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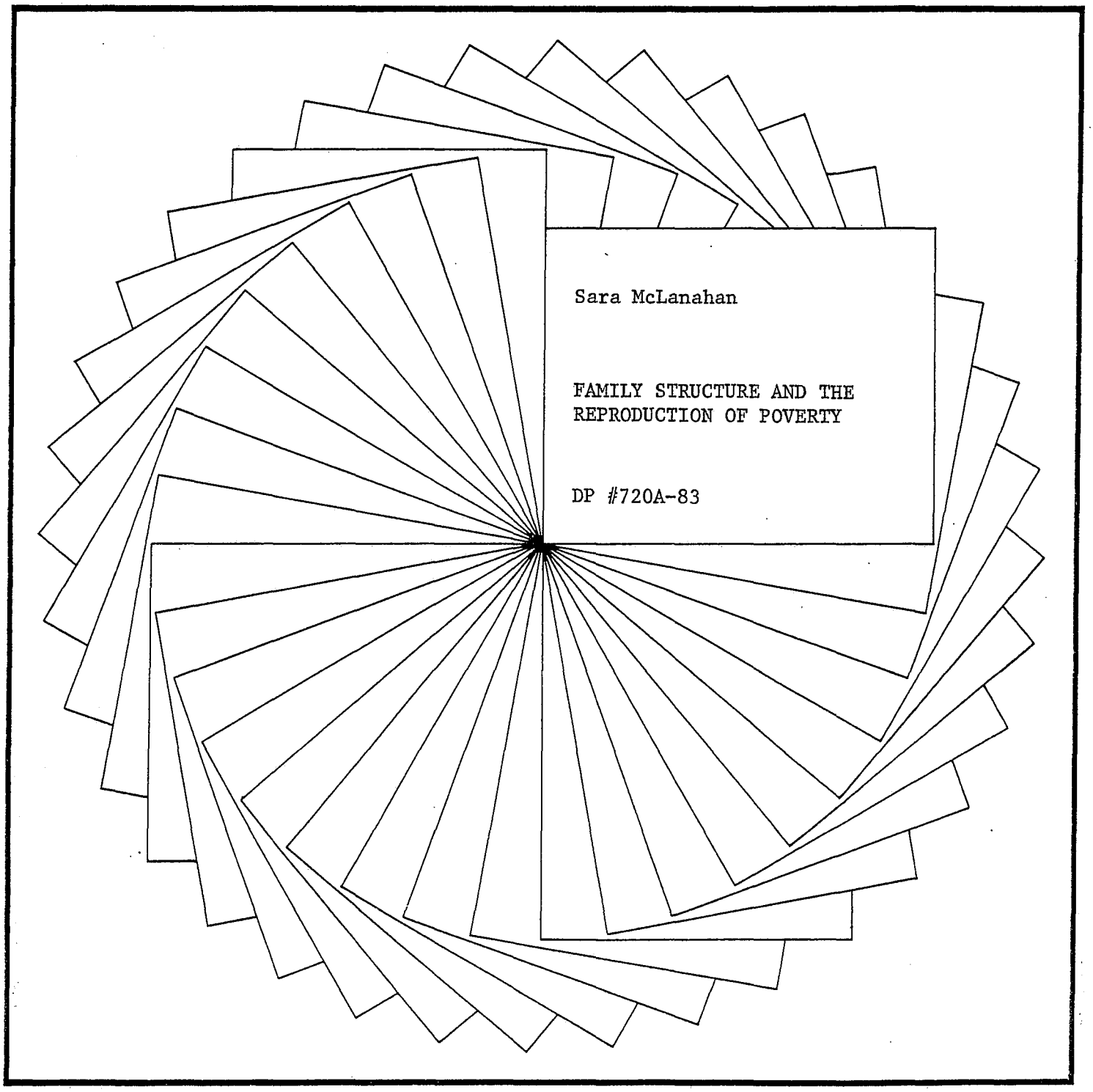

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FAMILY STRUCTURE AND THE REPRODUCTION OF POVERTY

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ABSTRACT

Recent analysts have argued that the female-headed family is responsible for the growth of an "underclass" in America. This study uses longitudinal data taken from the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics to address the questions of whether and why offspring in female-headed households are more likely to experience persistent poverty in adulthood. Four hypotheses regarding the effect of a father's absence are tested: the "no-effects" hypothesis, the "economic-deprivation" hypothesis, the "father-absence" hypothesis, and the "family-stress" hypothesis. Separate analyses are presented for blacks and whites. The findings indicate that growing up in a female-headed family increases the risk for poverty, but not because of father absence per se. Among whites, economic deprivation and the stress associated with recent family disruption account for nearly all of the negative effects of family structure on offsprings' attainment, while among blacks the results are more mixed.

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND THE REPRODUCTION OF POVERTY

1. INTRODUCTION

During the past few years, researchers and policy makers alike have expressed a growing concern over the instability of the American family and the disorganization of community life. Concern for the family has focused on issues such as the increase in divorce, the rise in illegitimate births, and the subsequent growth of female-headed families. Evidence of broader disorganization is found in high levels of crime and drug abuse, in unemployment among large segments of minority youth, and more generally in what is characterized as the emergence of an "underclass" in America (Auletta, 1981).

A prominent interpretation of these phenomena, as reported in a recent series of articles in The New Yorker (Auletta, 1981), is that the female-headed family is a major cause of inner-city disorganization and that both family status and community decline are fostered and perpetuated by the present welfare system. According to this argument, changes in the AFDC program which occurred in the sixties, along with the addition of new benefits aimed at the poor, have encouraged the growth of welfare-dependent mothers and produced a generation of youth whose attitudes and behavior are inconsistent with the American work ethic and with community norms in general.

The debate over family structure and its relationship to economic well-being is not new. Nearly all of the issues currently being raised extend back to the early sixties and to the controversy surrounding the

publication of the "Moynihan Report" (see Patterson, 1981, for a comprehensive review of this debate; also see Rainwater and Yancey, 1967). What is most surprising at this time is that so many questions remain unanswered, despite the time and energy that has been devoted to their resolution. That offspring from female-headed families have lower economic attainment is not at issue here. Most researchers would agree that children from broken homes are disadvantaged relative to children from two-parent households (for critical reviews, see Herzog and Sudia, 1973; Ross and Sawhill, 1975; Shinn, 1978; Hetherington, Camara, and Featherman, 1983). Rather, the key question has been and continues to be whether long-term inequality is due to family structure per se (i.e., the absence of a parent) or to some other factor such as social class and/or ethnicity which is correlated with both family structure and adult attainment. While this might appear to be a simple question, the solution is actually quite complicated, primarily because the information needed to separate the various background factors (parents' marital history, family income during childhood and adolescence, timing and duration of disruption) is simply not available in most data sets. As a result, while a great deal of research has been carried out during the past two decades, many of the most critical questions have not been adequately addressed.

