

# Nonmarital Births: Implications for Families and Children

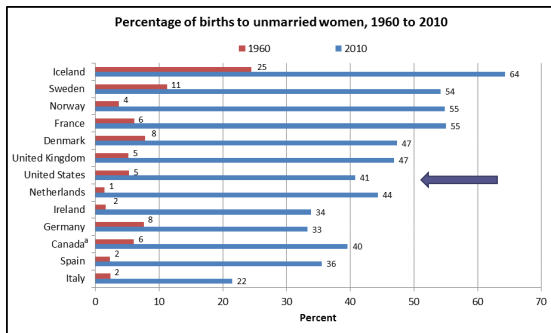
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August 24, 2015  
ASA Plenary Session, "The Rise of Nonmarital Births"  
Chicago, IL

## Key Points about U.S. Nonmarital Births

- 1) Linked to disadvantage (more so than other Western countries)
- 2) High levels of instability/complexity
- 3) Many biological fathers not highly involved, and many new 'social fathers'
- 4) Lower child wellbeing because fewer parental resources (time & money)—not marriage per se

## Nonmarital Childbearing

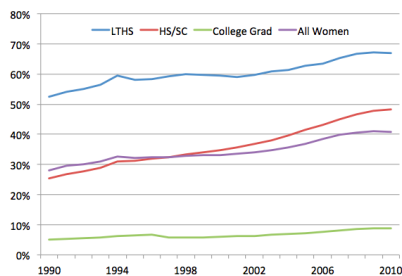


Sources: CDC/NCHIS Vital Statistics; Stat Canada; Eurostat, European Commission; figure by Laura Tach.  
<sup>a</sup> Earliest year available is 1974.

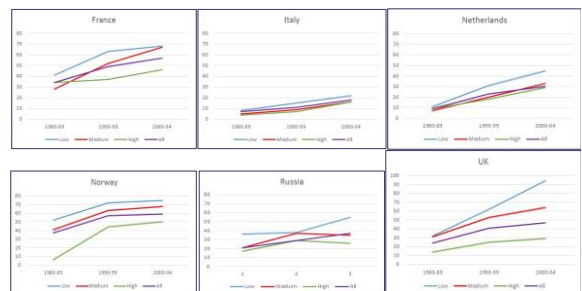
- 1) Linked to disadvantage (more so than other Western countries)

## U.S.

**Figure 1: Percent of All Births that are Non-marital by Education, 1990-2010**  
Source: National Vital Statistics Birth Data Files



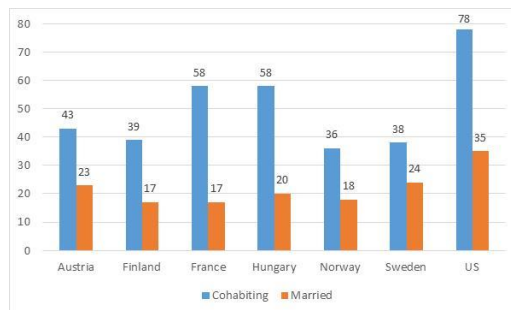
## Smaller Educational Gradient in Nonmarital Births in European Countries (except the UK)



Source: Perelli-Harris et al. 2010. "The Educational Gradient of Childbearing within Cohabitation in Europe." *Population and Development Review* 36(4): 775-801.

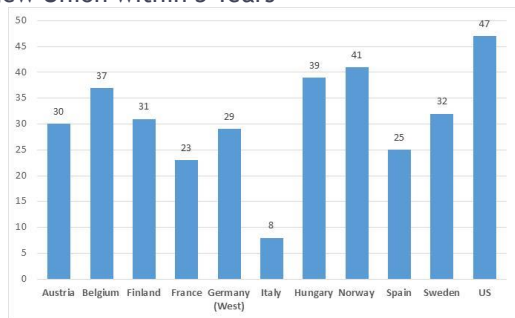
## 2) High levels of instability/complexity

