

**THE SURVEY OF INCOME AND
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION**

Multiple Partner Fertility in the United States: A Demographic Portrait

SEHSD Working Paper #2017-45
SIPP Working Paper #280

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Issued October 5, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Multiple partner fertility is defined as having children with more than one partner. Roughly one out of every 10 adults in the United States has multiple partner fertility (see Table 1), based on new data from the U.S. Census Bureau.^{1,2}

Families have become more complex in recent decades, due in part to high rates of divorce and non-marital fertility (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Martinez, Daniels, & Chandra, 2012). As families are disassembled and reassembled in new configurations, it seems a natural extension to assume that multiple partner fertility, or MPF, will be more prevalent and visible than ever before. However, data to this point have been unable to provide national estimates of the prevalence of multiple partner fertility.

The 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a nationally representative panel study of individuals and households, is the first national survey to include a direct question about whether respondents are MPF parents. In this paper, the SIPP data are used to describe the population of individuals in the U.S. who have MPF, and how they differ from other adults and other parents.

HISTORY AND PRIOR LITERATURE

Multiple partner fertility is not a new phenomenon, but it is only in recent years that social science data have become inclusive enough to permit its study. Until very recently, most large-scale questionnaires did not include questions about childbearing in sequential partnerships. For example, widowhood was probably the primary source of multiple partner fertility historically (see Cherlin, 1978, for a discussion). Due to war or disease or accidents, mothers and fathers still in their childbearing years found themselves available to repartner. The relatively young age at which these widows and widowers entered a second marriage increased the likelihood that such unions would also yield children. However, the complexity of such families was often masked by limitations of the data. Sometimes the children of previous unions were adopted by the new stepparent (see Stewart, 2007, for a discussion), but often surveys did not collect information about the biological relatedness of household members, and the data would show only a household comprised of two parents and their children. Even as divorce and remarriage increased in prevalence and the vocabulary of stepfamilies became common, many surveys did not expand their data collections to ask whether relationships were biological, step or adoptive.

¹ These data are released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion. Any views expressed on statistical, methodological, technical, or operational issues are those of the author and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

² In these data, adults are defined as individuals aged 15 or older.

Families across households present additional challenges. A coresident nuclear family consisting of mother, father, and child becomes infinitely more complex when the parents' other children living elsewhere are considered. Although some household surveys do include questions about children living elsewhere, the questions are often intended to capture child support data and so are limited to children of a certain age or children who live with an absent partner (see, for example, the SIPP, and Fragile Families).

Although interest in multiple partner fertility has grown in recent years, data limitations have impacted researchers' ability to explore the topic. Important work has been done, but researchers have had to provide caveats based on the constraints imposed by the data. For example, using the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, Carlson and Furstenberg (2006) estimated that more than a third of children born in large, urban centers around the turn of the millennium were born into multiple partner fertility families; however, they were limited in that their dataset does not include parents residing anywhere other than large cities. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79), Dorius (2011) estimated that 22 percent of mothers aged 41 to 49 have children with multiple partners; the sample, however, was limited to women who have completed childbearing. Using the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), Guzzo and Furstenberg (2007a) estimated that 17 percent of fathers aged 15 to 44 have children with more than one mother, but their analysis was limited to men of childbearing age. Other work has drawn on subpopulations such as poor parents (Evenhouse & Reilly, 2012; Monte, 2011), young mothers (Guzzo & Furstenberg, 2007b), or unmarried parents (Cancian, Meyer, & Cook, 2011; Scott, Peterson, Ikramulla, & Manlove, 2013).

Understanding the prevalence of MPF matters given what we know about its implications. For example, multiple partner fertility challenges the understanding of a family as a unit contained inside the walls of a single home. Once we start considering children or parents living elsewhere, resource sharing outside the household becomes a key factor in understanding the financial well-being of a household. Questions of child support received, as well as child support payments made, have significant impact on families' income and resources (Cancian, Meyer, & Park, 2003; Sinkewicz & Garfinkle, 2009). Additionally, while non-payment from an absent parent can have immediate impact for a custodial parent and children, non-payment also often results in steep penalties for outstanding payments for absent parents, compounding what are often already fragile financial situations (Maldonado, 2006). In light of all this, it is perhaps not surprising that Monte (2011) found that women's first birth with a second partner was associated with greater economic difficulties for poor mothers, as evidenced through a reliance on social welfare programs.

However, multiple partner fertility also matters for social support. Harknett and Knab (2007) found that mothers with children by more than one man had lower social support from family, despite theoretically having more family on which to call. They speculate that many extended kin may be willing to offer childcare and other forms of social support in a clearly defined nuclear family, but that the "boundary ambiguity" introduced by having children with multiple partners may reduce that willingness. These challenges also extend to men's children of a first relationship; Manning and Smock (2000) showed fathers' involvement with such children

plummets when they have a child or children in a new union. Moreover, Stewart (2005) found that stepparents become less involved with stepchildren upon the arrival of a biological child.

MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Guzzo and Dorius recently wrote an extensive piece outlining many of the challenges in the study of MPF (2016). In it, they demonstrate the breadth of estimates available, and discuss the ways in which the differences in datasets result in wildly disparate estimates. The authors discuss the need for a common definition of the phenomenon, which includes an understanding of its prevalence. Although the authors note that there is likely no “one size fits all” framing of MPF that will work for all analyses, they argue that research would be well served by a series of core estimates against which other samples could be benchmarked.

This paper is written partly in response to that call. In conjunction with what we know about the socio-economic correlates of MPF, and the ramifications of entering multiple partner fertility for both individuals and families, understanding the prevalence of such families is important for both future studies of fertility and families, as well as for policy makers looking to improve the circumstances of children and their parents. The new SIPP data presented here include key benchmarks for a national sample. In addition, the breadth of other information available in the SIPP is used to present subpopulation estimates and to describe the sample of parents with MPF and children in MPF families.

