

Research Data Point



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A Fresh Look at Black Family Structures in the United States

The *Fresh Look* Data Point Series is part of a suite of products produced by the Black Families Flourishing (BFF) project intended to expand knowledge about Black families with children in the United States. (Read an introduction to the *Fresh Look* Data Point Series [here](#).) The products will serve as the foundation for other work emanating from BFF. Additional foundational products include a conceptual model that is a roadmap for how BFF research is designed; [a review of research focused on Black families that spans 100 years \(1920–2020\)](#); [a white paper that conceptualizes and defines Black family flourishing](#); and a white paper that explores how researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have defined family over time, including how these definitions have facilitated or constrained access to systems for Black families (forthcoming).

Across BFF’s work, **Black people** refers to individuals who may identify as African American—including those who were primarily born in the United States and are descended from enslaved Africans who survived the trans-Atlantic slave trade—as well as the smaller populations of people living in the United States who may identify as Black African or Afro-Caribbean. Black also includes individuals who reported being Black alone or in combination with one or more races or ethnicities in their responses to the U.S. Census—for instance, an individual who identifies as Black only, as well as someone who identifies as Black and White combined or Afro-Latino.

Black families are defined as a group of at least one self-identified Black adult and/or child(ren), related by birth, marriage, adoption, or choice. Families must have children, and those children can be up to age 25.

Introduction

Family householdsⁱ in the United States are increasingly diverse in structure, and Black family households are no exception.¹ While policy and human service programming have historically used the nuclear family (i.e., a married mother and father raising their biological children) as a point of reference for how families with children should function, Black families have long organized caregiving more expansively, drawing on grandparents, extended kin, and chosen family to raise and support children.^{2,3,4,5} Despite this reality, much of what is known about the structure of Black family households comes from data and research that seeks to understand family life through a nuclear family lens, often using marital status as a benchmark for family operations and structure.^{6,7} As

Definitions of Different Family Structure Types

- **Black family household:** A family household that includes at least one child up to age 25, where either the youngest child in the household or a primary caregiver (i.e., biological parent, stepparent, adoptive parent, grandparent) is Black.
- **Two-parent household:** A household where two parents (biological, step, or adoptive; married or unmarried) live with the child.
- **One-parent household:** A household where one parent lives with the child, whether alone or with other adults.
- **Multigenerational household:** A household that includes three or more generations (e.g., grandparents, parents, and children).
- **Skip-generation household:** A household where grandparents live with their grandchildren, and the children's parents are not present in the household.
- **Other kin household:** A household where relatives other than parents or grandparents (e.g., siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins) live with the child, and the child's parents are not present.

ⁱ Throughout this brief, the terms “Black family household” and “Black family structure” are used interchangeably.

a result, the full range of caregivingⁱⁱ arrangements within Black family households, and how common various arrangements are, is underexamined and often misunderstood.

Conceptualizing and identifying family structures and understanding how common they are among Black family households matters for research, policy, and practice. Many programs are undergirded by policies that assume a parent-headed household, an approach that can overlook caregivers and children in other arrangements. Examples include family leave policies that cover only spouses, parents, and children (e.g., the Family and Medical Leave Act⁸); housing regulations that do not accommodate multigenerational households;⁹ and means-tested programs (e.g., the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) for which non-parental caregivers can face administrative hurdles even when they are eligible.¹⁰

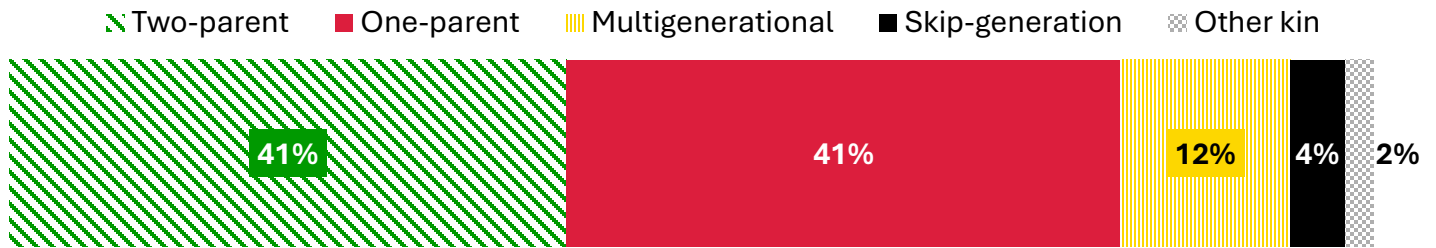
This data point addresses a gap in understanding by describing the prevalence of five family structures among Black family households with children up to age 25: two-parent households, one-parent households, multigenerational households, skip-generation households, and other kin households (see the “Definitions of Different Family Structure Types” text box for descriptions of the family structures referenced in this data point). It highlights what is known nationally, across states, across metropolitan settings, and by the age of children in the household. By highlighting the prevalence of each family structure, and whether some structures are more common in certain communities or at certain stages of children's development, this data point can enrich other research efforts and help policymakers and practitioners plan for and design supports that reflect the caregiving realities and nuances of Black families’ lives.

