

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 almost four times more likely to be poor. In 2011, 12 percent of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared to 44 percent of children in mother-only families.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2011, Table C8. Washington D.C.: 2011.

– Children living in female headed families with no spouse present had a poverty rate of 47.6 percent, over 4 times the rate in married-couple families.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; ASEP Issue Brief: Information on Poverty and Income Statistics. September 12, 2012 <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/12/PovertyAndIncomeEst/ib.shtml>

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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.

– There is significantly more drug use among children who do not live with their mother and father.

Source: Hoffmann, John P. “The Community Context of Family Structure and Adolescent Drug Use.” Journal of Marriage and Family 64 (May 2002): 314-330.

3. Physical and Emotional Health

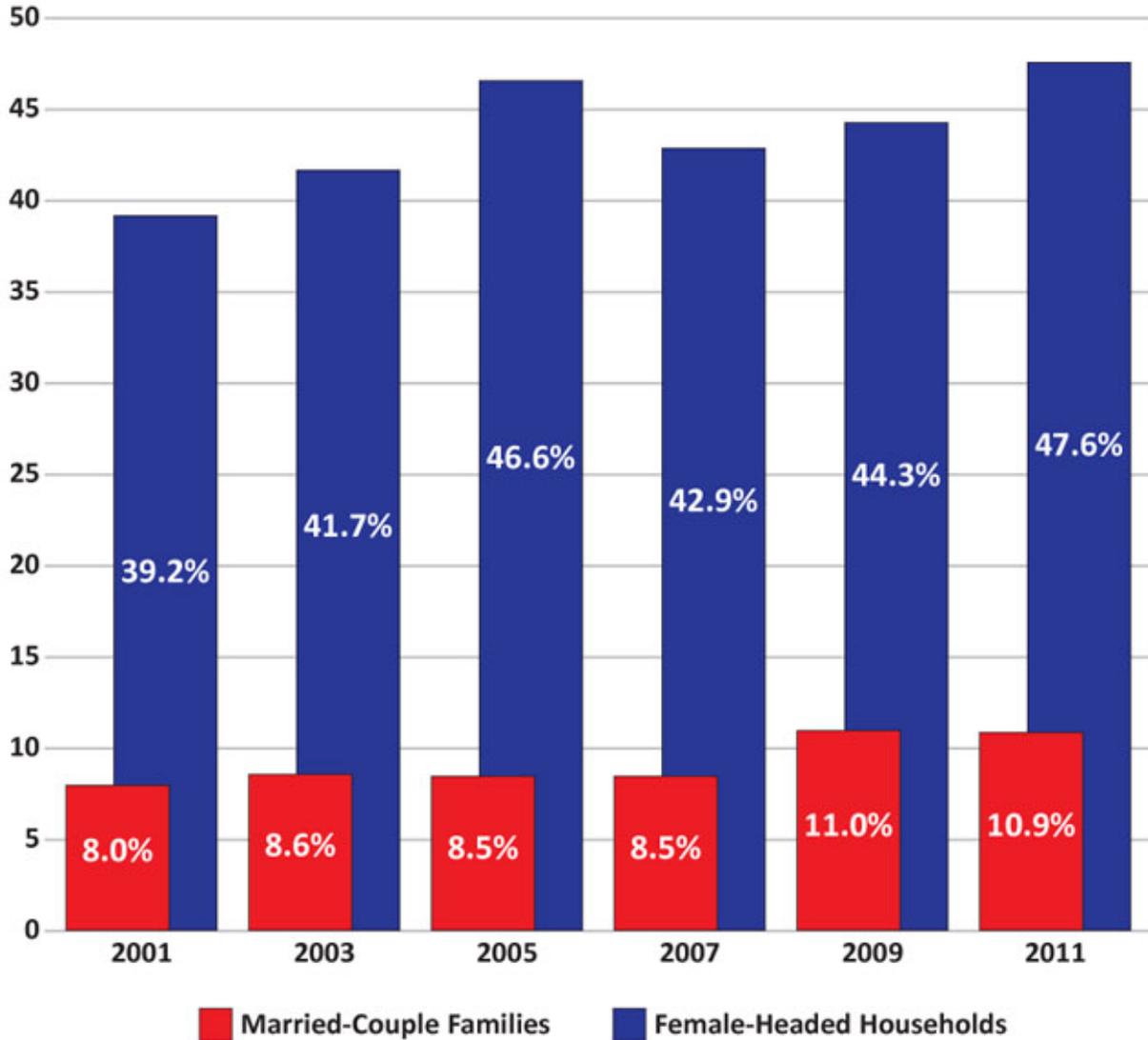
– A study of 1,977 children age 3 and older living with a residential father or father figure found that children living with married biological parents had significantly fewer

The Consequences of Fatherlessness

externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems than children living with at least one non-biological parent.

Source: Hofferth, S. L. (2006). Residential father family type and child well-being: investment versus selection. *Demography*, 43, 53-78.

Children in Poverty by Family Structure



<http://www.fathers.com/statistics-and-research/the-consequences-of-fatherlessness/>

The Consequences of Fatherlessness

- Children of single-parent homes are more than twice as likely to commit suicide.