The data used in this study are taken from the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), which contains an unusually large number of female-headed households and is representative of the general population (blacks and whites, males and females). Most important, the PSID data provide a limited amount of information on all household members, including those who "split off" after the first wave of interviews.

Because of this design, it is possible to construct a sample of offspring that includes detailed information on the economic and marital history of respondents' families of origin as well as their own socioeconomic behavior in late adolescence and young adulthood.

In the next section, I present a brief review of the principal findings of past studies, with special emphasis on the methodological limitations of each general approach. Following this, I identify four distinct hypotheses concerning family structure and its effect on offspring and discuss how each of these will be tested in the present study.

In examining the effects of family structure and comparing the various hypotheses, I focus on one dimension of offspring behavior: graduation from high school. Since the primary question addressed in the analysis is whether female-headed families are reproducing an "underclass," the graduation transition seems the most appropriate. It is at this point in the schooling process that much of the inequality among recent cohorts begins (Mare, 1981), and it is high school dropouts who are most disadvantaged in the labor market. This approach is also consistent with the recent work of Bane and Ellwood (1983) who show that failure to complete high school is a major predictor of the duration of poverty spells and welfare receipt.[1]

2. FAMILY STRUCTURE AND SCHOOLING: AN ASSESSMENT OF PAST METHODS

Our knowledge of family structure and its impact on schooling comes from two rather distinct literatures: research on adult attainment performed primarily by sociologists, and studies of cognitive achievement in

children and adolescents carried out by psychologists and sociologists. Each of these approaches has certain strengths as well as certain weaknesses, and each provides us with a somewhat different picture of the nature and importance of family structure effects. (See Hetherington, Camara, and Featherman, 1983, for an extensive review of both literatures.)

The attainment research, which focuses on adults, indicates that those who grow up in one-parent families complete fewer years of schooling than those who spend most of their lives in two-parent households (Duncan, 1967; Duncan and Duncan, 1969; Duncan, Featherman, and Duncan, 1972; Featherman and Hauser, 1976; Hauser and Featherman, 1976). This finding is consistent across several studies of attainment and is related to other indicators of adult well-being, including occupational attainment (Duncan and Duncan, 1969) and marital stability (Bumpass and Sweet, 1972).

The strength of the attainment approach lies in its use of large representative samples, multivariate models, and sophisticated statistical techniques. Moreover, it provides evidence of consequences that persist beyond childhood and adolescence. Its weakness lies in its inability to elaborate upon family structure effects. For example, none of this work deals satisfactorily with the issue of whether observed effects are due to the absence of a parent per se or to family economic status. While attainment models typically adjust for the occupational and educational status of the family head, these controls are not adequate when comparing one- and two-parent families. Since one-parent families are generally headed by single women, and since female householders earn considerably less than men of similar occupational and

educational status, effects due to economic deprivation are still confounded with those of family status.

Another limitation of the attainment models is their inability to discriminate among different types of single-parent families (e.g., never married, widowed, divorced, separated) or to control for duration of parent absence. These distinctions are crucial in separating effects due to the absence of a parent from effects due to marital disruption, and the lack of information on these variables seriously inhibits our ability to interpret past results. To be fair, we should note that the failure to control for income or to examine different types of single-parent families is generally not the fault of researchers, in that reliable information on parents' income and marital history is not available in most of the data used to examine adult attainment.

A second general approach to the study of family structure and schooling is found in the literature on cognitive achievement, which is based on children and adolescents currently in school. While studies of this kind are often cited as evidence that the female-headed family has negative consequences for children, much of this research has methodological problems and its findings are mixed and generally inconclusive[2] (Ross and Sawhill, 1975; Hetherington, Camara, and Featherman, 1983).

Perhaps the most provocative finding in the literature on school children is the evidence of variation among different types of single-parent families. Zill (1978), for example, shows that children of widows are much better off than children living with separated mothers. In a similar vein, Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1978a; 1978b) in their studies of divorce show that performance of offspring decreases dramatically immediately following parents' separation and gradually improves during

the next few years. These findings suggest that the event of marital disruption rather than continuing parent absence is the crucial determinant of lower achievement among children who currently live at home and that single-parent families may be no different from two-parent households once they have recovered from the shock of marital dissolution.

The work of Hetherington, Cox, and Cox highlights a more general limitation in the cognitive achievement literature, aside from the methodological problems noted above; namely, that children's responses to marital disruption may be relatively short-lived and that achievement and behavioral differences observed at one point in time may not necessarily translate into long-term differences in attainment. In a similar vein, one cannot infer that the absence of cognitive differences among children and adolescents means that family structure has no long-term consequences. As Hetherington, Camara, and Featherman (1983) have noted, offspring may terminate their schooling for reasons other than poor achievement. In particular, early entrances into the labor force, early pregnancies and marriages, and economic necessity in general may prove to be more critical in explaining family structure effects than academic performance in itself.

3. THEORETICAL ISSUES

Implicit in the literature on family structure are several distinct explanations for why educational attainment is lower among children who grow up in single-parent households. These explanations, which are based on more general models of status attainment, early socialization, and family stress, are usually presented as ad hoc interpretations and in

most cases have not been empirically tested. In the following discussion four such perspectives are described briefly, along with several hypotheses that might be used to compare and evaluate their relative merit.

The No-Effects Hypothesis

The most simplistic of the family status hypotheses is the view that the absence of one parent has no direct consequence for the attainment of offspring. According to this view, findings reported in past research result entirely from spurious relationships that are created by the failure to control for background factors such as race, education, and occupation of parents. Proponents of this hypothesis generally point out that being black and having little education or a low-status occupation is positively related to the formation of single-parent families as well as to lower attainment among offspring. To the extent that these factors are not taken into account when assessing parent absence, their impact will be reflected in the estimates of the family effect. This position is implicit in some of the earlier critiques of the literature in which the absence of proper controls is interpreted as an indication that family structure has no consequences for offspring.

