

# Stepfamilies in Germany:



## New Insights on Partnership Formation and Living Circumstances from AID:A

Pairfam Conference “Partnership Relations in Context”, September 21-23, Munich

Contact: heintz-martin@dji.de; entleitner@dji.de

### Definition of Family Types (household base)

- Intact family:** Two biological parents
- Lone parent family:** Single parent with child(ren)
- Stepmother family:** A father with his biological children and a stepmother
- Stepfather family:** A mother with her biological children and a stepfather
- Stepmother and stepfather family:** A mother with her biological children and a father with his biological children
- Blended stepmother family:** A father with his biological children and a stepmother + common children
- Blended stepfather family:** A mother with her biological children and a stepfather + common children
- Blended stepmother and stepfather family:** A mother with her biological children and a father and his biological children + common children

Figure 1: Distribution of families with children < 22, according to the type of family (N=3,623)

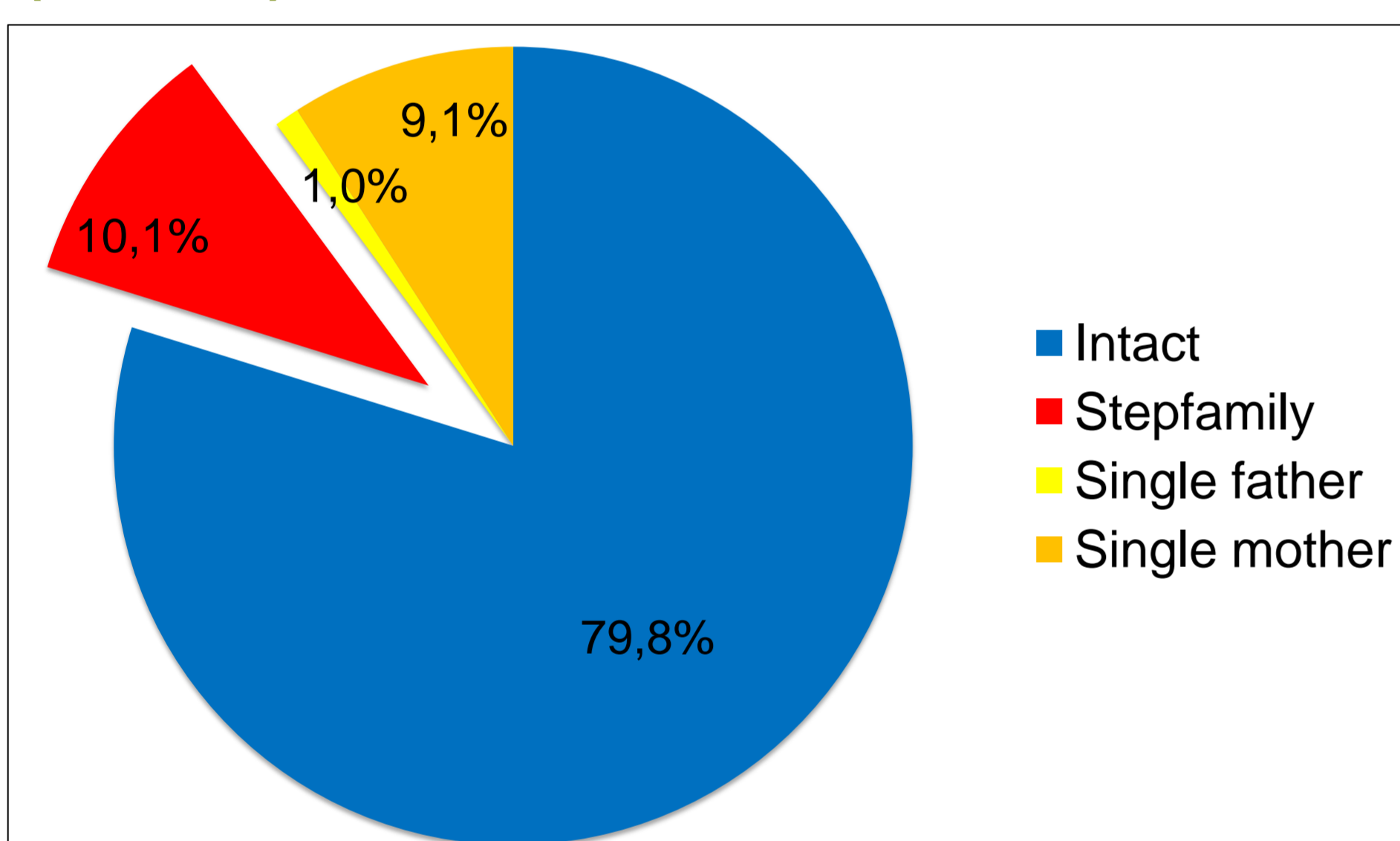


Figure 2: Distribution of stepfamilies with children < 22, according to the type of family (N=345)

