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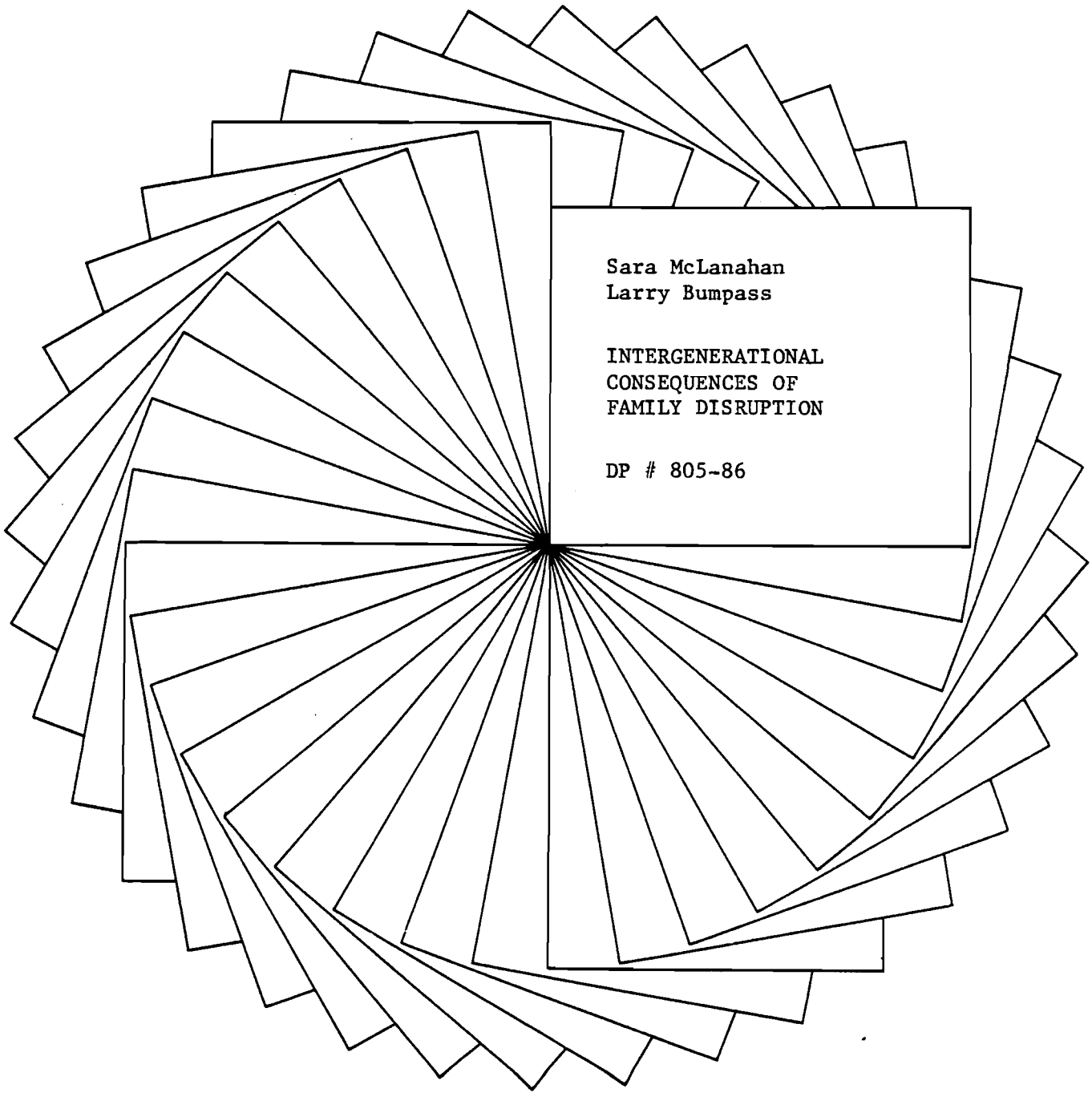

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INTERGENERATIONAL
CONSEQUENCES OF
FAMILY DISRUPTION

DP # 805-86

Institute for Research on Poverty
Discussion Paper No. 805-86

# Intergenerational Consequences of Family Disruption

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May 1986

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America in San Francisco, April 1986. This research was supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, grant #HD 19375-01. Computations were performed on the VAX 11/780 at the University of Wisconsin Center for Demography and Ecology, supported by NICHD grant #HD 05876-11. Any opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and not of the Institute.

