

Support to Bio-Parents by Adult Children in Step-Families

Exploring the Complexities of Intergenerational Relationships

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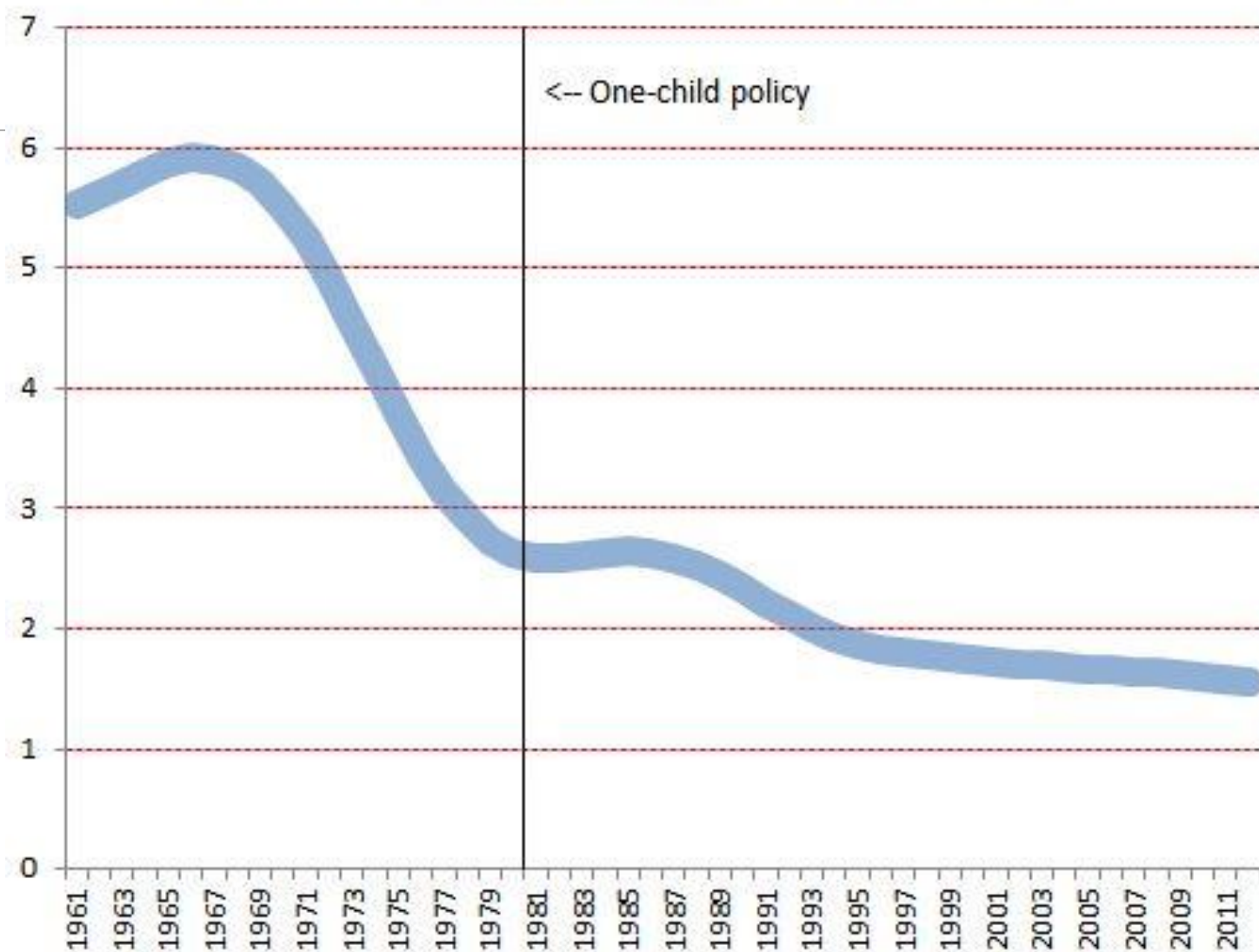
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Growing Intergenerational Complexity and Simplicity

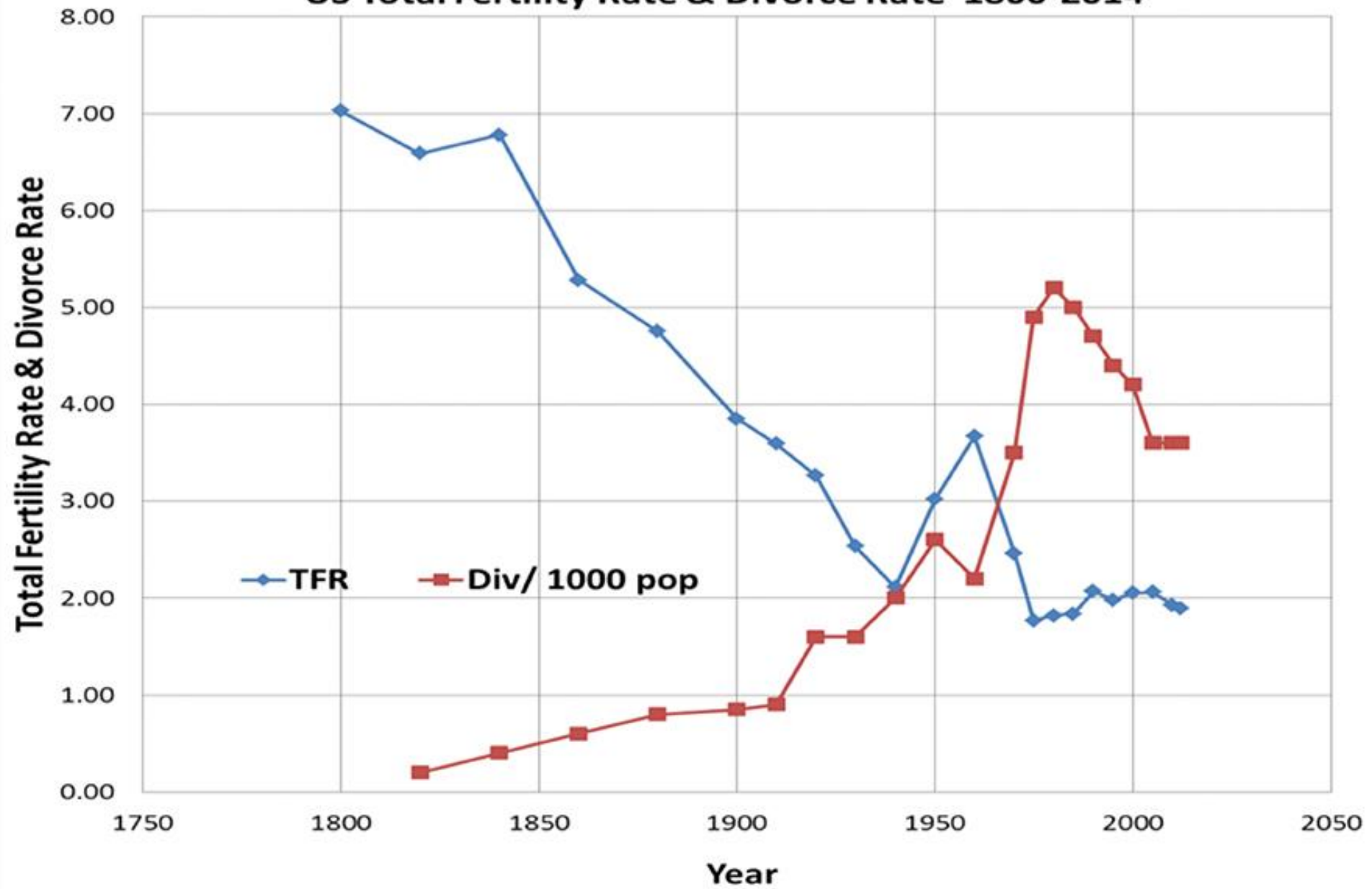
- Families have become simpler with smaller families and growth in childlessness in most nations
- In China, reduced fertility has put strains on smaller families to provide support to older parents.
- In the U.S., families are increasingly complex due to remarriage and step-family formation, also creating uncertainties in eldercare.

