

CHARACTERISTICS OF "OTHER" FAMILIES

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RESUMEN

Las "otras familias" en la clasificación del Censo de los Estados Unidos son aquellas familias cuyo jefe es un hombre o una mujer sin que el respectivo cónyuge esté presente, pero que tienen uno o más parientes viviendo dentro del seno familiar. El propósito de la investigación fue comparar las características de estas familias con las familias "normales" de marido y mujer. En 1960 había 5.5 millones de "otras familias." Esas familias resultan de la muerte de uno de los cónyuges, de separación conyugal del establecimiento de una unidad familiar por parte de una persona soltera, o de la separación temporal de los esposos debido a razones de trabajo o reclusión en instituciones. En comparación con las familias normales, las "otras" familias tienen un porcentaje más elevado de jefes mujeres; el jefe tiende a ser de mayor edad; los jefes mujeres tienden a estar entre las que han tenido un mayor número de hijos, y el ingreso de la familia es más bajo. Un número desproporcionado de estas familias son de raza negra. Estas "otras" familias cuyo jefe es una mujer joven hubo un aumento rápido durante los años cincuenta, sobre todo las que no son blancas en las áreas urbanas. La fuerza económica de este grupo de familias en comparación con otras familias, a disminuido mucho desde 1950.

Twelve per cent of the families in the United States were shown by the 1960 Census to be headed by a male or female with no spouse present. Our immediate problem is to decide whether or to what extent these families could be admitted as units of analysis in a general discussion of families. Our investigation of census results to date suggests that these "other" families, atypical by definition only in that the head has no spouse present, are sufficiently different in other respects that they should be given separate treatment in any discussion relating family characteristics and activities to the society at large.

These other families, showing up about five and a half million strong in the 1960 Census, represent a variety of groupings of relatives. A divorced woman and her young children are an "other" family, as would be an old man and his adult daughter, or two brothers. Such groupings would be classified as other families in any enumeration situation. There are some ambiguous groupings, however, such as the old man who owns the house, his daughter, her husband, and their children. If the daughter's husband is regarded as the head, we treat it as a husband-wife, or normal, family for analytic purposes. If the older man is regarded as the head we

treat it as an "other" family. Either the respondent or the enumerator filled in the census schedule and at that time a final determination of family type was made. We have no ability to estimate the conceptual purity of the enumerated "other" families as of now, although tabulations will be available in the future which will indicate how many "other" families could also have been classified, legitimately, as husband-wife families, and vice-versa.

But the figure of 5.5 million, for the total of other families, is close to what we would get if professional interviewers used the "other" family classification only as a last resort. We know this because in 1960 there were only 832,000 married couples who did not head a family and who lived with other relatives. If we assume all the couples live in "other" families (which they do not) and if they were all enumerated as heads, the official Census count of "other" families would be reduced only 15 per cent. Thus, although there may be lack of precision in classifying some families as atypical, most such classifications are correct.

How do these "other" families come into being? Clearly, a preliminary to the formation of a husband-wife family is marriage. Judging from the marital status of other family heads, a preliminary to the

formation of an other family is the break-up of a marriage.

The marital statuses of "other" family heads suggest at least three different events which precede the formation of other families. One is the death of one spouse. This event is most important for the formation of "other" families with older heads but is probably also involved in many cases where a young single person has taken over the family headship from a widowed parent. Another is marital discord leading to divorce or separation. This event probably precedes the formation of most young "other" families, particularly families with female heads with own children. The third is a separation of spouses for benign reasons. This event creates a proportionately small number of what might be called temporary "other" families.

About half of the females heading "other" families are widowed, and the remaining female heads of families are most likely to be divorced or separated. About one out of ten female heads is single. The marital status situation is similar for male heads although proportionately many more male heads than female heads are single. In this connection it is interesting to note that of all single female heads, 83,000 (17 per cent) reported the presence of their own children (presumably illegitimate children) in the household.

Some female heads with own children who may have never been married may have reported themselves as separated or divorced to the detriment of the quality of the data on marital status for female heads. Regardless of marital status, however, when there are own children present in an "other" family, which there are for 2.2 million families, we may be fairly certain that a man and woman were together at one time. The end of this togetherness began an other family usually with one of them as head. About 40 per cent of all "other" families have own children under 18 present in the household.

The temporary "other" families are those in which the head is married and

the spouse is absent from the household for reasons unrelated to marital discord. These families are a small fraction of all other families, but they have increased about 80 per cent since 1950. Most of the increase in female head families of this sort results from greater numbers of husbands in the Armed Forces in 1960 than in 1950. However, in this category male heads almost doubled during the decade. In 1960 there were 170,000 wives absent from these "other" male head families. It is likely that many of these wives were in institutions.

Now, the definitional difference between "other" families and normal families focuses on membership composition, that is, a spouse is missing in "other" families. In terms of family composition, and the responsibilities of family management, there is an equality of sexes in husband-wife families. However, this equality does not carry over to "other" families. Three out of four "other" families had female heads in 1960. The fact that "other" families are more frequently managed by females is one of five major items in the catalogue of reasons we developed for justifying special analytic treatment for "other" families.

The second item is color of head. "Other" families are twice as likely as normal families to have nonwhite heads; but, of equal interest, nonwhite families are twice as likely to be of the "other" type than white families. About one out of four nonwhite families is an "other" family.

The third item is age. Heads of "other" families are more often in the upper age groups than heads of husband-wife families. There was one out of four other family heads 65 years old or over in 1960, but only one out of eight normal family heads in that age range. However, among nonwhites only, the normal and "other" family head age differences diminish.

Fourth, the presence of own children under 18 in "other" families varies sharply with age of head compared to husband-wife families. Young female heads (under 35) are more likely to have some own

children under 18 than husband-wife families, and older female heads are less likely to have them than normal families. Furthermore, among all young husband-wife and female head families with some own children under 18, the female heads have proportionately more own children than the normal families.