## Abstract

This paper examines the effects of family disruption on future family formation behavior, including early marriage, early or premarital births, marital disruption, and remarriage. The results indicate that daughters from one-parent families are more likely to experience all of these events,with two exceptions: family disruption has no effect on daughters' remarriage among either whites or blacks, and it is not related to early marriage for blacks.

Several explanations for intergenerational consequences are tested, including the resource-deprivation hypothesis, the role-model hypothesis and the stress hypothesis. The results are most consistent with the role-model explanation, which argues that daughters develop their ideas of acceptable behavior by observing parents' behavior. The data are taken from the National Survey of Family Growth (1982). The analyses are based on proportional hazard models.

## INTRODUCTION

Family life experience has been dramatically transformed by increasing marital disruption and nonmarital fertility. Research has only recently begun to explore the implications of these trends for the lives of the children involved, but the number of children so affected underscores the importance of these issues. Over half of those recently born in the United States are likely to spend some portion of their childhood in a female-headed family. Those who do so will be likely to spend 5 or more years in this family status (Bumpass, 1984); over half will be poor, and most of those poor will be dependent on public welfare (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983, Table 15). Given the numbers involved and the economic hardship to which these families are exposed, it is essential that we understand what the long-term consequences of this experience will be for future generations of Americans.

Until recently, the prevailing wisdom was that family disruption was likely to have few, and relatively small, negative effects on the future lives of offspring (See Ross and Sawhill, 1975, for a review of early studies). During the past few years, however, new studies have appeared which suggest that negative effects have become stronger and that, for particular subgroups, the female-headed family is an important link in the intergenerational transmission of poverty and dependency. We now know that children of single mothers are less likely to complete high school and more likely to have low earnings and employment instability as adults (McLanahan, 1985a; Krein and Beller, 1985; Hill, Augustiniak, and Ponza, 1985). Similarly, there is growing evidence that living in a single-parent family is related to the reproduction of female-headed

families through both pre-marital fertility and marital disruption (Hogan, 1984; Hogan and Kitagawa, 1985; McLanahan, 1985b).

This paper is part of a larger project that is designed to examine the effects of family instability on the adult lives of offspring and, in particular, on early life-course transitions, such as dropping out of school, entering (or not entering) the labor force, and starting a new family. These transitions have been shown to have important implications for later economic well-being, and it is here that we expect to find the strongest impact of parents' marital instability on offspring's behavior. In previous work we reported on the relationship between family structure on the one hand and high school incompletion and future female family headship and dependency on the other (McLanahan, 1985a, 1985b). Here, we focus on the family formation process in more detail and ask whether children who grow up in single-parent families are more likely to have early marriages and/or early or premarital births, whether they are more likely to experience the disruption of their own marriage, and whether they are less likely to remarry after such a disruption.

The analyses are based on the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth, a representative survey of 7000 women between the ages of 15 and 44. The data provide detailed information on the marital and fertility histories of the women and more information than other sources on the marital histories of their families of origin.

## PAST STUDIES

Past research on family structure and intergenerational marital instability has produced mixed findings, but studies based on later data are increasingly reporting a positive link between the childhood and adult experience. Studies carried out during the sixties and early seventies generally found either no effect of living with a single parent or very weak effects. For example, in their analysis of the 1962 data from the Occupational Changes in a Generation Study, Duncan and Duncan (1969) found no relationship between parents' marital disruption and offspring's current marital status, whereas Bumpass and Sweet (1972) found a weak but positive effect on the probability of having separated or divorced after the first marriage. Heiss (1972) also reported a positive relationship for urban blacks living in the North, but only among offspring from middle-class families. More recently, analyses by Glenn and Supancic (1984) have reported a significant effect from the General Social Survey.

Evidence with respect to early marriage and fertility are also mixed. Michael and Tuma (1985), for example, used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth sample to examine early transitions to marriage and parenthood among whites, Hispanics, and blacks. Their estimates indicate that living with one parent has no effect on marriage rates for young males and females and only limited effects on rates of birth. Black females from one-parent families are more likely to have an early birth, but white and Hispanic youth are not. They do find negative consequences, however, for children who live apart from both parents or with a stepparent.

