



Adult Children’s College Completion by Parental Stepfamily Status and Race/Ethnicity

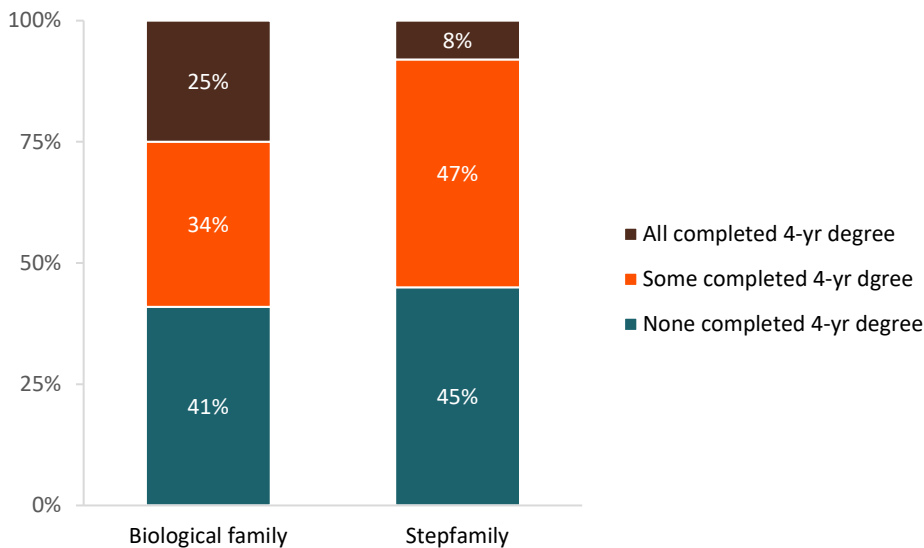
Authors: Leo LaPata, Jaycob Applegate, Jenjira Yahirun

Children raised in stepfamilies are less likely to complete college (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). Stepfamilies are also more common among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic families, compared to non-Hispanic White families (Westrick-Payne & Wiborg, 2021). However, it is unclear whether the variation in college completion between step and biological families differs across racial/ethnic groups. This family profile examines the distribution of adult children’s college completion by stepfamily status for non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic White adults over the age of 50 in the United States. Data are drawn from the 2018 U.S. Health and Retirement Study (HRS). Respondents who are parents of at least one adult child aged 25 or older are included in the sample. Respondents are differentiated by those with all, some, or no children who completed a four-year degree. When a respondent or a respondent’s partner has a step-tie to any child, the respondent is classified as being a member of a stepfamily. Conversely, biological family status is assigned when a respondent and their partner only list biological relationships to all children. Single parents are also included and biological or stepfamily status is classified similarly.

Adult Children’s College Completion by Parental Stepfamily Status

- The share of adult children who had obtained a college degree varies by stepparent status.
 - Among parents in biological families, 25% had children for whom all have completed a college education. Whereas among parents in stepfamilies, 8% had children who all had completed a college education.
 - In biological families, 34% of parents had some children who completed college compared to a higher share of parents in stepfamilies (47%).
 - Approximately four in ten (41%) parents in biological families had no children who completed a college degree. This percentage was slightly higher among stepfamilies, for whom 45% had no children who completed a college education.

Figure 1. Adult Children's College Completion by Parental Stepfamily Status, 2018