These data are used to address the following questions:

1. How prevalent is MPF?
2. How do MPF parents differ from the rest of the population?
3. How does the life course experience of MPF differ for mothers and fathers?

The goal of this paper is to provide a series of estimates of multiple partner fertility as a means to frame this phenomenon in the larger literature. Additionally, these data will show a variety of contextual measures as a means to extend the discussion of what MPF means for the individuals and families involved.

ABOUT THE DATA

The data used here are from Wave 1 of the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation, or SIPP. The SIPP is a longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of the civilian, non-institutionalized population. The 2014 SIPP panel ran for four years, and was administered by the U.S. Census Bureau annually during that period. These data are from the first interview, or Wave 1, of the 2014 SIPP panel, which was collected between February and June of 2014.³

The SIPP survey has been administered by the Census Bureau since 1984, in panels ranging from two to five years in length. The primary intent of the SIPP is to provide income and social program measures, and the survey has always focused on “core” questions of employment, income, and program use. Notably, however, the SIPP instrument was completely overhauled between the 2008 and the 2014 panels in an effort to reduce cost and respondent burden. Prior to

³ The data are subject to error arising from a variety of sources. For more information on sampling and nonsampling error see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements/2014/sipp-2014-source-and-accuracy-statement.pdf>

2014, the SIPP survey had been administered every four months throughout each panel, with assorted “topical modules” capturing information about non-core topics at various waves. The redesigned 2014 SIPP relies instead on annual interviews, and the previous topical module content has been folded into the core survey. To aid recall over a longer reference period (a year instead of the previous four months), an Event History Calendar was employed to capture monthly change.

The SIPP fertility battery was completely rewritten for the 2014 instrument. Previously, fertility content had been asked only once over the panel, in a single topical module, and the focus of the questions was on women’s fertility. However, the new SIPP instrument asks for complete fertility histories from both men and women, age 15 and over, and it asks them at every wave. The total children ever born / fathered, as well as month and year of birth for each child are collected from all adults. Additionally, the new SIPP includes a direct question about multiple partner fertility, asked of all adults with more than one child: “*Do all of your biological children share the same biological (mother/father)?*” For parents with children by multiple partners, the new SIPP also asks respondents to group children by shared other parent, and if the other parent lives in the household, the other parent is identified for all children.⁴

The multiple partner fertility question is a new item for the Census Bureau, and provides the first national estimate of multiple partner fertility. Additionally, the information about other parents allows parent partnerships between adult survey respondents to be identified, even when there are no children in the household. These data, however, are collected only at the parent level; this means that measuring parental MPF from the perspective of children is limited to the parents with whom children live.⁵

The Wave 1 sample is limited to residents of the sampled addresses at the time of the interview. Although some data are collected for individuals who lived with respondents during the year but are not present at interview, only those living at the sampled address are included as respondents and have fertility information. The Census Bureau employs a two-stage sample design to select the SIPP sample. The two stages are (1) selection of primary sampling units (PSUs) and (2) selection of address units within sample PSUs. This analysis utilizes replicate weights provided by the Census Bureau to more accurately represent standard errors and significance under this sampling methodology. When weighted, these data are nationally representative.⁶

RESULTS⁷

One of the central challenges in estimating MPF has been the lack of a standard against which to compare any new data. Although many phenomena of interest to social scientists also include a

⁴ Due to data collection constraints, these measures of childbearing relationships are limited to opposite-sex couples.

⁵ The implications of this are discussed further in both the Results section and in the Limitations section of this paper.

⁶ For additional information about the SIPP, its sampling frame, and its weights, see <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/methodology.html>. Readers should note that weights in the SIPP include an equivalency adjustment for spouses, but not for cohabiting couples. For this analysis, the weights provided by the Census Bureau were additionally adjusted to ensure equivalence between cohabitators.

⁷ The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant.

range of estimates, the lack of direct measures of MPF in national datasets has made framing the existing diversity of estimates much harder. Part of the difficulty lies in the lack of a common denominator. MPF parents are a select group. Although comparisons to all adults are reasonable, by definition, persons with MPF are all parents. More precisely, they are parents of at least two children. Therefore, depending on the research interest, researchers have generated estimates based on all adults, the population of adults who are parents, the population of adults who are parents of two or more children, and myriad other denominator populations.

Although the number of adults with MPF is static regardless of the population to whom they are being compared, the percent estimates of MPF within different populations vary as widely in the SIPP as they do elsewhere. For example, 10.1 percent of all adults have MPF, or roughly 1 out of 10 individuals aged 15 or older in the United States (see Table 1).^{8,9} However, when that same numerator (MPF parents) is compared only to other parents, the estimate changes; 15.7 percent of all parents have MPF, or roughly 1 out of every 6 parents. When the reference population is parents of two or more biological children, the prevalence of MPF is 20.6 percent, or roughly 1 out of every 5 parents of two or more children and roughly twice the rate as when the denominator is all adults.

(TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

In the SIPP, MPF is directly measured at the person level. However, the implications of a parent's fertility extend to children. As issues of child custody, child support, blended families, and social support are particularly relevant for young children, Table 1 also includes MPF estimates specifically for families with minor children.¹⁰ For these purposes, families are defined as any coresidential grouping featuring at least one parent and a minor child; estimates are presented at the couple level so if either parent has MPF, then the family is coded as having MPF, even if the MPF parent is not biologically related to the minor child.¹¹ Among such families living with minor children, more than a quarter feature MPF on the part of at least one parent. Roughly 22 percent of married parent families include MPF, while one or both parents has MPF in 44 percent of cohabiting families.

Unfortunately, the nature of the SIPP survey prohibits parental MPF estimates for a nationally-representative population of all children. Because the survey only asks about the fertility of resident parents, the data do not allow for complete measures of parental fertility for children who do not live with both biological parents. Nonetheless, these data do provide some insight into children's experience of MPF. As shown in Table 2, 17.6 percent of children under 18 are living with a biological half sibling, meaning that at least one of their parents has MPF. Additionally, we are able to obtain a complete estimate of familial multiple partner fertility for the subgroup of children who live with two biological parents. More than 1 in 5 of such children (21.8 percent) have at least one half-sibling through at least one of their parents.