The strongest evidence in support of intergenerational female headship comes from the work of Hogan and Kitagawa (1985) and Hogan (1984), who found that adolescent girls from single-parent families were more likely to be sexually active and to have a premarital birth than adolescents from two-parent households. McLanahan (1985b) also found a strong link between female headship in one generation and female headship in the next, although Hill and her colleagues (1985) found no significant effect, using the same data.

Some of the inconsistencies among these various studies probably result from differences in the data, measures, and populations represented. For example, the OCG data used by the Duncans is restricted to adult men and asks whether respondents are currently married or single. Thus the outcome is the joint outcome of patterns of marriage, marital disruption, and remarriage and does not clearly address differential marital instability. Differences between the Hill et al. and McLanahan studies may also be due to differences in the outcome variable. In the former study, the indicator for female headship among offspring is whether respondent was a female head between the ages of 25 to 27. In the latter, it is the transition rate to female headship for daughters between ages 16 and 24.

A major limitation of prior data sources for the exploration of theories linking broken-family experience in childhood to subsequent adult experience has been the lack of detail on parents' marital history and the process by which children of single parents end up as single parents themselves. In most data sets, information on the family of origin is limited to a single question: whether respondent was living with

both natural parents at a particular age. Thus we cannot identify the type of single parenthood--whether it was due to divorce, widowhood, or a nonmarital birth--the age at which it occurred, or whether it was followed by a remarriage. This information is very important in testing hypotheses about the causes of intergenerational relationships, as we shall outline below. While most of our results with respect to these distinctions are negative, this finding is important information. We are also able to go beyond previous studies by examining a broad range of relevant family formation behaviors to see whether effects are consistent across a range of behaviors, or whether one particular behavior, such as early marriage, is responsible for subsequent outcomes, such as marital disruption.

## THEORIES OF INTERGENERATIONAL INSTABILITY

There are three major explanations for why offspring from female-headed families might be more likely to become single parents themselves. The first attributes effects to resource deprivation. According to this view, single parents have less time and less money to invest in their children. This may affect both the offspring's characteristics as young adults and how they view the parental household. Some argue that adolescents with limited opportunities see marriage and/or parenthood as a means of escaping hardship and establishing an adult identity. In a similar vein, others stress the lack of parental supervision and point out that adolescents, and in particular adolescent girls, in such families are more likely to become sexually active and to have a premarital birth. (See Krein and Beller, 1985, and Hogan and Kitagawa, 1985, for more complete discussions of this explanation.)

A second explanation stresses the importance of role models in the socialization of children. The traditional version of this argument stated that early father absence led to social pathologies in offspring which undermined marital adjustment and increased instability in adulthood. More recently, researchers have argued that the critical factor is the role model provided by the single mother who is making it on her own. According to this view, having a mother who was a single parent makes single parenthood a more acceptable alternative for young women who find themselves in an unhappy marriage or with a premarital pregnancy.

A third explanation comes from stress theory, which points to the event of family disruption rather than the postdisruption experience as the primary determinant of negative outcomes. With respect to offspring's family formation behavior, stress theory suggests that family disruptions occurring in adolescence may precipitate premature transitions, which in turn have long-term consequences. For example, in response to parents' divorce, or remarriage, offspring may drop out of school, become sexually active without careful contraception, or marry early. Stress theory is different from the first two explanations in that it assumes that the stress associated with parents' marital instability dissipates over time. Thus, early disruptions may be less harmful than disruptions occurring in adolescence because the latter coincide with critical life course transitions.

The explanations outlined above can be used to generate a number of hypotheses about how parents' marital behavior may affect daughters' behavior. These hypotheses allow us to compare the relative merit of different explanations of intergenerational effects. For example, the

traditional version of developmental theory suggests that effects will be most negative when exposure to single parenthood occurs at a young age, whereas stress theory suggests that disruptions occurring in adolescence are worse because they occur at a time when young women are at risk for becoming pregnant, dropping out of school, or leaving home. The resource-deprivation theory also argues that parental absence is worse for adolescents because of the higher risks of pregnancy at this time.

The explanations also disagree with respect to whether the sex of the single parent or the cause of the disruption makes a difference. The role-model theory suggests that father absence should have a stronger effect on daughters because it creates the model of an independent woman. The resource-deprivation model makes a similar prediction for a very different reason. Given the difference in the earnings capacity of single fathers and single mothers, families headed by single women should experience more economic hardship than families headed by single men. Stress theory, on the other hand, makes no distinction with respect to the sex of the family head. It does, however, suggest that remarriage of the parent may be just as negative as marital disruption, given that it usually involves a considerable amount of family reorganization.

