

The Consequences of Fatherlessness

Some fathering advocates would say that almost every social ill faced by America's children is related to fatherlessness. Six are noted here. As supported by the data below, children from fatherless homes are more likely to be poor, become involved in drug and alcohol abuse, drop out of school, and suffer from health and emotional problems. Boys are more likely to become involved in crime, and girls are more likely to become pregnant as teens.

1. Poverty

- Children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor. In 2002, 7.8% of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared to 38.4% of children in female-householder families.

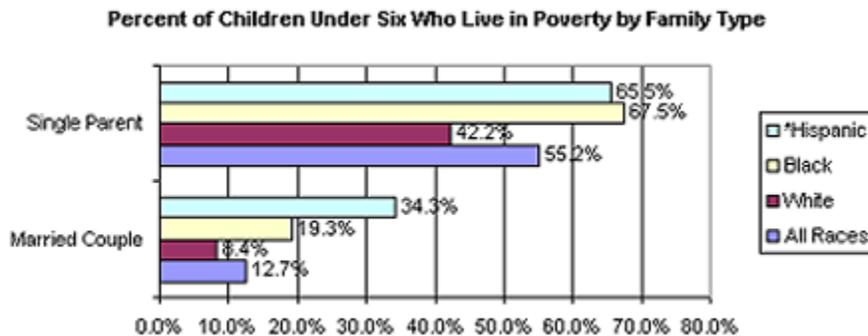
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2002, P20-547, Table C8. Washington, D.C.: GPO 2003.

- In 1996, young children living with unmarried mothers were five times as likely to be poor and ten times as likely to be extremely poor.

Source: "One in Four: America's Youngest Poor." National Center for children in Poverty. 1996.

- Almost 75% of American children living in single-parent families will experience poverty before they turn 11 years old. Only 20 percent of children in two-parent families will do the same.

Source: National Commission on Children. *Just the Facts: A Summary of Recent information on America's Children and their Families*. Washington, DC, 1993.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Statistical Abstract of the United States 1994. Washington, DC: GPO 1994.

2. Drug and Alcohol Abuse

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states, "Fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse."

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, DC, 1993.

- Children growing up in single-parent households are at a significantly increased risk for drug abuse as teenagers.

Source: Denton, Rhonda E. and Charlene M. Kampfe. "The relationship Between Family Variables and Adolescent Substance Abuse: A literature Review." *Adolescence* 114 (1994): 475-495.

- Children who live apart from their fathers are 4.3 times more likely to smoke cigarettes as teenagers than children growing up with their fathers in the home.

Source: Stanton, Warren R., Tian P.S. Oci and Phil A. Silva. "Sociodemographic characteristics of Adolescent Smokers." *The International Journal of the Addictions* 7 (1994): 913-925.

3. Physical and Emotional Health

- Unmarried mothers are less likely to obtain prenatal care and more likely to have a low birthweight baby. Researchers find that these negative effects persist even when they take into account factors, such as parental education, that often distinguish single-parent from two-parent families.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Public Health Service. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. Report to Congress on Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing. Hyattsville, MD (Sept. 1995): 12.

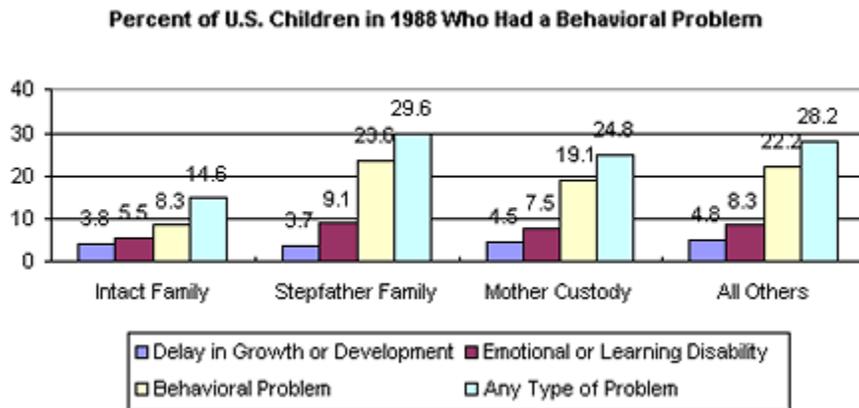
- A study on nearly 6,000 children found that children from single parent homes had more physical and mental health problems than children who lived with two married parents. Additionally, boys in single parent homes were found to have more illnesses than girls in single parent homes.

Source: Hong, Gong-Soog and Shelly L. White-Means. "Do Working Mothers Have Healthy Children?" *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 14 (Summer 1993): 163-186.

- Children in single-parent families are two to three times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioral problems.

Source: Stanton, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. "National Health

Interview Survey." Hyattsville, MD, 1988.



Source: Zill, Nicholas and Carol Schoenborn. Child Developmental, Learning and Emotional Problems: Health of Our Nation's Children. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Advance Data 1990. Washington, DC: GPO, 16 Nov. 1990.

- Three out of four teenage suicides occur in households where a parent has been absent.

Source: Elshtain, Jean Bethke. "Family Matters: The Plight of America's Children." *The Christian Century* (July 1993): 14-21.