The Economic-Deprivation Hypothesis

A second hypothesis states that lower academic achievement among offspring in one-parent families is a consequence of poverty rather than family structure (Rainwater and Yancey, 1966). Since single-parent families account for nearly one-half of all families living below the poverty line and since family income is clearly related to educational attainment, this argument must be given considerable weight until proven

otherwise. The "economic-deprivation" argument, as outlined above, treats economic status as an endogenous variable rather than a background factor. That is, current income is believed to have an independent impact on attainment, net of economic factors that influence the formation of female-headed families. For this reason, the hypothesis is distinct from the no-effects hypothesis described above.

Several arguments can be made for why low economic status might lead to low achievement among offspring in single-parent families. First is the notion that lack of supervision is the critical variable (Maccoby, 1958; Fleisher, 1966; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1978a; Colletta, 1979). This position, which is sometimes referred to as the "mother-absence" hypothesis, maintains that low income increases the likelihood that mothers will work, that working mothers provide less supervision to their children, and that inadequate supervision results in behavioral problems in school. Since offspring in single-parent families have lower incomes and are more likely to have a working mother, it is assumed that they have less supervision and therefore perform less well in school.

A second explanation suggests that economic necessity results in lower attainment by encouraging adolescents to assume adult roles which in turn affect the timing of life-course transitions. Specifically, offspring from single-parent families are more likely to work full time and to be responsible for younger siblings, and these activities result in early departures from school (Colletta, 1979; Kelly and Wallerstein, 1979; Weiss, 1979). It should be noted that this explanation does not assume that early departures are associated with poor performance or negative behavior in general. On the contrary, offspring who leave school prematurely to fulfill adult roles may be highly responsible.

Their responsibilities, however, are directed toward family survival rather than individual achievement.

A third argument for income-related effects blames the welfare system for the lower attainment of offspring. Included here are notions of welfare dependency and welfare stigma, both of which are believed to undermine achievement in school (Rainwater and Yancey, 1967; Auletta, 1981). Again it should be noted that in these explanations welfare is treated as an endogenous variable having an independent effect on offspring attainment, net of background or personality characteristics that may affect the selection into single-parent families as well as welfare status.

The Father-Absence Hypothesis

A third hypothesis for family effects states that the continuing absence of a father leads to low attainment among offspring in single-parent families. This view is derived from socialization theory, which stresses the importance of the male role model to the cognitive and emotional development of children. With respect to schooling, the hypothesis proposes that the absence of a father decreases motivation for achievement and interferes with normal psychosexual development, resulting in poorer academic performance and premature termination of schooling. This hypothesis is consistent with the more general "culture of poverty" argument, which attributes low socioeconomic attainment to socialization practices of disadvantaged subgroups.

The impact of the absence of a father is difficult to test because nearly all single-parent families have an absent father. As a result, it is difficult to tell whether family effects are due to the lack of

a male role model or to having one parent rather than two. While a pure father-absence effect cannot be measured empirically, other testable hypotheses can be derived from this theory. For example, if a male role model is the critical factor, the effect of family structure should be consistently negative across all types of female-headed families, other factors being equal. In addition, since socialization theory emphasizes the importance of early childhood in the development of attitudes and behaviors, one would expect children who experience the absence of a father at a young age and for an extended period of time to be worse off than those who lose a father in adolescence. Finally, the father-absence perspective argues that the absence of a male role model is more detrimental to male offspring than to females, and therefore one would expect to find a sex differences in the responses of offspring, with males showing more negative effects than females[3] (Carlsmith, 1964; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1978b; Wallerstein, 1978; Hess and Camara, 1979).

The Family-Stress Hypothesis

The fourth explanation for a family structure effect is derived from family-stress theory (Hill, 1958). According to this view, parents' marital disruption is a major source of stress for offspring, involving multiple role and status changes that often result in feelings of anger and loss (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, 1981). These feelings, which are most intense during the period of initial separation, may result in antisocial behavior as well as a loss of confidence and self-esteem. With respect to schooling, stress theory suggests that recent disruptions result in behavioral problems at school and in poorer

overall academic performance[4] (Goode, 1956; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1978a).

The variables appropriate for testing stress theory are similar to those used to evaluate the absence of a father. The hypotheses, however, predict contradictory results. First, stress theory suggests that since single-parent households vary according to their concentration of recently disrupted families, the effects of parent absence should also vary for different types of one-parent families. In particular, one would expect separated households to have the strongest negative effect and never-married households to show the least negative effect, all else being equal. Second, the theory suggests that within single-parent households, time since marital disruption should be positively related to offspring performance (i.e., the more distant the disruption, the less negative the impact).

4. METHODS

Data

The data are taken from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), a national representative survey of households conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The Panel Study has followed 5000 American families since 1968 and is made up of approximately 2000 low-income households drawn from the Census Bureau's Survey of Economic Opportunity and a fresh probability sample of approximately 3000 additional households taken from the Survey Research Center's national sampling frame. The oversampling of low-income families provides an unusually large sample of single-parent families and black families.

The present study is based on information obtained from the eleven-year individual tape (1978). The sample consists of respondents who were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-seven in 1978 and who had been dependent children of panel families at age seventeen. Information on these offspring and their family situation at age seventeen was used to examine the relationship between family structure and school behavior in adolescence. For a subset of these respondents (those who had reached the age of twenty-three and had established separate households by 1978), information on completed education was used to corroborate the initial analysis of adolescent performance, that is, to see if the effects on being in school at age seventeen were similar to those for graduation from high school. (Additional information on the sample and its limitations is provided in the Appendix.)

The initial sample of offspring contained 3289 respondents: 1730 whites and 1559 blacks. Since only a small number of single-parent families are headed by males, the sample was restricted to offspring living with either two parents or a single female parent. The single-parent subgroup contained 48 offspring living with never-married mothers, 242 offspring living with widows, 290 respondents living with divorced mothers, and 342 respondents living with separated mothers.

Variables

Educational attainment was measured by two indicators: whether respondent was in school at age seventeen and whether respondent graduated from high school.

All independent variables were measured when the respondent was seventeen. Family structure was measured in several ways: first as a

simple dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a parent was absent from the household, PA; second as a set of dummy variables indicating marital status of household head (never married, NEV; widowed, WID; divorced, DIV; and separated, SEP); and finally, as a set of dummy variables representing time since parents' marital disruption: 1 year or less, 2 to 4 years, or 5 years or more.