Key Findings

Black family households with children in the United States exist in many forms, with two-parent and one-parent households equally common. Among Black family households with children up to age 25, 41% are two-parent households and 41% are one-parent households. The remaining 18% reflect a range of extended-family arrangements: 12% are multigenerational households, 4% are skip-generation households, and 2% are other kin households. Together, these patterns show that while parent-headed households account for most Black family households, nearly 1 in 5 Black family households include extended family. Figure 1 shows the percentage of Black family households with children by family structure nationally.

ⁱⁱ A note on caregiving: We identify parents using the IPUMS MOMLOC and POPLOC variables of the American Community Survey, which link the youngest child to a parent in the same household. These variables show that a parent is present and assigned to the child, but do not indicate that the parent provides most of the care. Our analyses treat a co-resident parent as the primary caregiver, a reasonable assumption but also one our data cannot directly confirm.

Figure 1. *Percent of Black Family Households by Family Structure Across the United States Population*

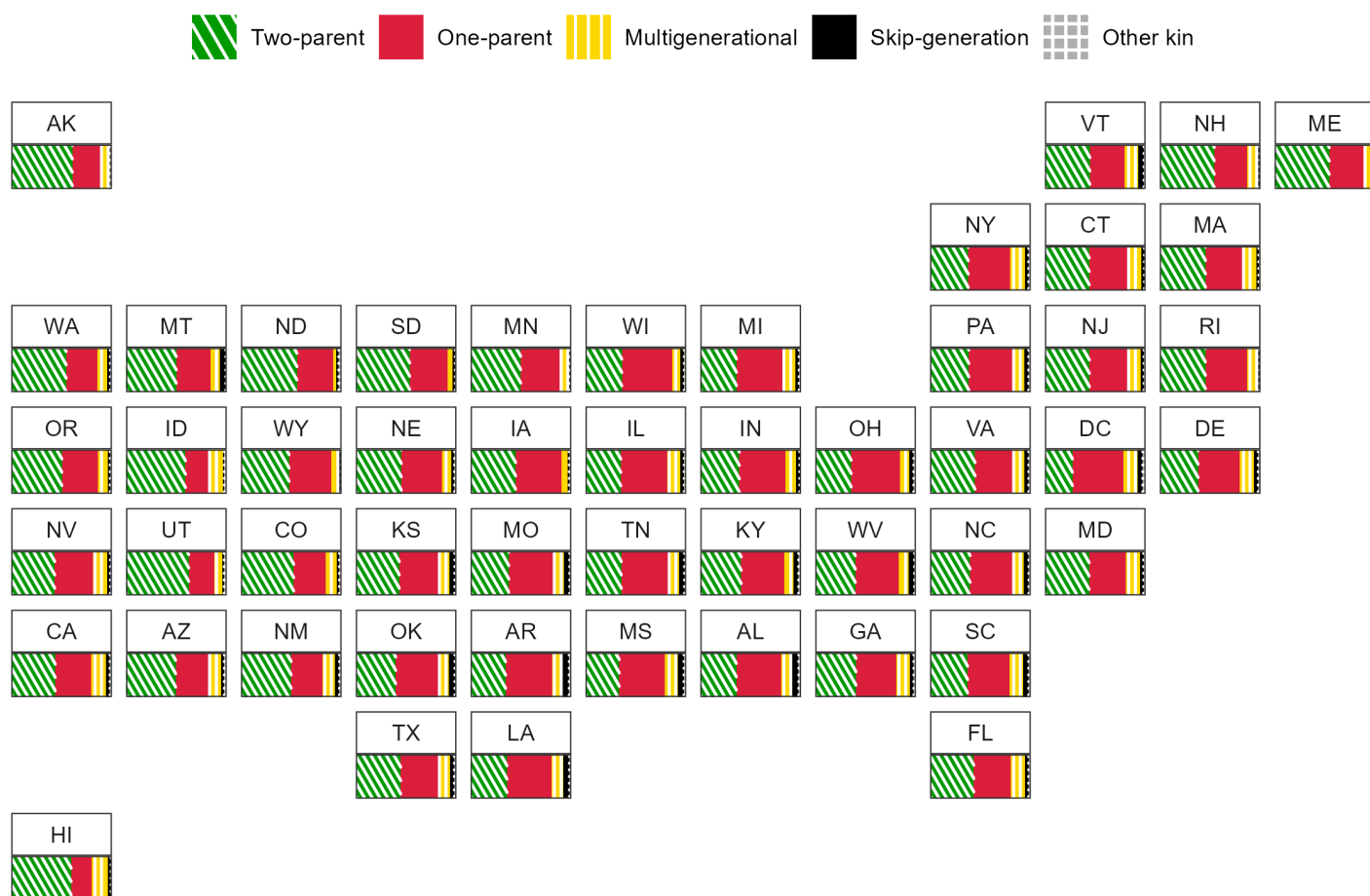


Source: The BFF team’s analysis of 2019–2023 five-year American Community Survey (ACS) microdata from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota.

