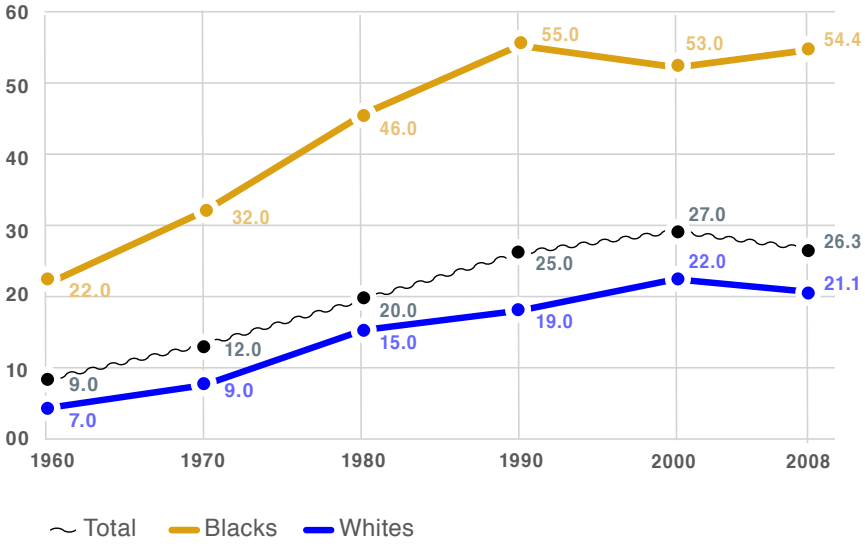


FRAGILE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

FIGURE 10. PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 LIVING WITH A SINGLE PARENT, BY YEAR, UNITED STATES



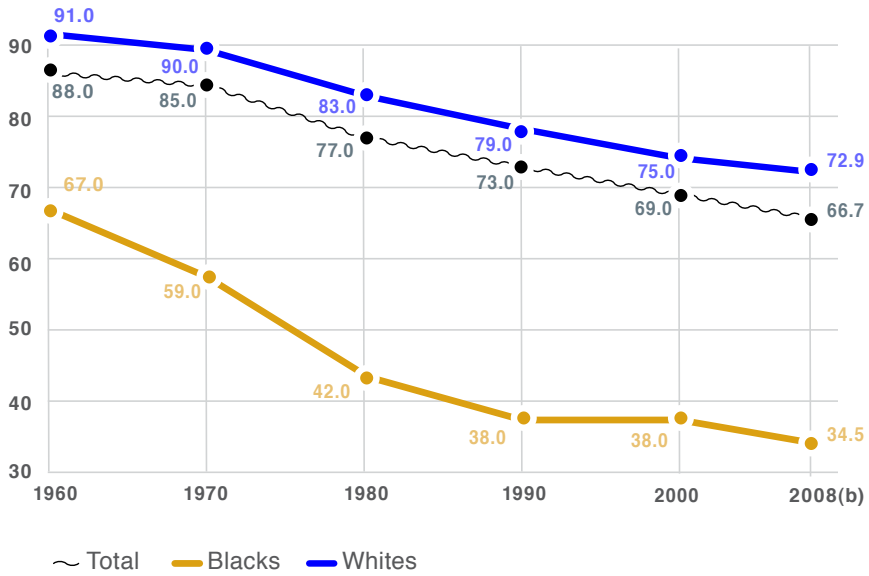
A Total includes Blacks, Whites and all other racial and ethnic groupings. Over these decades an additional 3 to 4 percent of children, not indicated in the above figure, were classified as living with no parent.

B In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau expanded its racial categories to permit respondents to identify themselves as belonging to more than one race. This means that racial data computations beginning in 2004 may not be strictly comparable to those of prior years.

* Prior to 2007, the U.S. Census counted children living with two cohabiting parents as children in single parent households. See "Improvements to Data Collection about Families in CPS 2007," (www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html).

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P20-537; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2008).