The control variables are defined as follows:

EDUC: 0 = has trouble reading or writing; 1 = 0-5 grades; 2 = 6-8 grades; 3 = 9-11 grades; 4 = high school; 5 = 12 grades plus nonacademic training; 6 = some college; 7 = college B.A., but no advanced degree; 8 = college and advanced or professional degree.

NC, South, West: region in which respondent lived, coded as dummy variables represented North Central, South, and West; Northeast omitted.

CITY: size of city in which respondent lived; coded as 1 = under 10,000; 2 = 10,000-24,999; 3 = 25,000-49,000; 4 = 50,000-99,999; 5 = 100,000-499,999; 6 = over 500,000.

INC: Total family income, measured in dollars.

NEED: family need in relation to size, measured in dollars and based on annual food needs adjusted for number and ages of family members.

WOKM: mother's employment status, coded as 0 = 0 hours worked during past years; 1 = 1 or more hours worked during past year.

WOKO: offspring's employment status, coded as 0 = 0 hours worked during past year; 1 = 1 or more hours worked during past year.

WEL: family welfare status, coded as 0 = no AFDC received during past year; 1 = 1 or more dollars of AFDC received.

5. MODELS AND ESTIMATION TECHNIQUES

The two dependent variables are dichotomous indicators: whether respondent was in school at age seventeen and whether respondent graduated from high school. To overcome the problems created by using dichotomous

dependent variables in ordinary least squares regression, logistic response models were used to estimate the effect of family structure on the two indicators of attainment. The logit model takes the following form:

$$\log_e(P_{ijt}/1 - p_{ijt}) = \lambda_{jt} + \sum_s \lambda_{sjt} X_{ist}$$

where λ_{jt} is a constant and λ_{sjt} denotes the effect of a unit change in X_{st} on the log odds of being in school at seventeen (or graduating from high school).

The estimates were generated by the program GLIM (Baker and Nelder, 1978), which uses a maximum likelihood estimation procedure. GLIM reports standard errors for each coefficient and a likelihood estimate for the fit of the overall model. The standard errors were used to evaluate the statistical significance of the independent variables, and changes in the likelihood estimates were used to determine whether the inclusion of particular variables improves the fit of nested models.

6. FAMILY STRUCTURE AND SCHOOLING AT SEVENTEEN

The first part of the analysis focuses on adolescent behavior and asks whether the absence of a parent is related to being in school at age seventeen. Preliminary findings indicated that responses vary considerably by race, and therefore each of the four hypotheses was tested separately for blacks and whites. Table 1 summarizes the relative status of black and white respondents. Results for this part of the analysis are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 1. Summary Information on Family Status, Educational Status and Welfare Status of Black and White Offspring at Age Seventeen

	Proportion in One-Parent Families	Proportion Out of School	Proportion on Welfare
Whites	11.7%	11.1%	2.4%
Blacks	41.6	17.4	23.6

The No-Effects Hypothesis

The first hypothesis to be tested is the notion that the relationship between the absence of one parent and offspring attainment is due to background factors such as parents' education, city size, and region of the country. These variables are believed to be related to parent absence as well as attainment, and some have argued that they are responsible for the family structure effect reported in past studies. To test this hypothesis the following equation was estimated:

$$\text{Log}\left(\frac{P}{1-p}\right) = \lambda_0 + \lambda_1 PA + \lambda_2 C \qquad (1)$$

where PA represents parent absence measured as a dichotomous variable and C represents a set of control variables: parents' education, city size, and region of the country. The results of these tests are presented in columns 1 and 2 of Tables 2 and 3.

The estimate for the bivariate relationship (column 1) between parent absence and attainment indicates that living in a single-parent family decreases the log odds of being in school by .52 for whites and by .89 for blacks. In probability terms, these numbers indicate that parent absence decreases the probability of being in school by about 5% for whites and about 13% for blacks.[5]

The change in the coefficients for parent absence between columns 1 and 2 indicates that the control variables account for approximately 18% of the negative association between family structure and offspring attainment among whites, while they are actually masking some of the

Table 2. The Effects of Father Absence on the Log Odds of Being in School at Age Seventeen for White Offspring

	No Effect		Economic Deprivation		Father Absence and Family Stress		
Independent Variable	Parent Absence (1)	Background Factors (2)	Economic Status (3)	Employment and Welfare (4)	Family Type (5)	Type and Time since Marital Disruption (6)	Sex of Offspring (7)
Constant	2.15 (.08)	1.25 (.26)	.71 (.41)	.58 (.42)	.81 (.41)	.70 (.41)	1.83 (.25)
PA	-.52 (.20)*	-.45 (.21)*	-.19 (.23)	-.08 (.24)			-.25 (.63)
SEX							.41 (.50)
PA × SEX							-.19 (.41)
NEV					-1.04 (3.35)		
WID					.66 (.44)		
DIV					-.09 (.32)		
SEP					-1.51 (.40)*		
YR1 × WID						.33 (1.00)	
YR2-4 × WID						.03 (.60)	
YR5+ × WID						1.51 (.82)†	
YR1 × DIV/SEP						-1.24 (.56)*	
YR2 × DIV/SEP						-.71 (.35)*	
YR5+ × DIV/SEP						-.08 (.40)	
EDUC		.28 (.05)*	.22 (.05)*	.21 (.05)*	.21 (.05)*	.21 (.05)*	
CITY		-.008 (.04)	-.04 (.05)	-.03 (.05)	-.03 (.05)	-.03 (.05)	
NC		-.36 (.21)	-.36 (.21)	-.36 (.21)	-.40 (.21)	-.36 (.21)	
SOUTH		-.26 (.24)	-.24 (.24)	-.19 (.24)	-.22 (.25)	-.19 (.25)	
WEST		-.10 (.25)	-.09 (.26)	-.05 (.26)	-.10 (.26)	-.03 (.26)	
INC			.34 (.11)*	.29 (.10)*	.33 (.11)*	.35 (.11)*	
NEED			.16 (.49)	.48 (.51)	.18 (.49)	.22 (.50)	
WOKM				.14 (.16)			
WOKO				.04 (.16)			
WEL				-.95 (.36)*			
df	1728	1722	1720	1717	1717	1709	1726
-2 log likelihood	1235	1187	1174	1167	1157	1147	1233

*$p < .05$

†$p < .10$

Table reads: "PA (the absence of a parent) decreases the log odds of being in school at age seventeen by .52. When background factors are taken into account, the absence of a parent reduces the log odds by .45. When economic factors are taken into account. . ."