Note: This brief uses a mutually exclusive family structure variable. When at least one parent and grandparent were present in the household, it was categorized as multigenerational. In other kin households, the youngest child’s parents and grandparents were not present in the household.

Nationally, two-parent and one-parent households are equally common among Black families, but the share of each varies widely across states. Among Black family households with children, two-parent households range from 27% in the District of Columbia to 62% in Utah, while one-parent Black family households range from 20% in Hawaii to 50% in the District of Columbia and Wisconsin. Southern states tend to have higher shares of one-parent and skip-generation households. For example, in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi skip-generation households represent 6% of Black family households. Multigenerational Black family households are most prevalent in Hawaii (16%), California (15%), and New York (15%), and least prevalent in South Dakota (5%) and North Dakota (3%). Other kin households remain a small share—generally 1% to 3%—across all states. Figure 2 shows the percentage of Black family households with children by family structure for each state. The corresponding percentages for every state are also provided in Appendix A (Table 1).

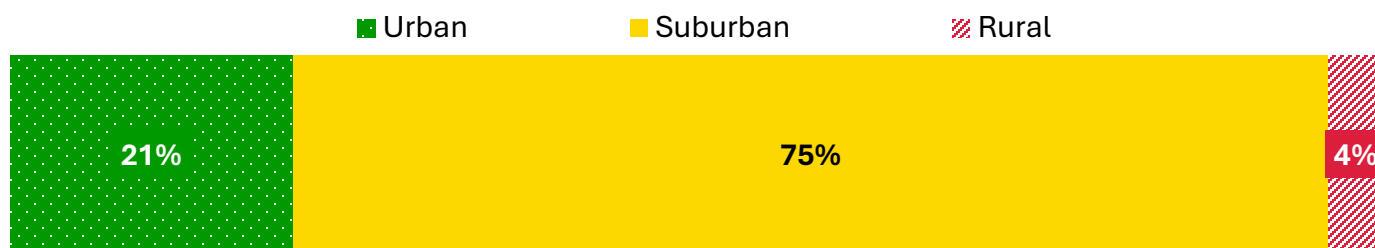
Figure 2. Percent of Black Family Households by Family Structure in Each State



Source: The BFF team's analysis of 2019–2023 five-year ACS microdata from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota.

