Stepfamily Facts

The U.S. Census Bureau recently decided to discontinue providing estimates of marriage, divorce, and remarriage except for those that are available from our current census. Thus, many of our current estimates were derived from the 1990 census and earlier data sources.

Current estimates from 1988-1990 suggest:

- 52-62% of all first marriages will eventually end in legal (vs. psychological) divorce.
- About 75% of divorced persons eventually remarry.
- About 43% of all marriages are remarriages for at least one of the adults.
- About 65% of remarriages involve children from the prior marriage and form stepfamilies.
- 60% of all remarriages eventually end in legal divorce.

Information from the most recent Vital Statistics Report (1998) shows:

- Of American children under 18 years of age:
  - 68.1% live with two parents (down from 72.5% in 1990)
  - 23.3% live with only their biological mother (down from 24.2% in 1990)
  - 4.4% live with only their biological father (up from 3.9% in 1990)
  - 3.0% live with other relatives (up from 2.2% in 1990)
  - 1.2% live with nonrelatives (up from .5% in 1990)
- There are no recent estimates on the percentage of children residing in stepfamilies.
- Our most recent information is from 1990 and shows that of the children under 18 years of age living in two-parent households:
  - 76.1% live with two biological parents.
  - 1.4% live with two adoptive parents.
  - 10.3% lived with a biological mother and stepfather.
  - 0.6% lived with a biological father and stepmother.
  - 9.8% lived with a combined stepmother-stepfather household.
  - 1.3% lived with a biological parent and an adoptive parent.

These statistics underestimate the number of U.S. stepfamilies, because...

To date, government reporting of population figures indicate families in which the child resides. So if the child lives with a divorced, single parent and the other nonresident parent has remarried, the child is not included in the calculations as being a member of a stepfamily.

Estimation efforts by Bumpass, Raley, and Sweet (1995), using data from 1987-1988 suggest that many children living in a "single parent household" (as designated by the Census Bureau) are actually living with two adults. Thus, their best estimates indicate that about 25% of current stepfamilies are actually cohabiting couples.

- They show that if only children residing in legally married stepfamilies are included, 23% of children would be designated as living in a stepfamily.
- When children are included who live with a cohabiting parent, the figure rises to 30%.
• They suggest that 2/3rds of all women, and 30% of all children, are likely to spend some time in a stepfamily, using the more liberal definition that includes cohabiting adult couples.

Other information from 1988-1990 sources:

• One of three Americans is now a stepparent, a stepchild, a stepsibling, or some other member of a stepfamily (Larson, 1992).

• More than half of Americans today have been, are now or will eventually be in one or more step situations during their lives (Larson, 1992).

• The most common stepfamilies where children reside are stepfather families or combined stepfather-stepmother families. In this latter case, his children from the prior marriage typically do not reside in the stepfamily

Sources:


• Larson, J. (1992), Understanding stepfamilies, American Demographics 14, 360.


www.saafamilies.org/faqs/index.htm