NOTE: The standard errors for the logits are reported in parentheses. See text for definitions of the variables.

Table 3. The Effects of Father Absence on the Log Odds of Being in School at Age Seventeen for Black Offspring

	No Effect		Economic Deprivation		Father Absence and Family Stress		
Independent Variable	Parent Absence (1)	Background Factors (2)	Economic Status (3)	Employment and Welfare (4)	Family Type (5)	Type and Time since Marital Disruption (6)	Sex of Offspring (7)
Constant	1.99 (.10)	1.58 (.28)	1.44 (.38)	1.46 (.38)	1.36 (.39)	1.44 (.39)	2.06 (.32)
PA	-.89 (.13)*	-.98 (.14)*	-.84 (.16)*	-.71 (.17)*			-.74 (.43)
SEX							.05 (.43)
PA × SEX							-.10 (.26)
NEV					.42 (.61)		
WID					-.98 (.19)*		
DIV					-.68 (.24)*		
SEP					-.84 (.21)*		
YR1 × WID						3.32 (3.61)	
YR2-4 × WID						-1.59 (.33)*	
YR5+ × WID						-.85 (.21)*	
YR1 × DIV/SEP						-.89 (.42)*	
YR2 × DIV/SEP						-.65 (.30)*	
YR5+ × DIV/SEP						-.66 (.19)*	
EDUC		.18 (.05)*	.15 (.05)*	.14 (.05)*	.14 (.05)*	.12 (.05)*	
CITY		.10 (.05)*	.08 (.05)	.07 (.05)	.07 (.05)	.07 (.05)	
NC		.31 (.23)	.28 (.23)	.32 (.23)	.28 (.23)	.27 (.23)	
SOUTH		.30 (.23)	.29 (.23)	.29 (.23)	.30 (.23)	.27 (.23)	
WEST		.17 (.31)	.19 (.31)	.21 (.31)	.18 (.31)	.24 (.32)	
INC (in ten thousands)			.27 (.13)*	.26 (.14)†	.30 (.13)*	.29 (.13)*	
NEED (in ten thousands)			-.22 (.31)	-.13 (.32)	-.17 (.32)	-.19 (.32)	
WOKM				-.27 (.15)			
WOKO				.33 (.16)*			
WEL				-.25 (.18)			
df	1557	1552	1550	1547	1547	1538	1555
-2 log likelihood	1497	1467	1461	1454	1454	1441	1496

*p < .05

†p < .10

effect on blacks. The masking is due to the fact that, among blacks, parents' education and city size are positively associated with being in school as well as with living in a female-headed family. These results indicate that the impact of family structure reported in past studies is not due entirely to its association with race, parents' lower level of education, city size, or region of the country; and therefore I reject the hypothesis that parent absence has no independent effect on attainment, net of its association with background factors.

The Economic-Deprivation Hypothesis

To evaluate the hypothesis that current economic status and income-related factors account for the negative impact of growing up in a single-parent family, additional control variables were added to equation (1): family income (INC), family need (NEED), mother's and offspring's employment status (WOKM, WOKO), and welfare receipt during the past year (WEL). Estimates obtained from the new models are reported in columns 3 and 4 of Tables 2 and 3.

According to column 3, current economic status, net of family size, accounts for a major portion of the effect of parent absence among whites but for very little of the impact on blacks. For whites, the disadvantage associated with living in a one-parent household drops dramatically when income is added to the model. The income coefficient itself may be interpreted as indicating that a $10,000 change in income alters the probability of being in school by about 17% for whites and about 13% for blacks (see note 5). While $10,000 is a great deal of money, this amount is not far from the average economic loss associated with marital disruption (Hoffman, 1977).[6]

Column 4 reports changes in the coefficient of parent absence due to the inclusion of the employment indicators and the welfare measure. For whites, the employment indicators are unrelated to being in school, while the welfare coefficient is highly significant. The latter variable may be interpreted as indicating that being on welfare decreases the probability of being in school by about 36% for whites. For blacks, the picture is somewhat different. Offsprings' working has a positive effect on being in school while mothers' working and welfare are statistically insignificant.

To summarize briefly, the results reported in columms 3 and 4 indicate that the economic-deprivation hypothesis has a good deal of merit in accounting for the negative consequences of family structure among white offspring but is less convincing as an explanation for negative consequences among blacks. In addition, the data suggest that neither the absence of a mother, who must work outside the home, nor adolescent employment can explain why offspring in single-parent families are less likely to be in school than adolescents in two-parent households.[7]

The interpretation of the welfare coefficient is somewhat ambiguous. Although one might argue that it is measuring the effect of early socialization or stigma, it may also be viewed as picking up the additional nonlinear effect of being in the lowest income category. The latter interpretation could explain why the welfare coefficient is more significant for whites than for blacks. To test that interpretation, I included a dummy variable indicating whether respondent's family income was below the poverty line. While the coefficient for this variable was negative, it was not statistically significant and did not alter the welfare coefficient.

Father Absence and Family Stress

As noted above, the father-absence and family-stress theories provide an interesting comparison in that they predict opposite effects for similar variables. The father-absence theory suggests that all types of single-parent families should have negative consequences, all else being equal, that the effect of the absence of a father should increase over time, and that male offspring should be most affected by family breakup. Family stress theory, on the other hand, argues that different types of single-parent families have different consequences for offspring (depending on their proportion of newly disrupted households), and that effects decrease over time.

To test these hypotheses, three additional equations were estimated in which the dichotomous indicator for parent absence was replaced with more precise measures of family background. In the first equation the PA variable was replaced by a set of dummy variables indicating whether family head was never married (NEV), widowed (WID), divorced (DIV), or separated (SEP). In the second equation, the marital status variables were replaced by a set of interaction terms indicating time since marital disruption for formerly married mothers. The WID v YEAR and SEP/DIV v YEAR interaction terms represent the effect of each family type for each period of parent absence, net of the control variables and current family economic status. (The omitted category is two-parent households. Respondents living with never-married mothers were not included in the analysis of duration effects.) A final equation was used to estimate the

interaction between sex of offspring and parent absence, which allows us to examine the additional impact on school behavior of being female and living with a single parent.