FIGURE 11. PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 LIVING WITH TWO MARRIED PARENTS^c, BY YEAR AND RACE, UNITED STATES



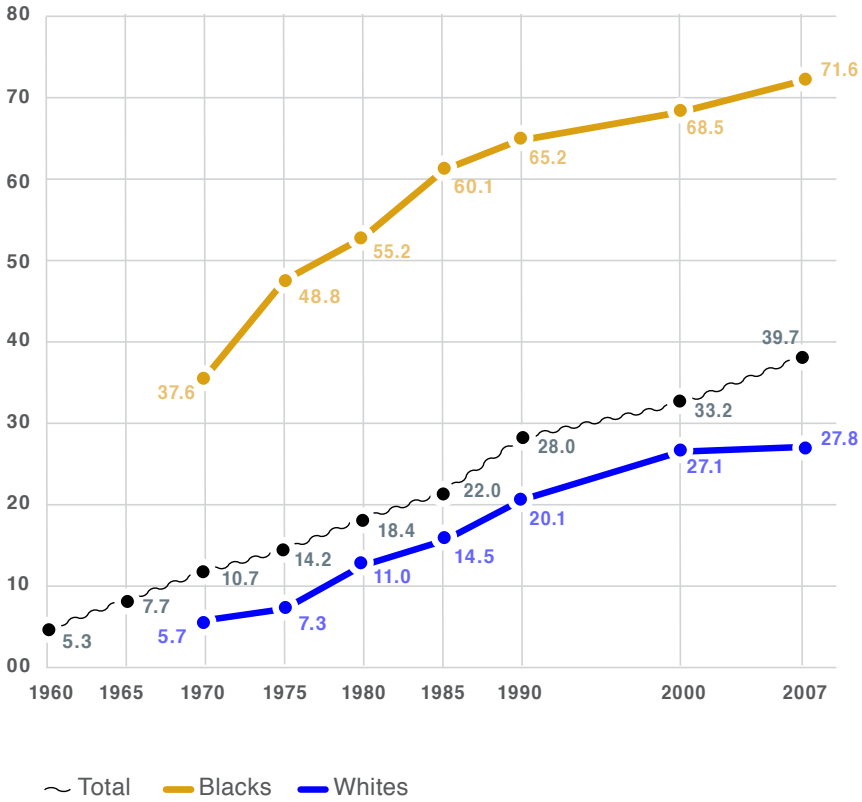
A Total includes Blacks, Whites and all other racial and ethnic groupings.

B In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau expanded its racial categories to permit respondents to identify themselves as belonging to more than one race. This means that racial data computations beginning in 2004 may not be strictly comparable to those of prior years.

C *Married Parents* may be step or natural parents of children in the household.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P20-537; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2008).

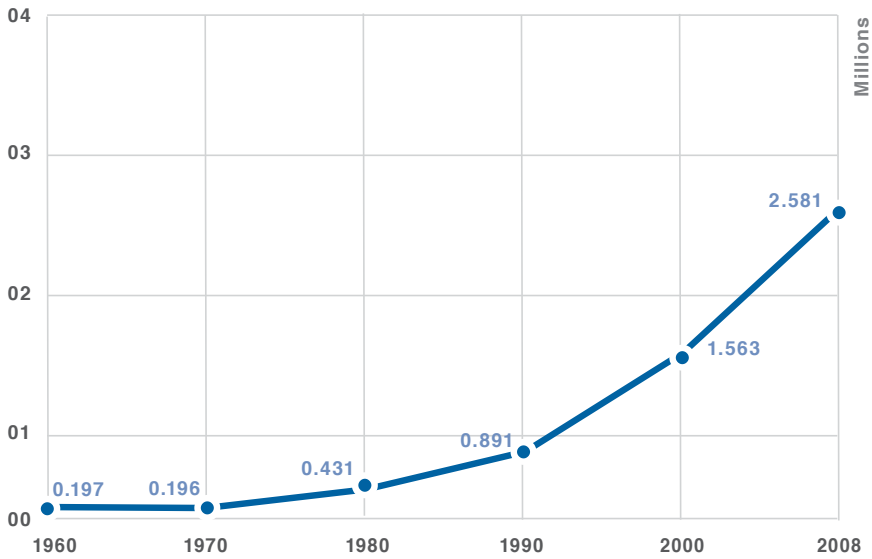
FIGURE 12. PERCENTAGE OF LIVE BIRTHS THAT WERE TO UNMARRIED WOMEN, BY YEAR, UNITED STATES



A Total includes Blacks, Whites and all other racial and ethnic groupings.

SOURCE: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1995, Page 77, Table 94; *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1999, Page 79, Table 99; *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2000, Page 69, Table 85; and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2001, Page 63, Table 76; National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 50, 5. Hamilton B., et al. *Births: Preliminary Data for 2007*, National Vital Statistics Report, 57:12, Mar 18, 2009, p. 6, Table 1.

