A person who has multiple partner fertility (MPF) is someone who has had biological children with more than one partner (see Figure 1). Multiple partner fertility is not a new phenomenon; widowhood, divorce, and separation are all common precursors of fertility in a second union. However, because multiple partner fertility families are complex and are almost always spread across multiple homes, measuring the prevalence of MPF has been difficult. For example, a couple who lives together with their shared children may appear to be a nuclear family but may actually be a multiple partner fertility family if either parent has any children by another partner who live elsewhere.

The 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is the first nationally-representative survey to include a direct question about multiple partner fertility. Based on survey responses to this question, 10.1 percent of all adults aged 15 or older have had children with more than one partner, or roughly one out of every ten adults (see Table 1).1, 2, 3

Parents with multiple partner fertility are identified by the children born to them (or, for men, biologically

1 Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. For further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, see <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html>.

2 All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing, and, unless otherwise noted, all comparisons are statistically significant at the 10 percent significance level.

3 The 2014 SIPP Wave 1 data were collected between February and June of 2014. These estimates reflect fertility at the time the survey was administered.
fathered by them). Custody of children is not a defining factor; a parent does not have to live with any of his or her children to be a multiple partner fertility parent. Similarly, a parent does not stop being a multiple partner fertility parent once his or her children are adults. Multiple partner fertility is also not defined by current marital status; married, divorced, cohabiting, and single parents can all have multiple partner fertility.

Estimates of MPF vary widely depending on the population examined (see Figure 2). The same MPF parent (shown in purple in Figure 2) will represent a different proportion of the population examined.

Table 1.
Overall Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility: 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>Have multiple partner fertility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number (in thousands)</td>
<td>Number (in thousands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People aged 15 and older</td>
<td>252,089</td>
<td>25,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents aged 15 and older</td>
<td>161,674</td>
<td>25,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women aged 15 and older</td>
<td>130,253</td>
<td>14,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers aged 15 and older</td>
<td>89,523</td>
<td>14,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men aged 15 and older</td>
<td>121,836</td>
<td>10,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers aged 15 and older</td>
<td>72,151</td>
<td>10,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coresidential couples</td>
<td>69,946</td>
<td>14,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married couples</td>
<td>60,993</td>
<td>11,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried couples</td>
<td>8,952</td>
<td>2,472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 90 percent confidence interval around the estimate.
2 Includes adults who are not parents.
3 Includes both married and cohabiting opposite-sex couples. Same-sex couples are excluded.
4 Multiple partner fertility is indicated if either parent has children with more than one person.


Figure 2.
Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility (MPF): 2014

- 1 in 10 adults* has MPF (10.1%)
- 1 in 6 parents has MPF (15.7%)
- 1 in 5 parents with 2 or more children has MPF (20.6%)

* People aged 15 or older.

depending on whether you compare them to other adults, other parents, or other parents of two or more children.

SIPP data allow us to generate estimates for these different populations. For example, in order to be a multiple partner fertility parent, a person must have biological children. One of the many ways in which multiple partner fertility parents are distinct from stepparents is that a person can be a stepparent without ever having had a biological child. In contrast, multiple partner fertility is a fertility status, and therefore requires that a person be a biological parent.

When you limit the population being examined to only adults who have biological children, MPF is more prevalent. About one in every six parents (15.7 percent) has multiple partner fertility. Among mothers, it is 16.6 percent, while it is 14.6 percent among fathers. It is important to note that these numbers are based on the entire population of mothers and fathers, not just mothers and fathers who live with their children, or who have young children; these estimates include all parents aged 15 and up regardless of whether they live with any or all of their children.

However, MPF parents are not just parents—they are parents to two or more children. A parent of only one child cannot have children with more than one partner. Therefore, the third group examined are parents with two or more children: roughly one in five parents of two or more children (20.6 percent) have children with more than one partner. Among mothers with two or more children, 21.6 percent have multiple partner fertility, while 19.3 percent of fathers of two or more children have multiple partner fertility.

It is important to note that because multiple partner fertility does not only affect one person, there is no one estimate that will fully describe multiple partner fertility in the United States. In the same way that a parent’s employment is relevant to all members of a family, so too is a parent’s fertility. Given this, it is also important to look within couples and families to see whether either parent has children with more than one person. In 20.3 percent of opposite-sex coresident couples, one or both partners has multiple partner fertility (see Table 1). For married opposite-sex couples, 19.2 percent include at least one partner who has MPF. Among cohabiting opposite-sex couples, MPF is more common; in 27.6 percent of these couples, one or both partners has MPF.

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**ABOUT THE SIPP**

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is a nationally-representative panel survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects information on the short-term dynamics of employment, income, household composition, and eligibility and participation in government assistance programs. It is a leading source of information on specific topics related to economic well-being, family dynamics, education, wealth and assets, health insurance, child care, and food security. Each SIPP panel follows individuals for several years, providing monthly data that measure changes in household and family composition and economic circumstances over time. For more information, please visit the SIPP Web site at <www.census.gov/sipp>.

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**CONTACTS**

For additional information, contact:
Lindsay Monte
lindsay.m.monte@census.gov
Fertility and Family Statistics Branch
301-763-2416

**SUGGESTED CITATION**


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5 For this brief, adults are defined as people aged 15 or older.

6 For the purposes of this brief, parents are identified here as individuals who have biological children, who are the majority of all parents; see R. Kreider and D. Lofquist, *Adopted Children and Stepchildren: 2010*, U.S. Census Bureau: Population Characteristics Report, P20-572, 2014.