The results of this portion of the analysis are presented in columns 5 through 7 of Tables 2 and 3. According to column 5 of Table 2, the impact of parent absence is not consistent across all categories of single-parent families, at least among whites. Offspring living with separated mothers are much worse off than those living with two parents, while offspring in other types of female-headed households do not differ significantly. For blacks, the effects are more consistent: they are negative for all types of single-parent families except never-married mothers.[8]

The absence of consistent effects in Table 2 indicates that for whites something other than a father's absence is determining whether or not offspring remain in school. Moreover, the concentration of negative effects in separated households suggests that recent marital disruption is an important determinant of negative consequences. The coefficients for the interactions between family type and length of parent absence (column 6) confirm this pattern and suggest that the effects are most negative during the first year after disruption, less negative but still significant during the second, third, and fourth years, and negative but insignificant after five years of father's absence. These findings lend considerable support to the notion that family stress rather than the absence of a father per se is responsible for the negative consequences associated with single-parent status for whites.[9]

For blacks the pattern is somewhat different. According to the coefficients in column 5, offspring living with widowed, divorced, and

separated mothers are less likely to be in school than offspring in two-parent households. While on the one hand these results appear to support the father-absence hypothesis, there is contradictory evidence as well. For example, the absence of a negative effect among offspring living with never-married mothers is unexpected inasmuch as these offspring are generally assumed to have had the least amount of contact with their fathers.[10] Moreover, for offspring living with divorced, separated, and widowed mothers, the effect of a father's absence decreases with time as it does among whites (column 6). The latter finding is consistent with the stress hypothesis up to a point. The persistence of negative effects among the five-year and one-year category, however, suggests that something other than stress is affecting offspring performance.

As a final step in the comparison of the stress and father-absence hypotheses, the interaction of parent's absence and sex was examined. The results of this test, presented in column 7, indicate that the impact of a parent's absence is similar for both sexes, which is inconsistent with the father-absence hypothesis, at least as it is formulated above.

7. FAMILY STRUCTURE AND GRADUATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL

The second part of the analysis focuses on the impact of family structure on high school graduation, observed in young adulthood. The motivation for looking at the new measure of schooling arises in part from the ambiguity of the adolescent indicator. For example, being out of school at seventeen does not necessarily indicate a failure to graduate from high school, while being in school is not perfectly correlated

with successful matriculation. The focus on adult attainment, therefore, represents an effort to validate the results in Tables 2 and 3 as well as to develop a model linking long-term attainment with adolescent behavior.

Results for the impact of family structure on graduation from high school are presented in Tables 4 and 5 below. As noted earlier, these estimates are based on a subsample of respondents who were seventeen at some point between 1968 and 1972 and who were 23 or older in 1978 (see Appendix). The same set of equations outlined above was used to test the hypotheses on the new measure of attainment.

In general, the results for whites, presented in Table 4, are quite similar to those in Table 2: the coefficient for parent absence remains positive even after background factors are taken into account; current family income continues to account for a major portion of the difference among offspring in one- and two-parent families; and separated households continue to account for nearly all of the parent-absence effect. The major difference in Table 4 appears in the years-since-disruption coefficients, which suggest that the impact of parent absence does <u>not</u> decrease with time. It should be noted that the duration variables have been recoded so that the YR1-4 variable represents one to four years of parent absence and the YR5+ variable represents five years or more of parent absence. Despite the recoding, the number of families in each category is quite small, and therefore it is difficult to interpret the five-year effect. The coefficients, however, do suggest that for divorced and separated households, the effects of a father's absence become <u>more</u> negative over time.[11]

For blacks, the differences between Tables 3 and 5 are more striking: the impact of parent absence on graduation from high school is weaker in

Table 4. The Effects of Father Absence on the Log Odds of Graduating from High School for Whites

	No Effect		Economic Deprivation		Absent Father and Family Stress		
Independent Variable	Parent Absence (1)	Background Factors (2)	Economic Status (3)	Employment and Welfare (4)	Family Type (5)	Type and Time since Marital Disruption (6)	Sex of Offspring (7)
Constant	2.13 (.29)	.56 (.42)	1.11 (.64)	.97 (.67)	1.16 (.65)	1.18 (.66)	1.65 (.16)
PA	-.58 (.28)*	-.60 (.31)*	-.44 (.34)	-.16 (.38)			-.005 (.39)
SEX							.71 (.30)*
PA × SEX							-.39 (.24)
NEV					---		
WID					.70 (.66)		
DIV					-.64 (.47)		
SEP					-1.77 (.64)*		
YR1-4 × WID						.02 (.80)	
YR5+ × WID						1.47 (1.14)	
YR1-4 × DIV/SEP						-1.05 (.46)*	
YR5+ × DIV/SEP						-1.53 (.57)*	
EDUC		.53 (.08)*	.39 (.09)*	.37 (.08)*	.38 (.09)*	.40 (.09)*	
CITY		-.03 (.06)	-.09 (.07)	-.09 (.07)	-.07 (.07)	-.07 (.07)	
NC		-.28 (.34)	-.27 (.34)	-.30 (.35)	-.26 (.35)	-.33 (.36)	
SOUTH		-.39 (.38)	-.41 (.39)	-.35 (.40)	-.39 (.39)	-.41 (.40)	
WEST		-.66 (.37)	-.65 (.38)	-.62 (.38)	-.64 (.39)	-.68 (.40)	
INC (in ten thousands)			.94 (.28)*	.82 (.28)*	.90 (.28)*	.92 (.28)*	
NEED (in ten thousands)			-2.44 (.66)*	-2.04 (.70)*	-2.33 (.67)*	-2.38 (.67)*	
WOKM				-.005 (.26)			
WOKO				.23 (.24)			
WEL				-1.24 (.50)*			
df	764	759	757	754	755	750	762
-2 log likelihood	574.4	512.9	489.4	482.3	479.9	474.3	323.7

*$p < .05$

Table 5. The Effects of Father Absence on the Log Odds of Graduating from High School for Blacks