## METHODS

The study of time-dependent events with cross-sectional samples requires some strategy for dealing with the truncation of experience at the time of interview. For example, a birth or marriage before age 20 will occur to some of the younger respondents who at the time of the survey were still childless or single. Similarly, many of the marriages

that are intact at interview will eventually break up. Analysis that ignores this truncation may well be biased. Techniques informed by the logic of life tables have become increasingly common for this purpose. The underlying concept of such techniques is to estimate duration-specific risks on the basis of experience at each duration represented in the sample data. We use proportional hazard models to provide multivariate estimates of the independent effect of our variables on the rate of each transition of interest. As the label implies, the procedure estimates the proportion by which rates at all durations are altered upward or downward by unit change (or contrasting categories) in a predictor variable. The models are estimated using Cox's (1972, 1975) partial likelihood method, which allows the time dependence of the hazard to be determined by the data.

We have also carried out these analyses using an alternative procedure that relaxes the proportional assumption: logit analyses were run predicting cumulative transitions by a given age, or within 5 years of risk depending on the dependent variable, and limited to persons exposed to the risk in question until that age, or for at least 5 years, as appropriate. With one exception that will be discussed later, we obtained the same results with this alternative. We present the proportional hazard results here because they allowed use of more of the data by not requiring sample limitations to avoid truncation biases.

Table 1 reports the means (proportions) for the family background variables and the family formation events. The upper portion of the table reports the distribution of respondents by family type, level of parents' education, whether respondent is Catholic, and region of the

country. The lower portion reports the proportion of respondents who had experienced each family formation event by the time of the survey.

* * * * *

Table 1 about here.

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## FAMILY DISRUPTION AND DAUGHTERS' FAMILY BEHAVIOR

We begin the analysis by estimating a set of equations that treat respondents' family behavior as a function of parents' behavior and control variables. Outcome variables include teenage marriage, teenage birth, premarital birth, marital disruption, and remarriage. Estimates for the first three outcomes are based on the total sample, estimates of divorce rates are based on a subsample of respondents who had married by the time of the interview, and estimates for remarriage are based on a subset of respondents whose first marriages had ended by the time of the survey. Table 2 reports the results for the five different indicators of family formation behavior. To facilitate interpretation, we focus on an estimate of the relative risk of the events in question in each category of a predictor variable relative to the omitted category of that variable. The partial likelihood estimates of the log of the rates and their standard errors are reported in the appendix tables.

* * * * *

Table 2 about here.

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The first model in Table 2 is based on a bivariate equation which compares respondents who were living with both natural parents at age 14

Table 1

Proportions for Background Variables and Family Formation Events, by Race

| | Whites | Blacks |
|---|---|---|
| **Background Variables** | | |
| Family structure | | |
| Two parent | .78 | .57 |
| Widowed | .06 | .11 |
| Other parent absent | .16 | .32 |
| Parents' educational attainment | | |
| 12 years (mom) | .45 | .32 |
| 12+ years (dad) | .23 | .15 |
| 12 years | .37 | .29 |
| 12+ years | .29 | .14 |
| Catholic | .34 | .08 |
| Region of country | | |
| North East | .21 | .16 |
| North Central | .27 | .17 |
| South | .34 | .58 |
| West | .18 | .09 |
| **Family Formation Events**[a] | | |
| Teenage marriage | .39 | .30 |
| Teenage birth | .20 | .45 |
| Premarital birth | .06 | .44 |
| Marital disruption* | .16 | .25 |
| Remarriage* | .58 | .23 |
| N | (4537) | (3170) |

*Based on population at risk for event
[a]Proportion experiencing event by time of survey.