FIGURE 13. NUMBER OF COHABITING, UNMARRIED, ADULT COUPLES OF THE OPPOSITE SEX LIVING WITH ONE CHILD OR MORE, BY YEAR, UNITED STATES



* Prior to 1996, the U.S. Census estimated unmarried-couple households based on two unmarried adults of the opposite sex living in the same household. After 1996, respondents could identify themselves as unmarried partners. The Census also identified households with children under 15 until 1996 when they began identifying children under 18.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P20-537; America's Families and Living Arrangements, March, 2000, and U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table H3 and (www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2008).

KEY FINDING: The percentage of children who grow up in fragile—typically fatherless—families has grown enormously over the past four decades. This is mainly due to increases in divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and unmarried cohabitation. The trend toward fragile families leveled off in the late 1990s, but the most recent data show a slight increase.

There is now ample evidence that stable and satisfactory marriages are crucial for the well-being of adults. Yet such marriages are even more important for the proper socialization and overall wellbeing of children. A central purpose of the institution of marriage is to ensure the responsible and long-term involvement of both biological parents in the difficult and time-consuming task of raising the next generation.

The trend toward single-parent families is probably the most important of the recent family trends that have affected children and adolescents (Figure 10). This is because the children in such families have negative life outcomes at two to three times the rate of children in married, two-parent families.¹ While in 1960 only nine percent of all children lived in single-parent families, a figure that had changed little over the course of the 20th century, by 2008 the percentage had jumped to 26 percent. The overwhelming majority of single-parent families are mother-only, although the percentage of father-only families recently has grown to about 18 percent.

An indirect indicator of fragile families is the percentage of persons under age 18 living with two parents. Since 1960 this percentage has declined substantially, by more than 20 percent-

age points (Figure 11). Unfortunately, this measure makes no distinction between natural and stepfamilies; it is estimated that some 88 percent of two-parent families consist of both biological parents, while nine percent are stepfamilies.² The problem is that children in stepfamilies, according to a substantial and growing body of social science evidence, fare no better in life than children in single-parent families.³ Data on stepfamilies, therefore, probably are more reasonably combined with single-parent than with biological two-parent families. An important indicator that helps to resolve this issue is the percentage of children who live apart from their biological fathers. That percentage has doubled since 1960, from 17 percent to 34 percent.⁴

The dramatic shift in family structure indicated by these measures has been generated mainly by three burgeoning trends: divorce, unmarried births, and unmarried cohabitation. The incidence of divorce began to increase rapidly during the 1960s. The number of children under age 18 newly affected by parental divorce each year, most of whom have lost a resident father, went from under 500,000 in 1960 to well over a million in 1975. After peaking around 1980, the number leveled off and remains close to a million new children each year. Much of the reason for the leveling off is a drop in average family size; each divorce that occurs today typically affects a smaller number of children than in earlier times.

The second reason for the shift in family structure is an increase in the percentage of babies born to unwed mothers, which suddenly and unexpectedly began to increase rapidly in the 1970's.

Since 1960, the percentage of babies born to unwed mothers has increased more than sevenfold (Figure 12). Nearly four in ten births and more than two-thirds of Black births in 2007, the latest year for which we have complete data, were out-of-wedlock.

A third and still more recent family trend that has affected family structure is the rapid growth of unmarried cohabitation. Especially as cohabitation has become common among those previously married as well as the young and not-yet-married, there has been an almost 1,000 percent increase in the number of cohabiting couples who live with children (Figure 13). An estimated 40 percent of all children are expected to spend some time in a cohabiting household during their growing up years.⁵

In 2000 about 40 percent of unmarried-couple households included one or more children under age 18.⁶ For unmarried couples in the 25 to 34 age group the percentage with children is higher still, approaching half of all such households.⁷ Seventy percent of the children in unmarried-couple households are the children of only one partner.⁸ Indeed, if one includes cohabitation in the definition of stepfamily, almost one half of stepfamilies today would consist of a biological parent and unrelated cohabiting partner.⁹

Children who grow up with cohabiting couples tend to have worse life outcomes compared to those growing up with married couples.¹⁰ Prominent reasons are that cohabiting couples have a much higher breakup rate than married couples, a lower level of household income, and a higher level of child abuse and domestic violence. The proportion of cohabiting mothers who eventually marry the fathers of their children is declining, to 44 percent in