China total fertility rate: 1961-2012

Average births per woman in her lifetime



US Total Fertility Rate & Divorce Rate 1800-2014



Step Families and Support to Parents

- Relationships of adult children weaker with step parents in terms of contact and support (step-gap)
- Negative impact of having step-parents on support to aging biological parents
- However, some step-parents are “parent-like”
- Little is known about how integration of step-parents into families impacts relations with bio-parents

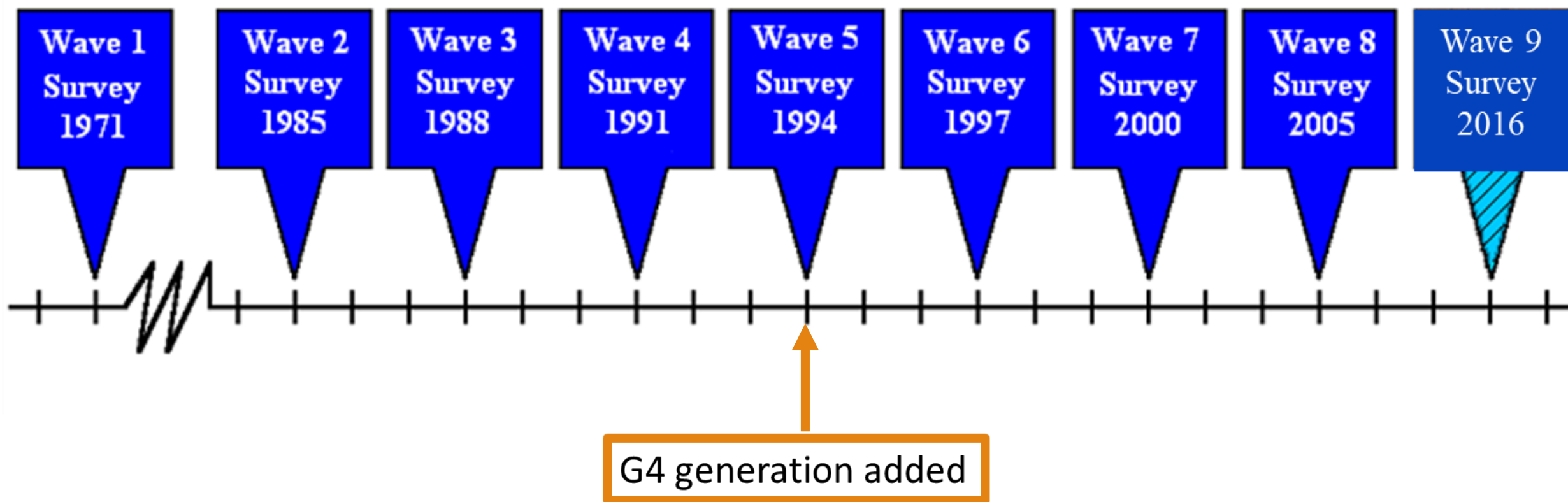
Three Perspectives on the Presence of Step-Parents with respect to Bio-Parents

- Boundary ambiguity: permeable and negotiated boundaries as to whether step-parents are included or not included as *family* members
- Competition: having multiple parents as a result of remarriage places demands on the time/energy resources of adult children
- Gender asymmetry: resistance to incorporating step-mothers into family and primacy of mother-child bond

The Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG)

- A multigenerational multi-time-point study, started in 1971, with sampling of grandfathers from large SoCal HMO and their wives and descendants.
- Consists of 3,500 individuals from 418 three-generation families.
- Repeated panels → 2005. Mail-back and web surveys.
- Full families are surveyed: grandparents (G1), parents (G2), and grandchildren 16 years and older (G3), including siblings. Great-grandchildren in the G4 generation added in 1994.