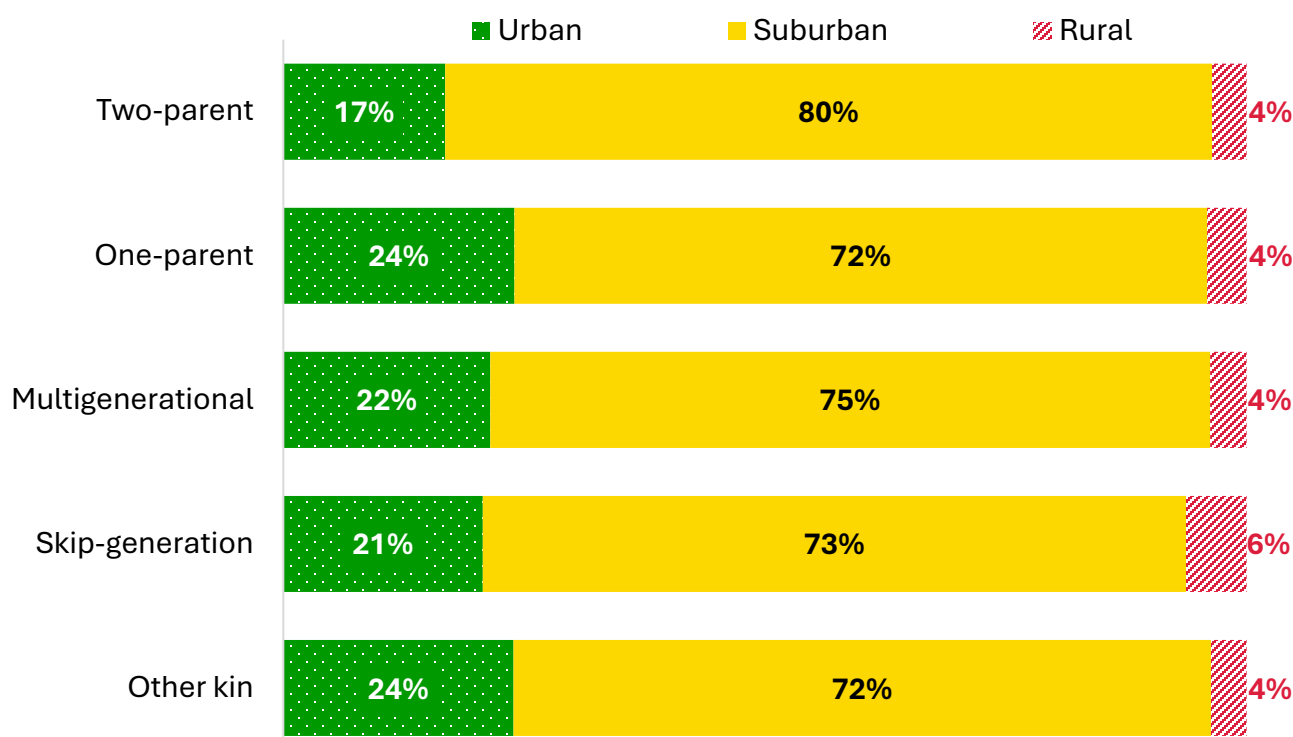
Black family households with children are concentrated in suburban areas, though residential patterns vary somewhat by family structure. Across all family structures, roughly three in four Black family households with children up to age 25 are located in suburban areas, about one in five are in urban areas, and fewer than 1 in 20 are in rural areas (see Figure 3). However, some family structure types are more typical in particular geographic settings (See Figure 4). One-parent and other kin households are more common in urban areas—both at 24% compared with 17% of two-parent households and about 21% of multigenerational and skip-generation households. Two-parent households are more common in suburban areas (80%), compared with other family structures ranging from 72% to 75%. Skip-generation households are more common in rural areas (6%), compared with about 4% for every other family structure type, making skip-generation households the only family structure with a notably above-average (albeit still small) presence in rural places.

Figure 3. Percent of Black Family Households by Metropolitan Area



Source: The BFF team’s analysis of 2019–2023 five-year ACS microdata from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota.