Percent of Parents who Broke up by Child Age 15



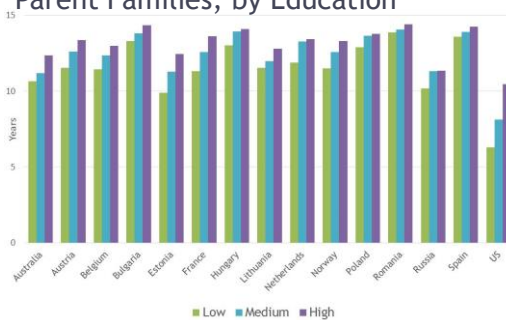
Source: Anderson, 2002. "Children's experience of family disruption and family formation: Evidence from 16 FFS countries." Demographic Research.

Percent of All Separated Parents Who Enter a New Union within 3 Years



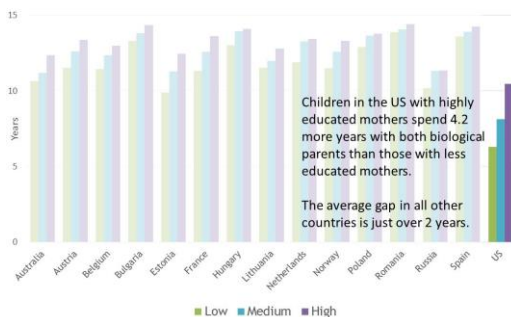
Source: Anderson, 2002. "Children's experience of family disruption and family formation: Evidence from 16 FFS countries." Demographic Research.

To Age 15: Years with Two-Biological Parent Families, by Education

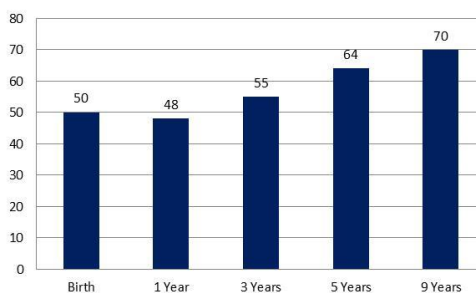


Source: Generations & Gender Survey.

To Age 15: Years with Two-Biological Parent Families, by Education



U.S. Urban Nonmarital Births: Percent of Parents Who Separate by Child Age

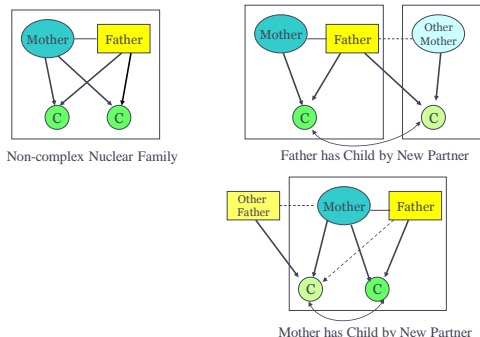


Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study

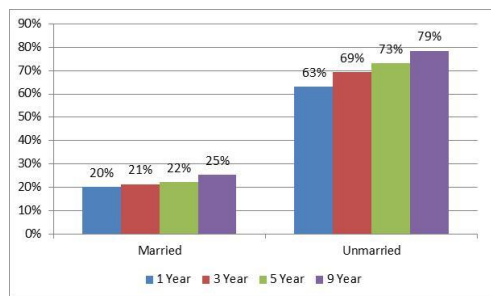
## New Partners

- By 5 years after a nonmarital birth, 22% of urban mothers have a new partner (Bzostek et al. 2012)
- Biological fathers *intend* to stay involved with their children, but fathers'—and especially mothers'—new relationships diminish fathers' involvement with children (Edin & Nelson 2013; Tach et al. 2010)
- Social fathers are often highly involved, but will the relationships last?