⁸ All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing, and, unless otherwise noted, all comparisons are statistically significant at the 5 percent significance level.

⁹ For collection purposes, the Census Bureau treats individuals age 15 and up as "adults." Anyone 15 years old or older at the time of interview is asked about their fertility, and these results include all eligible respondents.

¹⁰ Minor children include both biological and nonbiological children (such as step or adopted children).

¹¹ In single parent families, in which there is no coresident spouse or partner, MPF estimates are limited to the resident parent.

(TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE)
(TABLE 3a ABOUT HERE)

Tables 3a and 3b shows the demographic comparison between the U.S. population of all adults (persons aged 15 or older), the population of parents (persons aged 15 or older who have given birth to or biologically fathered at least one child), and the population of MPF parents. The table also includes the breakouts for Single Partner Fertility (SPF) parents for general reference; however, those results are not discussed here.

As demonstrated in other datasets, parents are more highly represented in older age groups, and are more likely to be female, than is the full adult population (see Table 3a).¹² However, the MPF parents have lower representation in the highest age groups than do parents as a whole, likely indicating a cohort effect of increasing prevalence of MPF. MPF parents also have a significantly different racial profile from both all adults and all parents. MPF parents are less likely to be White alone or Asian alone, and more likely to be Black alone or to identify as multiracial or something other than White, Black, or Asian. Additionally, a larger percentage of multiple partner fertility parents are Hispanic than is true for either all adults or all parents.¹³

There are also differences in educational attainment. MPF parents as a group tend to have lower education levels at the time of the survey than both all adults and all parents. A higher percentage of MPF parents have at most a high school degree than do either all adults or all parents. Similarly, a lower percentage of MPF parents have either a bachelor's or a graduate degree than do either of these other groups.

(TABLE 3b ABOUT HERE)

Given demonstrated differences by age, education, and race, it is perhaps unsurprising that MPF parents are more likely to live in a household below the poverty line than are all adults or all parents (see Table 3b).^{14,15} More than one in six MPF parents (18.4 percent) lives in a household below poverty, compared to 12.4 percent of all adults, and 11.5 percent of all parents. Concomitantly, MPF parents are more than 10 percentage points less likely than all parents to live in a household where the household's income is at or above twice the poverty threshold for a household of that size.

¹² Compared to all parents, smaller proportions of MPF parents are in their teens or 20s, likely because MPF parents have to have had at least two children.

¹³ Hispanic origin is measured independent of race.

¹⁴ The SIPP provides multiple measures of poverty. In this paper, I use household poverty because family poverty measures do not include the income of cohabiting partners. Given the prevalence of MPF in cohabiting families, the household poverty measures, which includes everyone living in a residence, are believed to be a more complete representation of these households' economic well-being. As only 5.6 percent of the 2014 SIPP sample live in extended family households or with non-relatives, this more inclusive measure seems unlikely to bias estimates (Schondelmyer, 2017).

¹⁵ Household poverty is measured by combining the income of all persons in the household, regardless of relationship, and comparing it to the Federal Poverty Line for a household of that size.

Notably, however, the relationship between MPF and poverty persists even when controlling for correlated demographic characteristics. Table 4 shows the results of a logistic regression modeling the odds of living in a household below the poverty threshold based on MPF and demographics. Even net of controls for sex, race, age, origin, educational attainment, and children ever born, MPF parents are still more likely to live in households below the poverty line than are either all parents or all adults.

(TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE)

The relationship between economic disadvantage and multiple partner fertility is likely reciprocal, meaning that poverty may both cause, and result from, MPF. More disadvantaged individuals have less stable relationships, perhaps due to economic pressures (Lewin, 2005). It may be that the difficulty of maintaining a first childbearing relationship with few resources disproportionately puts low-income parents in the MPF risk set. However, MPF itself may also cause economic problems. For example, MPF is associated with larger family size (Carlson & Furstenberg, 2006), which may mean that MPF parents face greater strain on their resources than do other parents. MPF also means that custodial parents are likely relying on child support from absent parents (Meyer, Cancian, & Cook, 2005), and child support is a less efficient means of economic support than a shared household budget (Bartfeld, 2000). Conversely, MPF parents may have financial obligations outside the household - including, but not limited to, both formal and informal child support - and these obligations may reduce family resources (Sinkewicz & Garfinkle, 2009).

Marriage, cohabitation, and childbearing are all also correlated with MPF (see Table 3b). A smaller proportion of MPF parents report either being married, or being married and having had children with their spouse, than do all parents. Conversely, a larger proportion of MPF parents report both living with an unmarried partner, and living with an unmarried partner with whom they have children, than do all parents. Additionally, MPF parents are less likely to have ever been married, but a higher percentage have been married two or more times than is true for all parents. Some of these differences in marital histories may be because MPF is typically associated with the end of a first childbearing relationship, and non-marital unions have been found to be significantly less stable than marital unions (for a recent review of this literature, see Tach & Edin, 2013). This means that individuals with a non-marital first birth are disproportionately at risk of having their relationship end, and therefore are at greater risk of MPF.

(TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE)

The prevalence of multiple partner fertility varies among different demographic subgroups. Table 5 shows the percent of mothers and fathers who have MPF in different demographic subgroups. For example, a higher percentage of mothers in their 20s have MPF than do fathers in their 20s (16 percent compared to 10 percent). The same is true of mothers and fathers in their 30s and in their 40s. White alone mothers are more likely to have MPF than are White alone fathers, as are Hispanic mothers when compared to Hispanic fathers. Notably, Black alone mothers and fathers are not significantly different from each other in their percent MPF; the same is true for Asian alone mothers and fathers. Additionally, Black alone parents have the

highest rates of MPF of any race or origin group except for mothers in the “other race” category.¹⁶ MPF mothers are a disproportionately large proportion of never married mothers (28.9 percent) compared to the proportion of MPF fathers among never married fathers (19.2 percent). However, roughly one third of parents who have been married two or more times have MPF, regardless of whether you look at mothers or fathers.

