The International Handbook of Stepfamilies
Policy and Practice in Legal, Research, and Clinical Environments

Edited By
Jan Pryor

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
The International Handbook of Stepfamilies
The International Handbook of Stepfamilies
Policy and Practice in Legal, Research, and Clinical Environments

Edited By
Jan Pryor

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
This book is dedicated to Simon, Emily, and Esther, and to the memory of Alexander.
Contents

Foreword    Paul R. Amato xi
Preface     xiii
Contributors xv
Introduction xix
Acknowledgments xxv

SECTION I  INTERNATIONAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

1  The Demography of Stepfamilies in the United States 3
   Jay Teachman and Lucky Tedrow
2  Stereotypes of Stepfamilies and Stepfamily Members 30
   Stephen Claxton-Oldfield
3  Stepfamilies in France Since the 1990s 53
   Jean-François Mignot
4  The Social Context of Emerging Stepfamilies in Japan 79
   Shinji Nozawa
5  Stepfathers in Cultural Context: Mexican American Families in the United States 100
   Scott Coltrane, Erika Gutierrez, and Ross D. Parke

SECTION II  DYNAMICS WITHIN STEPFAMILY HOUSEHOLDS

6  Stepfathers in Families 125
   Jeremy Robertson
7  Resident Mothers in Stepfamilies 151
   Marjorie Smith
viii Contents

8 Sibling Relationships in Blended Families 175
   Melinda E. Baham, Amy A. Weimer, Sanford L. Braver, and William V. Fabricius

9 Resident Parent-Child Relationships in Stepfamilies 208
   Claire Cartwright

10 A Longitudinal Examination of Marital Processes Leading to Instability in Remarriages and Stepfamilies 231
    Brad van Eeden-Moorefield and Kay Pasley

11 Children’s Appraisals of Relationships in Stepfamilies and First Families 250
    Katherine H. Shelton, Sasha L. Walters, and Gordon T. Harold

12 The Distribution of Household Tasks in First-Marriage Families and Stepfamilies Across Europe 277
    Laurent Snoeckx, Britt Dehertogh, and Dimitri Mortelmans

13 Communication in Stepfamilies 299
    Tamara D. Afifi

Section III INFLUENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS BEYOND THE HOUSEHOLD

14 Kinship in Stepfamilies 323
    Graham Allan, Sheila Hawker, and Graham Crow

15 Children’s Relationships with Nonresident Parents 345
    Jan Pryor

16 The Diversity of Stepmothers 369
    Marilyn Coleman, Jessica Troilo, and Tyler Jamison

17 Intergenerational Relationships in Stepfamilies 394
    Lawrence Ganong

Section IV CLINICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

18 A Clinician’s View of “Stepfamily Architecture” 423
    Patricia L. Papernow

19 Research on Interventions for Stepfamily Couples 455
    Sarah W. Whitton, Jan M. Nicholson, and Howard J. Markman

20 The Prevention and Treatment of Children’s Adjustment Problems in Stepfamilies 485
Contents

21 Legal Structures and Re-Formed Families 522
   Bill Atkin
22 How Relevant Are U.S. Family and Probate Laws to Stepfamilies? 545
   Sarah E. C. Malia
23 Where to from Here? Stepfamilies and the Future 573
   Jan Pryor

Author Index 587
Subject Index 599
Foreword

In the past, most stepfamilies were formed after the death of a parent. Today stepfamilies are more likely to be formed after a parental divorce or a nonmarital birth. Whatever the cause, stepfamilies are common because most people find it difficult to be single parents and long for a chance to find happiness with new partners. Stepfamilies represent new beginnings, opportunities to correct prior mistakes, and visions of a better future. Of course, the optimism of many parents is soon tempered by the everyday realities of stepfamily life—including children’s more skeptical views of these new unions.

We have always known that stepfamilies are complicated. Children in stepfather households, for example, have two father figures rather than one. And if the biological father remarries, then children also have two mother figures. Moreover, each partner may bring children from a previous relationship into the household, resulting in an intricate—and often volatile—mixture of people with different histories, expectations, and working models of family life. Understanding how parents and children navigate the complexities of stepfamily life has been a major focus of much prior research. But the increasing trend of nonmarital cohabitation has made this family form even more interesting—and more difficult to study. Consider the following questions: How do unmarried stepparents differ from married stepparents? In what ways are their roles similar or different? Do unmarried stepparents invest as much time and money in their families as do married stepparents? Are children better off if their parents and new partners marry? Finally, do the answers to questions like these depend on the cultures, policy environments, and legal systems in which stepfamilies are formed?

