

Is Family Complexity Negatively Associated with Parental Psychological Well-Being?

Karen Guzzo (kguzzo@bgsu.edu), Lydia Anderson, Paul Hemez

Department of Sociology
Bowling Green State University

Introduction

- Today's parents, even those in unions, often experience high levels of family complexity
 - Multipartnered fertility (MPF) – an individual has children with different partners, usually their current partner and a past partner
 - Resident and nonresident stepchildren – an individual is partnered with someone who has children from a prior relationship
 - Nonresidential biological children
- Growing body of work on how family complexity affects child well-being
- Less clear how this complexity affects parents' psychological well-being

Family Complexity & Parental Psychological Well-Being

- Parenthood may be more difficult when individuals have different parental obligations than their partners
 - Varying relationships between and across parents, partners, and children
 - MPF – individual has clear ties to all his/her own children but partner does not
 - Stepchildren – partner has clear ties to his/her own children but individual does not
 - Obligations across households
 - Boundary ambiguity

MPF

- May be tough to feel as if meeting needs of own children and partner
- May be tough to navigate relationships with partner's children
 - Residential children present more chances for conflict but also for building ties
 - Nonresidential children may entail fewer conflicts but also weaker ties

Step-children

Nonres children

- May be tough to meet obligations to children who live in different households

Data

- Family & Relationships Survey (FRS) 2013
 - Nationally representative survey of 7,517 adults ages 18-65
 - Designed by NCFMR @ BGSU and collected by GfK – online panel
- Analytical sample restricted to partnered parents (N=3,099) whose children were all minors (N=1,412) and who had at least one minor child in the household (N=1,377)
- Analytical sample varies across dependent variables due to missing data

Variables & Method

- Four dependent variables
 - Depressive symptoms: 12-item CESD subset, constructed if at least 8 valid responses are provided, scores range from 0-7 ($\alpha = 0.93$)

Variables & Method (con't)

- Parental stress: 5-item scale, constructed if at least 3 valid responses are provided, scores range from 0-5 ($\alpha = 0.79$)
- Evaluation of partner as parent: 6-item scale, constructed if at least 4 valid responses are provided, scores range from 0-4 with higher scores indicating a more positive evaluation ($\alpha = 0.86$)
- Perceived fairness of childrearing: dichotomous indicator, 1 = time spent on childcare is fair, 0 = not fair
- Key independent variables: MPF, presence of residential & nonresidential stepchildren, and whether respondent has any nonresidential biological children
- Control variables include socioeconomic, demographic, and union/family variables
- Approach
 - Bivariate associations
 - Multivariate OLS & logistic regressions

