

Family Patterns and Social Inequalities
among Children in the United States, 1940-2012:
A Re-Assessment

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LSE, 10 February 2016

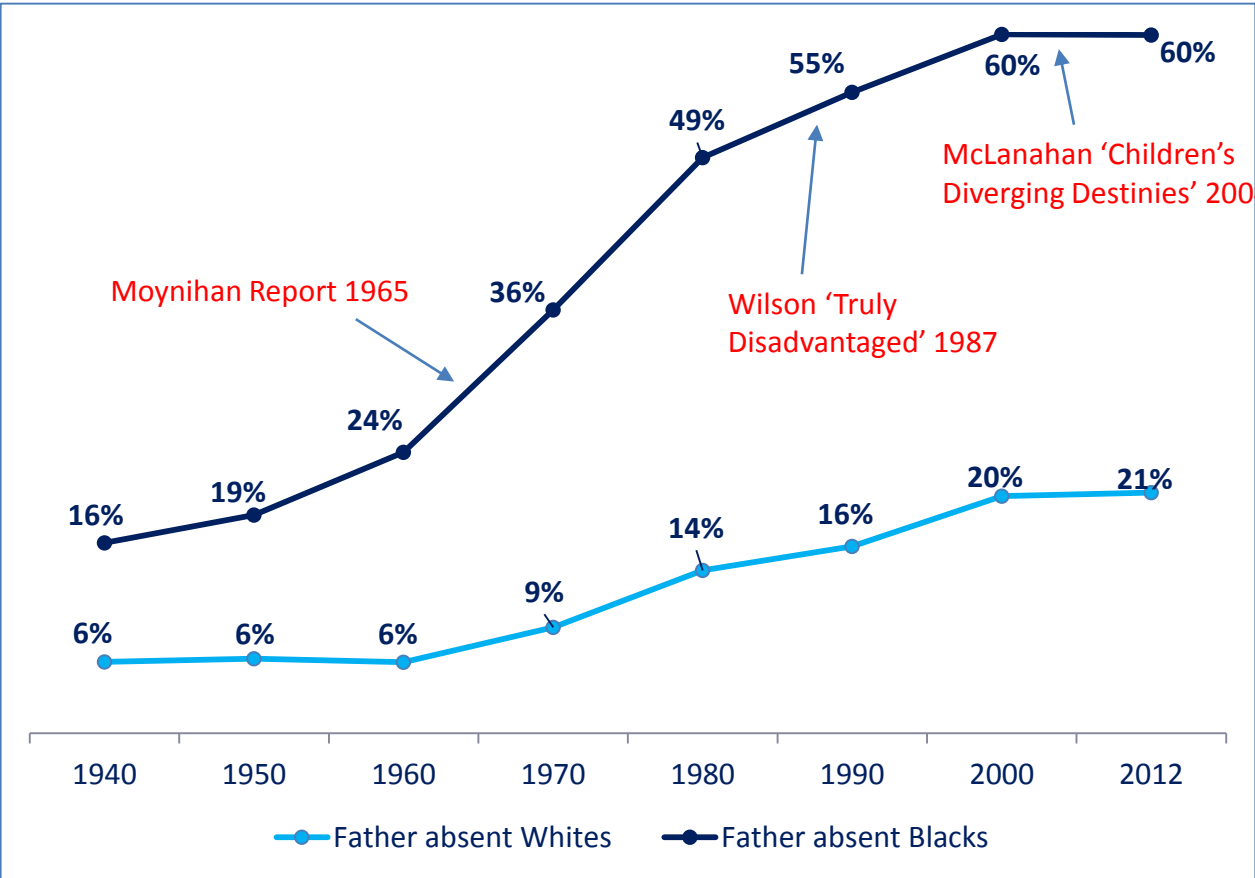


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**Scoil an Pholasáí Shóisialta, na
hOibre Sóisialta agus na Córa
Sóisialta, An Coláiste Ollscoile**

Widening social divide in fragile family structures

**% of 8-9 yr olds with no father in household, by race,
United States, 1940-2012**



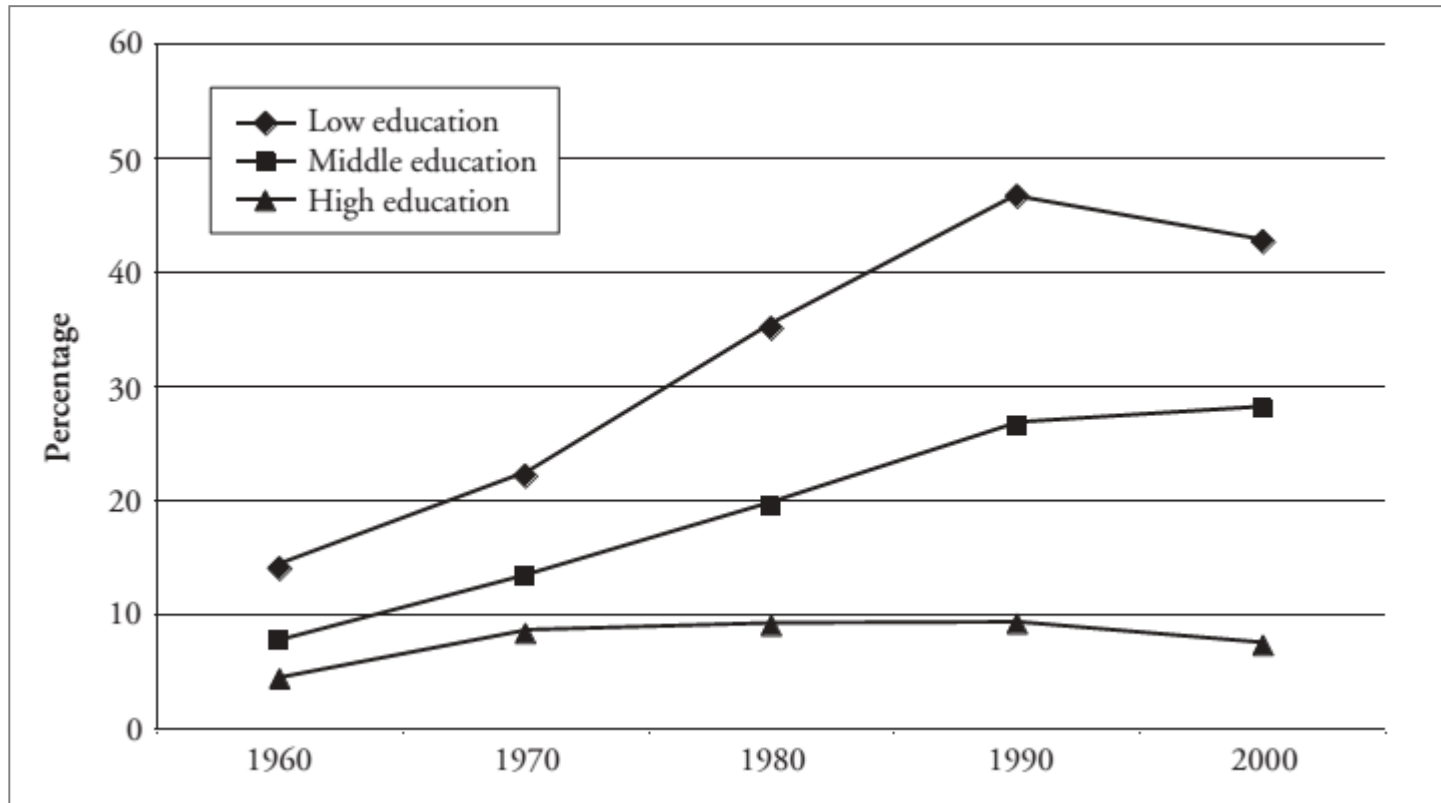
Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) –
Census 1940-1990; Current Population Survey 2000 & 2012

Widening social disparities in family patterns in the US?