Table 2

Percentage Difference in the Risk Associated with Parent Absence for the Experience of Teenage Marriage, Teenage Birth, Premarital Birth, Marital Disruption, and Remarriage[a]

| | Teenage Marriage % | Teenage Birth % | Premarital Birth % | Marital Disruption % | Remarriage % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WHITES | | | | | |
| Zero-Order Model | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | 30* | 75* | 175* | 40* | -19 |
| Other parent absence[b] | 53* | 111* | 164* | 92* | -6 |
| Zero-Order plus Background[c] | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | 17 | 57* | 161* | 35* | -18 |
| Other parent absence | 43* | 98* | 160* | 87* | -7 |
| Zero-Order plus Background[d] and Education | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | 5 | 34* | 124* | 28+ | -18 |
| Other parent absence | 28* | 58* | 118* | 77* | -8 |
| N | (4537) | (4537) | (4537) | (2812) | (778) |
| BLACKS | | | | | |
| Zero-Order Model | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | -10 | 21* | 34* | 21 | -14 |
| Other parent absence[b] | 6 | 50* | 60* | 44* | 9 |
| Zero-Order plus Background[c] | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | -12 | 18+ | 31* | 22 | -4 |
| Other parent absence | 6 | 51* | 61* | 36* | 13 |
| Zero-Order plus Background[d] and Education | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | -15 | 12 | 28 | 21 | 00 |
| Other parent absence | -1 | 36* | 52* | 32* | 22 |
| N | (3152) | (3152) | (3152) | (1716) | (697) |

[a]Estimated from proportional hazard model. See Appendix Table A1 for coefficients and standard errors.
[b]Includes parents never married, divorced, or separated, and respondents living with neither parent.
[c]Background variables are region of county, parent's education, religion.
[d]Background variables are same as above plus respondent's high school completion.
*Significant at .05 level or below.
+ Significant at .10 level.

with those who were living with one or neither parent. The one/neither category includes those whose parents divorced, separated, or were never married. We distinguish between respondents who lived with a widowed parent and those who lived in other types of one-parent families, because we expect weaker effects for the former than the latter. Families headed by widows have substantially higher incomes and probably lower ongoing conflict and stress than other types of single-parent families. Previous studies have found fewer negative consequences for widowed families than for separated and divorced families (Mclanahan, 1985a, 1985b).

The second model is based on an equation that controls for parent's education, religion, and the respondent's region of current residence. Comparison of models 1 and 2 allows us to determine whether or not the observed relationship between parent's marital behavior and offspring's behavior is due to differences in the socioeconomic status and other background factors of disrupted families versus those that remain intact. Past research has generally shown that SES accounts for a good deal of the difference between one- and two-parent families with respect to high school completion. McLanahan (1985b), however, found in her analysis based on the PSID data, that differences in income did not account for intergenerational female headship. The National Survey of Family Growth does not have a measure of family income, and so our indicator of socio-economic status is parent's education. Clearly, this measure does not fully capture income differences between one- and two-parent families.

The third model contains the same set of variables as model 2 as well as information on whether respondent completed high school. In estimating the equation for offspring's marital disruption, we included variables for high school completion and age at marriage (model 3). This

set of estimates gives us some idea of the intervening processes between family disruption and offspring's behavior and allows us to determine if higher divorce rates are a result of early marriage and/or failure to complete high school.

## Results

The most striking aspect of Table 2 in regard to whites is the size and consistency of the effects across categories of behavior. With the exception of remarriage, family disruption is significantly related to all of the outcome variables. Reading across row 2 we find that respondents who spent time in a single-parent family because of marital disruption or because the parent was not married are 53 percent more likely to have a teenage marriage, 111 percent more likely to have a teenage birth, 164 percent more likely to have a premarital birth, and 92 percent more likely to experience a marital disruption than are daughters who grew up in two-parent families. The results for widowed families are somewhat surprising. Although in most cases the effects are weaker than those for other types of single parenthood, they are clearly negative and significantly different from those of two-parent families. In the case of premarital births, there is virtually no difference between the two measures of single parenthood.

Equally surprising is the fact that these effects for whites do not change very much when we control for family background variables. Although all of the coefficients are somewhat smaller in model 2, the changes are slight, and the effects remain statistically significant. One exception is the effect of widowhood on early marriage, which is reduced by 50 percent and becomes insignificant when the background

variables are included in the equation. As noted above, past studies have generally found that background variables explained a good deal of the difference between offspring from one- and two-parent families. These studies, however, have looked primarily at socioeconomic outcomes, such as high school graduation and earnings, rather than family formation behavior. Based on our findings here, and those reported by Hogan and Kitagawa (1985) and McLanahan (1985b), it appears that that the direct effect of family structure may be stronger for family outcomes than for other types of behavior.