The experience of, and trajectory to, multiple partner fertility is different for MPF fathers and MPF mothers; Table 6 shows these differences. For example, MPF mothers are more likely to have had only two children than are MPF fathers, while MPF fathers are more likely to have had four or more children than are MPF mothers. These differences result in a relatively small, but statistically significant difference in the average children ever born for MPF mothers and fathers (3.3 children for mothers, and 3.5 children for fathers).

(TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE)

MPF mothers and fathers enter parenthood earlier than average. While national data from the National Center for Health Statistics reports that the average age at first birth is 23 for women and 25 for men, the mean age that MPF parents in the SIPP enter parenthood is approximately 20 for women and 23 for men (Martinez, Daniels, Chandra, 2012).¹⁷ Table 6 shows that average age at entry into MPF in the SIPP sample is 26 for women and just under 30 for men.¹⁸

The majority of MPF parents transition into MPF at the second child, regardless of parent sex, and there are not differences between men and women in terms of the birth order at which that parent transitioned to MPF. However, there are differences by sex in terms of fertility subsequent to the transition into multiple partner fertility. A higher percentage of MPF fathers have had more than one child after entering MPF than do MPF mothers: only about a third of MPF fathers had entered MPF with their last observed birth, while 42 percent of mothers entered MPF with their last child.¹⁹

Disparities in overall fertility are paralleled by disparities in coresidence with children. About 65 percent of MPF mothers live with at least one biological child, but the same is true of only 51 percent of MPF fathers. Of course, the population of MPF parents includes parents for whom some or all of their children are adults and have moved out; however, we would expect the impact of child age to be relatively equal across mothers and fathers. Far more striking is the proportion of parents who live with all of their biological children; only 4.5 percent of MPF fathers live with all of their biological children, while about a quarter of MPF mothers do. These data accord with the findings of others who note that mothers almost always retain custody following a union dissolution (e.g., Grall, 2016).

¹⁶ The “other race” category includes individuals who indicated a race other than White alone, Black alone, or Asian alone, as well as those who selected more than one race.

¹⁷ The average ages for entry into parenthood are higher for SIPP parents than the national averages by sex: 24 for women, and 27 for men.

¹⁸ Age at entry into MPF is the age at which a woman gave birth to her first child with a second partner, or the father’s age when his second childbearing union partner gave birth to their first shared child.

¹⁹ Readers should note that these data include only births observed at the time of the Wave 1 survey in the spring of 2014. Not all respondents have completed their fertility at the time of that survey, so for some of these respondents the last observed birth may not ultimately be their last birth.

The difference in the proportion of mothers and fathers who live with biological children likely helps to explain differences in poverty status. Differential custody of children means that MPF mothers likely have larger households with fewer earners, on average, than do MPF fathers, which results in a lower ratio of income to household size. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that 22.4 percent of MPF mothers live in households below the poverty line, while the same is true of only 12.7 percent of MPF fathers. These data do not negate the overall higher levels of poverty observed for MPF parents when compared to all adults and all parents in Table 2, however. Instead, poverty is likely both a cause of MPF and an outcome, but the effects are exacerbated for custodial parents.

Current relationship status and marital histories also diverge by the sex of the MPF parent in question. For example, 61.8 percent of MPF fathers are married at the time of the interview, and about half (48.2 percent) of all fathers are not only married, but also have children with their current spouse at the time of the interview.²⁰ In contrast, less than half of all MPF mothers are married at the time of the survey, and only about a third of all MPF mothers are married and have children with their spouse. The prevalence of marriage for men extends to marital history; MPF fathers are also more likely to be ever married, and more likely to have ever been divorced, than MPF mothers. Notably, however, a higher percentage of MPF mothers report having ever been widowed than do MPF fathers.

Relatively few MPF parents of either gender are cohabiting; only 10.1 percent of MPF mothers and 11.9 percent of MPF fathers are living with an unmarried partner at the time of the interview. However, what is striking for this population of parents is the number who are neither married nor cohabiting at the time of the interview. About half of MPF mothers do not have a coresident spouse or partner, while the same is true of approximately a quarter of MPF fathers.

LIMITATIONS

Although numerous steps have been taken to address potential issues in these data, there are nonetheless still caveats to these estimates. For example, the SIPP is a nationally representative sample of the civilian, non-institutionalized population. Other research has directly linked incarceration to fertility in higher order partnerships (Cancian, Chung, & Meyer, 2016); in this context, the exclusion of the incarcerated portion of the “institutionalized” population may result in an undercount of the true level of MPF, particularly for men, as men are the majority of the incarcerated population (see Petit & Western, 2004, for a discussion). In fact, Hernandez and Brandon (2002) note that Black men, in particular, are underrepresented in surveys like the SIPP because of their disproportionate representation in both incarcerated and enlisted populations. Given that MPF is higher among the Black alone population, any underrepresentation of Black men may again dampen estimates.

There are also consistent concerns with regard to reporting of sensitive information, such as fertility. Many scholars have found that sensitive information is often underreported during in-person interviews (Marquis, Marquis, & Polich, 1986). Anticipating this concern, the SIPP fertility battery underwent extensive cognitive testing to lessen negative responses to the questions being asked. Even so, the topics covered are likely to have been considered “personal”

²⁰ Due to data constraints, only opposite sex couples are included in measures of shared childbearing in unions.

questions by many respondents, which may have influenced reporting. These data do not permit an analysis of this type of non-response, but it is important to acknowledge its possibility.

