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Brief**

Stepchildren and Their Families

Almost 1 in 5 married-couple families with children had a stepchild living in the household in 1985.

By 1985, a higher proportion of Americans (23 percent) than ever before had been divorced at some point in their lives. Because most people who divorce eventually remarry, more children and adults experience living as part of a stepfamily.

This Brief describes the situation of married-couple families with stepchildren. It does not count stepparents and stepchildren who live in different households and, therefore, underestimates the total number of stepparents and stepchildren. Stepchildren who have been adopted by the stepparent with whom they are living are still considered to be stepchildren for the purposes of this report.

In 1985, about 4.5 million families contained 6.8 million stepchildren under age 18—15 percent more than in 1980.

Of these families, 2.4 million had stepchildren only and 2.1 million had a mix of at least one stepchild and at least one child borne to or adopted by both parents in the household. The 6.8 million stepchildren accounted for 15 percent of children in all married-couple families in 1985. In Black married-couple families, 1 in 4 children under 18 was a

stepchild. Nicholas Zill of Child Trends, Inc., has estimated that about one-quarter of today's children will live with a stepparent by the time they reach the age of 16.

Most stepchildren live with their biological mothers and stepfathers.

After divorce, mothers are still much more likely than fathers to have custody of their children. Over 6 million children, or 9 of 10 stepchildren in married-couple families, lived with their biological mothers and stepfathers. Only 740,000 stepchildren lived with their biological fathers and stepmothers.

Most stepfamilies are at an economic disadvantage as compared with other married-couple families with children.

Median income for all married-couple families with children was \$28,162 in 1985. Families that contained a biological mother, a stepfather, and stepchildren only

had a median income of \$25,272. The median income of married-couple families with at least one stepchild and at least one biological child was even lower—\$22,932. The striking exception was families with a biological father and stepmother: they had the highest median family income—\$34,850.

Parents in stepfamilies were less well-educated than parents in married-couple families, in general.

This finding is consistent with research by the National Center for Health Statistics showing that those persons who dissolved their first marriages and persons who remarried had fewer years of school when compared with all persons marrying for the first time. Our research showed that 44 percent of fathers and 37 percent of mothers in all married-couple families had at least some college education, while only 35 percent of fathers and 29

Among married-couple families with children, one-fifth had at least one stepchild living with them.

Type of Married-Couple Family	Number (000's)	Percent
Total with own children under 18	23,868	100
Biological and/or adopted children only	18,996	80
Stepchildren only	2,387	10
Biological mother-stepfather	2,207	9
Biological father-stepmother	180	1
Biological and stepchildren only	2,038	9
Other families with stepchildren	44	-
Unknown	403	2

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percent of mothers in families comprising a stepfather, a biological mother, and stepchildren only had at least some college. Biological fathers in stepfamilies, however, were relatively well-educated: 48 percent had at least some college.

Even under the best of circumstances, stepchildren may have increasing and competing demands on their time from family members in their homes and elsewhere.

Stepchildren not only have to deal with complex social relationships within their own household, but many also have to deal with complex relationships involving their noncustodial biological parent and often that parent's family. Data from the National Health Interview Survey in 1981 showed that almost half of children living with a stepfather never saw their biological fathers. Among the minority of children living with a stepmother and biological father, three-quarters had some contact

with their biological mothers.

The recent striking growth in stepfamilies has left little time for individuals, families, and society to develop ways of coping with problems associated with living in families where step relationships exist. Their swelling numbers have led researchers to study more intensely the unique qualities of this family type so effective programs to assist them can be created.

The data shown here were derived from information collected in the Current Population Survey for June of 1980 and 1985 unless noted otherwise.

For further information on stepfamilies:

See-

Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 162, *Studies in Marriage and the Family*. (For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government

Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. For telephone orders, call (202) 783-3238.)

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