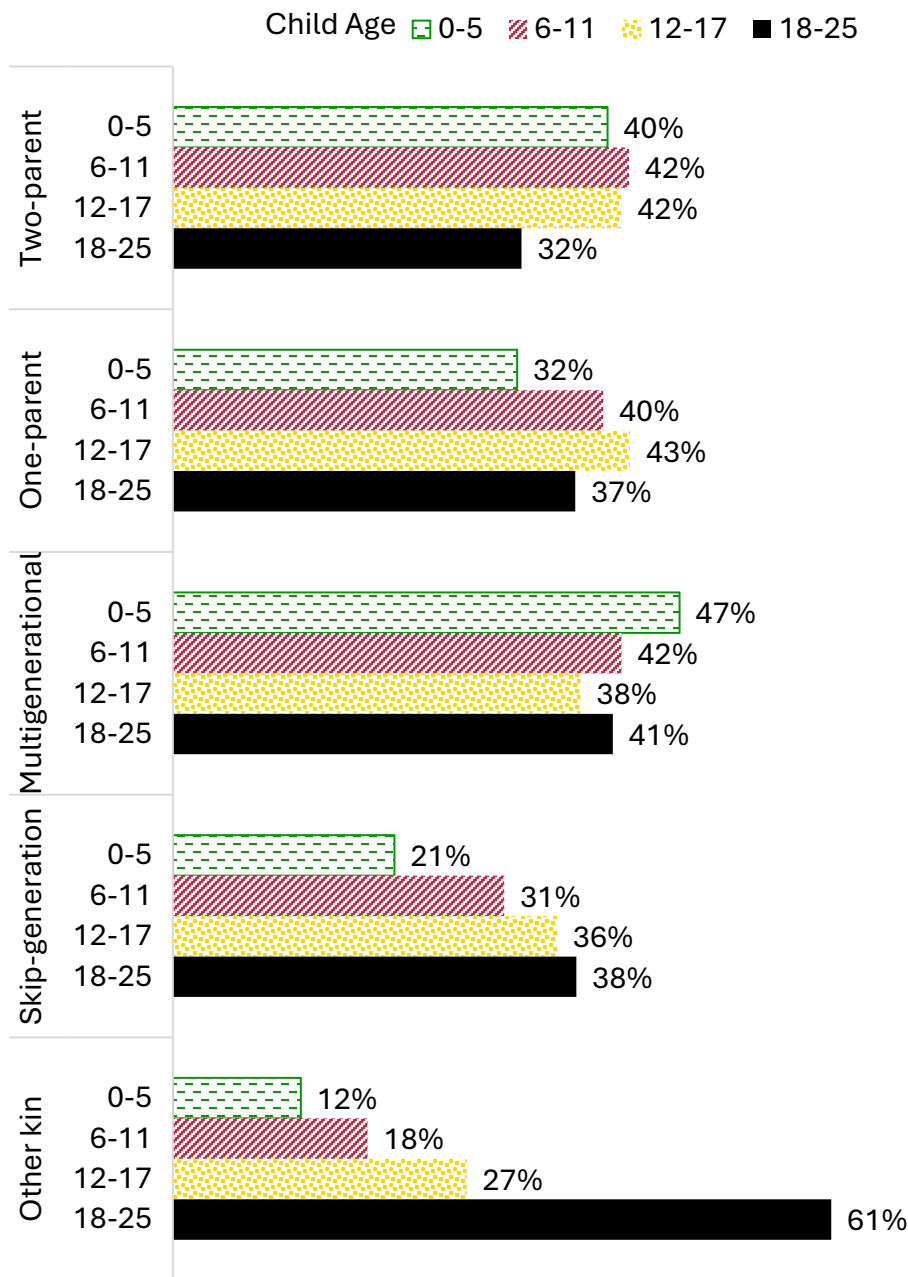
Figure 4. Percent of Black Family Households by Family Structure and Metropolitan Area



Source: The BFF team’s analysis of 2019–2023 five-year ACS microdata from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota.

Different family structures support Black children at different life stages. Multigenerational households are most likely to include very young children: 47% include a child ages 0–5, the highest share among all family structures, suggesting that grandparents and other older relatives may be playing a particularly active role in the lives of children when they are very young. Two-parent households include children fairly evenly across early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence (ranging from 40% to 42%), but the share that includes a young adult ages 18–25 drops to 32%. One-parent households are most likely to include adolescents ages 12–17 (43%) and remain a common arrangement for young adults (37%). Skip-generation households become more common as children age, rising from 21% that include a child age 0–5, to 38% that include a young adult ages 18–25. The most striking shift is among other kin households: only 12% include a child ages 0–5, but 61% include a young adult ages 18–25, indicating that other kin living arrangements are heavily concentrated in late adolescence through the transition to adulthood.

Figure 5. Percent of Black Family Households by Family Structure and Age of Children



Source: The BFF team's analysis of 2019–2023 five-year ACS microdata from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota.

Note: Denominators are Black family households of the specified family structure. Households may have children in more than one age bracket; percentages will not add up to 100%.

Implications

Our analysis shows that there is no "typical" structure among Black family households with children. Nationally, two-parent and one-parent households are nearly equally common, accounting for 41% of Black family households with children up to age 25, while the remaining 18% include multigenerational (12%), skip-generation (4%), and other kin (2%) arrangements.