Additionally, many scholars have questioned the validity of men's reports of their own fertility. For example, Rendall et. al. (1999) finds significant underreporting of non-marital and previous-marriage fertility by men, although the authors attribute some of these issues to coverage problems like those discussed above. Nonetheless, inaccurate reporting remains a concern for men's fertility data in the SIPP.

In an effort to counteract these reporting concerns, the fertility battery in the 2014 SIPP was designed to try to address reporting issues. For example, questions asked about shared fertility between coresident partners, and information from a coresident partner's fertility history was used to build a second partner's history. This resulted in low rates of statistical imputation for both men's and women's reports of multiple partner fertility (3.6 percent for both). However, by dint of their comprehensive nature, the data reveal other concerns. For example, roughly 40 percent of men in the SIPP sample report that they are childless, which is higher than the 31 percent of women who report the same. Although this discrepancy is in line with other data on men's childlessness (e.g., Martinez, Daniels, Chandra, 2012), per the logic presented in Amundsen (2014), higher childlessness among men is explainable if the men who have children have those children with more than one woman. However, the SIPP data show lower levels of MPF for men than for women, and generally fewer unions. Given low levels of statistical allocation of both children ever born and multiple partner fertility, this juxtaposition then suggests that respondents in the SIPP are either not fully reporting their fertility, or that the SIPP may not include a truly representative sample of men.

Beyond sampling and reporting concerns, there are also limitations in using these data in terms of what is not included. The SIPP includes respondents' reports of their own MPF, and household roster data on sibling relationships allow some examination of parents' MPF. However, the SIPP does not collect MPF information directly from a child's perspective. This means that if a SIPP child lives with a single parent, we only know about the fertility of that coresident parent, not the parent who lives elsewhere. From a child's perspective, then, we only know whether their coresident parent(s) have MPF. As roughly a third of all children under 18 in the SIPP live with only one biological parent at the time of the survey, and roughly 3 percent do not live with any parents, this omission greatly limits the utility of SIPP for studying the implications of MPF for children.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2014 SIPP is the first nationally-representative dataset to include a direct measure of multiple partner fertility. These data offer new insight into the extent of familial complexity that many parents and children are navigating, and offers additional information about the correlates of MPF.

The most fundamental finding is that MPF is quite common. Even acknowledging multiple data limitations that may lower estimates of its prevalence in the SIPP, the data still show that more than a quarter of families with minor children have multiple partner fertility. Additionally, one

out of every ten adults, and one out of every five parents of two or more biological children, have MPF. Moreover, roughly 17 percent of children live with a half sibling.²¹

However, the data also demonstrate the differential prevalence of MPF in different demographic subgroups. For example, roughly a third of parents who have been married two or more times have MPF, while only 15 percent of ever married women, and 14 percent of ever married men, have MPF. The SIPP data further show that the trajectory into parenthood is different for MPF parents than it is for the population of all parents; MPF parents start earlier, and have more kids, than do all parents. The paths through adulthood also diverge. At the time of the interview, MPF parents are less likely to be married, and are less likely to have ever been married, than are all parents. However, a significantly larger percentage of MPF parents has been married two or more times than is true among all parents. Additionally, the data show marked difference in terms of coresidence with children and household poverty for MPF mothers and MPF fathers.

The 2014 SIPP data represent the first nationally-representative collection of information about multiple partner fertility in the United States. These data, although limited to the civilian, non-institutionalized population, provide estimates against which other data can be compared.²² Based on these data, the importance of considering families that extend beyond a single household is clear. Although the prevalence of multiple partner fertility varies by subgroup, the overall impression is that MPF is fairly common. Future work using these and other data will need to consider more fully the implications of such family complexity for the individuals involved.

²¹ This estimate is limited to children under age 18 who live with a biological parent. For a parallel estimate from the 2008 SIPP panel, see Table 4 in:

<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2011/demo/p70-126.pdf>

²² In the interest of facilitating comparison, Appendix Table A presents additional subsample estimates from the 2014 SIPP in comparison to published estimates from other surveys. Statistically significant differences are noted.

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TABLE 1: Overall Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility (MPF)

(Numbers in thousands)

	All	Have MPF		
	Number	Number	Percent	MOE (1)
Persons aged 15+	252,089	25,436	10.1	0.3
Persons aged 15+ who are parents (2)	161,690	25,436	15.7	0.4
Parents of 2+ biological children	123,479	25,436	20.6	0.5
Families living with children <18 (3)	36,588	9,796	26.8	1.0
Parent with no partner present (4)	11,711	3,576	30.5	2.0
Partnered parent families	24,878	6,220	25.0	1.1
Married parent families	21,897	4,921	22.5	1.1
Cohabiting parent families	2,981	1,300	43.6	4.2

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel, Wave 1

- (1) This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 95-percent confidence interval around the estimate.
- (2) This sample is limited to parents with biological children; the children may be of any age.
- (3) For these purposes, a family is defined as any familial grouping including at least one parent/child pair who live together and in which the child is less than 18 years old. Multiple partner fertility is indicated if either parent (including step- and adoptive parents) has children with more than one person. Each family is counted only once, regardless of how many children are in the family. A single household can contain more than one family.
- (4) These are parents who do not have a spouse or cohabiting partner in the household.

TABLE 2: Prevalence of Parental Multiple Partner Fertility Among Children

(Numbers in thousands)

	Number	Percent	MOE (1)
Children < 18 (2)	70,923	100.0	0.0
Has half siblings in household (3)	12,475	17.6	1.0
Children < 18 living with two biological parents	43,400	100.0	
Has half siblings	9,474	21.8	1.2
Has half siblings in household (3)	3,648	8.4	0.8
Has half siblings not in household (4)	6,762	15.6	1.1

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel, Wave 1

- (1) This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 95-percent confidence interval around the estimate.
- (2) Limited to children under 18 living with at least one biological parent as of December 2013.
- (3) This measure reflects children's families as of December 2013.
- (4) This estimate likely represents a lower bound. Due to limitations of the data, we are unable to fully estimate half siblings when a parent has more than two childbearing unions.