- Moynihan (1965) *The Negro Family*
 - Growth in mother-headed families in black population
 - Due to discrimination and poor job situation of black men – undermines their role as husbands & fathers
 - Gives rise to the black ‘matriarchal family’
- Wilson (1987) *The Truly Disadvantaged*
 - Family disorganisation as matter of social class rather than race
 - Increasingly common among all urban poor & marginalised, black & white
 - Driven by segregation and labour market differentiation in American cities
 - The cycle of inequality:
 - Socio-economic inequality → differentiation in family behaviour → disadvantage among lower class children → reproduction of socio-economic inequality
- Similar themes: McLanahan 2004, McLanahan and Percheski 2008, Cherlin 2009, Carlson and England 2011, Morgan 2011, Furstenburg 2011, Putnam 2015
- A pessimistic picture

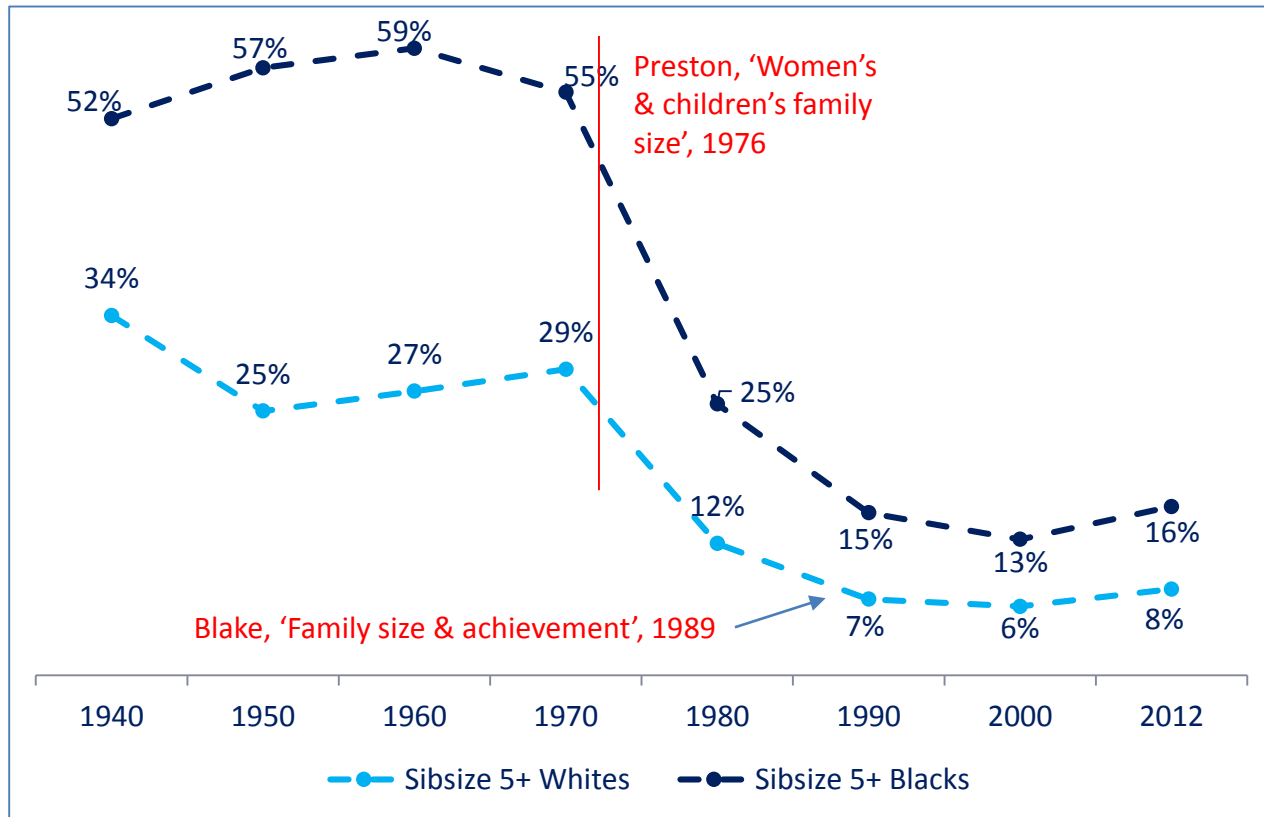
S. McLanahan (2004) 'Diverging destinies: How children are faring under the second demographic transition', *Demography* 41, 4: 607-627

% of children living with lone mothers, United States, 1960-2000



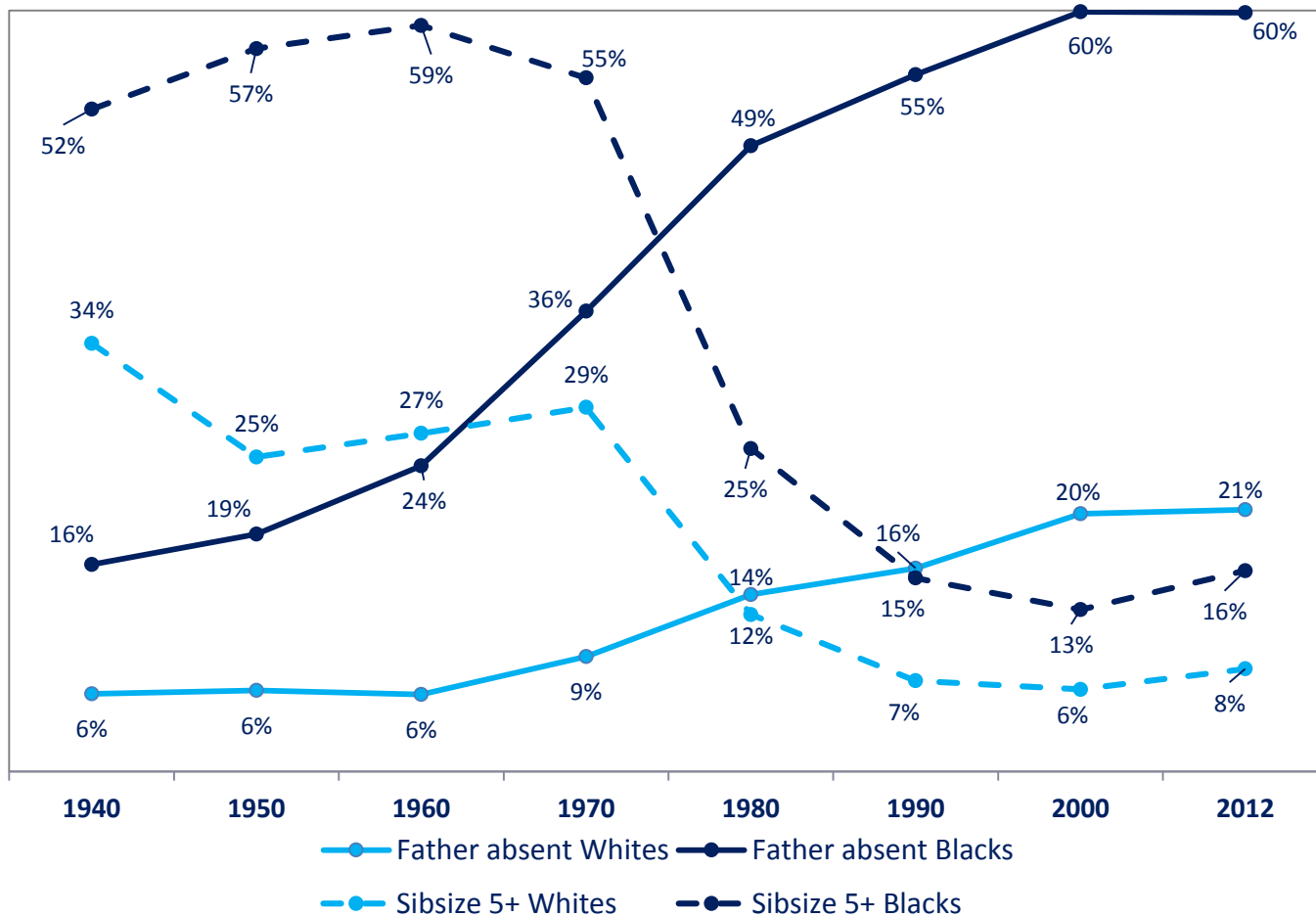
The other side of the story: narrowing social divide in children's family size – the 'sibsize revolution'