Black family household structures also vary by place and across children's lifespan, though many of the differences we observe are small. Place-based patterns emerge at both the state and metropolitan levels:

Southern states tend to have higher proportions of skip-generation households, while Hawaii, California, and New York tend to have proportionately more multigenerational households. Across metropolitan settings, one-parent households are most likely to be in urban areas, two-parent households in suburban areas, and skip-generation households in rural areas. Family structures also include children at different developmental stages, with multigenerational households having a higher proportion of very young children and other kin and skip-generation households having a higher share of older children who are transitioning to adulthood. While most family structures show only slight variation across these dimensions, the patterns suggest that the ways Black families organize caregiving may be reflective and responsive to local conditions as well as the needs of children at different ages.

These findings are an important step toward understanding the diversity of caregiving arrangements within Black family households and can be used to inform research, policy, and practice.

- **For research**, our findings underscore the importance of exploring a wide range of family structures within Black family networks. Extended family beyond parent caregivers plays a critical caretaking role in Black families. While this analysis sought to understand Black families within the limitations of Census household definitions, it only scratches the surface of how Black families interact with and support one another. Future research should aim not only to understand the wide range of family structures within households, but also to understand how caregivers inside and outside of households contribute to the caretaking and development of Black children. Research questions to consider include: What local economic and social conditions are associated with different Black family structures? How do caregiving arrangements within Black family households shift across children's developmental stages, and what supports help families navigate those transitions? How do individuals outside of households contribute to the care, development, and well-being of children in Black family households?
- **For policy**, the variation we highlight suggests that households with and without a parent caregiver should be considered in policy planning conversations. With a meaningful share of Black children being raised by grandparents and other kin caregivers, understanding whether policies recognize and support the array of caregiving arrangements that exist across the country is prudent. Policy questions to consider include: How can family-focused policies and support structures better attend to the full range of caregiving arrangements in Black family households (e.g., students applying for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or FAFSA), including those without a parent caregiver in the home? What policies are needed and which policy levers can be used to support families caring for children transitioning to adulthood to support their success and well-being?
- **For practice**, agencies and organizations that work with Black families can benefit from having a nuanced understanding of the mix of family structures in their service areas. This is a particularly important issue because family strengths and cultural assets, as well as the potential supports families may need, are likely to differ by structure and setting. Based on our findings, agencies and organizations in urban areas, for example, may engage with a higher proportion of one-parent households who might need more flexibility around service engagement. Rural agencies and organizations may be more likely to serve grandparent caregivers in skip-generation households who may have a need for access to resources specific to their circumstances including kinship navigator programs,ⁱⁱⁱ supports centered around guardianship such as legal advice, and/or respite care that may

ⁱⁱⁱ Kinship navigator programs connect relatives raising children, such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles, to the services, benefits, and supports they and the children need.

enable grandparents to rest and recharge. Programs that engage with households with very young children may want to structure services so that they are inclusive of multigenerational caregivers, while programs that work with households with young adults may want to plan for the possibility that they need to engage with other kin and skip-generation caregivers to meet young adults' needs. Possible practice questions include: What outreach strategies are most effective for reaching caregivers in skip-generation and other kin households? How can programs adapt their intake processes and service models to identify and engage with caregivers who are not a child's parent? How can programs tailor outreach and services to the developmental stage of the children being cared for, particularly when caregivers are extended family?

As the third data point in the *Fresh Look* series, our analysis describes how Black family households with children are structured. We find that Black family structures are diverse, vary by place and across children's development, and include a meaningful share of extended family arrangements that are often missed by conventional household categorizations. These findings lay a foundation for future BFF research focused on Black families with children that will continue to illuminate the characteristics and nuances of Black family households across the country. We hope that others will draw on, continue to build out, and engage with this work to support the well-being and flourishing of Black families.

Methodology

To better understand Black family households with children up to age 25, we drew on 2019–2023 five-year American Community Survey (ACS) microdata from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota. The data contain information on individuals, including householders, who self-identified as Black alone or in combination with other races and/or Latino ethnicity. For our methodology identifying Black family households, please see our previous data point on [Black family households with children in the United States](#). The key steps in our analysis included the following:

- **Identifying relatives and categorizing households.** We categorized a household’s family structure based on the relationships between the household’s youngest child and other members of the household.
 - **Identifying parents.** Parents of the youngest child in a household were found using the IPUMS variables MOMLOC, MOMLOC2, POPLOC, and POPLOC2.
 - **Identifying grandparents.** Grandparents of the youngest child were found using the IPUMS variable RELATE. If the youngest child was the grandchild of the head of household, grandparents (and their partner, if applicable) were identified as the head of household. When the youngest child’s parent was the head of household, grandparents were identified as anyone who was the parent or parent-in-law of the head of household.
 - **Creating a mutually exclusive variable.** This brief uses a mutually exclusive family structure variable based on the identification of relatives. When one or more grandparents and one or more parents were present in a household, that household was categorized as **multigenerational**. Households in which the youngest child is cared for by another relative were categorized as **other kin**. Otherwise, the household was categorized by number of parents present (zero parents for **skip-generation household**, one parent for **one-parent household**, and two parents for **two-parent household**).
 - **Identifying other kin households.** In our previously published briefs, family households were defined as households with at least one child up to age 25 and their primary caregiver, who had to be a parent (biological, step, and adoptive all accepted) or a grandparent. In this brief, we expand the definition of family household to include households with at least one child up to age 25 who is the sibling, sibling-in-law, or another family member of the head of household (according to the IPUMS variable RELATED). To be categorized as an other kin household, the youngest child’s parents and grandparents could not be present in the household. To be categorized as a Black family household, the youngest child or the head of household had to identify as Black.
- **Identifying metropolitan status.** We classified households listed as “Not in a metropolitan area” on the IPUMS METRO variable as rural households. We classified households listed as “In central/principal city” as urban households. All other households (“Not in central/principal city,” “Central/principal city status indeterminable [mixed],” and “Metropolitan status indeterminable [mixed]”) were categorized as suburban households.

Suggested Citation

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Appendix A.

Table 1. Black Family Structure by State

State	Family Structure Type (%)				
	Two-parent	One-parent	Multigenerational	Skip-generation	Other kin
National	41%	41%	12%	4%	2%
Alabama	36%	44%	11%	6%	2%
Alaska	61%	28%	8%	2%	2%
Arizona	49%	33%	12%	3%	3%
Arkansas	35%	46%	11%	6%	2%
California	44%	36%	15%	4%	2%
Colorado	52%	32%	11%	2%	2%
Connecticut	44%	39%	13%	3%	1%
Delaware	38%	41%	14%	4%	2%
District of Columbia	27%	50%	14%	5%	3%
Florida	43%	37%	14%	4%	2%
Georgia	40%	40%	13%	4%	2%
Hawaii	60%	20%	16%	3%	1%
Idaho	59%	24%	13%	1%	2%
Illinois	35%	46%	13%	4%	2%
Indiana	39%	46%	11%	4%	1%
Iowa	45%	45%	6%	2%	2%
Kansas	43%	39%	11%	5%	2%
Kentucky	41%	43%	10%	5%	3%
Louisiana	36%	44%	12%	6%	2%
Maine	54%	35%	6%	3%	2%
Maryland	44%	37%	14%	3%	2%
Massachusetts	45%	37%	13%	2%	2%
Michigan	36%	47%	12%	3%	2%
Minnesota	50%	39%	8%	2%	1%
Mississippi	34%	45%	13%	6%	2%
Missouri	38%	44%	11%	5%	2%
Montana	50%	34%	9%	6%	1%
Nebraska	45%	40%	10%	3%	2%
Nevada	43%	38%	14%	3%	2%
New Hampshire	54%	33%	11%	1%	1%
New Jersey	44%	37%	14%	3%	2%
New Mexico	50%	31%	12%	5%	2%
New York	38%	41%	15%	3%	2%
North Carolina	40%	42%	11%	5%	2%
North Dakota	56%	36%	3%	2%	3%
Ohio	36%	48%	10%	4%	2%
Oklahoma	40%	43%	10%	6%	2%

State	Family Structure Type (%)				
	Two-parent	One-parent	Multigenerational	Skip-generation	Other kin
Oregon	50%	36%	10%	2%	2%
Pennsylvania	39%	44%	11%	4%	2%
Rhode Island	45%	41%	10%	3%	1%
South Carolina	37%	42%	13%	5%	2%
South Dakota	54%	38%	5%	3%	1%
Tennessee	36%	46%	11%	5%	2%
Texas	45%	38%	11%	4%	2%
Utah	62%	25%	8%	2%	3%
Vermont	45%	35%	13%	6%	2%
Virginia	45%	37%	12%	4%	2%
Washington	55%	31%	10%	3%	2%
West Virginia	40%	43%	9%	6%	2%
Wisconsin	36%	50%	8%	4%	2%
Wyoming	48%	42%	8%	2%	0%

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