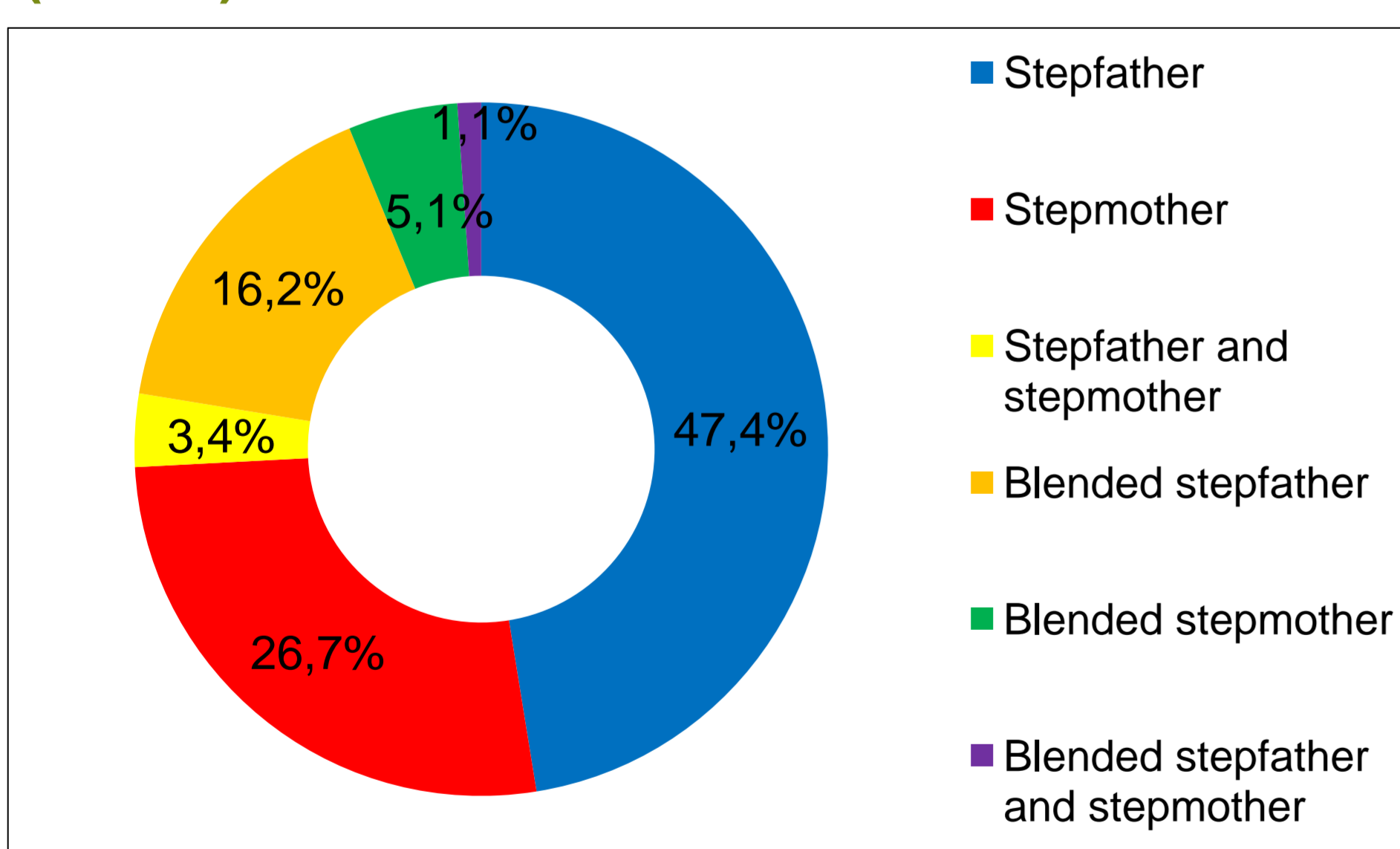
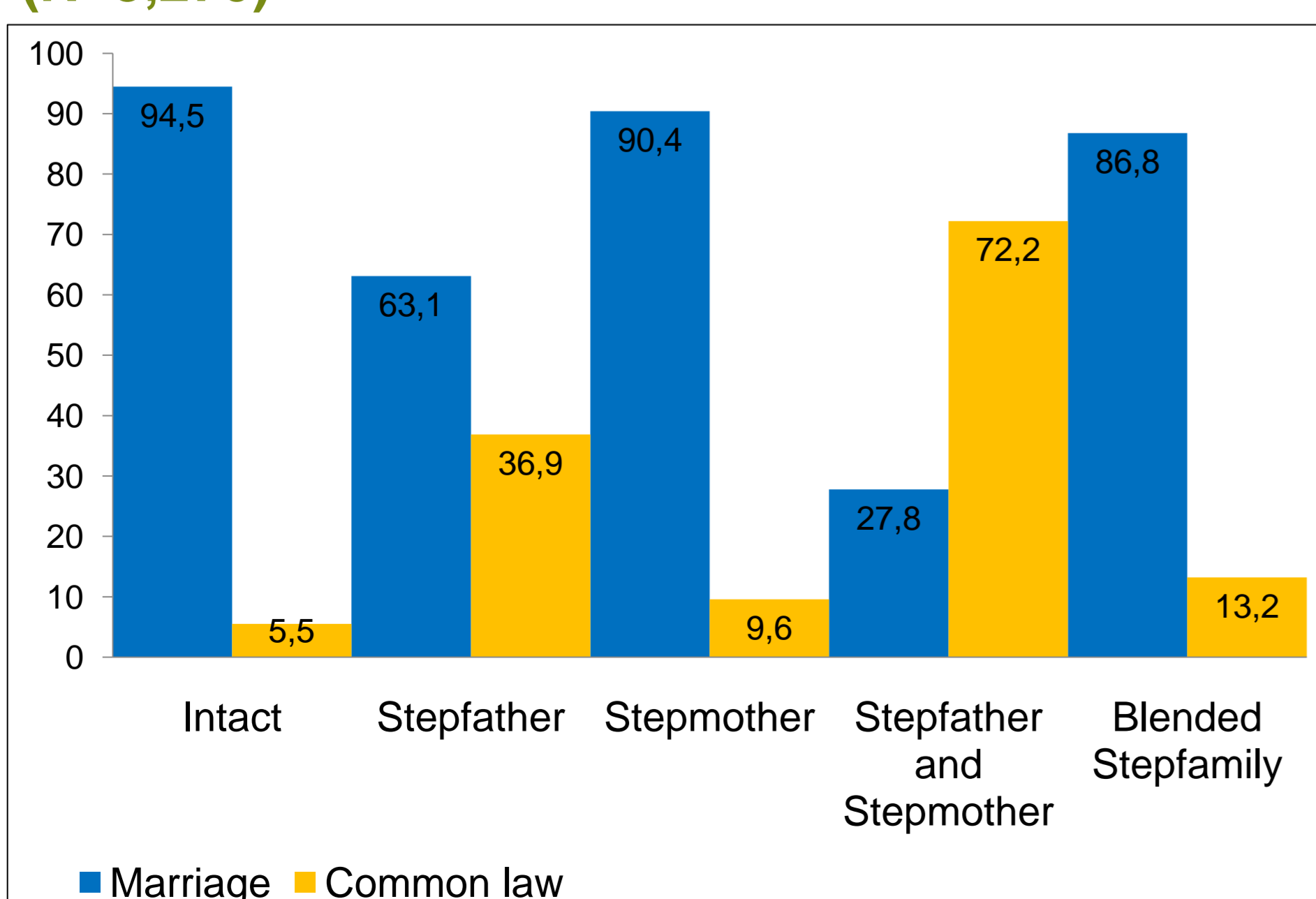


Figure 3: Distribution (in %) of families with children < 22, according to the type of union (N=3,270)



### Theoretical Background

Stepfamilies are still often characterized as an “incomplete institution” (Cherlin, 1978) and seen as very different from intact families.