**% of 8-9 yr olds with sibsize 5+, by race,
United States, 1940-2012**



Note: Sibsize is measured by linking 8-9 yr olds to their mothers' reported number of children ever born (Census up to 1990, Current Population Survey after 1990).

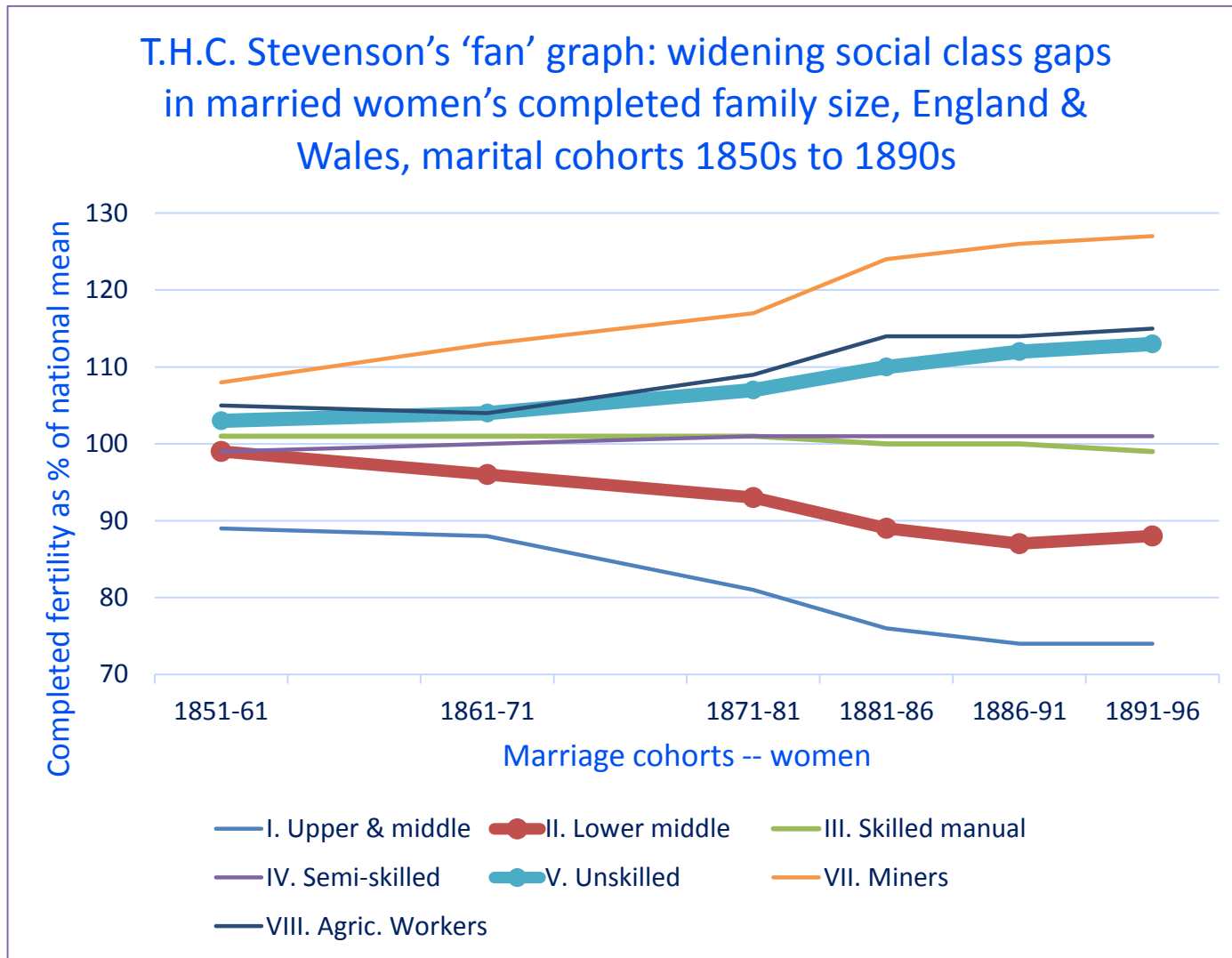
The two sides of the story together: counter-trends in family structure and sibsize



Topics

- Background: How did the sibsize revolution come to be overlooked?
 - Fertility differentials a major focus pre-WWII
 - Dropped in 1960s – why?
 - Technical issue: women's v children's family size (cohort fertility v sibsize)
- Further details on sibsize revolution
- Questions/implications for further research
 - Re-examine the fertility transition from a children's perspective
 - What are the effects on children
 - Relevance for other countries

Fertility differentials in late 19th/early 20th century



Source: T.H.C. Stevenson (1920) 'The fertility of various social classes in England and Wales from the middle of the nineteenth century to 1911' *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 83, 3: 401-444

Eugenics & population quality

- **Social Darwinism:** fertility differentials → ‘survival of the unfittest’
- ‘Race suicide’, ‘population degeneration’: in shrinking population, lower orders & ethnic minorities outbreed (white) middle & professional classes
- **Social eugenics/reform eugenics** – ‘family policy’:
 - Incentivise higher fertility among the middle & professional classes
 - Birth control programmes for the poor (incl. abortion? sterilisation?)
- Gunnar & Alva Myrdal *Crisis in The Population Question* (1934)
- W. Beveridge ‘Eugenic aspects of children’s allowances’ Galton Lecture, Eugenics Society, Feb 1943

G. Myrdal *The American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944/1962)

- Commissioned by Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Major influence on post-war racial liberalism in United States
- Strand on the 'Negro family':
 - Poor fertility control as cause of black immiseration
 - Large families, illegitimacy
 - Solution: public family planning programme for black women (abortion? sterilisation?)

Post-war baby-boom

- Population decline turns into population growth
- Lower classes 'catch up' with middle/upper class birth control behaviour: the social divide in fertility behaviour greatly reduces (disappears?)
 - Kiser et al. (1968), Glass (1976)
- Research on social divide in fertility/family formation turns to other topics:
 - Maternal age at childbearing (esp. re teenage births)
 - Non-marital births

Why has children's family size (sibsize) been overlooked?

