

Multiple Partner Fertility Research Brief: 2021

Current Population Reports

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In 2021, more than 10 percent of adults aged 15 or over had multiple partner fertility (MPF) according to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) (Table 1).^{1,2}

Because the SIPP is the first nationally representative survey to include a direct question about MPF, it is a unique resource for understanding the fertility of women and men, especially occurrences of MPF.³

A person who has MPF is someone who has biological children with more than one partner (Figure 1). In that way, parents with MPF are identified by the children born to them (or, for men, biologically fathered by them). A parent does not have to live with any of his or her children to be an MPF parent, nor does a parent stop being an MPF parent once his or her children are adults. Similarly, MPF is not defined by current marital status; married, divorced, cohabiting, and single parents can all have MPF.

While not a new phenomenon, measuring the prevalence of MPF has been difficult. As widowhood, divorce, and separation are all common precursors to fertility in a second union, MPF families are

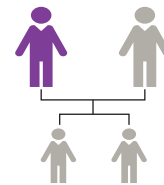
¹ For technical documentation and more information about SIPP data quality, visit the SIPP Technical Documentation page at <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation.html>.

² All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing, and, unless otherwise noted, all comparisons are statistically significant at the 90 percent significance level.

³ L. M. Monte, "Multiple Partner Fertility in the United States: A Demographic Portrait," *Demography*, 56(1), 2019, 103-127.

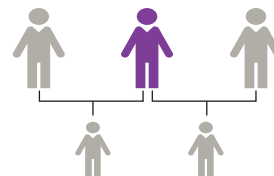
Figure 1.
What Do "Single Partner Fertility" and "Multiple Partner Fertility" Mean?

Single Partner Fertility



All of a parent's biological children are with the same person.

Multiple Partner Fertility



A parent has biological children with more than one person.

Note: These family configurations are not contingent on living arrangements. That is, the children in question do not have to live in the parent's household for the parent to be counted as either a single partner or multiple partner fertility parent.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2021 public-use data.

Table 1.
Overall Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility
 (Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total sample	Have multiple partner fertility		
	Number	Number	Percent	Margin of error (\pm) ¹
People aged 15 and older ²	265,100	28,410	10.7	0.3
Parents aged 15 and older	159,400	28,410	17.8	0.4
Parents aged 15 and older with two or more biological children	120,600	28,410	23.6	0.5
Women aged 15 and older ²	136,800	16,770	12.3	0.4
Mothers aged 15 and older	87,660	16,770	19.1	0.6
Mothers aged 15 and older with two or more biological children	66,940	16,770	25.1	0.7
Men aged 15 and older ²	128,400	11,640	9.1	0.3
Fathers aged 15 and older	71,720	11,640	16.2	0.6
Fathers aged 15 and older with two or more biological children	53,700	11,640	21.7	0.7

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.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2021 public-use data.

complex and are almost always spread across multiple homes. For example, a couple who lives together with their shared children may appear to be a nuclear family but may actually be an MPF family if either parent has children by another partner who lives elsewhere.

Estimates of MPF vary widely depending on whether they are calculated among adults, parents, or parents of two or more children (Figure 2).^{4,5} For example, more than 1 in every 6 parents (17.8 percent) had MPF, and nearly 1 in 4 parents of two or more children (23.6 percent) had MPF.⁶ Although only those with at least two children have the opportunity to have MPF, it is also informative to get a

⁴ For a review of the literature, refer to K. B. Guzzo, “New Partners, More Kids: Multiple Partner Fertility in the United States,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*: 654(1), 2014.

⁵ In the 2021 SIPP, 105,700,000 adults (39.9 percent) did not have any children, 38,740,000 adults had one child (14.6 percent), and 120,600,000 adults had two or more children (45.5 percent).

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

ABOUT THE SIPP:

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is a nationally representative, longitudinal survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau that provides comprehensive information on the dynamics of income, employment, household composition, and government program participation. SIPP is also a leading source of data on economic well-being, family dynamics, education, wealth, health insurance, child care, and food security. SIPP interviews individuals for several years and provides monthly data about changes in household and family composition and economic circumstances over time. Visit the SIPP website at <www.census.gov/SIPP> for more information.

sense of how many adults and how many parents overall have MPF.

