood is associated with the likelihood of having children with multiple partners. Specifically, men who father a child before the age of 20 have three times higher rates of subsequent births with different partners, compared with men who become fathers at later ages.^{xxx}

Figure 7. Prevalence of Multiple-Partner Fertility Among Fathers Declines With Older Age at Birth of First Child

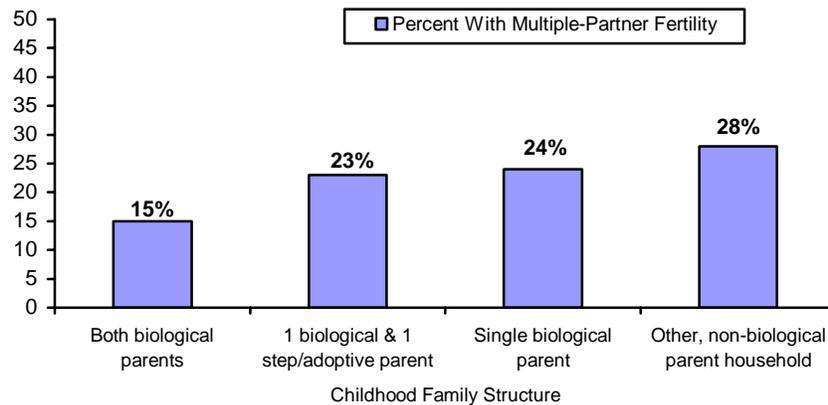


Source: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6, 2002^{xxxi}

Differences by Fathers' Family of Origin

Studies have found that fathers who were raised in homes with both biological parents experience lower rates of multiple-partner fertility, compared with fathers who were raised in homes without two biological parents (see **Figure 8**).^{xxxii, xxxiii} Men with children from multiple partners also are more likely to have had mothers who gave birth at an early age and who have lower levels of educational attainment.^{xxxiv}

Figure 8. Prevalence of Multiple-Partner Fertility Is Lower Among Fathers Who Lived With Both Biological Parents



Source: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6, 2002^{xxxv}

Definition of Measures

Multiple-partner fertility refers to the pattern of having biological children with more than one partner, as noted. In the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), men were asked to report about their biological children both chronologically and in the context of their relationships with the children's mothers, which allowed biological children to be linked to specific relationships.^{xxxvi}

Data Sources

The information in this snapshot was drawn from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG 2002) male data file, collected by the National Center for Health Statistics. The NSFG 2002 is a nationally representative cross-sectional survey that oversamples certain groups, e.g., teens, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic blacks. The graphs shown represent data from three samples of the survey respondents: 4,928 men, including those who were fathers and those who were not; a subsample of 1,731 men who were fathers; and a subsample of 316 men who had fathered children with more than one woman and who had available fertility information. Children included only biological children (not stepchildren).

Data Limitations

The NSFG data used here are limited in that they rely on father reports of their childbearing histories. Research has shown that men tend to underreport their levels of fertility, either because they are unaware of children they have fathered or because they choose not to report them.^{xxxvii} Furthermore, the sample is limited to men between the ages of 15 and 44. It is possible that men outside this age range (particularly older men) may have fathered children with multiple partners. Thus, the actual prevalence of men's multiple-partner fertility may in fact be higher than what is represented by these data.

Resources

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' **Promoting Responsible Fatherhood** homepage contains information about federal and state initiatives to promote responsible fatherhood: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov>
- **The National Fatherhood Initiative** provides information to fathers and educators about increasing fathers' involvement in the lives of their children: www.fatherhood.org
- **The National Center on Fathers and Families** provides current research knowledge and information about programs, organizations, and policies aimed at increasing father involvement: <http://fatherfamilylink.gse.upenn.edu/index.htm>

References

- ⁱ Manning, W.D., & Smock, P.J. (1999). New families and nonresident father-child visitation. *Social Forces*, 78(1), 87-116.
- ⁱⁱ Manning, W.D., & Smock, P.J. (2000). Swapping families: Serial parenting and economic support for children. *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 62, 111-122.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Mincy, R.B. (2001). *Who should marry whom?: Multiple partner fertility among new parents*. Paper presented at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Research Conference, Washington, DC.
- ^{iv} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006). *Men who father children with more than one woman: A contemporary portrait of multiple-partner fertility*. Child Trends Research Brief (Publication No. 2006-10). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ^v Guzzo, K., & Furstenberg, F.F. (2006). *Multi-partnered fertility among American men*. Paper presented at the Population Association of America, Los Angeles, CA.
- ^{vi} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006).
- ^{vii} Manning, W.D., & Smock, P.J. (1999).
- ^{viii} Manning, W.D., & Smock, P.J. (2000).
- ^{ix} Mincy, R.B. (2001).
- ^x Carlson, M. & Furstenberg, F. (2005). *The consequences of multi-partnered fertility for parental resources and relationships*. Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington, DC.
- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} Lichter, D.T., & Graife, D.R. (2001). Finding a mate? The marital and cohabitation histories of unwed mothers. In L.L. Wu, & B. Wolfe (Eds.), *Out of wedlock: Causes and consequences of nonmarital fertility* (pp. 317-343). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- ^{xiii} Upchurch, D.M., Lillard, L.A., & Panis, C.W.A. (2001). The impact of nonmarital childbearing on subsequent marital formation and dissolution. In L.L. Wu, & B. Wolfe (Eds.), *Out of wedlock: Causes and consequences of nonmarital fertility* (pp. 344-380). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- ^{xiv} Guzzo, K., & Furstenberg, F.F. (2006).
- ^{xv} Manning, W.D., & Smock, P.J. (1999). New families and nonresident father-child visitation. *Social Forces*, 78(1), 87-116.
- ^{xvi} Manning, W.D., & Smock, P.J. (2000). Swapping families: Serial parenting and economic support for children. *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 62, 111-122.
- ^{xvii} Mincy, R., & Huang, C.C. (2002). *The "M" word: The rise and fall of interracial coalitions of fathers and welfare reform*. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Working Paper #02-07-FF.
- ^{xviii} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006).
- ^{xix} Ibid.
- ^{xx} Ibid.
- ^{xxi} Ibid.
- ^{xxii} Carlson, M. J., & Furstenburg, F. F. (2006). The prevalence and correlates of multipartnered fertility among urban U.S. parents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 68, 718-732.
- ^{xxiii} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006).
- ^{xxiv} Carlson, M. J., & Furstenburg, F. F. (2006).
- ^{xxv} Guzzo, K., & Furstenberg, F.F. (2006).
- ^{xxvi} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006).
- ^{xxvii} Ibid..
- ^{xxviii} Carlson, M. J., & Furstenburg, F. F. (2006).
- ^{xxix} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006).
- ^{xxx} Guzzo, K., & Furstenberg, F.F. (2006).
- ^{xxxi} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006).
- ^{xxxii} Carlson, M. J., & Furstenburg, F. F. (2006).
- ^{xxxiii} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006).
- ^{xxxiv} Guzzo, K., & Furstenberg, F.F. (2006).
- ^{xxxv} Logan, C., Manlove, J., Ikramullah, E., & Cottingham, S. (2006).
- ^{xxxvi} National Center for Health Statistics. (2004). *Public use data file documentation: National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6: 2002, users' guide*. Hyattsville, MD.
- ^{xxxvii} Rendell, M.S., Clarke, L., Peters, H. D., Ranged, N., & Verrapolou, G. (1997). *Incomplete reporting of male fertility in the United States and Britain: A research note*. Unpublished manuscript, Cornell University.