	No Effect		Economic Deprivation		Absent Father and Family Stress		
Independent Variable	Parent Absence (1)	Background Factors (2)	Economic Status (3)	Employment and Welfare (4)	Family Type (5)	Type and Time since Marital Disruption (6)	Sex of Offspring (7)
Constant	1.51 (.20)	2.10 (.53)	2.97 (.65)	2.86 (.65)	1.74 (.67)	2.76 (.68)	.90 (.40)
PA	-.55 (.20)*	-.51 (.20)*	-.26 (.24)	-.63 (.27)*			-.45 (.62)
SEX							.50 (.60)
PA × SEX							-.09 (.39)
NEV					.85 (.94)		
WID					-.71 (.29)*		
DIV					-.38 (.40)		
SEP					.40 (.35)		
YR1-4 × WID						-.17 (.53)	
YR5+ × WID						-.83 (.31)*	
YR1-4 × DIV/SEP						-.45 (.35)	
YR5+ × DIV/SEP						-.31 (.33)	
EDUC		.11 (.07)	.02 (.07)	.02 (.07)	.02 (.08)	.03 (.08)	
CITY		-.11 (.06)*	-.19 (.07)*	-.19 (.07)*	-.24 (.07)*	-.24 (.07)*	
NC		-1.14 (.48)*	-1.46 (.49)*	-1.54 (.50)*	-1.57 (.50)*	-1.57 (.50)*	
SOUTH		-1.38 (.48)*	-1.57 (.49)*	-1.52 (.49)*	-1.58 (.49)*	-1.57 (.50)*	
WEST		-.82 (.65)	-.94 (.66)	-1.00 (.66)	-1.01 (.67)	-1.13 (.68)	
INC (in ten thousands)			.88 (.30)*	.89 (.31)*	1.05 (.32)*	1.05 (.32)*	
NEED (in ten thousands)			-2.10 (.05)*	-2.36 (.47)*	-2.15 (.46)*	-2.16 (.47)*	
WOKM				.34 (.23)			
WOKO				.28 (.24)			
WEL				.75 (.30)*			
df	540	535	533	530	530	524	538
-2 log likelihood	650.6	635.3	605.9	595.9	595.5	592.5	646.9

*$p < .05$

Table 5 and drops dramatically when income is added to the model; the effects of separated and divorced households, which were strong and negative in Table 3, are much weaker in Table 5; and finally, the coefficients for time since disruption do not show the pattern of negative association between recent disruption and attainment as they did in Table 3. Of particular note is the change in the welfare coefficient, which has a positive effect on attainment in Table 5. Taken at face value, the welfare coefficient suggests that the negative consequences of a parent's absence are restricted to those offspring whose families receive no public support. Since approximately 49% of female heads are welfare recipients, this suggests that the negative effects associated with parent absence accrue to only one-half of the single-parent population.

Despite the inconsistency across the two tables, the estimates for graduation from high school do not seriously alter my earlier conclusions regarding the theoretical explanations for parent absence with one exception: for blacks, the impact of economic status on attainment appears to be more substantial and more similar to that observed for whites. In addition, the results reported in Tables 4 and 5 suggest that being out of school at age seventeen is indicative of failure to graduate from high school.

8. SUMMARY

The present study was designed to address the question of whether the female-headed family is responsible for the growth of an "underclass" in America. While this label is used to describe a fairly heterogeneous group of people, the common denominator of the group is economic

dependence. Thus, to evaluate the notion that family structure is related to dependency, I focused on an indicator of offspring behavior that has been shown to be a strong predictor of welfare recipiency and persistent poverty: failure to graduate from high school (Bane and Ellwood, 1983). Four specific hypotheses designed to specify the nature of the family structure effect were tested: the "no-effects" hypothesis, the "economic-deprivation" hypothesis, the "family-stress" hypothesis, and the "father-absence" hypothesis.

The first set of results demonstrate that offspring who are living with single mothers at age seventeen are less likely to complete high school than offspring who are living in two-parent households. These findings are not an artifact of place of residence, parents' education, or race, and they argue against the notion that family effects observed in past research are due entirely to the failure to control for background factors associated with the formation or presence of single-parent families.

Second, the data add considerable weight to the notion that economic deprivation is an important source of the difference between one- and two-parent households and suggest that the disadvantages associated with high school dropouts (e.g., lack of employment, persistent poverty) could be significantly reduced if the incomes of single parents were increased and stabilized. With respect to employment behavior, there is no clear evidence that either the absence of the mother (because she is employed) or the concomitant assumption of adult responsibilities by the offspring lead to lower attainment in one-parent families. Welfare, on the other hand, is associated with schooling for both racial

groups. While being on welfare appears to have negative consequences for whites, the pattern is less consistent for blacks. Indeed, there is some indication that welfare enhances the long-term attainment of black offspring.

Finally, the data indicate that the impact of parent absence varies considerably according to type of single-parent family and, to a lesser extent, according to duration of parent absence. On the one hand, these findings lend support to the family-stress hypothesis insofar as they show that parent absence does not necessarily have negative consequences and that offspring from recently disrupted households are least likely to be in school. On the other hand, the persistence of negative effects for five years and longer among some groups suggests that something other than the event of marital disruption is triggering early departures from school.[12]

While the results are somewhat mixed with respect to the stress hypothesis, there is even less support for the father-absence argument. The lack of consistent effects across different types of single-parent households, and in particular the absence of negative effects among black offspring living with never-married mothers, are clearly contradictory to the predictions of this hypothesis. Moreover, there is very little indication that consequences grow more negative as time passes.

In sum, the major findings of this study show that offspring who live in female-headed families are less likely to complete high school than those living with two parents. On the one hand, these results are consistent with the "underclass" position insofar as it argues that economic deprivation in one generation leads to deprivation in future generations.

On the other hand, the results do not support the notion that the long-term absence of a male role model itself is the major factor underlying family structure effects. Consequently they contradict at least one aspect of the "underclass" position: that any deviation from the nuclear family model implies pathology and inappropriate socialization of children. In short, the findings suggest that policies aimed at equalizing the incomes of different family forms and at minimizing the stress that accompanies marital disruption may be quite successful in eliminating some of the intergenerational disadvantages currently being attributed to family structure and single mothers.

NOTES

[1]In their analysis of the dynamics of welfare, Bane and Ellwood show that recipients without a high school degree have an expected recipiency duration that is 1 1/2 times that of high school graduates. They state that "We find that there are identifiable groups of welfare recipients that are much more likely than others to have long spells of welfare receipt: non-whites, unmarried women who have children, and high school dropouts, particularly" (p. 6). It should also be noted that, for women, being a high school dropout is closely related to single motherhood, the other major indicator of long-term poverty and dependence.