It is important to look at fertility for women and men separately since the fertility trends of women are not dictated by those of men, or vice versa.

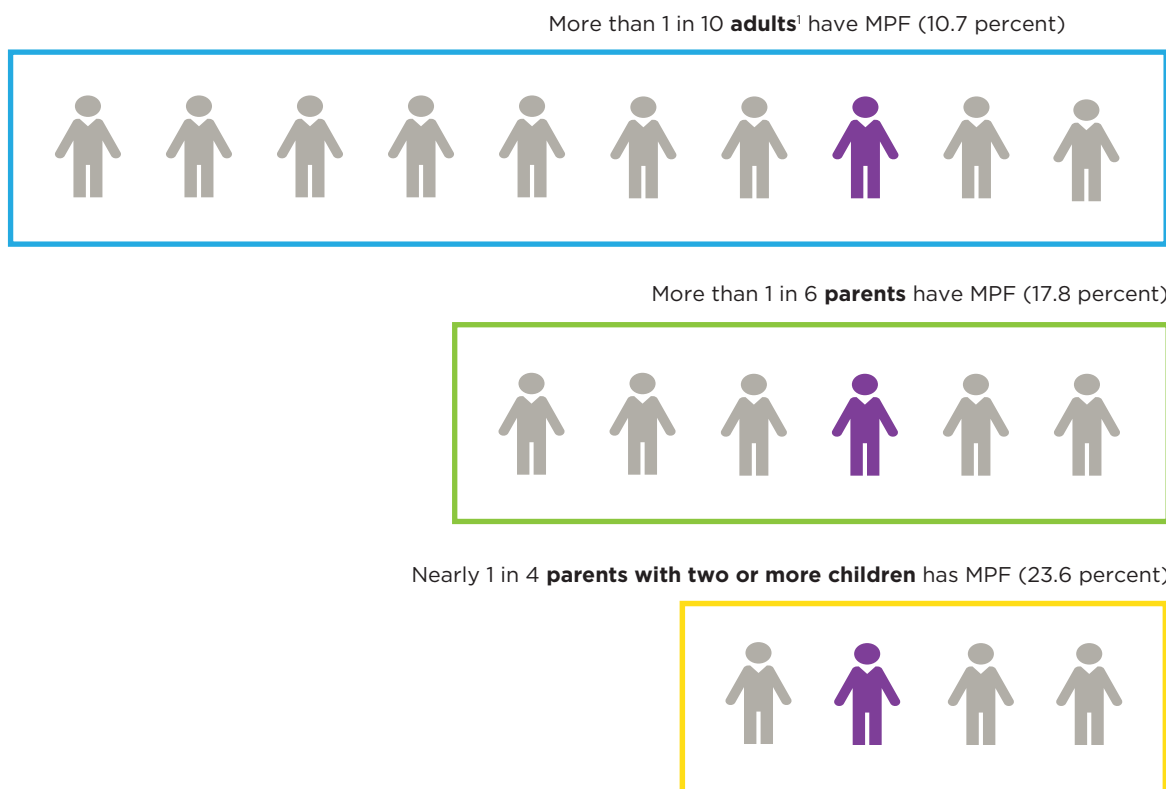
Among women aged 15 and older, 1 in 8 (12.3 percent) had MPF. The prevalence of MPF changes when the population is limited to mothers with biological children. One in 5 mothers (19.1 percent) had MPF, while 1 in 4 mothers with two or more children (25.1 percent) had MPF.

Among men aged 15 and older, 9.1 percent had MPF. The prevalence of MPF among men increases as we limit the population: 1 in 6 fathers (16.2 percent) and more than 1 in 5 fathers with two or more children (21.7 percent) had MPF. While these estimates lend insight into the fertility of men, previous research has found that certain groups of men are under-represented in survey data, suggesting that estimates of men with MPF may be conservative.⁷

⁷ L. M. Monte and J. M. Fields, “Where’s Daddy? Challenges in the Measurement of Men’s Fertility,” SEHSD Working Paper #2020-02, SIPP Working Paper 291, U.S. Census Bureau, 2020.