Longitudinal Study Of Generations



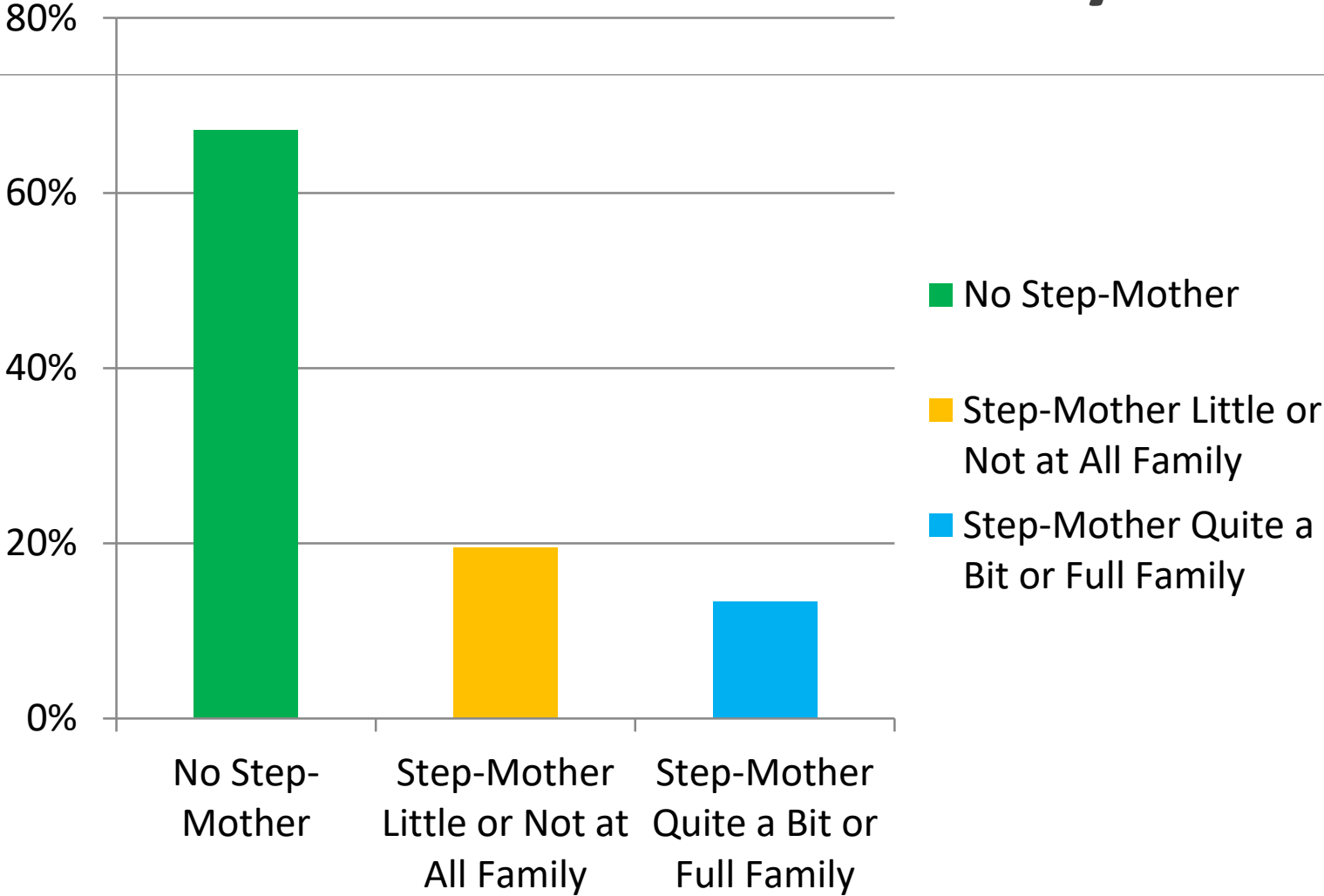
Analytic G4 Sample

- 305 who participated in 1997 and 2005
- 55% were female
- Mean age in 2005
 - G4 children = 30 years
 - G3 parents = 58 years (mothers), 60 years (fathers)
- 42% had at least one step-parent, 26% step-mothers, 27% step-fathers

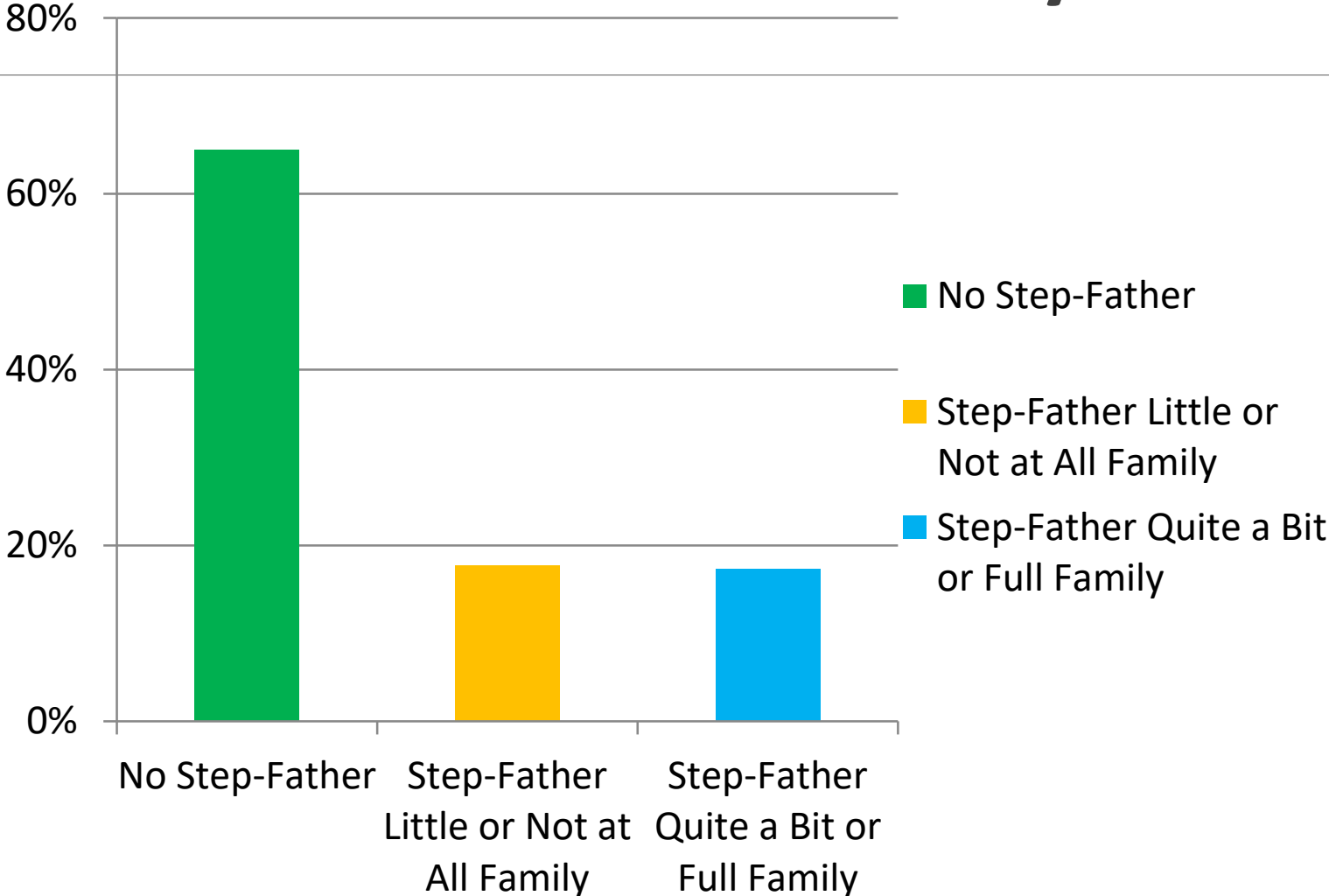
Measure of *Familyness*

- Step parents were rated in 1997 on the following question:
- To what extent do you consider this (step-parent) “family”?
 - Rated: fully, quite a bit, a little, or not at all.
- 15% did not acknowledge that the person who remarried a parent was a “step-parent” and coded as fully family
- *Familyness* correlates with age of child when step-parent came into family

Distribution of Mothers by Relationship



Distribution of Fathers by Relationship



Support to Mothers and Fathers

- **Emotional support**

- Discussing important life decisions
- Providing advice and information
- Emotional support

- **Instrumental support**

- Help with household chores
- Help with transportation and shopping
- Help when sick

- Standardized factor scores calculated for two dimensions identified in factor analysis.