Including the respondent's own educational attainment has the greatest consequence for the estimated effect of family structure on the likelihood of a teenage birth: it reduces this effect by about 40 percent for whites. The effect nonetheless remains strong and significant. The causal linkage of early fertility and education is much debated (Marini, 1984; Rindfuss, Bumpass, and St. John, 1980; Haggstrom et al., 1981; Card, 1981; Hofferth and Moore, 1979). But under the assumption that most of the relationship results from the effect of education on fertility, the results suggest that an important part of the effect of parental background is mediated through the effect of parental background on education. Much smaller indirect effects through education are found for the other outcome variables.

The pattern of effects for black women is very similar to that of whites, with one exception: there are no effects on early marriage. The size of the effects on births and divorce are also substantially smaller for blacks than for whites. Controlling for background factors, both alone and with respondent's education, has almost no significant effect on the coefficients for parent absence among blacks.

The lack of any effect of parental absence on the prospects of respondent's remarriage is the one instance in which the results of these proportional hazard models departed from our logit analyses of cumulative transitions in five years. While we would expect the effects of parental background to decline with time, it is not implausible that altered attitudes about marriage and family would reduce the likelihood of remarriage, especially since the parents' marital breakup has been repeated in the respondent's own marriage. We did find that likelihood of remarriage within five years of separation was significantly lower among those who had experienced parental marital disruption. We are exploring the difference in this finding in terms of both assumptions and population coverage, but will not consider this variable further for the remainder of the present paper.

## THE EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF SINGLE PARENTHOOD

Having established that single parenthood has important consequences for the family behavior of daughters, we next examined variation among different types of single parenthood to see if certain experiences were more negative than others, in terms of effects on future family transitions. In this set of analyses, we restricted our sample to respondents who were not living with both natural parents or either parent at age 14.

### Sex of the Single Parent

The first question we address is whether there are significant differences among offspring who lived with single fathers or with neither parent versus those who lived with single mothers. As noted above, one

version of developmental theory stresses the importance of the father in the early psychosexual development of children. During the fifties and sixties, clinical researchers argued that father absence undermined the sex-role development of sons and daughters, which in turn impaired marital adjustment. Sex of the single parent also provides a reasonable proxy for family income and therefore allows us to test for the importance of economic hardship in accounting for intergenerational effects. Children who live with single fathers rather than single mothers are much less likely to be poor and/or dependent on public welfare, and therefore we would expect effects to be less negative.

We should note that single fathers are relatively rare because social norms and expectations about who should raise the children in the event of a marital disruption have generally favored the mother. Consequently, single-father families are a highly selective group which may have other kinds of problems, e.g., families in which mothers have been been declared "unsuitable" or have abandoned their children. In this case we would expect respondents from single-father families to experience worse conditions than those from single-mother families. The same argument can be made for children who lived with neither parent.

The top panel in Table 3 reports the effects of parent absence according to sex of parent or whether respondent lived with neither parent. The most important finding is the lack of any difference between those who lived with their mothers and those who lived with their fathers. We find that those who lived with neither parent are more likely to have a teenage marriage and are less likely to divorce. The former may reflect a greater urgency to leave teenage living arrangements

Table 3

Percentage Difference in Risk Associated with Parent Absence for Subsequent Family Behavior, by Sex of Single Parent or Absence of Parents, Age at Disruption, and Whether a Remarriage Occurred

| | Teenage Marriage % | Teenage Birth % | Premarital Birth % | Marital Disruption % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| WHITES | | | | |
| Parent | | | | |
| Father only | 5 | -7 | -6 | 9 |
| Neither parent | 52* | 17 | 6 | -34+ |
| Age at Disruption | | | | |
| 5-9 | 3 | 1 | -29 | -18 |
| 10-16 | 2 | 10 | 7 | 13 |
| Lived with Stepparent | 6 | 11 | 8 | 20 |
| N | (995) | (995) | (995) | (601) |
| BLACKS | | | | |
| Parent | | | | |
| Father only | .46+ | 29 | 23 | -21 |
| Neither parent | .27+ | -5 | -11 | -7 |
| Age at Disruption | | | | |
| 5-9 | 8 | -11 | -17+ | 5 |
| 10-16 | 10 | 12 | 9 | -12 |
| Lived with Stepparent | 6 | -16 | -19 | -15 |
| N | (1368) | (1368) | (1368) | (677) |

in which both parents are absent. The lower divorce rate of this group is difficult to interpret.