Figure 2.

Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility (MPF)



¹ People aged 15 or older.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2021 public-use data.

Table 2.

Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility Among Coresidential Couples

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total sample	Have multiple partner fertility		
	Number	Number	Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹
Coresidential couples ^{2, 3}	69,130	14,650	21.2	0.6
One partner has children with more than one person	69,130	12,600	18.2	0.6
Both partners have children with more than one person	69,130	2,050	3.0	0.3
Married couples ³	61,160	12,620	20.6	0.6
One spouse has children with more than one person	61,160	10,820	17.7	0.6
Both spouses have children with more than one person	61,160	1,800	2.9	0.3
Unmarried couples ³	7,974	2,032	25.5	2.2
One partner has children with more than one person	7,974	1,783	22.4	2.1
Both partners have children with more than one person	7,974	249	3.1	0.8

¹ This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 90 percent confidence interval around the estimate.

² Includes both married and cohabiting opposite-sex couples. Same-sex couples are excluded.

³ Multiple partner fertility is indicated if either parent has children with more than one person.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2021 public-use data.

Table 3.
Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility Among Childbearing Unions
 (Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total sample	Have multiple partner fertility		
	Number	Number	Percent	Margin of error (\pm) ¹
Coresidential couple in a childbearing union ^{2, 3}	45,470	10,910	24.0	0.8
Married couples in a childbearing union	43,150	9,837	22.8	0.8
Unmarried couples in a childbearing union	2,327	1,069	45.9	4.3

¹ This number, when added to or subtracted from the estimate, represents the 90 percent confidence interval around the estimate.

² Includes both married and cohabiting opposite-sex couples. Same-sex couples are excluded.

³ Multiple partner fertility is indicated if either parent has children with more than one person.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2021 public-use data.

No one estimate fully describes MPF in the United States because MPF does not only affect one person. 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 or both parents have children with more than one person. About 21 percent of opposite-sex coresident couples included one or both partners with MPF; the majority of these (18.2 percent) had only one partner with MPF (Table 2).

The prevalence of MPF differed depending upon the marital status of the couple. Married opposite-sex couples were less likely than unmarried opposite-sex couples to

include at least one partner with MPF (20.6 percent and 25.5 percent, respectively).

However, the percentage of married and unmarried opposite-sex couples in which both partners had MPF does not differ (2.9 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively).

Among opposite-sex coresidential couples who had a child together (also known as a childbearing union), 24.0 percent included at least one partner with MPF (Table 3). For married couples in a childbearing union, 22.8 percent include at least one partner with MPF. Unmarried couples in a childbearing union were more likely to include at least one partner with MPF (45.9 percent) than their married counterparts.

In summary, many adults and children are connected through MPF. While MPF is not a new occurrence, improvements in the ability to capture these complex relationships have furthered our knowledge of them. This brief focuses on adults with MPF, but the Census Bureau has other information about children’s experiences in blended families, which provides more insight about this important topic.^{8, 9}

⁸ Refer to L. R. Anderson, P. F. Hemez, and R. M. Kreider, “Living Arrangements of Children: 2019,” *Current Population Reports*, P70-174, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2021, for more information about children.

⁹ Refer to B. Knop, “One in Six Children Live With a Half Sibling Under 18,” *America Counts: Stories Behind the Numbers*, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2020, for more information about half siblings.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY

Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted. This means the 90 percent confidence interval for the difference between the estimates being compared does not include zero. Nonsampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately the answers are coded and classified. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process, including the overall design of surveys, wording of questions, review of the work of interviewers and coders, and the statistical review of reports. Additional information on the SIPP can be found at <www.census.gov/sipp/> (main SIPP website), <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/guidance/users-guide.html> (SIPP Users' Guides), and <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html> (SIPP Source and Accuracy Statements).

CONTACTS

Additional information on family statistics can be found by contacting the SIPP Coordination and Outreach Staff at <census.sipp@census.gov> or 1-888-245-3076. For further information on the content of this report, contact:

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