- Demographic research focuses on *women's* family size (mean completed cohort fertility)
- Preston (1976): highlighted and mathematically defined difference between mean family size of cohort of women (\bar{X}) and mean family size (sibsize) of their children (\bar{C}), where V_x is coefficient of variation in women's family size:

$$\bar{C} = \bar{X} (1 + V_x^2)$$

- \bar{C} always exceeds \bar{X} except where V_x is 0, that is, where all women have the same number of children & none are childless

Illustration

- 10 women x 2 children each: 20 children in total

$$\bar{X} = 2$$

$$20/10=2$$

$$\bar{C} = 2$$

$$(20 \times 2)/20=2$$

- 5 women x 1 child, 5 women x 3 children: 20 children in total

$$\bar{X} = 2$$

$$((5 \times 1) + (5 \times 3))/10 = 2$$

$$\bar{C} = 2.5$$

$$((5 \times 1) + (15 \times 3))/20 = 50/20 = 2.5$$

50% of women have 3 children; 75% of children are in families of 3 children

- Add 5 childless women: 15 women, 20 children

$$\bar{X} = 1.33$$

$$20/15=1.333$$

33.3% of women have 3 children

$$\bar{C} = 2.5$$

- If the 5 childless women have 1 child each: 15 women, 25 children

$$\bar{X} = 1.67$$

$$25/15=1.667$$

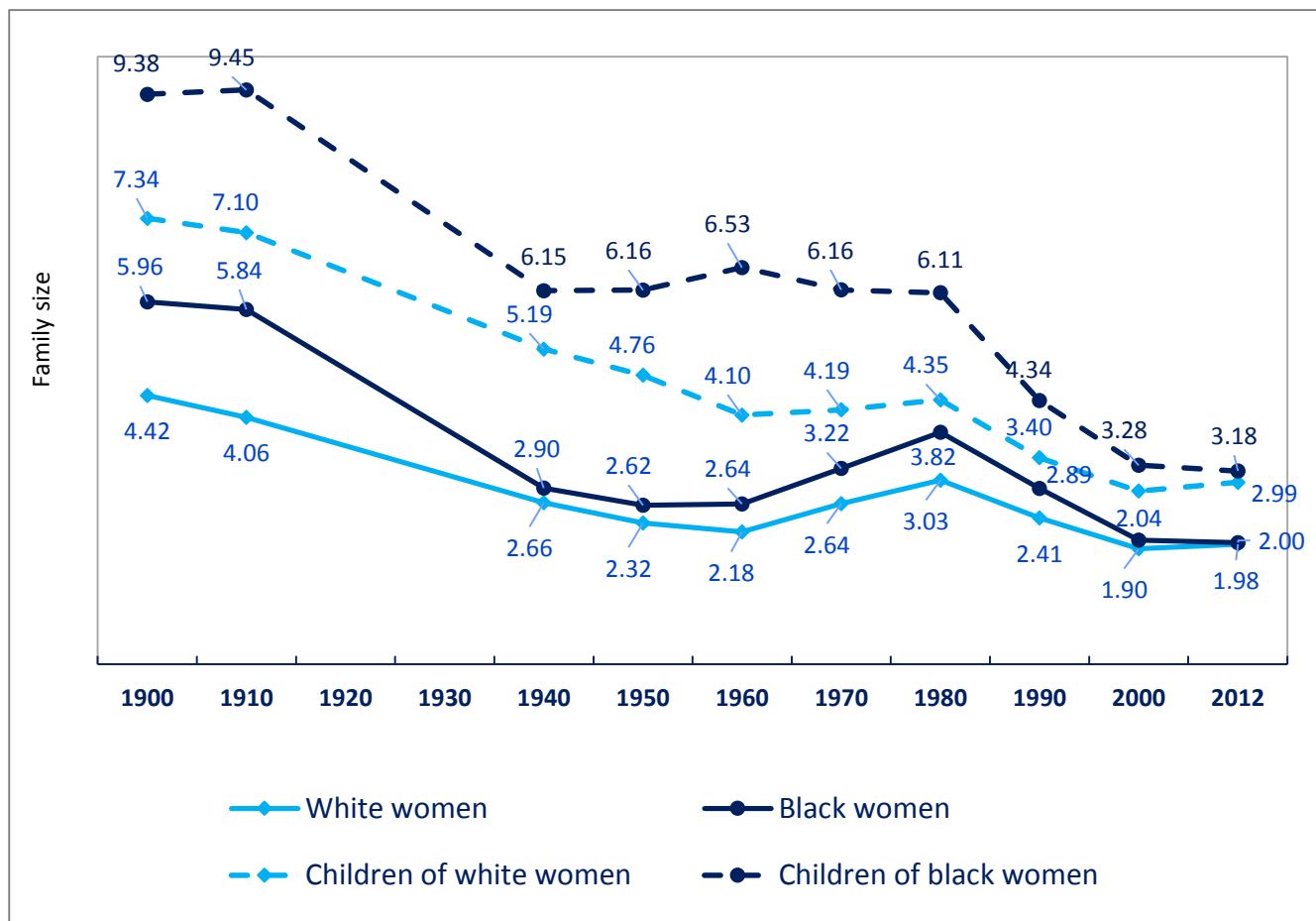
$$\bar{C} = 2.2$$

$$((10 \times 1) + (15 \times 3))/25 = 55/25 = 2.2$$

Conclusion: *movements over time in women's mean cohort fertility, or comparisons between groups of women at one point in time, on their own tell us little about corresponding differences in children's sibsize. Must also take account of **variance** in women's cohort fertility.*

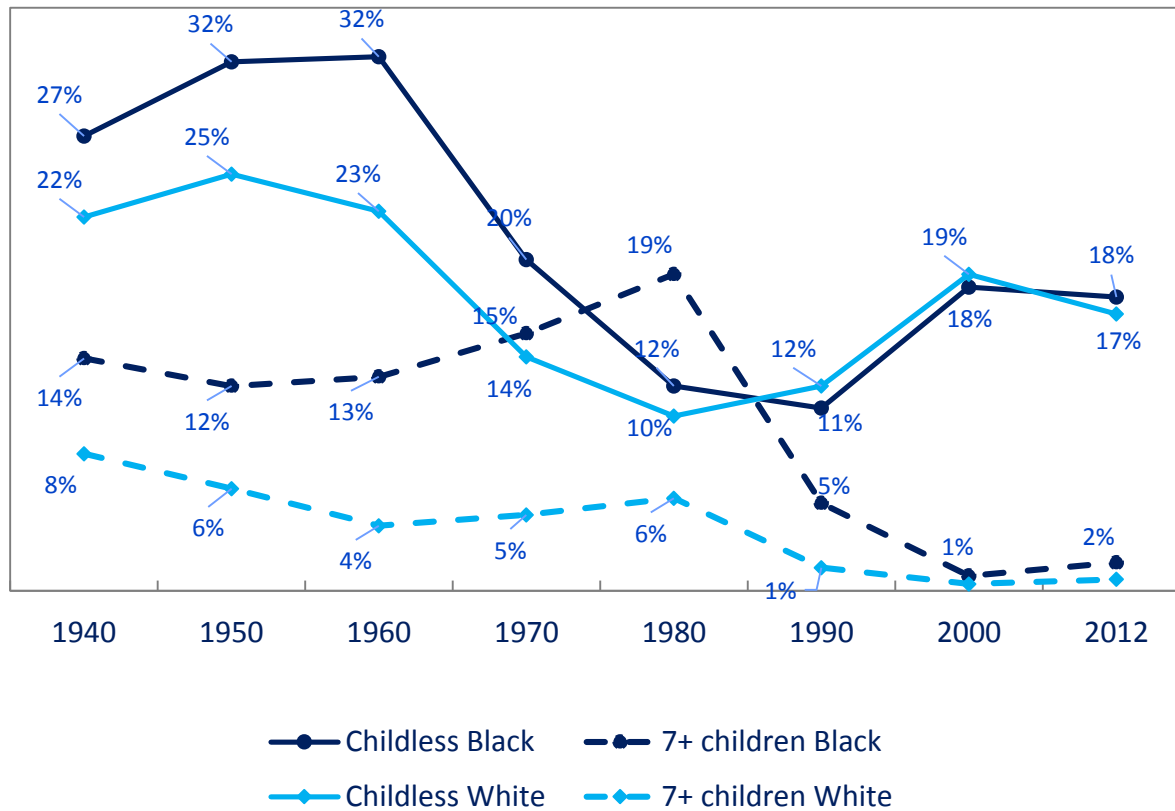
The fertility transition from women's and children's perspective