Control Variables: Children's Characteristics

- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Has spouse or partner
- Has children

Boundary Ambiguity Prediction

- Relationships with remarried bio-parents will be weaker if step-parent is not considered *family*.

Competition Prediction

- Relationships with remarried bio-parents will be weaker if step-parent is considered *family*.

Gender Asymmetry Prediction

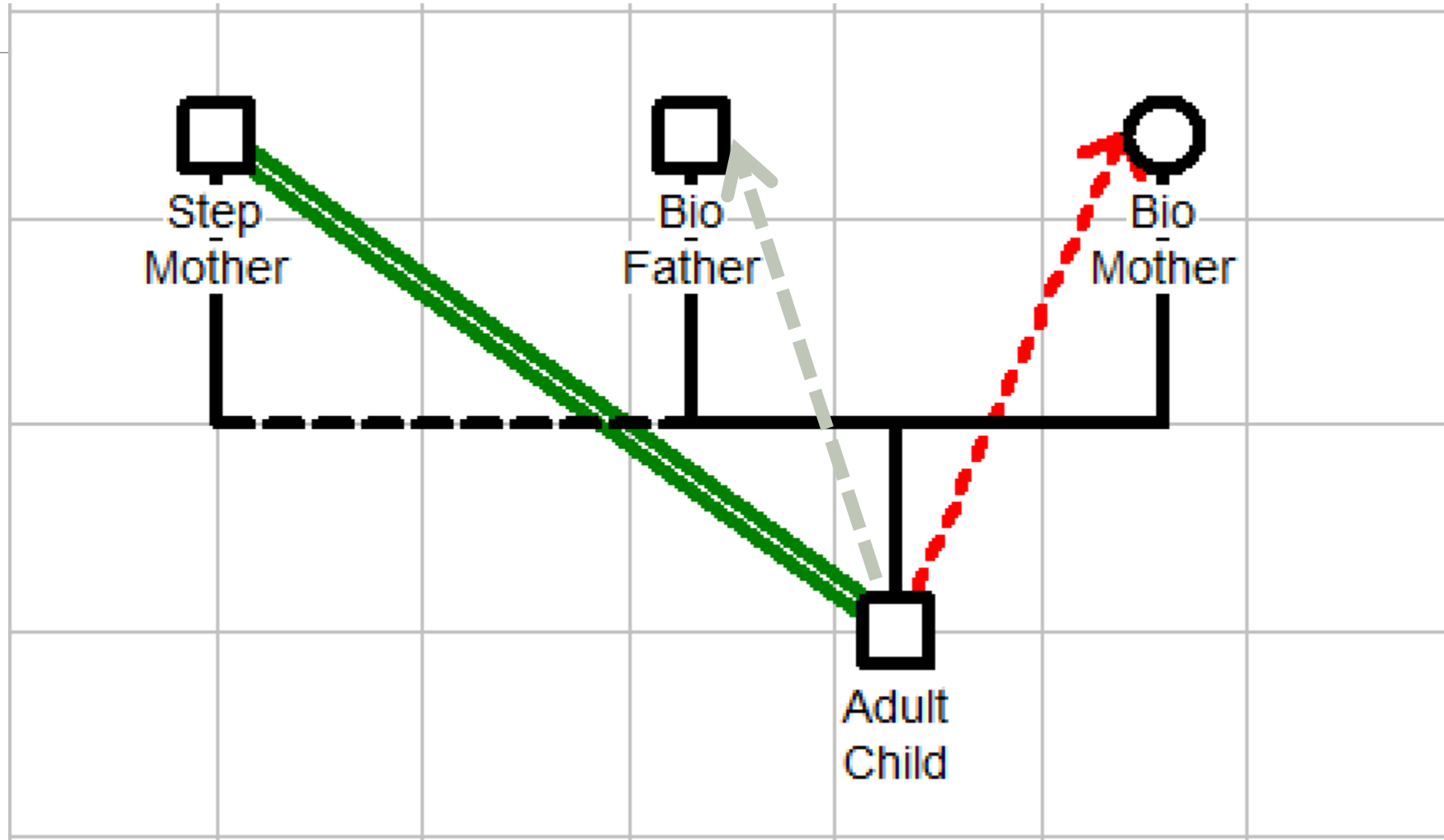
- Relationships with remarried bio-fathers will be more disadvantaged than relationships with remarried bio-mothers when step-parent is not considered *family*.