TABLE 3a: Demographic Characteristics of Adults, Parents, and Types of Parents
(Numbers in thousands)

	All Adults			All Parents			Multiple Partner Fertility (MPF) Parents			Single Partner Fertility (SPF) Parents		
	Percent of			Percent of			Percent of			Percent of		
	N	total	MOE (1)	N	total	MOE (1)	N	total	MOE (1)	N	total	MOE (1)
Sample	252,089	100.0	0.0	161,690	100.0	0.0	25,436	100.0	0.0	136,255	100.0	0.0
Male	121,715	48.3	0.1	72,022	44.5	0.2	10,475	41.2	1.2	61,547	45.2	0.3
Female	130,375	51.7	0.1	89,668	55.5	0.2	14,961	58.8	1.2	74,708	54.8	0.3
AGE												
15-19	21,000	8.3	0.1	540	0.3	0.1	18	0.1	0.1	523	0.4	0.1
20-29	42,681	16.9	0.1	12,178	7.5	0.3	1,685	6.6	0.6	10,492	7.7	0.3
30-39	40,383	16.0	0.1	27,644	17.1	0.3	4,615	18.1	1.0	23,029	16.9	0.4
40-49	40,825	16.2	0.1	32,518	20.1	0.3	6,090	23.9	1.1	26,428	19.4	0.4
50-59	43,889	17.4	0.1	34,720	21.5	0.3	6,328	24.9	1.2	28,392	20.8	0.3
60-69	33,296	13.2	0.1	27,671	17.1	0.3	4,032	15.9	0.9	23,639	17.3	0.3
70+	30,015	11.9	0.1	26,419	16.3	0.2	2,668	10.5	0.8	23,751	17.4	0.3
Median age at interview	45			52			50			52		
Median age at first birth	NA			24			21			25		
RACE & ETHNICITY												
White alone	198,835	78.9	0.0	128,422	79.4	0.3	17,847	70.2	1.0	110,575	81.2	0.3
Black alone	31,417	12.5	0.0	20,211	12.5	0.2	5,865	23.1	1.0	14,346	10.5	0.2
Asian alone	13,789	5.5	0.2	8,476	5.2	0.3	598	2.4	0.4	7,878	5.8	0.3
All other races, race combinations	8,048	3.2	0.2	4,581	2.8	0.2	1,126	4.4	0.6	3,455	2.5	0.2
Hispanic (of any race)	39,095	15.5	0.0	25,105	15.5	0.2	4,452	17.5	1.0	20,653	15.2	0.3
EDUCATION												
Less than a high school degree	41,993	16.7	0.3	22,285	13.8	0.5	4,777	18.8	1.2	17,509	12.8	0.4
High school degree	69,861	27.7	0.4	49,827	30.8	0.5	8,995	35.4	1.5	40,832	30.0	0.6
Some college, no degree	48,831	19.4	0.4	29,409	18.2	0.4	5,609	22.1	1.1	23,800	17.5	0.5
Associate's degree	20,897	8.3	0.3	14,486	9.0	0.3	2,209	8.7	0.7	12,277	9.0	0.3
Bachelor's degree	44,888	17.8	0.4	28,081	17.4	0.5	2,350	9.2	0.8	25,731	18.9	0.5
Graduate or Professional degree	25,618	10.2	0.3	17,602	10.9	0.4	1,496	5.9	0.7	16,106	11.8	0.5

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel, Wave 1

NOTE: Estimates are weighted so as to be nationally representative. When added together, individual estimates may not equal the total due to rounding.

NA = Not applicable

(1) This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 95-percent confidence interval around the estimate.

TABLE 3b: Interview Month Characteristics of Adults, Parents, and Types of Parents
(Numbers in thousands)

	All Adults			All Parents			Multiple Partner Fertility (MPF) Parents			Single Partner Fertility (SPF) Parents		
	N	Percent of		N	Percent of		N	Percent of		N	Percent of	
		total	MOE (1)		total	MOE (1)		total	MOE (1)		total	MOE (1)
Sample	252,089	100.0	0.0	161,690	100.0	0.0	25,436	100.0	0.0	136,255	100.0	0.0
POVERTY STATUS AT TIME OF INTERVIEW (2)												
Lives in household below poverty line	31,217	12.4	0.4	18,610	11.5	0.4	4,681	18.4	1.0	13,929	10.2	0.4
Lives in household at or above the poverty line	220,873	87.6	0.4	143,081	88.5	0.4	20,755	81.6	1.0	122,326	89.8	0.4
Lives in household at or above 2x poverty	177,786	70.5	0.5	114,362	70.7	0.6	15,011	59.0	1.3	99,351	72.9	0.6
NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN/FATHERED												
No children	90,399	35.9	0.4	NA			NA			NA		
One child	38,212	15.2	0.4	38,212	23.6	0.6	NA			38,212	28.0	0.7
Two children	61,774	24.5	0.4	61,774	38.2	0.7	7,568	29.8	1.2	54,206	39.8	0.7
Three children	35,216	14.0	0.3	35,216	21.8	0.5	8,348	32.8	1.3	26,868	19.7	0.6
Four or more children	26,489	10.5	0.4	26,489	16.4	0.6	9,520	37.4	1.5	16,970	12.5	0.5
Mean number of children ever born/fathered	1.6			2.4			3.4			2.3		
PRESENCE OF PARTNER AT TIME OF INTERVIEW												
Married, spouse present	122,482	48.6	0.5	103,929	64.3	0.5	12,954	50.9	1.4	90,975	66.8	0.6
Spouse has MPF	12,952	5.1	0.2	12,297	7.6	0.3	2,407	9.5	1.0	9,891	7.3	0.3
Has biological children with spouse (3)	86,004	34.1	0.5	86,004	53.2	0.7	9,851	38.7	1.4	76,153	55.9	0.7
Has biological children with spouse, and spouse has MPF (3)	9,849	3.9	0.2	9,849	6.1	0.3	1,900	7.5	1.0	7,950	5.8	0.3
Cohabiting	18,943	7.5	0.3	11,058	6.8	0.4	2,749	10.8	0.9	8,309	6.1	0.4
Partner has MPF	2,749	1.1	0.1	2,389	1.5	0.2	570	2.2	0.6	1,820	1.3	0.1
Has biological children with partner (3)	5,546	2.2	0.2	5,546	3.4	0.3	1,408	5.5	0.7	4,138	3.0	0.3
Has biological children with partner, and partner has MPF (3)	1,408	0.6	0.1	1,408	0.9	0.1	239	0.9	0.3	1,170	0.9	0.1
No coresident partner	110,665	43.9	0.5	46,703	28.9	0.5	9,733	38.3	1.4	36,970	27.1	0.5
MARITAL HISTORY												
Ever married	172,709	68.5	0.4	145,881	90.2	0.4	21,434	84.3	1.1	124,447	91.3	0.3
Married 2+ times	41,309	16.4	0.3	36,269	22.4	0.5	12,018	47.2	1.3	24,251	17.8	0.5
Never married	79,380	31.5	0.4	15,810	9.8	0.4	4,002	15.7	1.1	11,808	8.7	0.3