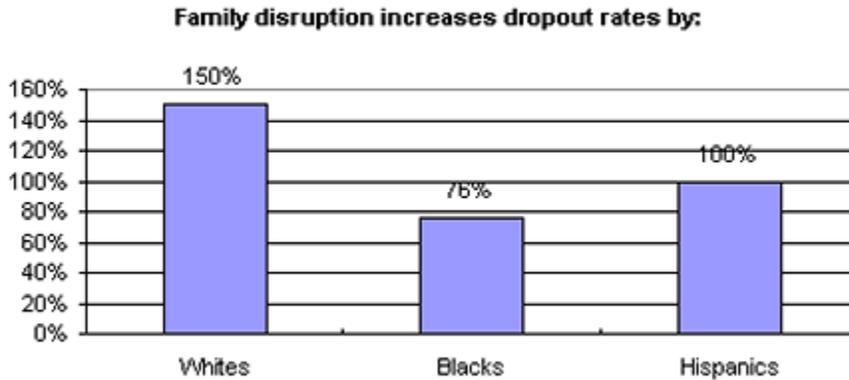
4. Educational Achievement

- In studies involving over 25,000 children using nationally representative data sets, children who lived with only one parent had lower grade point averages, lower college aspirations, poor attendance records, and higher drop out rates than students who lived with both parents.

Source: McLanahan, Sara and Gary Sandefur. *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

- Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, DC; GPO, 1993.



Source: McLanahan, Sara and Gary Sandefur. *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

- After taking into account race, socioeconomic status, sex, age, and ability, high school students from single-parent households were 1.7 times more likely to drop out than were their corresponding counterparts living with both biological parents.

Source: McNeal, Ralph B. Jr. "Extracurricular Activities and High School Dropouts." *Sociology of Education* 68(1995): 62-81.

- School children from divorced families are absent more, and more anxious, hostile, and withdrawn, and are less popular with their peers than those from intact families.

Source: One-Parent Families and Their Children: The School's Most Significant Minority. The Consortium for the Study of School Needs of Children from One-Parent Families. National Association of elementary School Principals and the Institute for Development of Educational Activities, a division of the Charles f. Kettering Foundation. Arlington, VA 1980.

5. Crime

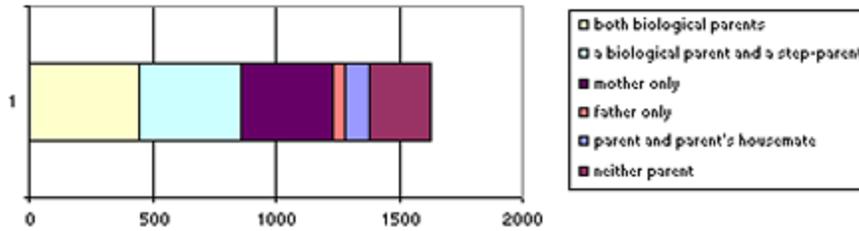
- Children in single parent families are more likely to be in trouble with the law than their peers who grow up with two parents.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. National Health Interview Survey. Hyattsville, MD, 1988.

- In a study using a national probability sample of 1,636 young men and women, it was found that older boys and girls from female headed households are more likely to commit criminal acts than their peers who lived with two parents.

Source: Heimer, Karen. "Gender, Interaction, and Delinquency: Testing a Theory of Differential Social Control." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 59 (1996): 39-61.

Breakdown of 1600 juvenile sex offenders' homes



Source: Ryan, Gail et al. "Trends in a National Sample of Sexually Abusive Youths." *Journal of the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry* 35 (January 1996): 17-25.

- A study in the state of Washington using statewide data found an increased likelihood that children born out-of-wedlock would become a juvenile offender. Compared to their peers born to married parents, children born out-of-wedlock were:

- 1.7 times more likely to become an offender and 2.1 times more likely to become a chronic offender if male.
- 1.8 times more likely to become an offender and 2.8 times more likely to become a chronic offender if female.
- 10 times more likely to become a chronic juvenile offender if male and born to an unmarried teen mother.

Source: Conser, Amy et al. "Maternal and Perinatal Risk Factors for Later Delinquency." *Pediatrics* 99 (1997): 785-790.

6. Sexual Activity and Teen Pregnancy

- Adolescent females between the ages of 15 and 19 years reared in homes without fathers are significantly more likely to engage in premarital sex than adolescent females reared in homes with both a mother and a father.

Source: Billy, John O. G., Karin L. Brewster and William R. Grady. "Contextual Effects on the Sexual Behavior of Adolescent Women." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 56 (1994): 381-404.

- A survey of 720 teenage girls found:

- 97% of the girls said that having parents they could talk to could help reduce teen pregnancy.
- 93% said having loving parents reduced the risk.
- 76% said that their fathers were very or somewhat influential on their decision to have sex.

Source: Clements, Mark. *Parade*. February 2, 1997.

- Children in single parent families are more likely to get pregnant as teenagers than their peers who grow up with two parents.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. National Health Interview Survey. Hyattsville, MD 1988.

- A white teenage girl from an advantaged background is five times more likely to become a teen mother if she grows up in a single-mother household than if she grows up in a household with both biological parents.

Source: Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe. "Facing the Challenges of Fragmented Families." *The Philanthropy Roundtable* 9.1 (1995): 21.