This finding led us to ask if female "other" family heads have higher cumulative fertility than wives. Published 1960 Census data will not answer that question, but we were able to examine some relevant tallies prepared in checking out the one-in-a-thousand sample which the Bureau of the Census has recently made available for public use. These figures show a striking cumulative fertility difference between wives and female family heads. The female heads have a cumulative fertility rate one-fourth larger than the wives. Among those females who were mothers by 1960, wives had an average of 2.9 children ever born, and female heads had an average of 3.7 children ever born.

We estimate that the age and color differences between wives and female heads could, at most, account for about one-third of the cumulative fertility difference.

The last major item in our catalogue of differences is income. "Other" families have less income than husband-wife families.

Examining income in relation to the sex and age of atypical family heads reveals that under age 65 the male head other families are somewhat poorer than husband-wife families, and the female head families are much poorer than husband-wife families. However, over age 65, other families, both male and female, had higher median family income in 1959 than husband-wife families.

In any economic analysis there is little doubt that "other" families will obscure relationships at the lower end of the family income scale if they are combined with husband-wife families.

When we look at changes in the char-

acteristics of "other" families since 1950, the other families begin to look less like a separate category of analysis and more like a miscellaneous collection of widely varying atypical family situations which are waxing or waning independently of one another. In particular, the young, urban, nonwhite female head with own children emerges as a growing force from 1950 to 1960, and older widowed persons appear as less likely to be the head of an "other" family in 1960 than in 1950.

Although "other" families increased somewhat less rapidly than husband-wife families between 1950 and 1960, the number of "other" families with male heads actually declined. The young male heads decreased most.

Female head families, by contrast, increased almost as rapidly as husband-wife families. In the younger age groups female heads increased more rapidly. For example, with age of head under 35, there were 47 per cent more families with female heads but only 7 per cent more husband-wife families in 1960 than in 1950. Among the young nonwhites, the female head family increases were even more spectacular. They increased 62 per cent, compared with a 7 per cent increase in young nonwhite husband-wife families. These increases in female head families were concentrated in urban areas, especially among nonwhites.

Older "other" families increased proportionately less than all families during the decade, even though all persons over 65 increased proportionately more than the total population. Between 1950 and 1960 the proportion of widows and widowers among "other" family heads dropped sharply. At the same time the proportion of divorced persons among other family heads of both sexes increased. The proportion of separated female heads also increased, while the proportion of separated male heads stayed about the same. All these changes were true of nonwhites as well as whites.

We first suspected that the change in

the marital status distribution of "other" family heads, at least for female heads, might be explained by their changing age distribution. But the application of 1950 marital status proportions by age to the 1960 age distributions did not yield the marital status distribution shift we observed in the published data. Apparently, the proportion of widows declined and the proportion of divorced persons increased even within age groups.

To check our inferences we compared 1950 Census data with the March 1962 Current Population Survey. Here we found that the proportion of widowed persons among other family heads of both sexes dropped between 1950 and 1962 in all age groups except the highest (75 years and over). The proportion of divorced and separated persons increased in most age groups under 65. In case you wonder where the widows went, they were much more likely in 1960 than 1950 to be living alone or with nonrelatives as primary individuals.

The income position of all families, normal and atypical, improved between 1950 and 1960, with a constant dollar increase of about 50 per cent in median income. "Other" families with male heads improved their position over the decade somewhat more than heads of normal families, especially in the youngest and oldest ages. In the oldest age group the median income of the female head families more than doubled during the decade. The median income of female head families increased least in the youngest ages, gaining only about half as much as that of all families.

Because incomes rose generally over the last decade, it is not surprising that in 1960 there were 44 per cent fewer families, over-all, with incomes under \$2,000 than there were in 1950. This reduction in the absolute number of low income families was visible in each age group for husband-wife families and for "other" families with male heads. Even female head families as a whole experienced a

reduction of 24 per cent in the under \$2,000 family income group. However, as a single exception to this happy finding, the absolute number of female heads under age 35 with less than \$2,000 family income increased by 21 per cent from 1950 to 1960. In 1960 these female head families under age 35 had a median income of \$1,780. These are the same other families that have shown the greatest increase since 1950 and which have proportionately more own children than husband-wife families of the same age of head.

These descriptive details make it clear that "other" families differ too much from husband-wife families to permit combining the two groups for most analytic purposes.

But it is also clear the "other" families differ far too much among themselves to be satisfactorily regarded as a single group. For the most part, "other" families with heads age 45 and over, especially those with heads 65 and over, represent the last stage of the normal family life cycle—the phasing-out of the husband-wife family after the death of one spouse.

"Other" families with younger heads, however, represent deviations from the normal pattern of the family life cycle.

The young female head "other" families increased extremely rapidly during the 1950's, especially among nonwhites in urban areas. This rapid change surprises no one who is familiar with city welfare programs. It is worth noting that the economic power of this group of families relative to all families has decreased sharply since 1950.

We expect that "other" families with young female heads will continue as an important segment of all "other" families, particularly as long as economic, social, and demographic conditions are favorable for childbearing, legitimate or otherwise, and for divorce and separation. These young female head families, 700,000 under 35 and 1.5 million under 45, have public policy implications out of proportion to their numbers and will undoubtedly be

studied separately in the future, whether we suggest it or not. We would also regard the older "other" families, about 1.3 million with male or female heads over 65, as likely candidates for special treatment because of the increasing social and political importance of the aged population

in general. We would hope, however, that the special characteristics of *all* 5 and one-half million "other" families would be acknowledged in any analysis relating the characteristics of families to the operation of the social system of the United States in the 1960's.