Presence of Step-Mothers and Support to Bio-Mothers and Fathers

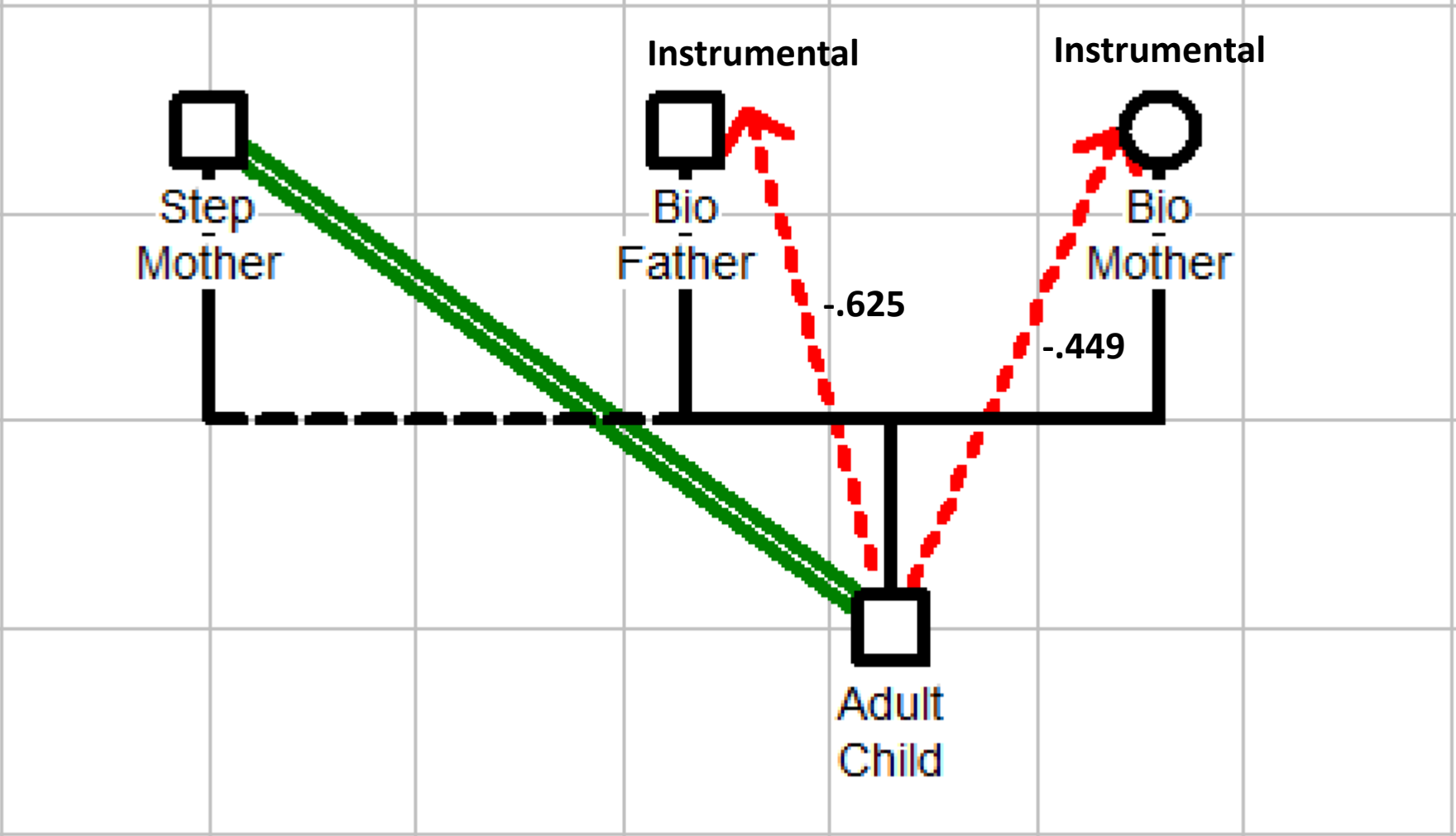
Key

- Relationship with step-mother
 - **Double green** = fully or quite a bit family
 - **Double red** = little or not at all family
- Support provided to bio-parents
 - **Green** = positive or more support than mother/father in intact marriage
 - **Red** = negative or less support than mother/father in intact marriage
 - **Gray** = no difference than mother/father in intact marriage

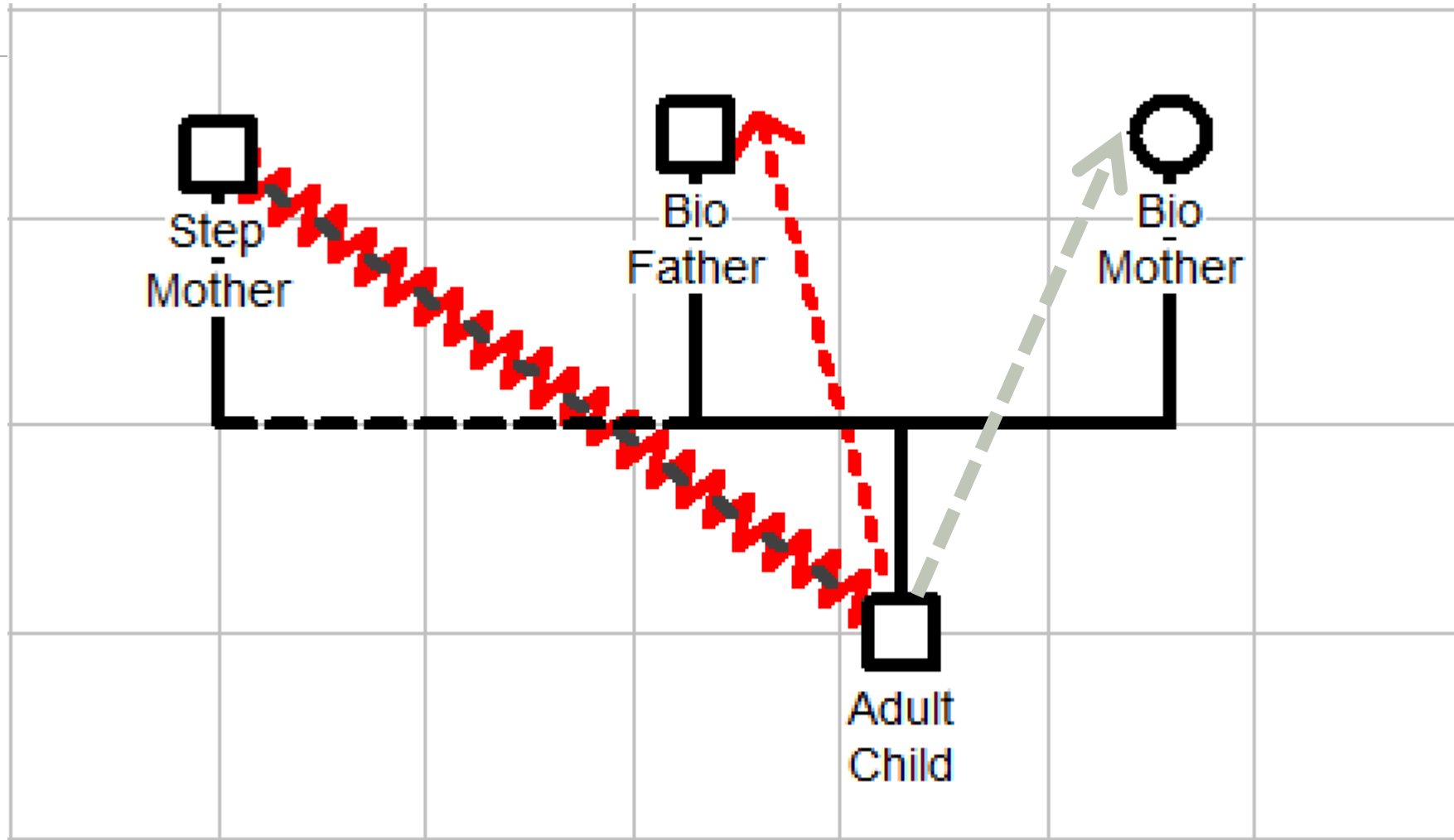
Step Mother Fully/Quite a Bit Family Predictions