We similarly find no differences among blacks who lived with single mothers or fathers in terms of the effects on early births, premarital births, or marital disruption. On the other hand, we do find that those who did not live with their mother are significantly more likely to marry early than those who did. When we recall that in Table 2 we found no difference between those in intact families and others with respect to early marriage, these data suggest that living with the mother (whether in an intact family or not) reduces the likelihood of early marriage compared to not living with her. One mechanism involved might be the potential role of these mothers in assisting with the care of nonmarital births.

Timing of Parents' Marital Breakup

The next question addressed is whether the age at which a family disruption occurred makes a difference. As noted earlier, developmental theory has generally argued that younger children are more negatively affected by parents' marital disruption than older children, both because the young have a less developed external support system and because early experiences are presumably more critical in personality development than later experiences. Conversely, the stress hypothesis and the supervision hypothesis argue that parent absence during adolescence is more critical because it coincides with the timing of critical decisions regarding life course transitions--leaving school, becoming sexually active, etc. Some have suggested that early absences are worse because they mean that children will be exposed to poverty for a longer period of time, but this

argument is really about the duration of parent absence rather than about the timing of exposure. Since many single parents remarry, and since remarriage is more common among women with young children, age at disruption is not a good measure of length of exposure, except in families where the disruption occurs very late.

The developmental hypothesis has received some support in studies of educational attainment (Krein and Beller, 1986), but it has not been tested with respect to family formation behavior. The NSFG survey is somewhat unusual in that it provides information on the age at which respondents first lived apart from either parent. As far as we know, no other large retrospective study has provided this much detail on the timing of family disruption. Respondents who were born to never-married mothers are coded as 0 and are grouped with those whose families broke up prior to age 5.

The second set of estimates in Table 3 reports the effects of age on the four family behaviors. As was the case with the sex of family head, age at disruption appears to have no significant effect on any of the outcomes. There is some hint at curvilinearity in the results that show the least effects in the 5-9 age range for premarital births and marital disruptions among whites and for teenage and premarital births among blacks. However, the negative coefficient for this age at disruption is significant only for premarital births among blacks. Such curvilinearity would be expected if both the developmental theories and the stress theories were accurate. Though the differences are generally small and not significant, disruptions at later ages are associated with higher transition rates than those before age 5 in all cases but one.

Does Remarriage Make a Difference?

The final question addressed is whether parental remarriage alters the negative consequences associated with single parenthood. Again, several hypotheses can be derived from the various explanations for why family disruption may have negative consequences for offspring. The resource-deprivation argument, for example, indicates that remarriage should have a positive effect because the presence of a stepparent means more time and more money for the household. If economic hardship and lack of supervision are what push adolescents into early sexual activity or early marriages, we would expect that those whose parent remarried would be better off than those whose parent remained single. Conversely, the stress explanation argues that remarriage represents a second disruption which may be just as negative as the initial family breakup.

The third set of estimates in Table 3 reports the effect of parental remarriage (whether the respondent lived with a stepparent at age 14) on the four outcome variables. As before, the remarriage variable is not significantly related to any of the family formation indicators for either blacks or whites. These findings could be due to the fact that the hypothesized effects are cancelling one another out--remarried families may be better off financially and may provide more supervision but they also have undergone two disruptions rather than one--or to the fact that remarriage is not critical in determining family behavior.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results presented above provide strong support for the notion that women who grow up in single-parent families are more likely to marry and bear children early, to have births before marriage, and to have their own marriage break up. They also suggest that intergenerational consequences are not due entirely to differences in family socioeconomic status. The latter finding should be viewed with some caution in that we were not able to control directly for family income. On the other hand, since there were no differences by sex of the single parent, and since parental remarriage was not an important factor in determining the offspring's behavior, we feel fairly confident that something other than income differences is operating here.

We interpret our findings as being most consistent with the role-model explanation, which argues that children develop their own ideas of what is acceptable and "workable" behavior from what they observe in their parents. We reach this conclusion for several reasons. First, the process of elimination leads us in the direction of rejecting each of the other explanations. Age at disruption does not appear to be an important factor, which is inconsistent with the early development explanation. Similarly, the fact that parents' marital disruptions when the offspring are adolescents have no worse effects than earlier disruptions, and the fact that family effects persist beyond initial marriage and fertility behavior--they also affect divorce--suggest that something other than a "push" to leave a stressful household is affecting intergenerational behavior. Finally, the findings are inconsistent with the resource-deprivation argument, for the reasons noted above.

