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## FP-11-07 Children in Cohabiting Unions

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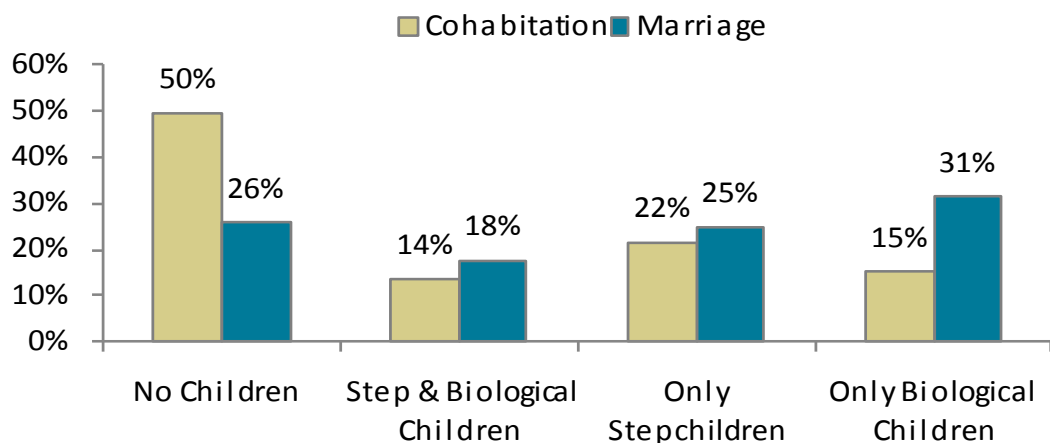
# Children in Cohabiting Unions

The past twenty years have seen many changes in American families: rising ages at first birth (FP-11-04) and first marriage (FP-09-03) and an increase in the proportion of Americans cohabiting. A net result is children are increasingly experiencing cohabiting parent families (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008), but less is known about the specific family configurations of cohabiting and married couples. This profile examines the presence of children in first cohabiting unions and first marriages formed since the year 2000. Using data from the 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) based on women ages 15-44, we provide descriptive statistics on the biological relationship of children living in first cohabiting unions compared to first marriages.

## Family Configurations

- Half of first cohabiting unions include children.
  - About one in seven (14%) cohabiting unions includes both biological and step children.
  - Nearly one-quarter (22%) include only stepchildren and another 15% include only biological children.
  - Overall, 29% of cohabiting unions include biological children, and 36% include stepchildren.
- The presence of children in first unions is less common among cohabiting than married couples.
  - Half of cohabiting couples are not living with children compared to only one-quarter (26%) of married couples.
  - Childbearing is less common within first cohabitation than first marriage. Half of first married couples are residing with a biological child, whereas about only a third of first cohabiting unions include biological children (29%).

Figure 1: Percentage of Cohabiting and Married Unions Formed Since 2000 by Presence of Children



Source: 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth (weighted), NCFMR analyses of women ages 15-44.

- *Couples with Children*
  - Among first cohabiting unions with children, the most typical family configuration is 'only stepchildren' (44%). In contrast, the typical family configuration among first marriages is only biological children (41%).

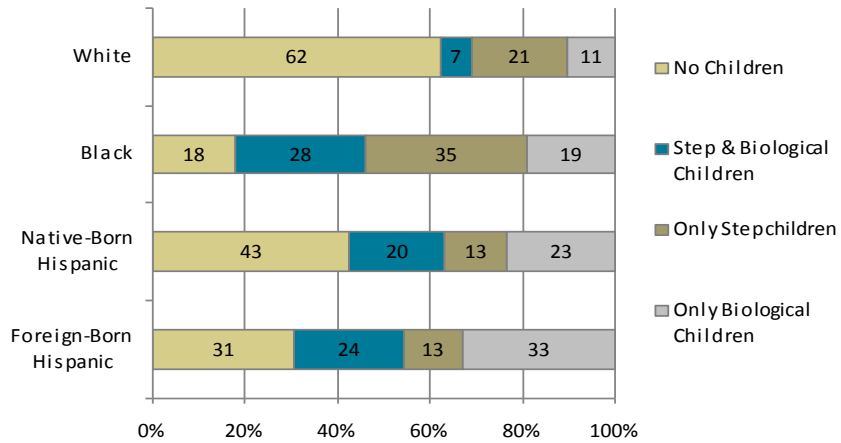
Family Profiles examine topics related to NCFMR's core research themes. Data are presented at both the national and state levels using new data sources. Written for both researchers and broad communities, these profiles summarize the latest statistics on U.S. families.