Family size among women aged 45-49*
and among their children, by race, 1900-2012



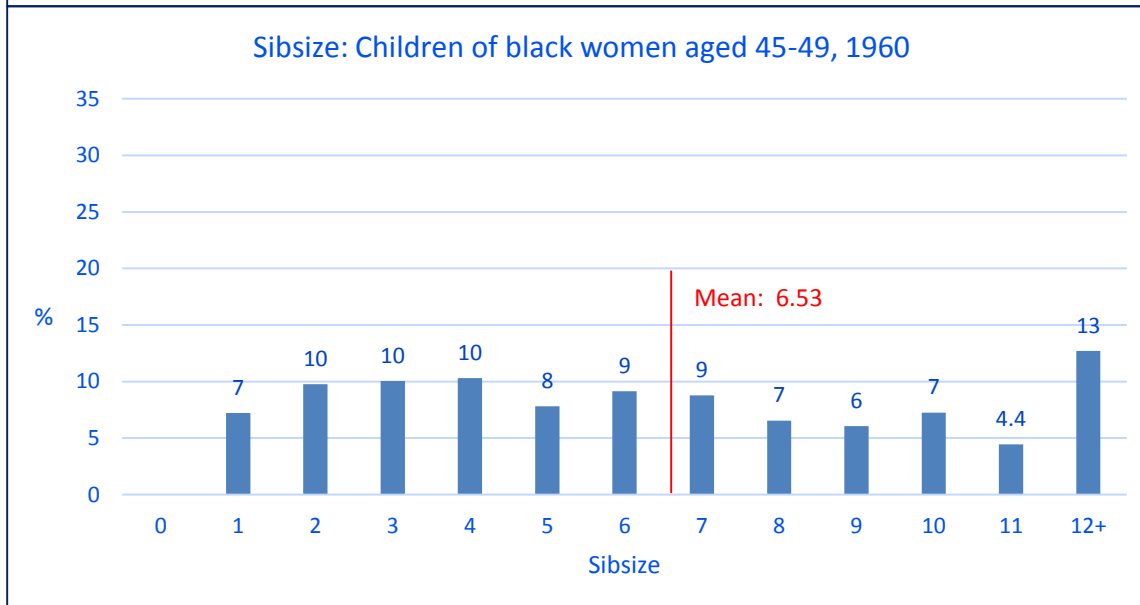
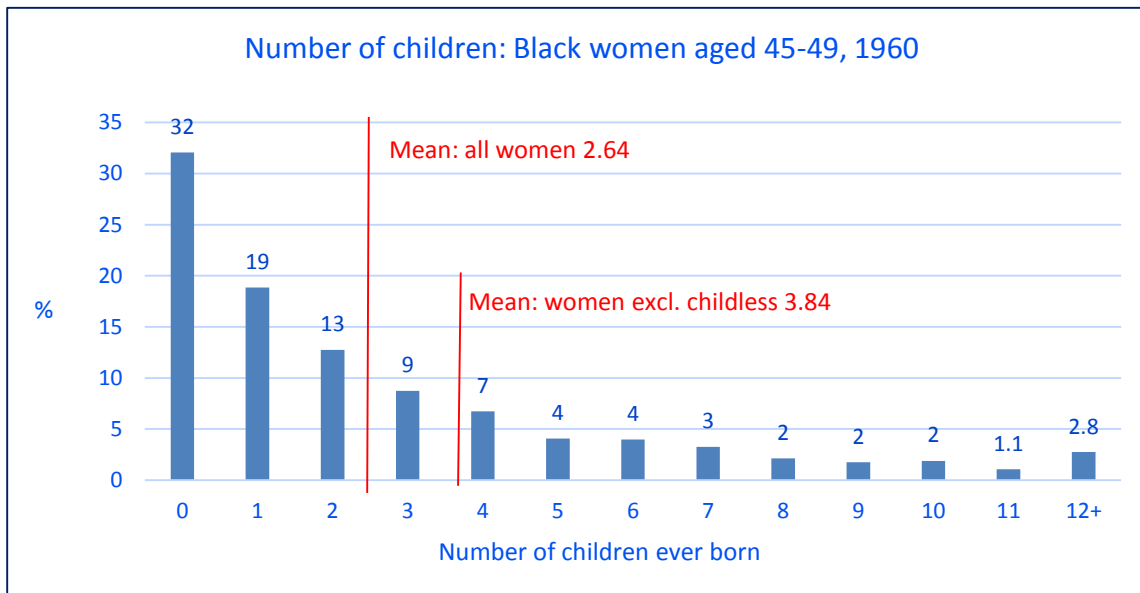
* Data for 2000 are based on women aged 40-44. Family size among children (sibsize) is derived based on the method described by Preston (1976).

Women aged 45-49*: % childless and % with large families (7+ children) by race, 1940-2012