Bivariate Results

Figure 1. Mean Depressive Symptoms by Child Complexity Indicators

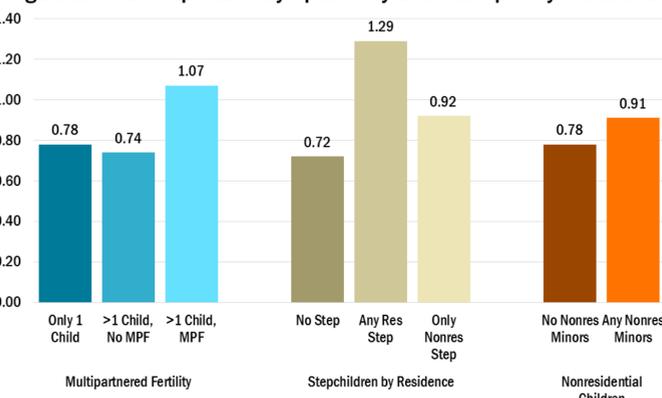


Figure 2. Mean Parental Stress by Child Complexity Indicators

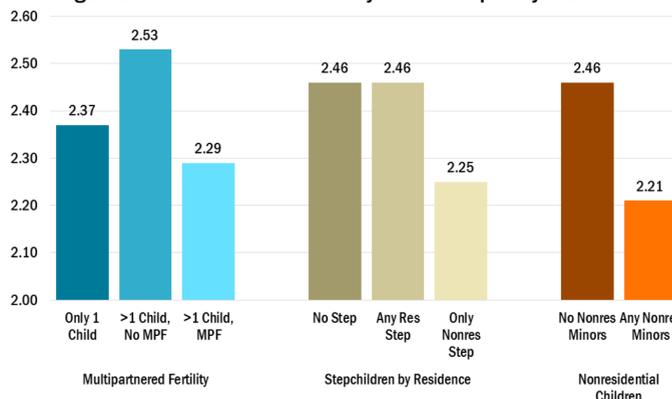


Figure 3. Mean Partner Evaluation by Child Complexity Indicators

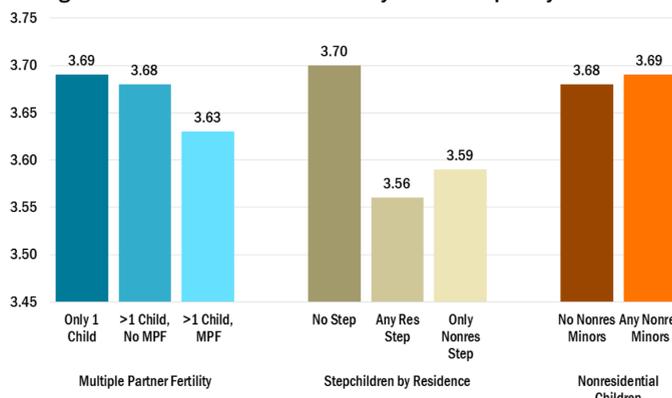
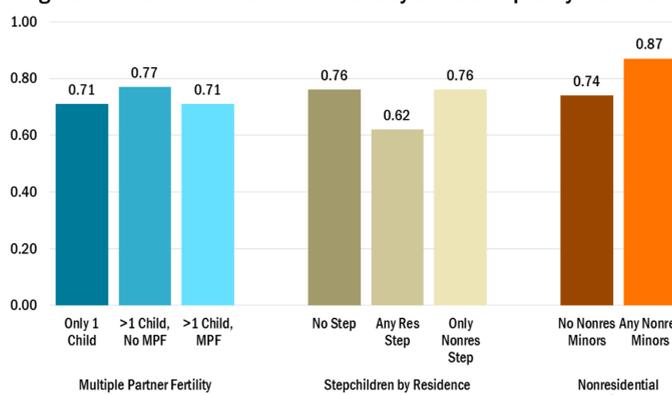


Figure 4. Perceived Childcare Fairness by Child Complexity Indicators



Multivariate Results

| | Model 1: Depressive Symptoms (OLS) | Model 2: Parental Stress (OLS) | Model 3: Parenting Evaluation (OLS) | Model 4: Fairness (Logit) |
|--|---|---|--|---------------------------------|
| MPF (Ref = More than One Child, MPF) | | | | |
| Only One Child | 0.06 | 0.08 | 0.00 | 0.22 |
| More than One Child, No MPF | 0.09 | 0.23 * | -0.04 | 0.51 |
| Stepchildren (Ref = Any Resident Stepchildren) | | | | |
| No Stepchildren | -0.31 + | -0.01 | 0.08 | 0.58 * |
| Only Nonresident Stepchildren | -0.56 * | -0.12 | 0.07 | 0.91 * |
| Nonresidential Minor Children (Ref = No Nonres Minors) | | | | |
| Any Nonres Minors | -0.23 | -0.19 | 0.04 | 1.15 * |
| Unweighted N | 1,141 | 1,331 | 1,331 | 1,331 |

+p ≤ .10 *p ≤ 0.05, **p ≤ 0.01, ***p ≤ 0.001
Note: Models contain a full set of covariates

- Having MPF does not decrease parental psychological well-being
 - Counterintuitive finding for no MPF
- Having residential stepchildren is associated with more depressive symptoms and lower perceptions of fairness
- Having nonresidential minor children actually increases perceptions of fairness

Summary

- Only weak evidence of negative link between family complexity and parental well-being
 - Residential stepchildren
- Analyses excluded single parents – possible selection into unions of parents with better psychological well-being despite complexity