[2]Many studies in the cognitive achievement literature are based on small nonrandom samples and do not attempt to control for socioeconomic factors. Other studies use school samples that exclude offspring who are not in school, or (in longitudinal surveys) who move out of the district. Since those most affected by parental absence may be those most likely to drop out of school or to move, this design would result in underestimating effects of parental absence, particularly when comparing adolescents.

[3]Recent research is not entirely consistent with this view inasmuch as there is increasing evidence of the importance of fathers in female development. The hypothesis tested here, however, reflects the view that was dominant in the early research on absent fathers, as expressed by Carlsmith (1964).

[4]In the present study I focus on one type of family stress: marital disruption. Needless to say, there are numerous other sources of stress which affect two-parent families as well as single-parent households.

[5]The following equations were used to transform logit estimates into probability effects. For dichotomous variables, the equation is $P = Bp(1-p)$, where p is the average probability for the sample. For whites, p = .889, for blacks, p = .826. For continuous variables, the equation is $P = p_2 - p_1$, where $p_2 = \exp(B_1 + B_2\bar{z})/1 + \exp(B_1 + B_2\bar{z})$ and $p_1 = \exp(B_2\bar{z})/1 + \exp(B_2\bar{z})$. $\bar{z}$ represents the control variables.

[6]Hoffman found that white women who divorced or separated between 1968 and 1974 experienced a $7789 loss in spouses' earnings while black women experienced a $6468 loss. The net income loss for both groups was smaller because of increases in women's labor income, transfer income, and income of others in the household.

[7]In interpreting the income effect, I have treated income as an endogenous variable rather than a background factor. Since low income is related to the formation of female-headed households, one could argue that the income effect is simply picking up background characteristics of the mother, and therefore should be taken as evidence in support of the "no-effects" hypothesis. There are several reasons for treating income differently and for believing that it is measuring something other than characteristics associated with selection into family type. First, we have good evidence that women experience major income losses as a result of marital disruption (see Hoffman, 1977), and so we know that at least some of the low income we observe at seventeen reflects the consequence rather than the cause of family dissolution. Second, separate analyses of different family types show that the income effect is much stronger among divorced families and among widows (for whites). If income were simply picking up characteristics associated with predisruption poverty, we would expect it to be stronger among the separated households which,

on average, come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. (According to this same logic, we would expect to find stronger income effects among blacks than these data indicate.) In any case, even if income is treated as exogenous, the "no-effects" hypothesis is not totally supported: negative effects persist among white offspring living with separated mothers and among nearly all categories of blacks even after income is included in the model.

[8]Sandra Hoffert (private communication) has pointed out that the coding of marital status for blacks in the PSID is not very reliable, which could explain the absence of a clear pattern of effects among different marital status groups. The large number of widowed and separated mothers suggests that perhaps some never-married mothers are being included in these categories.

[9]It should be noted that the duration effect is confounded with age of offspring; i.e., all those with a father absent for one year are 17, all those with a father absent for two years are 16, etc. With respect to the father-absence hypothesis, the confounding does not present a problem. The argument states that the longer the absence and the younger the child, the greater the effects will be. Since there is no evidence of a positive duration effect, we can be relatively sure that neither young age nor long duration are critical factors in predicting high school dropouts, at least among whites. With regard to the stress hypothesis, the effects associated with recency of disruption are more ambiguous and may also be interpreted as an age effect; that is, if the disruption occurs at a crucial time in young adulthood (e.g., age 17), the probability of dropping out of school is much higher.

[10]It should be noted that the never-married mothers in this sample do not fit the stereotype of the unwed teenage mother. Since all respondents are seventeen, their mothers must be at least over thirty. Thus, the never-married here are women who have survived seventeen years of single parenthood without every marrying. Clearly, this is a special group which probably has a well-developed support network.

[11]The change in the coefficients for family effects could result from several sources. First, the difference may show that being in school at seventeen is not a good indicator of whether offspring graduate from high school. For example, it may be that offspring from recently disrupted households are more likely to graduate early or to return to school at some point. Second, the differences between Tables 1 and 3 could also result from differences in the two samples of offspring. Table 1 is based on respondents who were seventeen between 1968 and 1978, while Table 3 is restricted to offspring who were seventeen between 1968 and 1973. Different estimates, therefore, could result either from changes in behavior across cohorts or from differential attrition from the panel study.

[12]The concentration of negative effects in separated households and the persistence of effects beyond five years suggest that separated households are uniquely problematic for white offspring. Two explanations come to mind. The first involves a reformulation of the stress hypothesis tested above to include "unresolved" disruptions as well as recent disruptions. The second argues for a selection effect, namely, that long-term separation represents a category of female heads who have not gone to the trouble or expense of obtaining a legal divorce. According to the latter view, characteristics associated with a low probability of remarriage in mothers are also related to low attainment in offspring.

APPENDIX

The offspring sample is representative of noninstitutionalized individuals aged 17 to 27 in 1978. To be included in the present study, respondents must have been children of household heads at 17. Weights provided by the PSID staff were used to adjust for nonresponse and for attrition between 1968 and 1978.

For each individual in the 1978 sample, the PSID survey provides 10 years of past information on family background and educational behavior. Information on the age and years for which information is available is reported in the diagram below.

	Survey Year										
	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78
Age of Respondent	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17

To examine the effect of parent absence on adolescents, family status information and educational behavior were both observed at age 17. As can be seen by the diagram, the analysis is based on observations of 17-year-olds taken over an eleven-year period (1968-1978). Educational behavior was based on educational status (in school or out of school at age 17). Offsprings' family status was based on two indicators: parents' marital status at 17 and length of time since parents' marital disruption. The latter indicator was constructed from a variable asked in 1968 of nonmarried heads (how long since marital disruption?) and from information on changes in marital status of the family head subsequent to 1968 and prior to respondent's becoming age 17. Unfortunately, in the PSID, information is not available on the marital history of married family heads prior to 1968, and therefore it is impossible to construct complete family histories for the offspring in my sample. (For offspring who were 17 in 1968 in two-parent families, there is no background information; for offspring who were 17 in 1978, there are 10 years of background data.) Because of this design limitation, I have focused specifically on family status at age 17 and have treated reconstituted families as continuously married households.

To examine the effect of parent absence on completed education, a subsample of respondents aged 23 to 27 in 1978 were used to observe completed education at age 23. As the diagram shows, less than half of the respondents in the original sample had reached age 23 by 1978 and thus the analysis of long-term attainment is based on a smaller sample.

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