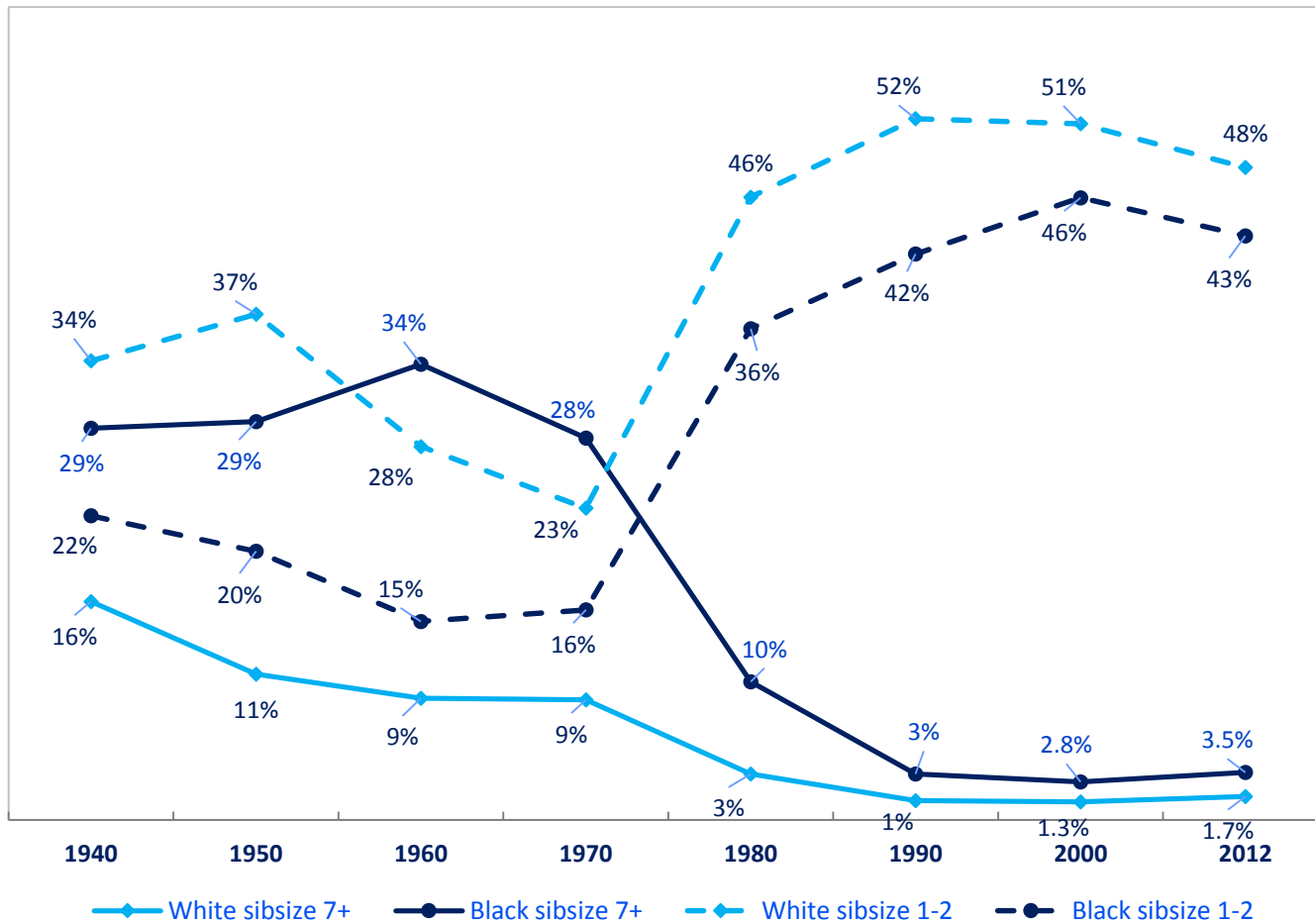


* Data for 2000 are based on women aged 40-44.

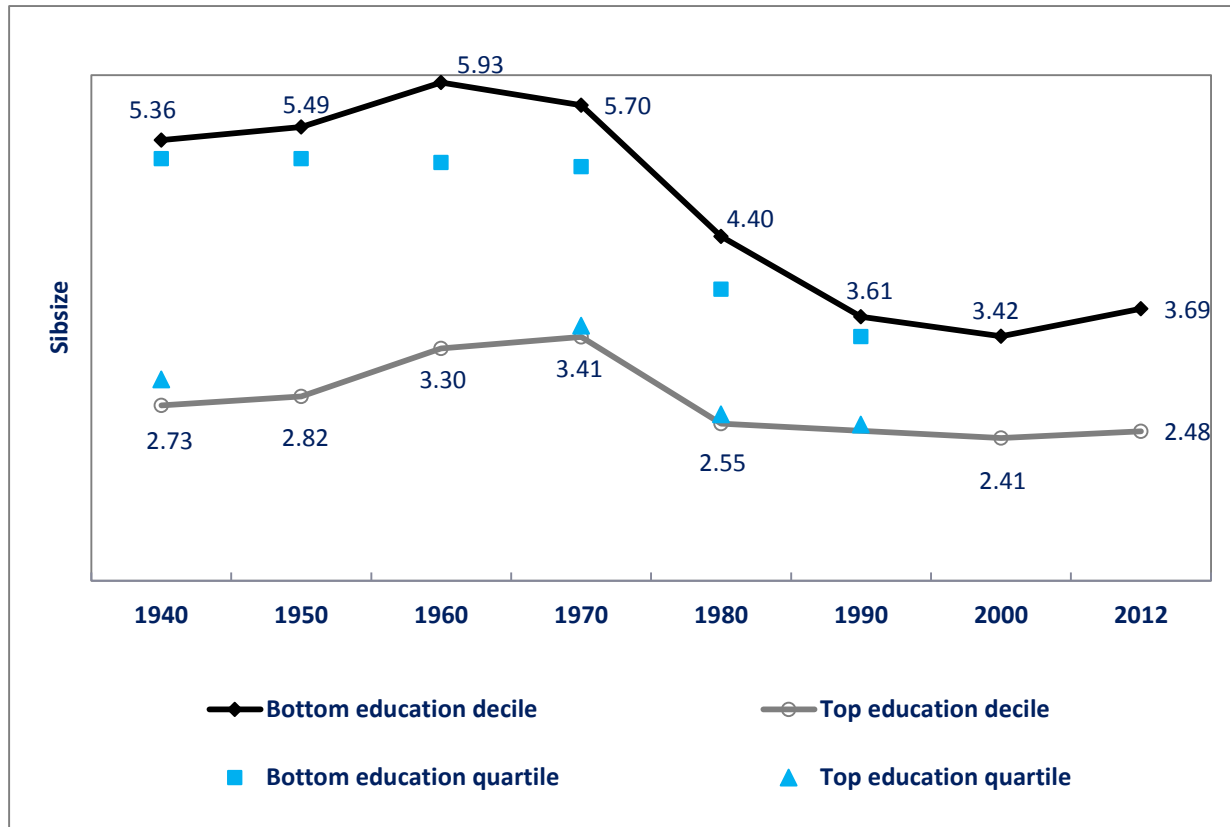
Black women and their children in 1960: distribution by family size



Percent of 8-9 yr olds with large (7+) and small (1-2) sibsize by race, 1940-2012



Sibsize of 8-9 year-olds by educational level of mothers, 1940-2012

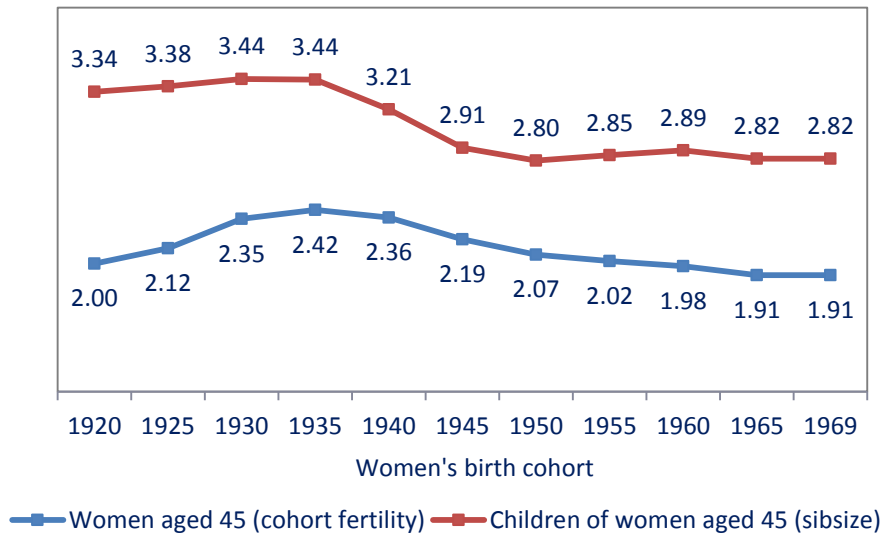


Key points

- Among American children, widening social divide (and overall increase) in lone parenthood since 1960s counter-balanced by narrowing social divide (and overall decrease) in sibsize
 - a change in the *form* of family vulnerability among lower status children rather than an *increase* in family vulnerability over past half-century
- No research as yet on the comparative impact of these two trends -- but overall effect likely to be less negative for children than current focus on changing family structure implies
- Methodological caveats:
 - Need to focus on trends in *total* sibsize, not co-resident sibsize: the larger the sibsize, the less likely that all siblings will be co-resident
 - Need to base analysis on samples of children, not of adults or families: (alternative: use samples of parents/families weighted by number of children)