Sources: *The Lancet*, Jan. 25, 2003 • Gunilla Ringbäck Weitoft, MD, Centre for Epidemiology, the National Board of Health and Welfare, Stockholm, Sweden • Irwin Sandler, PhD, professor of psychology and director of the Prevention Research Center, Arizona State University, Tempe • Douglas G. Jacobs, MD, associate clinical professor of psychiatry, Harvard Medical School; and founder and director, The National Depression Screening Program • Madelyn Gould, PhD, MPH, professor of child psychiatry and public health, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University; and research scientist, New York State Psychiatric Institute.

<http://www.webmd.com/baby/news/20030123/absent-parent-doubles-child-suicide-risk>

- Data from three waves of the Fragile Families Study (N= 2,111) was used to examine the prevalence and effects of mothers' relationship changes between birth and age 3 on their children's well being. Children born to single mothers show higher levels of aggressive behavior than children born to married mothers. Living in a single-mother household is equivalent to experiencing 5.25 partnership transitions.

Source: Osborne, C., & McLanahan, S. (2007). Partnership instability and child well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 1065-1083.

4. Educational Achievement

- Children in grades 7-12 who have lived with at least one biological parent, youth that experienced divorce, separation, or nonunion birth reported lower grade point averages than those who have always lived with both biological parents.
- Children living with their married biological father tested at a significantly higher level than those living with a nonbiological father.

Source: Tillman, K. H. (2007). Family structure pathways and academic disadvantage among adolescents in stepfamilies. *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

- Father involvement in schools is associated with the higher likelihood of a student getting mostly A's. This was true for fathers in biological parent families, for stepfathers, and for fathers heading single-parent families.

Source: Nord, Christine Winquist, and Jerry West. *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*. (NCES 2001-032). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001.

- 71% of high school dropouts are fatherless; fatherless children have more trouble academically, scoring poorly on tests of reading, mathematics, and thinking skills; children from father-absent homes are more likely to be truant from school, more likely to be excluded from school, more likely to leave school at age 16, and less likely to attain academic and professional qualifications in adulthood.

Source: Edward Kruk, Ph.D., "The Vital Importance of Paternal Presence in Children's Lives." May 23, 2012.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/co-parenting-after-divorce/201205/father-absence-father-deficit-father-hunger>

The Consequences of Fatherlessness

5. Crime

– Adolescents living in intact families are less likely to engage in delinquency than their peers living in non-intact families. Compared to peers in intact families, adolescents in single-parent families and stepfamilies were more likely to engage in delinquency. This relationship appeared to be operating through differences in family processes—parental involvement, supervision, monitoring, and parentchild closeness—between intact and non-intact families.

Source: Stephen Demuth and Susan L. Brown, "Family Structure, Family Processes, and Adolescent Delinquency: The Significance of Parental Absence Versus Parental Gender," Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 41, No. 1 (February 2004): 58-81.

<http://familyfacts.org/briefs/26/marriage-and-family-as-deterrents-from-delinquency-violence-and-crime>

– A study using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health explored the relationship between family structure and risk of violent acts in neighborhoods. The results revealed that if the number of fathers is low in a neighborhood, then there is an increase in acts of teen violence. The statistical data showed that a 1% increase in the proportion of single-parent families in a neighborhood is associated with a 3% increase in an adolescent's level of violence. In other words, adolescents who live in neighborhoods with lower proportions of single-parent families and who report higher levels of family integration commit less violence.

Source: Knoester, C., & Hayne, D.A. (2005). "Community context, social integration into family, and youth violence." Journal of Marriage and Family 67, 767-780.

– Children age 10 to 17 living with two biological or adoptive parents were significantly less likely to experience sexual assault, child maltreatment, other types of major violence, and non-victimization type of adversity, and were less likely to witness violence in their families compared to peers living in single-parent families and stepfamilies.

Source: Heather A. Turner, "The Effect of Lifetime Victimization on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents," Social Science & Medicine, Vol. 62, No. 1, (January 2006), pp. 13-27.

– A study of 109 juvenile offenders indicated that family structure significantly predicts delinquency.

Source: Bush, Connee, Ronald L. Mullis, and Ann K. Mullis. "Differences in Empathy Between Offender and Nonoffender Youth." Journal of Youth and Adolescence 29 (August 2000): 467-478.

6. Sexual Activity and Teen Pregnancy

– A study using a sample of 1409 rural southern adolescents (851 females and 558 males) aged 11 – 18 years, investigated the correlation between father absence and self-reported

The Consequences of Fatherlessness

sexual activity. The results revealed that adolescents in father-absence homes were more likely to report being sexually active compared to adolescents living with their fathers.

Source: Hendricks, C.S., Cesario, S.K., Murdaugh, C., Gibbons, M.E., Servonsky, E.J., Bobadilla, R.V., Hendricks, D.L., Spencer-Morgan, B., & Tavakoli, A. (2005).

– Being raised by a single mother raises the risk of teen pregnancy, marrying with less than a high school degree, and forming a marriage where both partners have less than a high school degree.

*Source: Teachman, Jay D. "The Childhood Living Arrangements of Children and the Characteristics of Their Marriages." *Journal of Family Issues* 25 (January 2004): 86-111.*