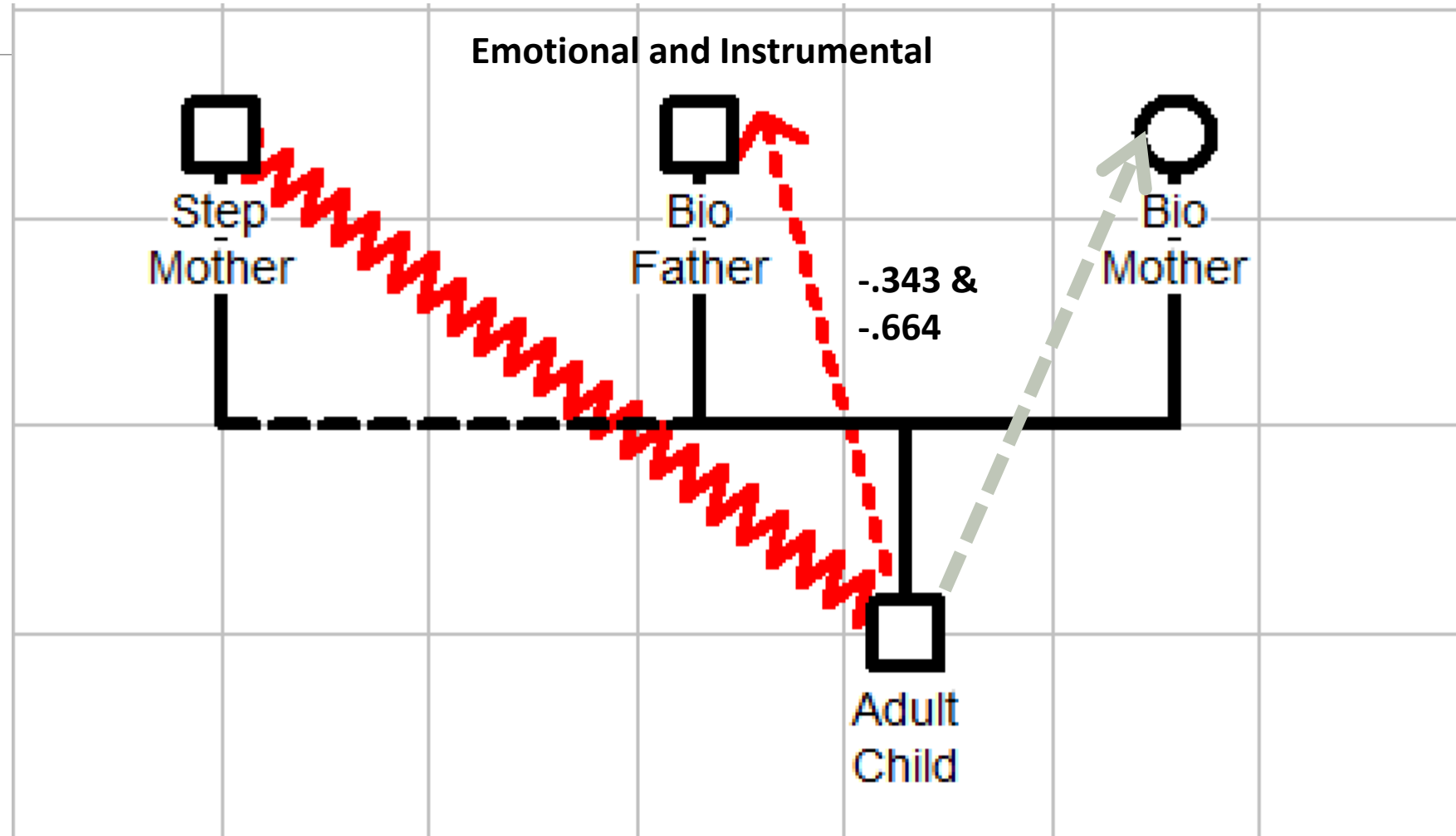
Step Mother Fully/Quite a Bit Family Results