Second, the role-model explanation is based on very powerful theory. It makes a good deal of sense that daughters who live with single parents would be more likely to become single mothers themselves, since parents' behavior makes this appear both a more acceptable and more viable alternative. This would account for higher rates of premarital births among young women whose future occupational alternatives appear bleak, as well as higher rates of divorce among women who find themselves in unhappy or abusive marriages. We note the similarity of effects for blacks and whites. With the exception of early marriage, which has become increasingly rare among blacks, the racial patterns are very similar.

Whatever the causal linkages, the results of this analysis suggest a dynamic in current family changes that may well further weaken the prevalence of simple nuclear families. More than half of today's children will have had family experiences that are likely to have negative effects on their subsequent marital and fertility life course.

Appendix Table A1

Effects[a] of Parent Absence on Early Marriage, Early Parenthood, Premarital Birth, Marital Disruption, and Remarriage (coefficients; and standard errors in parentheses

| | Teenage Marriage | Teenage Birth | Premarital Birth | Marital Disruption | Remarriage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WHITES | | | | | |
| Zero-Order Model | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | .25(.10) | .56(.13) | 1.01(.20) | .34(.13) | -.21(.17) |
| Other parent absence[b] | .43(.07) | .75(.08) | .97(.15) | .65(.09) | -.06(.12) |
| Zero-Order plus Background | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | .16(.10) | .45(.13) | .96(.20) | .30(.13) | -.20(.17) |
| Other parent absence | .36(.07) | .68(.09) | .96(.15) | .63(.09) | -.07(.12) |
| Zero-Order plus Background | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | .05(.10) | .29(.13) | .81(.20) | .23(.13) | -.21(.17) |
| Other parent absence | .25(.07) | .46(.09) | .78(.15) | .51(.09) | -.08(.12) |
| BLACKS | | | | | |
| Zero-Order Model | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | -.10(.12) | .19(.09) | .30(.09) | .19(.12) | -.15(.23) |
| Other parent absence[b] | .06(.08) | .41(.06) | .47(.06) | .36(.08) | .09(.14) |
| Zero-Order plus Background | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | -.13(.12) | .17(.09) | .27(.09) | .20(.12) | -.04(.23) |
| Other parent absence | .05(.08) | .41(.06) | .48(.06) | .31(.08) | .12(.14) |
| Zero-Order plus Background | | | | | |
| Widowed parent | -.17(.12) | .11(.09) | .25(.09) | .19(.12) | .002(.23) |
| Other parent absence | .01(.08) | .31(.06) | .42(.06) | .28(.09) | .20(.14) |

[a]Based on proportional hazard model.

[b]Includes respondent who lived with a divorced, separated, or never-married parent or with neither parent.

Appendix Table A2

Effects[a] of Parent Absence on Family Behavior Broken Down by Sex of Single Parent, Age at Disruption and Whether a Remarriage Occurred (coefficients; standard errors in parentheses)

| | Teenage Marriage | Teenage Birth | Premarital Birth | Marital Disruption |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| WHITES | | | | |
| Sex of Parent | | | | |
| Father-only | .05(.16) | .07(.20) | -.06(.33) | .09(.21) |
| Neither parent | .42(.15) | .16(.18) | .05(.31) | -.41(.23) |
| Age at Disruption | | | | |
| 5-9 | .03(.13) | .01(.16) | -.34(.27) | -.20(.17) |
| 10-16 | .02(.13) | .10(.15) | .07(.24) | .12(.16) |
| Lived with Stepparent | .06(.11) | .10(.13) | .08(.22) | .18(.14) |
| N | (995) | (995) | (995) | (606) |
| BLACKS | | | | |
| Sex of Parent | | | | |
| Father-only | .38(.21) | .25(.16) | .21(.16) | -.24(.23) |
| Neither parent | .24(.13) | -.05(.10) | -.12(.10) | -.08(.13) |
| Age at Disruption | | | | |
| 5-9 | .08(.13) | -.11(.10) | -.19(.10) | .05(.13) |
| 10-16 | .10(.15) | .11(.11) | .08(.11) | -.12(.16) |
| Lived with Stepparent | -.06(.17) | -.17(.12) | -.22(.13) | -.17(.16) |
| N | (1358) | (1368) | (1368) | (677) |

[a]Based on proportional hazard model.

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