## Children in First Cohabiting Unions and Socioeconomic Characteristics

- **Race and Ethnicity**

- The presence of children is more prevalent within first cohabiting unions formed by Black than White or Hispanic women.
- While over three-fifths (62%) of first cohabiting unions formed by White women do not include children, only one-fifth (18%) of those formed by Black women do not include children.
- Family configuration varies according to race/ethnicity and nativity status.
  - » Families with both biological and stepchildren are most frequent (28%) among Black cohabiting women and least among White cohabiting women.
  - » Families with only stepchildren are most common among Black cohabiting women (35%) and least common among Hispanics (13%).
  - » Cohabiting unions that include only biological children exist most often among foreign-born Hispanics (33%) and least often among Whites (11%).

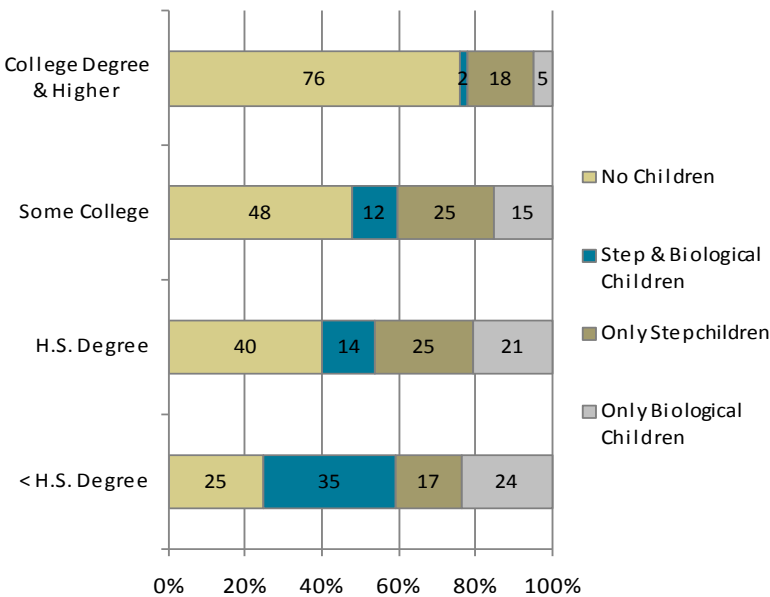
Figure 2. Presence of Children Within First Cohabiting Unions Formed Since 2000 by Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity



Source: 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth (weighted), NCFMR analyses of women ages 15-44.

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Figure 3. Presence of Children Within First Cohabiting Unions Formed Since 2000 by Educational Attainment



Source: 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth (weighted), NCFMR analyses of women ages 15-44.

- **Educational Attainment**

- The majority of women with the lowest level of education (75%) live with children (step and/or biological), whereas only about one-quarter (24%) of women with a college degree live with biological or stepchildren.
  - » Having step and biological children is most frequent among women with the lowest levels of education (35%) and least among women with a college degree (2%).
  - » Families composed of only stepchildren are most common among women with a high school degree or some college. Women with the lowest and highest levels of education are similarly likely to live with only stepchildren (17% and 18% respectively).
  - » Approaching half of cohabiting mothers with the lowest education are raising a biological child, whereas only 7% of women with a college degree are raising a biological child.

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Kennedy, S., & Bumpass, L. (2008). Cohabitation and children's living arrangements: New estimates from the United States. *Demographic Research*, 19, 1663-1692. doi:10.4054/DemRes.2008.19.47