

Multiple Partner Fertility Research Brief

Household Economic Studies

Current Population Reports

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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

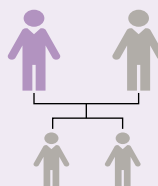
¹ Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. For further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, see <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html>.

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.

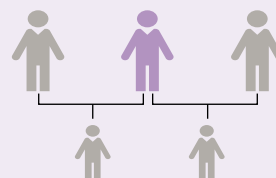
Figure 1.
What Does “Multiple Partner Fertility” Mean?

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. The children in question do not have to live in the parent's household in order 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, 2014 Panel, Wave 1.

Table 1.
Overall Prevalence of Multiple Partner Fertility: 2014

Characteristic	Total sample	Have multiple partner fertility		
	Number (in thousands)	Number (in thousands)	Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹
People aged 15 and older ²	252,089	25,404	10.1	0.2
Parents aged 15 and older	161,674	25,404	15.7	0.3
Parents aged 15 and older with 2 or more biological children . .	123,437	25,404	20.6	0.4
Women aged 15 and older ²	130,253	14,905	11.4	0.3
Mothers aged 15 and older	89,523	14,905	16.6	0.4
Mothers aged 15 and older with 2 or more biological children . .	68,920	14,905	21.6	0.6
Men aged 15 and older ²	121,836	10,498	8.6	0.3
Fathers aged 15 and older	72,151	10,498	14.6	0.5
Fathers aged 15 and older with 2 or more biological children . .	54,517	10,498	19.3	0.6
Coresidential couples ^{3, 4}	69,946	14,192	20.3	0.6
Married couples	60,993	11,720	19.2	0.6
Unmarried couples	8,952	2,472	27.6	1.9

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.

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

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

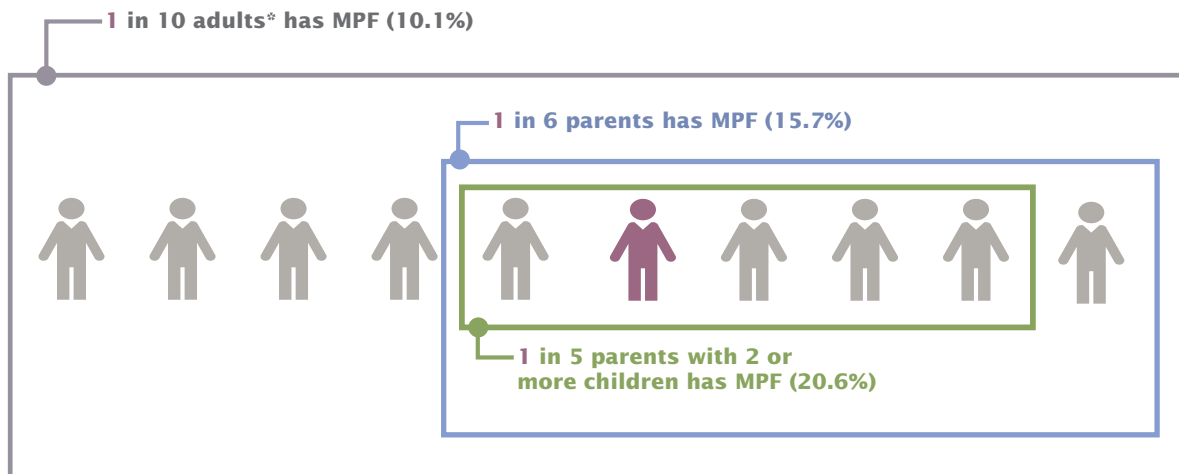
adults. Multiple partner fertility is also not defined by current marital status; married, divorced, cohabiting, and single parents can all have multiple partner fertility.

Estimates of MPF vary widely depending on the population

examined (see Figure 2).⁴ The same MPF parent (shown in purple in Figure 2) will represent a different proportion of the population

⁴ For a review of the literature about the variation in estimates of MPF, see 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.

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



* People aged 15 or older.

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

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 adults⁵ who have biological children, MPF is more prevalent. About one in every six parents (15.7 percent) has multiple partner fertility.⁶ 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

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.

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>.

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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