#### Reasons:

- The lack of norms makes it difficult for each member to know how to behave.
- Stepparenthood is an achieved status and not an ascribed one.
- There is a lack of role models for the members living in a stepfamily this can lead to role ambiguity.
- It is difficult for stepfamilies to establish a “family common sense”.

### Research Questions

- How are stepfamilies compared to other families?
- What are the main differences between the family types?
- What type of union is more prevalent? What are the differences between East and West Germany?
- How are the socioeconomic conditions of families?
- What are the main strains families life today?
- How is the family life organized?

### Data and Method

- Survey Growing up in Germany (AID:A), 2009
- Cross sectional survey with a large sample (25,339); detailed information on household composition, respondents’ family of origin, and socioeconomic characteristics
- Sample size: 3,677, analyze based on weighted data
- Descriptive analyses on family characteristics
- Analyses of variance

### Findings

Table 1: Distribution (in %) of families with children < 22 by family type, according to the age of youngest child, duration of union, age at entering into the union and employment status

	Intact	Stepfather	Stepmother	Stepmother and Stepfather	Blended Stepfather	Blended Stepmother/ Blended Stepfather and Stepfather
<b>Age of youngest child in household (N=3,270)</b>						
0-5 years	38,3	13,8	18,5	23,5		49,6
6-11 years	28,6	30,4	27,4	41,2		36,3
12 and older	33,2	55,8	54,1	35,3		14,2
Total	100	100	100	100		100
$\chi^2=121,003 \quad p < .000$						
<b>Number of children (N=3,270)</b>						
Number	1,8	1,4	1,6	2,8	2,5	2,7
<b>Duration of union (N=3,242)</b>						
Years	15,5	8,3	12,9	3,6	8,7	9,9
<b>Age at entering in the union, father (N=1,241)</b>						
Years	27,5	33,3	39,1	43,6	34,0	34,8
<b>Age at entering in the union, mother (N=2,001)</b>						
Years	24,9	34,6	25,4	37,0	31,1	27,1
<b>Hours weekly worked (N=2,385)</b>						
not more than 15h	10,0	4,6	4,0	13,3		15,4
16h to 30h	28,1	22,8	34,7	20,0		21,8
31h to 40h	32,3	37,4	42,6	40,0		33,3
more than 41h	29,5	42,6	18,8	26,7		29,5
Total	100	100	100	100		100
$\chi^2=28,866 \quad p < .000 \quad$ missing cases: 885						

### Conclusions

- The number of stepfamilies is not as high as often assumed.
- Stepfatherfamilies are the most frequent stepfamily type.
- Compared to intact families, stepfamilies live more often in common law unions, especially in East Germany.

Table 2: Regional differences in the distribution of families with children < 22, according to the type of family and type of union (N=3,677)

	West Germany	East Germany
% of stepfamilies among two-parent families with children	11,9%	15,0%
% of two-parent families with children living in common law unions	5,7%	19,4%
% of stepfamilies living in common law unions	20,6%	42,7%

Table 3: Analysis of variance: Quality of family life

		F	df	p	Eta <sup>2</sup>	Effect
Happiness in Partnership	Family type	0,670	2	.401	.000	no effect
	Sex	7,024	1	.002	.002	♂ happier
Conflict in Partnership	Family type	5,091	2	.006	.002	more conflicts in blended families compared to intact and stepfamilies
	Sex	1,825	1	.177	.000	no effect
Family Climate	Family type	12,460	2	.000	.005	Intact better Family Climate than blended and stepfamilies
	Sex	1,207	1	.272	.000	no effect

- Family climate appears minimal higher among intact families, whereas conflicts in partnership have higher average values in blended stepfamilies.
- The family types follow the same patterns with regard to demographic characteristics.