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel, Wave 1

NOTE: Estimates are weighted so as to be nationally representative. When added together, individual estimates may not equal the total due to rounding.

NA = Not applicable

(1) This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 95-percent confidence interval around the estimate.

(2) Poverty status is determined using the Federal Poverty Line for a household of that size.

(3) Due to constraints of the data, estimates of shared fertility are limited to opposite sex couples.

TABLE 4: Logistic Regressions Predicting Poverty by MPF Status

	All Adults				All Parents			
	Estimate	SE	Odds Ratio	P<.05	Estimate	SE	Odds Ratio	P<.05
Intercept	5.2	0.00273	NA	<.0001	7.1	0.00400	NA	<.0001
Multiple partner fertility (0/1, 1=yes)	0.4	0.00064	1.48	<.0001	0.3	0.00065	1.40	<.0001
Female (0/1, 1=yes)	0.3	0.00040	1.29	<.0001	0.4	0.00054	1.52	<.0001
Age (continuous, in years)	0.0	0.00001	0.98	<.0001	0.0	0.00002	0.97	<.0001
White alone (0/1, 1=yes)	-0.5	0.00045	0.58	<.0001	-0.6	0.00059	0.56	<.0001
Hispanic Origin (0/1, 1=yes)	0.3	0.00051	1.37	<.0001	0.2	0.00069	1.21	<.0001
Educational Attainment (categorical, higher values = more education)	-0.2	0.00007	0.85	<.0001	-0.2	0.00009	0.82	<.0001
Children ever born (continuous)	0.1	0.00015	1.05	<.0001	0.1	0.00019	1.09	<.0001

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel, Wave 1

NA = Not applicable

TABLE 5: Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility (MPF) in Demographic Subgroups, by Parent Sex
(Numbers in thousands)

	Mothers				Fathers			
	N	Number in group who have MPF	Percent of group to have MPF	MOE (1)	N	Number in group who have MPF	Percent of group to have MPF	MOE (1)
TOTAL	89,668	14,961	16.7	0.5	72,022	10,475	14.5	0.5
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW								
15-19	389	15	3.9	3.7	151	2	1.4	2.9
20-29	7,873	1,255	15.9	1.6	4,305	430	10.0	1.8
30-39	15,465	3,069	19.8	1.4	12,179	1,545	12.7	1.4
40-49	17,297	3,612	20.9	1.5	15,222	2,478	16.3	1.4
50-59	18,732	3,454	18.4	1.2	15,988	2,875	18.0	1.3
60-69	14,762	2,174	14.7	1.2	12,909	1,858	14.4	1.4
70+	15,151	1,381	9.1	1.0	11,268	1,287	11.4	1.3
RACE & ETHNICITY								
White alone	70,311	10,354	14.7	0.6	58,111	7,493	12.9	0.6
Black alone	11,990	3,546	29.6	1.6	8,221	2,319	28.2	2.0
Asian alone	4,751	324	6.8	1.6	3,725	274	7.4	2.2
All other races, race combinations	2,617	737	28.2	3.8	1,964	389	19.8	4.0
Hispanic (of any race)	13,833	2,667	19.3	1.4	11,271	1,785	15.8	1.3
MARITAL HISTORY								
Ever married	79,679	12,076	15.2	0.6	66,201	9,358	14.1	0.5
Married 2+ times	19,566	6,434	32.9	1.5	16,703	5,585	33.4	1.6
Never married	9,989	2,885	28.9	2.0	5,820	1,117	19.2	2.4

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel, Wave 1

NOTE: Estimates are weighted so as to be nationally representative. When added together, individual estimates may not equal the total due to rounding.

NA = Not applicable

(1) This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 95-percent confidence interval around the estimate.

TABLE 6: Multiple Partner Fertility Characteristics by Parent Sex
(Numbers in thousands)