Although much has been learned about stepfamilies during the past several decades, this information is scattered across journals and books from multiple disciplines. Demographers have focused on counting the number of stepfamilies and documenting trends in their formation. Sociologists have asked questions about how stepfamily life varies by social class and other structural variables. Family psychologists have examined the
multiple sources of stress that often emerge in stepfamily relationships. Child psychologists have studied the implications of stepfamily life for children’s development, adjustment, and well-being. Clinicians and counselors have focused on interventions to facilitate the adjustment of stepfamily members. And law scholars have grappled with the legal ambiguities that stepfamilies generate, such as stepparents’ financial obligations to stepchildren and whether divorced stepparents should have visitation rights. Given this diversity of scholarship, a critical need exists for a single volume that pulls this information together to provide a resource for counselors, policy makers, and scholars working in diverse fields.

Jan Pryor has assembled an impressive collection of chapters on stepfamilies, the most comprehensive set of writings on stepfamilies currently available. The contributing authors include demographers, sociologists, family psychologists, clinicians, legal scholars, and communication researchers. All of these authors are among the top scholars in their fields. The chapters address a variety of topics, such as trends in the prevalence and incidence of stepfamilies, marital quality in stepfamilies, parent-child relationships in stepfamilies, children’s views of stepfamilies, sibling relationships in stepfamilies, stepfamilies and the law, and interventions for stepfamilies.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of this volume is the fact that the contributors come from a variety of countries, including the United States, France, Japan, Belgium, New Zealand, England, Wales, Canada, and Australia. This international flavor is missing from previous works on this topic. It is fascinating to know how the experiences of stepfamilies differ around the world. Studies conducted in the United States have tended to dominate the research literature on this topic, but good work is being done in many countries, and it is critical for family scholars to be aware of these contributions.

In addition to compiling and summarizing what we currently know about stepfamilies, this volume will undoubtedly stimulate new theoretical and empirical work. As our world becomes smaller and our methods of communication become faster, much of this new work will have a comparative and international perspective. I can foresee the formation of research teams comprising scholars from multiple countries, working on the same problems but viewing them through the lenses of their own cultures and legal systems. This type of arrangement is rare today, but it may become a more common research paradigm in the next several decades.

In summary, this edited collection will be a useful resource for scholars, students, and practitioners for many years. I congratulate the editor and the contributors to this volume for helping to shift the study of stepfamilies to a higher level of sophistication.

Paul R. Amato
Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Demography
Pennsylvania State University
Preface

Books about stepfamilies, and families generally, abound. Yet most would agree that we are still in the dark as far as understanding the complexities, challenges, and joys of the ever-increasing numbers of stepfamilies. And increasing it is: As the rates of separations and divorces continue to rise, so too do the hopes of adults as they repartner in the earnest desire that this relationship and new family will work.

Sadly, the statistics tell us that second and third relationships are even more vulnerable than first ones. So families and households face further transitions and turmoil as they set about reorganizing themselves. Yet, many stepfamilies—often those unheralded by commentators and researchers—settle into a family life in which everyone thrives.

One response to the challenging aspects of stepfamilies is to discourage their formation by making divorce harder to achieve. David Popenoe has suggested that societies should be endeavoring to “halt the growth of stepfamilies” (Popenoe, 1994), and others have described them as incomplete institutions with few societal scripts available for guidance. There is no doubt that to try to understand stepfamilies is to aim at a moving and constantly changing target. However, it is true more generally that many families are now “incomplete institutions” as the traditional nuclear household is increasingly joined by other family structures such as cohabiting families, families headed by same-sex parents, and other combinations of adults and children. An alternative response to those who would discourage stepfamilies, and one taken by this book, is to acknowledge the reality that is family life in this century, which includes large numbers of stepfamily households.

Why, then, another book on this topic? It is my hope that this book is different from the others. First, it brings an international perspective on the subject; we have authors from Japan, France, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, England, Canada, and the United States, and one U.S.-based chapter focuses on Mexican American stepfathers. This perspective highlights