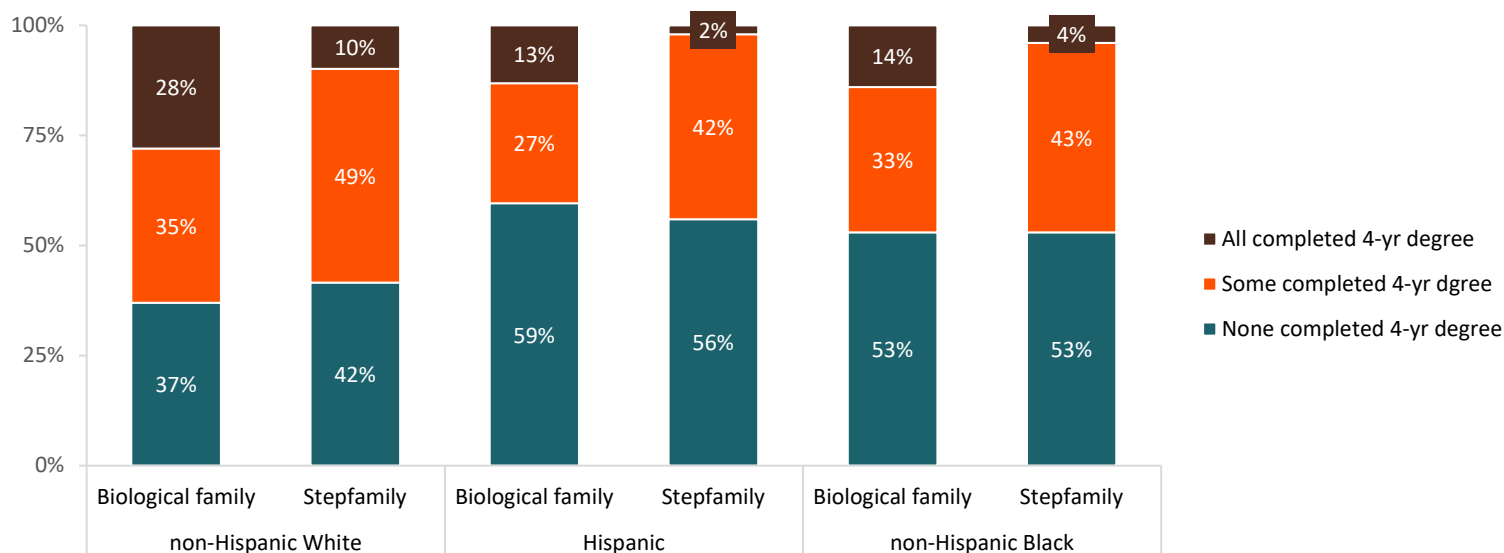


Source: Health and Retirement Study, 2018

Adult Children’s College Completion by Family Structure & Race/Ethnicity

- Across multiple racial/ethnic groups, the distribution of children’s college attainment differed between step and biological families.
 - For all groups, the share of offspring who all completed college was smaller among stepfamilies than biological families. Among non-Hispanic White parents, 28% of biological families had all children complete college compared to 10% in stepfamilies, a difference of 18%. The absolute difference was smaller for Hispanic families (11%) and non-Hispanic Blacks families (11%).
 - Parents in stepfamilies also had a larger share of some children who completed college compared to biological families across all racial-ethnic groups. The absolute difference between biological and stepfamilies was similar for non-Hispanic White parents (14%) and Hispanic parents (15%), but slightly smaller for non-Hispanic Black parents (10%).
 - If we consider the share of parents with no children who completed college, absolute differences in the step-biological gap were small across all racial/ethnic groups. Still, a larger share of White parents in stepfamilies had no children who completed college (42%) compared those in biological families (37%). The reverse was true for Hispanic families, where parents in biological families had a greater share of children with no college attainment (59%) compared to parents in stepfamilies (56%). No difference between step versus biological families in the share of children with no college education was evident among non-Hispanic Black parents.

Figure 2. Share of Offspring with College Degree by Parental Stepfamily Status and Race, 2018



Source: Health and Retirement Study, 2018

Data Sources:

Health and Retirement Study, public use dataset. Produced and distributed by the University of Michigan with funding from the National Institute on Aging (grant number NIA U01AG009740). Ann Arbor, MI.

RAND HRS Family Data 2018 (V2). Produced by the RAND Center for the Study of Aging, with funding from the National Institute on Aging and the Social Security Administration. Santa Monica, CA (July 2023).

References:

McLanahan, S., & Percheski, C. (2008). Family structure and the reproduction of inequalities. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 257-276. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134549>

Westrick-Payne, K. K., & Wiborg, C. E. (2021). Children’s family structure, 2021. *Family Profiles, FP-21-26*. Bowling Green, OH: National Center for Family & Marriage Research. <https://doi.org/10.25035/ncfmr/fp-21-26>

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