Step-Mother Little/Not at All Family Predictions



Step-Mother Little/Not at All Family Results

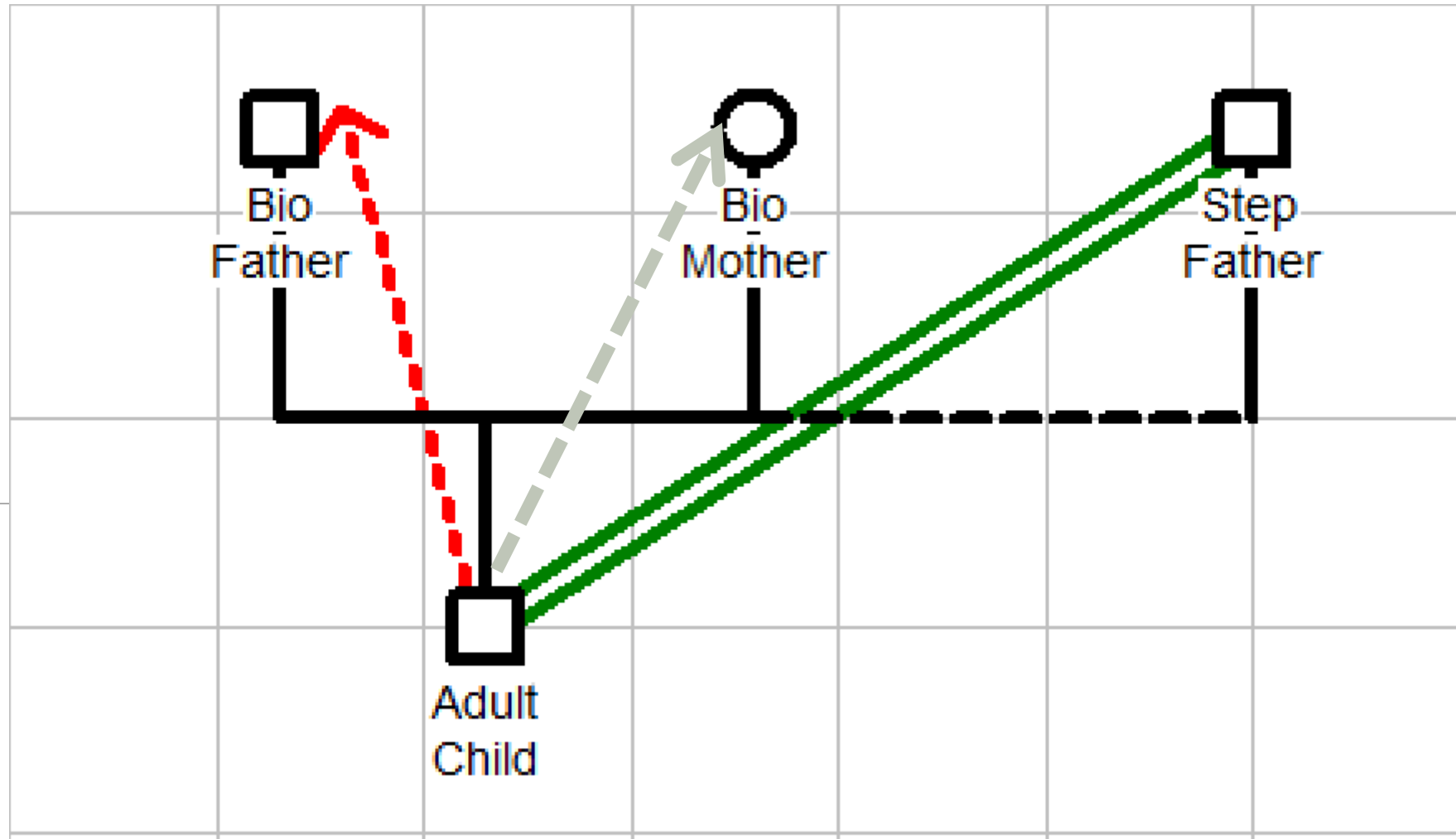


Presence of Step-Fathers and Support to Bio-Mothers and Fathers

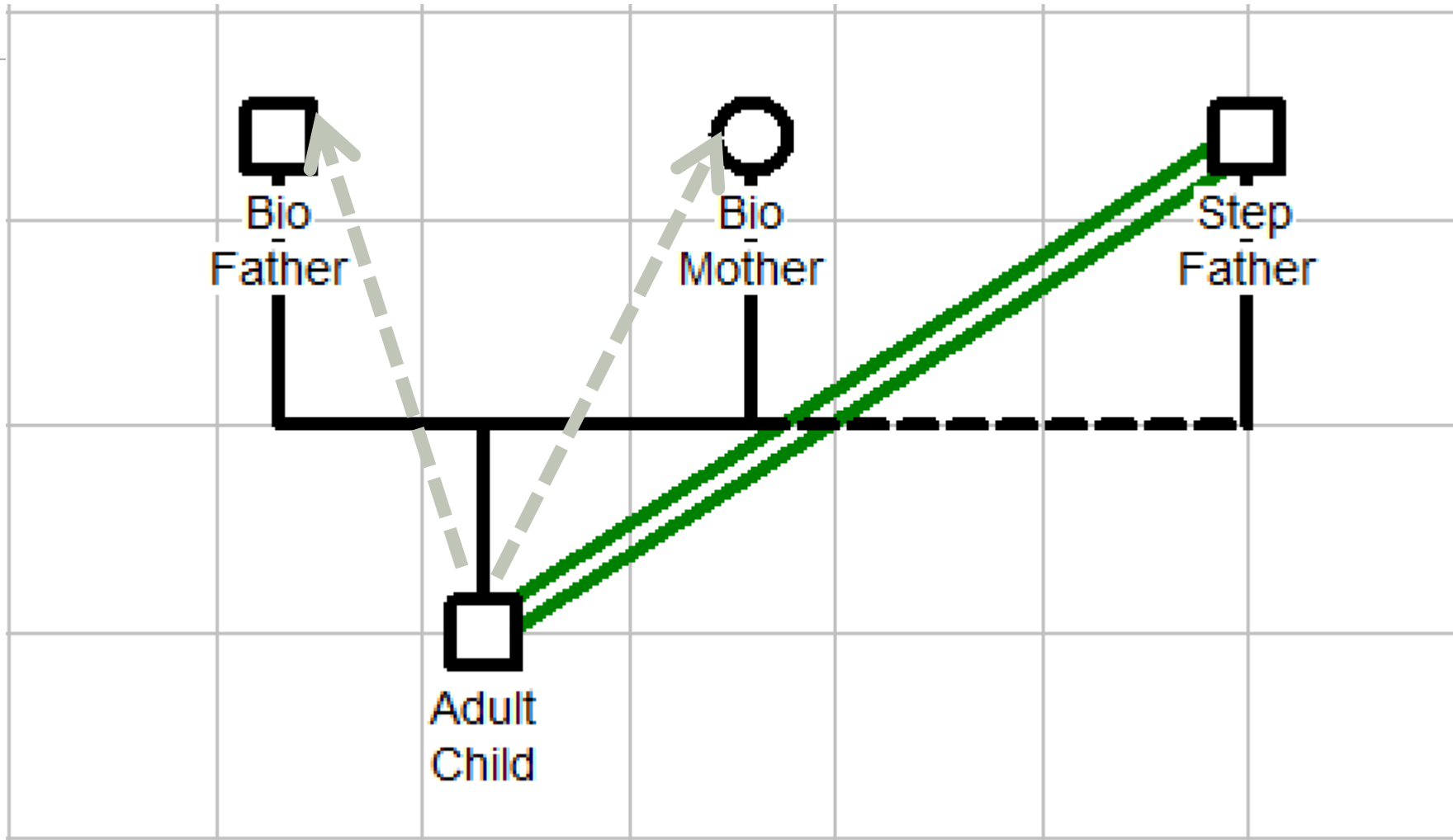
Key

- Relationship with step-father
 - **Double green** = fully or quite a bit family
 - **Double red** = little or not at all family
- Support provided to bio-parents
 - **Green** = positive or more support than mother/father in intact marriage
 - **Red** = negative or less support than mother/father in intact marriage
 - **Gray** = no difference than mother/father in intact marriage

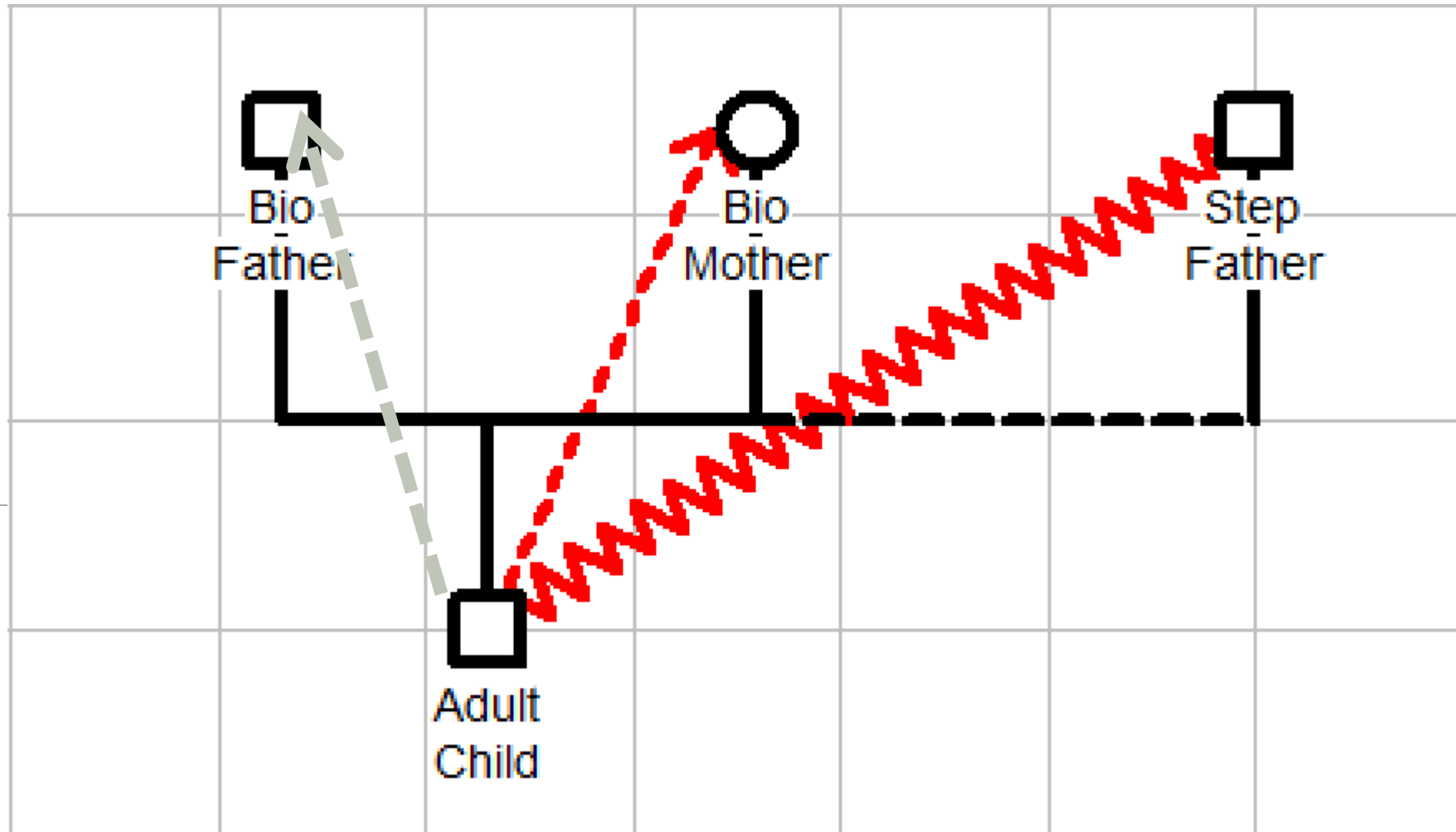
Step Father Fully/Quite a Bit Family Predictions