	MPF Mothers			MPF Fathers		
	N	Percent of total	MOE (1)	N	Percent of total	MOE (1)
TOTAL	14,961	100.0	0.0	10,475	100.0	0.0
NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN / BIOLOGICALLY FATHERED						
Two children	4,832	32.3	1.6	2,736	26.1	1.8
Three children	4,993	33.4	1.8	3,356	32.0	1.8
Four or more children	5,136	34.3	1.8	4,384	41.8	2.2
Mean number of children ever born/fathered	3.3	NA		3.5	NA	
MEAN AGE AT FIRST BIRTH	20.5	NA		23.3	NA	
MEAN AGE AT MPF ENTRY	26.2	NA		29.5	NA	
BIRTH ORDER OF MPF CHILD & NUMBER OF CHILDBEARING UNIONS						
Second child	12,688	84.8	1.3	9,043	86.3	1.5
Third child	1,682	11.2	1.1	1,046	10.0	1.4
Fourth or higher child	591	4.0	0.6	386	3.7	0.8
Most recent birth was MPF entry	6,300	42.1	1.8	3,532	33.7	2.1
MPF entry preceded most recent birth	8,661	57.9	1.8	6,943	66.3	2.1
Has more than two unions	2,673	17.9	1.4	1,646	15.7	1.6
Three childbearing unions	2,153	14.4	1.2	1,187	11.3	1.4
Four or more childbearing unions	520	3.5	0.7	459	4.4	0.8
CORESIDENCE WITH CHILDREN AT TIME OF INTERVIEW						
Lives with any biological children	9,707	64.9	1.6	5,326	50.8	2.1
Lives with all of his/her biological children	3,601	24.1	1.6	475	4.5	0.9
Lives with only biological children	9,355	62.5	1.6	4,743	45.3	2.1
POVERTY STATUS AT TIME OF INTERVIEW (2)						
Lives in household below poverty line	3,353	22.4	1.5	1,328	12.7	1.3
Lives in household at or above the poverty line	11,608	77.6	1.5	9,147	87.3	1.3
Lives in household at or above 2x poverty	7,927	53.0	1.8	7,084	67.6	2.1
PARTNER AT TIME OF INTERVIEW						
Married, spouse present	6,477	43.3	1.9	6,476	61.8	2.0
Spouse is also MPF parent (3)	1,210	8.1	0.9	1,197	11.4	1.3
Has biological child(ren) with spouse (4)	4,797	32.1	1.9	5,053	48.2	1.9
Has biological children with spouse and spouse has MPF (3)	950	6.3	0.9	950	9.1	1.2
Cohabiting	1,504	10.1	1.1	1,245	11.9	1.4
Partner is also MPF parent (3)	291	1.9	0.5	279	2.7	0.7
Has biological child(ren) with partner (4)	757	5.1	0.8	651	6.2	1.0
Has biological children with partner and partner has MPF (3)	119	0.8	0.3	119	1.1	0.4
No coresident partner	6,980	46.7	1.7	2,753	26.3	1.7
MARITAL HISTORY						
Ever married	12,076	80.7	1.6	9,358	89.3	1.3
Ever divorced	7,799	52.1	1.6	6,276	59.9	2.2
Ever widowed	1,722	11.5	1.0	614	5.9	1.0
Never married	2,885	19.3	1.6	1,117	10.7	1.3

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel, Wave 1

NOTE: Estimates are weighted so as to be nationally representative. When added together, individual estimates may not equal the total due to rounding.

NA = Not applicable

(1) This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 95-percent confidence interval around the estimate.

(2) Poverty status is determined using the Federal Poverty Line for a household of that size.

(3) Estimates may not match for men and women due to the inclusion of same sex couples.

(4) Due to constraints of the data, estimates of shared fertility are limited to opposite sex couples.

APPENDIX Table A. Comparison of Published Subsample Estimates of MPF to Parallel Subsample Estimates in the 2014 SIPP

Authors	Data source(s); estimate year(s)	How MPF is determined	Published estimate	Parallel SIPP 2014 estimate (1)	Significantly different?
Dorius (2011)	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (women aged 14–21 in 1979); 2006	household roster data, survey questions on father presence and involvement over time, relationship status data	18.7% of all women aged 41–49	17.4	Yes
	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (women aged 14–21 in 1979); 2006	household roster data, survey questions on father presence and involvement over time, relationship status data	27.7% of all mothers of two or more children aged 41–49	26.5	No
Evenhouse and Reilly (2011)	Survey of Income and Program Participation (women aged 15 and older); 2008	household relationship matrix (only captures MPF within the house)	8.4% of all mothers 15 and older who have biological children residing in the household	18.8	Yes
Guzzo (2014)	National Survey of Family Growth (men aged 15–44); 2006–10	direct questions linking men's biological children to partnerships	13.1% of all men aged 40–44	12.3	No
	National Survey of Family Growth (men aged 15–44); 2006–10	direct questions linking men's biological children to partnerships	17.1% of all fathers aged 40–44	16.0	No
	National Survey of Family Growth (men aged 15–44); 2006–10	direct questions linking men's biological children to partnerships	22.5% of fathers of two or more children aged 40–44	21.3	No
	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (enrolled in grades 7–12 in 1995), wave IV; 2007–08	direct questions linking biological children to partnerships	6.9% of all men aged 25–32	4.5	Yes
	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (enrolled in grades 7–12 in 1995), wave IV; 2007–08	direct questions linking biological children to partnerships	12.1% of all women aged 25–32	9.9	Yes
	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (enrolled in grades 7–12 in 1995), wave IV; 2007–08	direct questions linking biological children to partnerships	16.6% of fathers aged 25–32	12.2	Yes
	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (enrolled in grades 7–12 in 1995), wave IV; 2007–08	direct questions linking biological children to partnerships	22.1% of mothers aged 25–32	17.9	Yes
	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (enrolled in grades 7–12 in 1995), wave IV; 2007–08	direct questions linking biological children to partnerships	32.4% of fathers of two or more children aged 25–32	21.7	Yes
	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (enrolled in grades 7–12 in 1995), wave IV; 2007–08	direct questions linking biological children to partnerships	37.9% of mothers of two or more children aged 25–32	28.7	Yes
Monte (2014)	Survey of Income and Program Participation (women aged 15 and older); 2008	household relationship matrix, children ever born for women and their partners	27.9% of mothers of two or more children aged 18–55 who are living with at least one biological child	26.1	Yes
Scott et al. (2013)	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (men aged 12–16 in 1997); 2008	direct questions linking biological children to partnerships	13.7% of all fathers aged 23–27	9.2	Yes

NOTE: This table is modeled after a similar table comparing estimates that appeared in Guzzo (2014).

(1) SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel, Wave 1