1997 from 57 percent a decade earlier—a decline sadly predictive of increased problems for children.¹¹

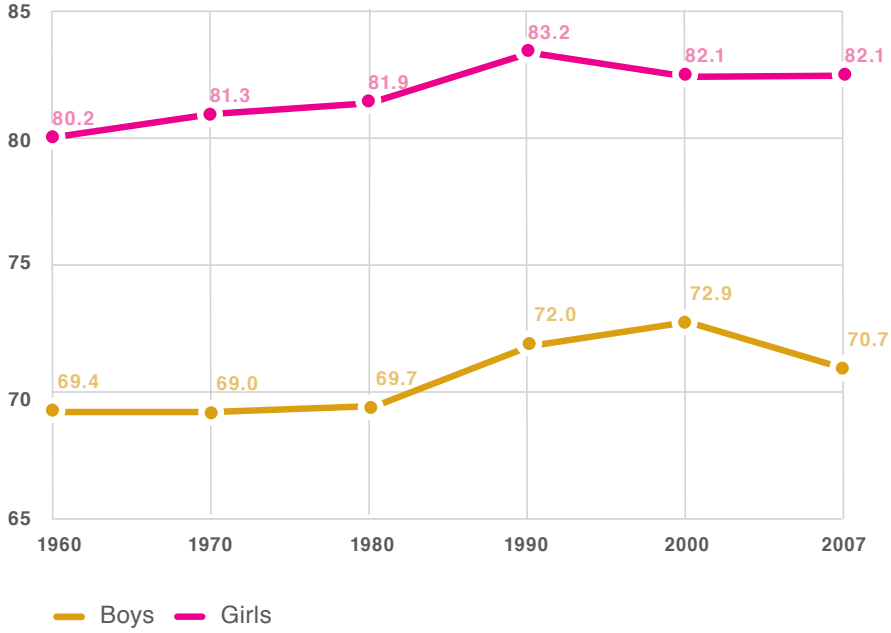
- 1 Mary Parke, *Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?* (Washington, DC, Center for Law and Social Policy, May 2003); and W. Bradford Wilcox, et. al., *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2005).
- 2 Jason Fields, *Living Arrangements of Children: Fall, 1996*, Current Population Reports, P70-74, Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2001.
- 3 Susan L. Brown, “Family Structure and Child Well-Being: The Significance of Parental Cohabitation” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 66 (2004), 351-367; and more generally, David Popenoe, “The Evolution of Marriage and the Problem of Stepfamilies,” in A. Booth and J. Dunn (eds.) *Stepfamilies: Who Benefits? Who Does Not?* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), 3-27.
- 4 Jason Fields, *op.cit.*
- 5 Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, “Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children’s Family Contexts in the U.S.,” *Population Studies* 54 (2000), 29-41.
- 6 Tavia Simmons and Martin O’Connell, *Married-Couple and Unmarried-Partner Households: 2000*, Census 2000 Special Reports, CENSR-5, Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.
- 7 Wendy D. Manning and Daniel T. Lichter, “Parental Cohabitation and Children’s Economic Well-Being,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (1996), 998-1010.
- 8 Larry Bumpass, J. A. Sweet and A. Cherlin, “The Role of Cohabitation in Declining Rates of Marriage,” *Demography* 53 (1991), 913-27.
- 9 Larry Bumpass, R. K. Raley, and J. A. Sweet, “The Changing Character of Stepfamilies: Implications of Cohabitation and Nonmarital Childbearing,” *Demography* 32 (1995), 425-436.

10 Susan L. Brown, *op. cit.*; Wendy Manning, “The Implications of Cohabitation for Children’s Well-Being,” in A. Booth and A. Crouter (eds.) *Just Living Together* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), 121-152; Robin Fretwell Wilson, “Evaluating Marriage: Does Marriage Matter to the Nurturing of Children?” *San Diego Law Review* 42 (2005), 848-881; and Sandra L. Hofferth, “Residential Father Family Type and Child Well-Being: Investment Versus Selection,” *Demography* 43 (2006), 53-77.

11 Bumpass and Lu, *op. cit.*

TEEN ATTITUDES ABOUT MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

FIGURE 14. PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS WHO SAID HAVING A GOOD MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE IS “EXTREMELY IMPORTANT,” BY PERIOD, UNITED STATES



Number of respondents for each sex for each period is about 6,000.

SOURCE: *Monitoring the Future* surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan