A Closer Look at Unmarried Families: Children’s Experiences of Relationship Instability and Family Complexity

Family Taskforce Meeting
Brookings Institution
Feb 10th, 2011
Part 1: Relationship Instability

Focal Child
Part 1: Relationship Instability

New Partner → Love Heart ← New Partner

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Focal Child

New Partner ← Love Heart → New Partner
Total New Parental Romantic Relationships in Fragile Families, by Child’s 5th Birthday

Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Counts total number of mothers’ and fathers’ new romantic relationships that lasted at least three months. Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.
**Mother’s New Romantic Relationships in Fragile Families by Child’s 5th Birthday**

- **No New Relationship**: 49%
- **At Least 1 New Relationship**: 51%

- **1 New Relationship**: 23%
- **2 New Relationships**: 18%
- **3 New Relationships**: 7%
- **4+ New Relationships**: 3%

Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Counts total number of mothers’ new romantic relationships that lasted at least three months. Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.
Father’s New Romantic Relationships in Fragile Families by Child’s 5th Birthday

Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Counts total number of fathers’ new romantic relationships that lasted at least three months. Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.
Part 2:
Family Complexity

- Half-Sib
- Half-Sib

Focal Child
Part 2: Family Complexity

Half-Sib

Focal Child

Half-Sib
Part 2: Family Complexity

Step-Sib

Half-Sib

Half-Sib

Half-Sib

Step-Sib
Amount of Multi-Partner Fertility (Half-Sibs) in Fragile Families by Child’s 5th Birthday

Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Counts total number of half-siblings (biological children of either mother or father, but not both). Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.
Type of Multi-Partner Fertility (Half-Sibs) in Fragile Families by Child’s 5th Birthday

No Half-Sibs in Family: 40%
Any Half-Sibs in Family: 60%

- Dad Only: 18%
- Mom Only: 19%
- Both Mom & Dad: 23%

Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more.

Half-siblings are biological children of either mother or father, but not both.
Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.
Children’s Combined Experiences of Instability and Complexity in Fragile Families by 5th Birthday

Unstable: relationship between biological parents ends and/or relationship with new partner begins
Complex: one or more parents has children by a different partner

Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.
Children’s Combined Experiences of Instability and Complexity in Fragile Families by 5\textsuperscript{th} Birthday

- **Unstable/Complex**: 78%
  - **Unstable, No Half-Sibs**: 10%
  - **Stable, Half-Sibs**: 23%
  - **Unstable and Half-Sibs**: 45%
- **Stable Two-Parent**: 18%
- **Stable Single Mother**: 4%

**Unstable**: relationship between biological parents ends and/or relationship with new partner begins

**Complex**: one or more parents has children by a different partner

Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.
Children’s Combined Experiences of Instability and Complexity in Fragile Families by 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday

- **4%** Stable, Single Mother
- **78%** Unstable/Complex
- **18%** Stable, Two-Parent
- **10%** Unstable, No Half-Sibs
- **23%** Stable, Half-Sibs
- **45%** Unstable and Half-Sibs

*18% of kids have step-siblings from either mom’s or dad’s current new partner.*

Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.
Half-Sib

Step-Sib

Half-Sib

Focal Child

Half-Sib

Step-Sib