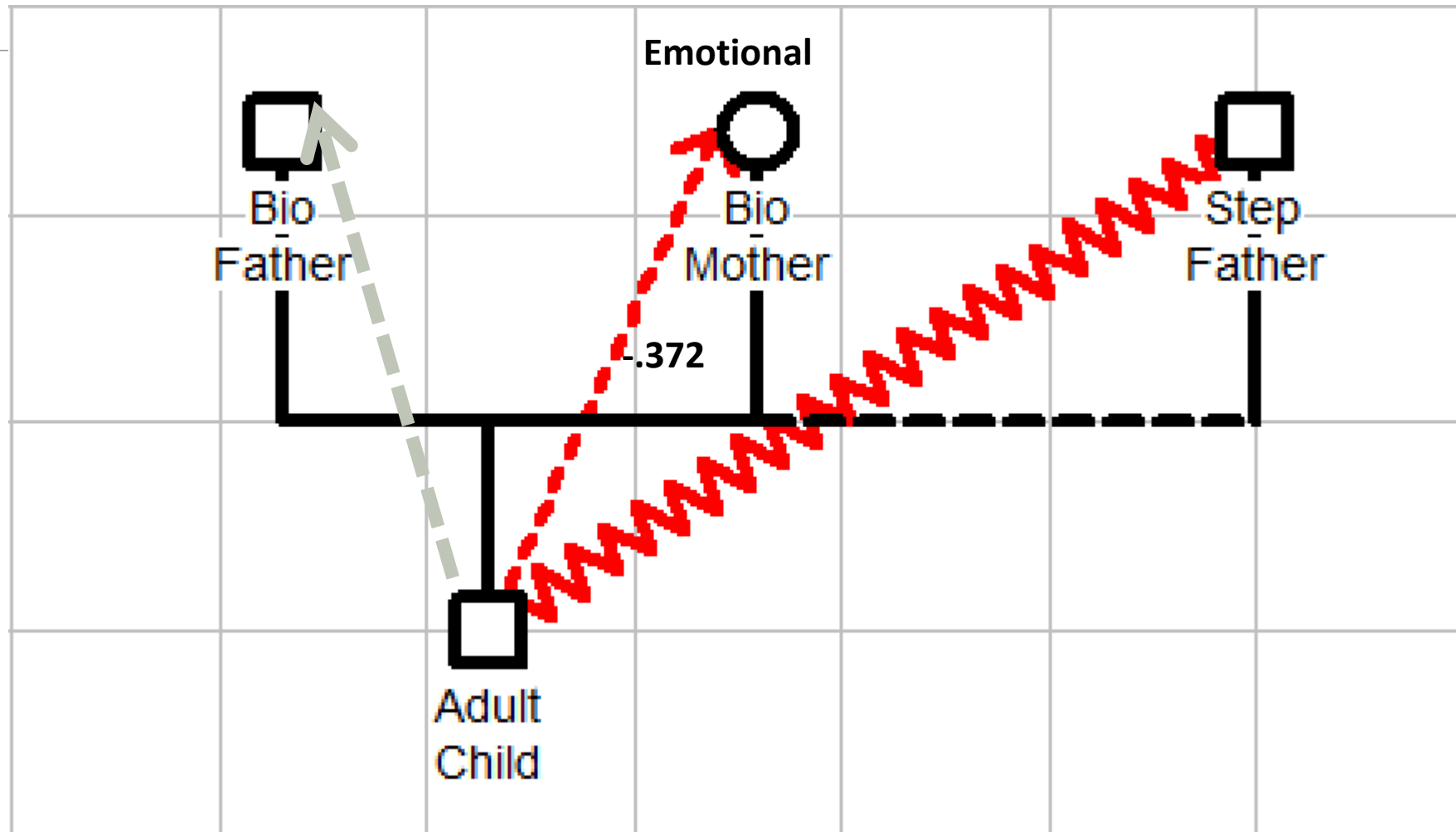
Step Father Fully/Quite a Bit Family Results



Step Father Little/Not at All Family Predictions



Step Father Little/Not at All Family Results



Conclusion

- Some support for boundary ambiguity, competition, and gender asymmetry perspectives.

- Boundary ambiguity: Children provide less support to bio-father and bio-mother when their “new” spouse is not considered *family*.
- Competition: Children provide less support to bio-mother when step-mother is considered *family*.
- Gender asymmetry (step-mother bias)
 - Children provide less instrumental *and* less emotional support to bio-fathers when step-mothers are not considered family; only less emotional support to bio-mothers when step-fathers are not considered family.
 - Presence of stepmothers produces downward shift in instrumental support to biological fathers regardless of stepmothers’ acceptance as family members.

Rethinking Step Families in Later Life

- Findings suggest that nature of relations with step-parents in later life is consequential for the intergenerational support to biological parents.
- Network analysis to treat step-families as systems with multiple remarriages, step-siblings, step-bio parent relations, and track their interconnections.
- Role of step-grandparents just beginning to be investigated.
- The existence of a care-deficit due to family disruption may be too hasty a conclusion as supply of kin may increase to offset lower fertility rate in a quantity-quality trade-off.

More Complexity and More Supply of Caregivers

The Latent Kin Matrix (Riley, 1983)