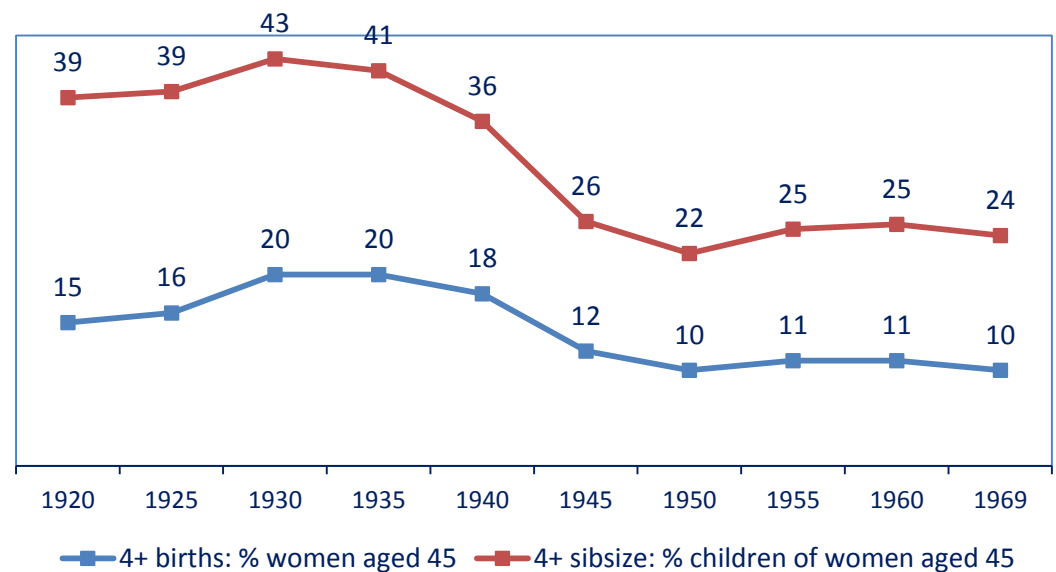
Women's birth cohorts, 1920-196, England & Wales