## Complex Family Situations

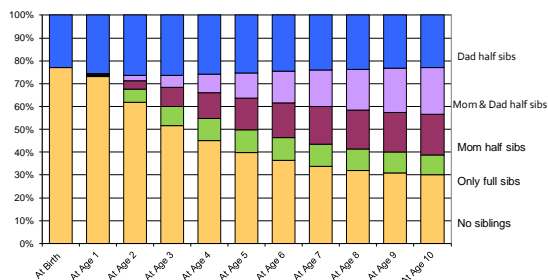


## Urban U.S. Births: Children with at Least One Half-Sibling over 9 Years, by Marital Status at Birth



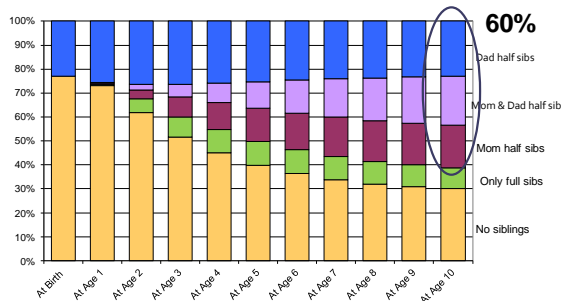
Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study

## Most Children Born to Unmarried Parents Will Be in a Complex Family by Age 10 (WI state data)



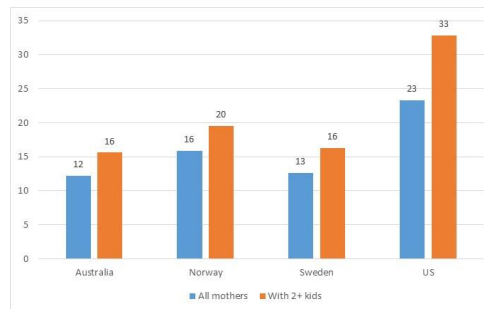
Source: Cancian, Meyer & Cook. 2011. "The Evolution of Family Complexity from the Perspective of Nonmarital Children." *Demography*.

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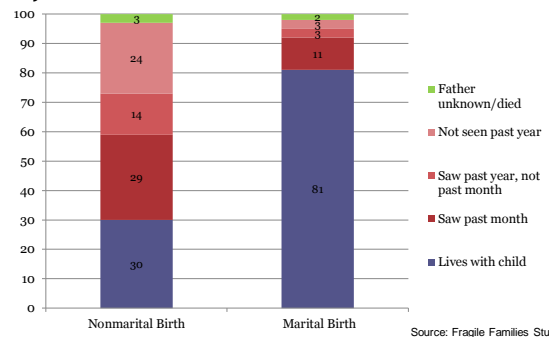
## Percent of Mothers Who Have Children with Two or More Fathers



Source: Thomson et al. 2014. "Childbearing Across Partnerships in Australia, the United States, Norway, and Sweden." *Demography*.

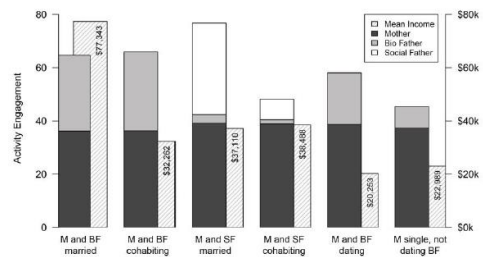
- 3) Many biological fathers not highly involved, and many new 'social fathers'

Urban Parents: Biological-Father Contact at 9 Years by Parents' Marital Status at Birth



- 4) Lower child wellbeing because fewer parental resources (time & money)—not marriage per se

Parenting Resources by Family Type at Child Age 5 (Fragile Families Study)



## Implications

- At least in the U.S., children born to unmarried parents are 'triple disadvantaged'
  - 1) Low economic resources
  - 2) Unstable/complex families
  - 3) Limited policy supports
- Policy?
  - Hard to change family behaviors, so either:
    - 1) Decrease unintended fertility (Sawhill 2014) or
    - 2) Better support children/families