Women's and children's mean completed family size



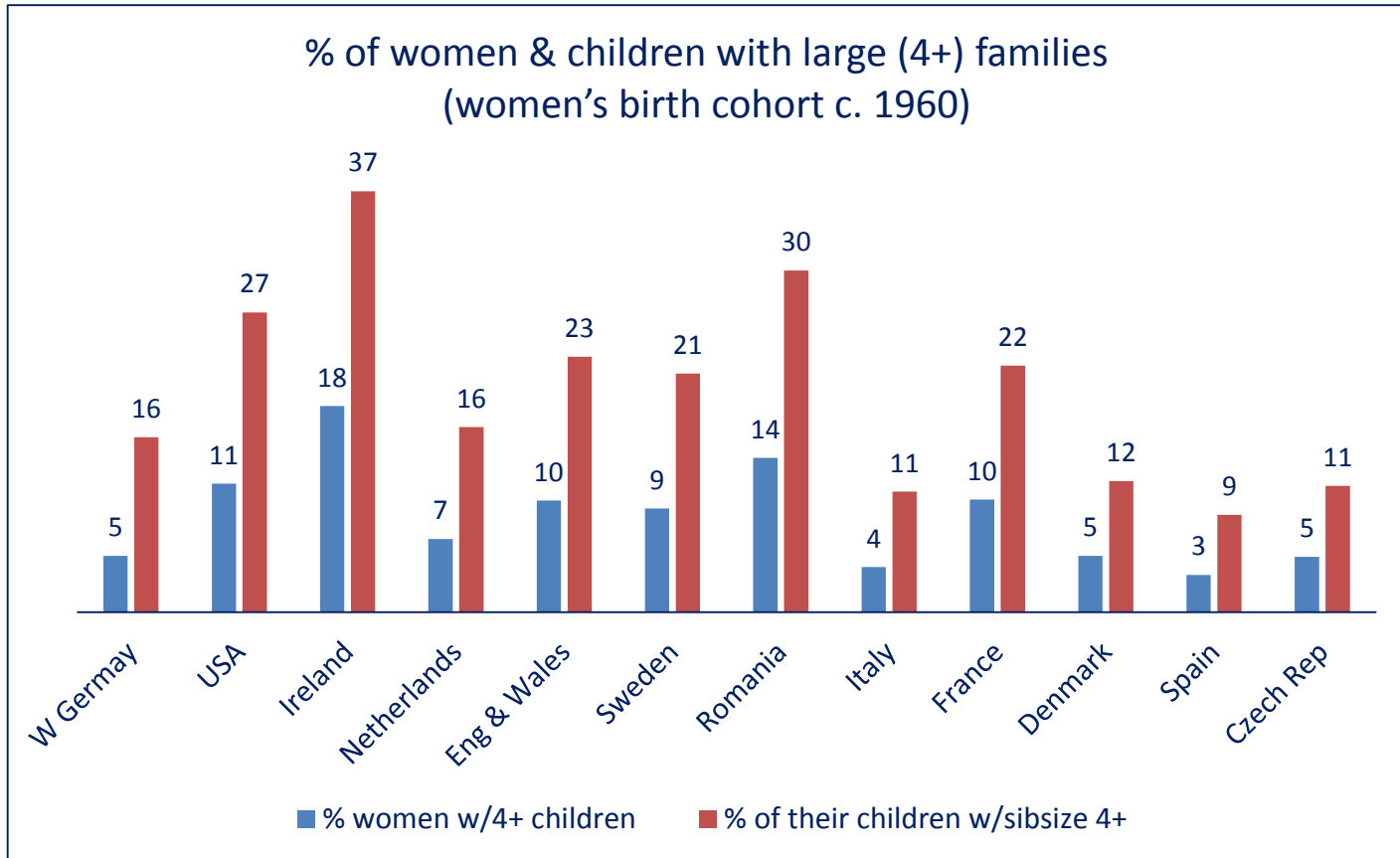
Relevance for UK

% of women and their children with completed family size of 4+



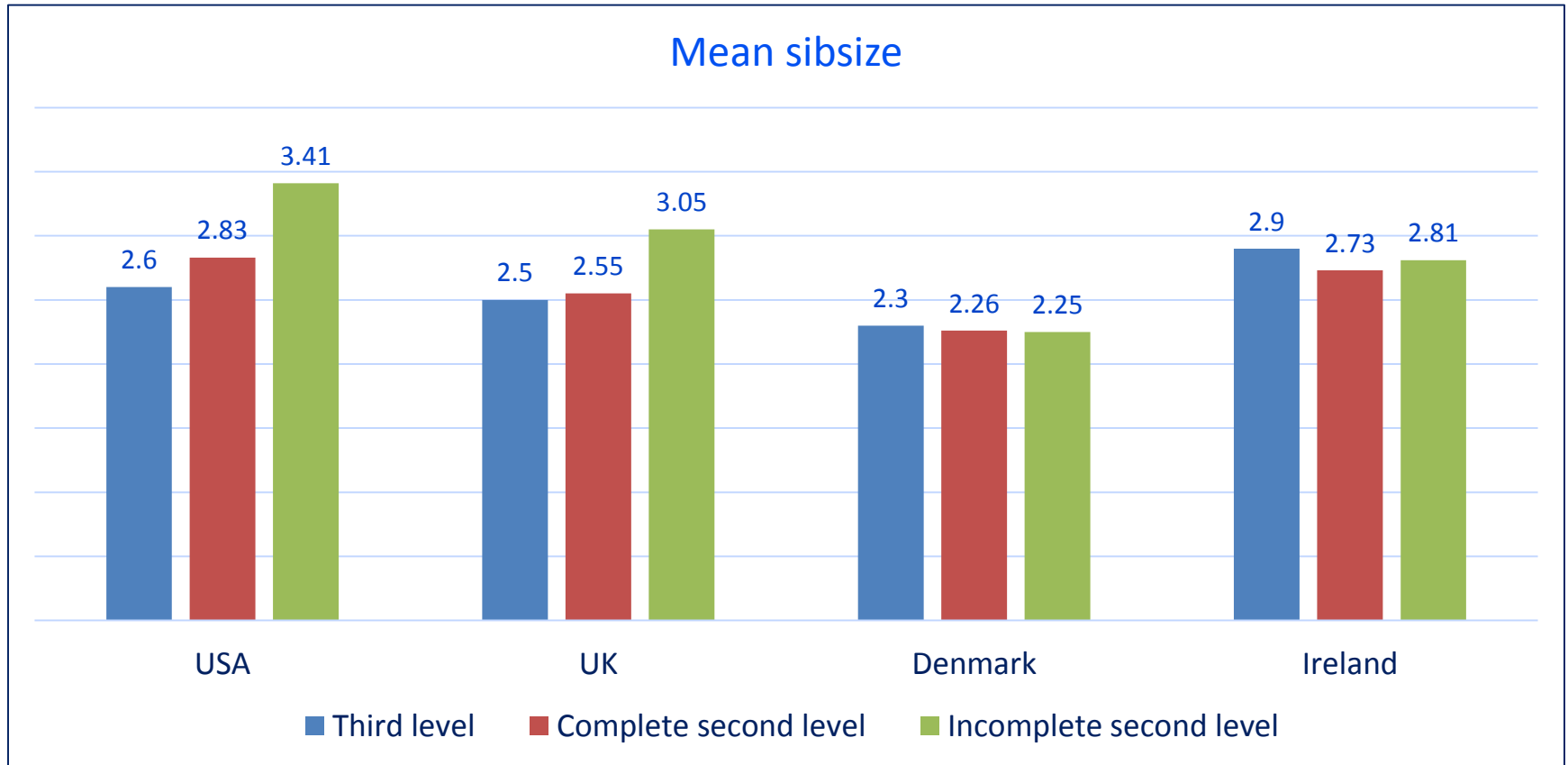
Source: Derived from ONS, *Childbearing among women born in different years, England and Wales*, 2014 Release (Table 3)

Other countries



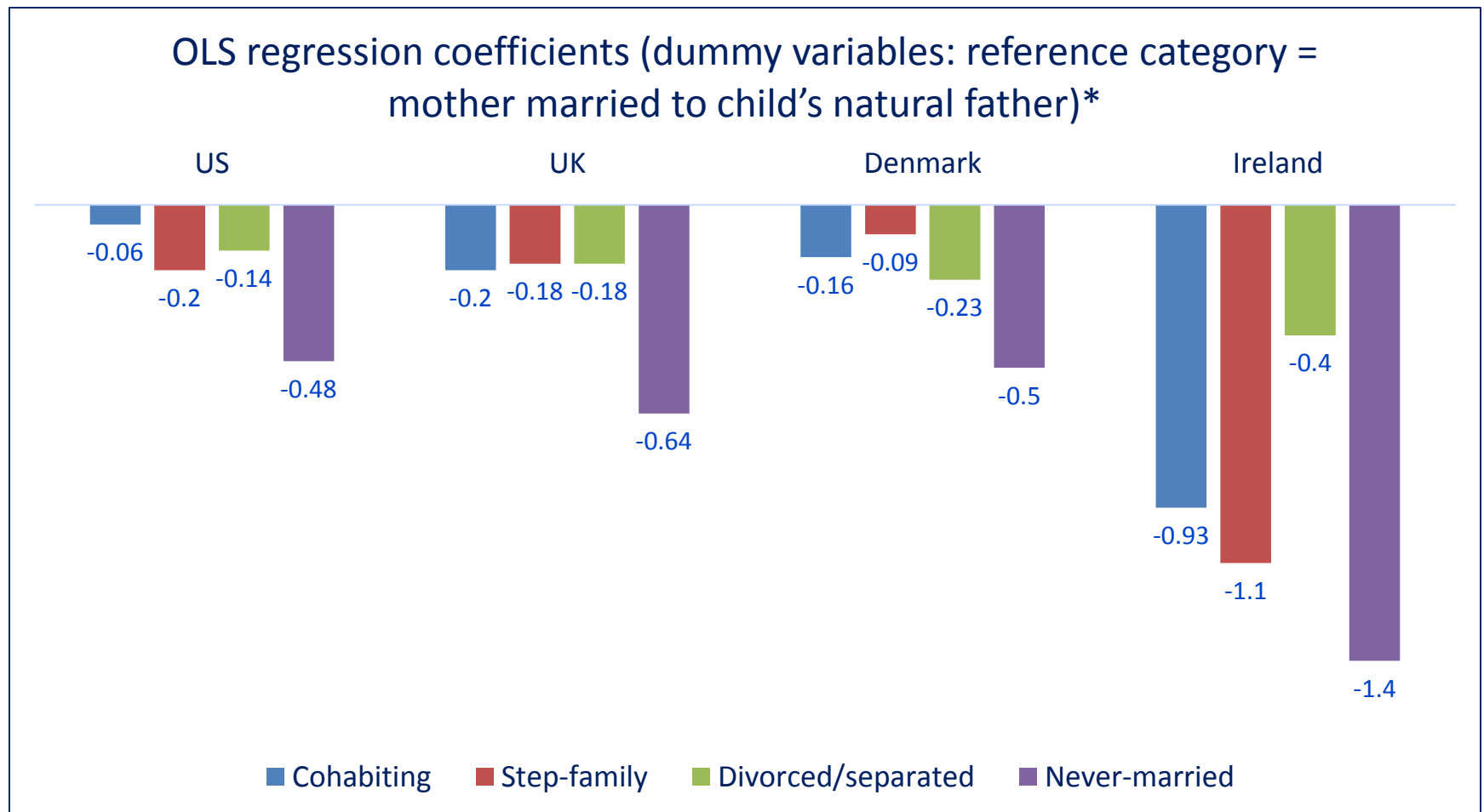
Source: Derived from V.M. Shkolnikov, E.M Andreev, R. Houle, J.M Vaupel (2007) 'The Concentration of Reproduction in Cohorts of Women in Europe and the United States' *Population and Development Review* 33, 1: 67-99, Table 5.

Differentials in children's sibsize in middle childhood by maternal education, US, UK, Denmark & Ireland



From: P. Keilthy & T. Fahey (forthcoming) 'Inequalities in Children's Family Circumstances in the US, UK, Denmark and Ireland'.
Data: USA: 10-11 yr olds Current Population Survey 2012; UK: 11 yr olds Millennium Cohort Survey 2011; Denmark: 11 yr olds, Danish Longitudinal Survey of Children 2007; Ireland: 8-9 yr olds Growing Up in Ireland Survey 2008.

Effect of mother's partnership status on children's sibsize in middle childhood, US, UK, Denmark & Ireland



* Controlling for effects of maternal education and age
Sources & data: as previous slide

Some overall conclusions

- More attention to sibsize needed in research on children's family contexts
- ... paying close attention to key methodological issues (focus on total sibsize, based on samples of children)
- ... and to interactions with other family patterns (esp. family structure)
- Trends over time positive for children, reduced social inequalities between children? Is the US experience typical?
- But inequalities still not eliminated in all countries (?)

Working paper version: T. Fahey (2015) 'Family patterns & social inequalities among children in the United States, 1940-2012'

<http://www.ucd.ie/geary/static/publications/workingpapers/gearywp201523.pdf>