Family Structure and Anti-Poverty Policy

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The Charge

This session will highlight marked changes in family structure over the last 30 years and the relationship to poverty, policymaking and responsiveness.

• How might local and federal policies respond to these documented changes?
• What do we know and what are the implications?
What are these changes?
% of children younger than 18 living with ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of child</th>
<th>Married parents</th>
<th>Solo mother</th>
<th>Solo father</th>
<th>Cohabitating parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Children who are not living with any parents are not shown.

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Poverty Rates of Households with Children under 18

**1960 and 1970 married rates are for all families
Author’s calculations from U.S. Census data**
Poverty Rates for Single Mothers with Minor Children, by Race/Ethnicity

Author’s calculations from U.S. Census data
Family Structure and Child Outcomes

Compared to children growing up with both biological parents, children growing up with a single parent are:

- More likely to drop out of school;
- Less likely to be employed as adults;
- More likely to be teen moms (girls).

(McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994)
What Should We Do?

• Encourage formation of two parent households?
• Discourage single people from having children?
• Support the family/children?
Taking a Step Back

Underlying issues

• Whose responsibility is a child?
• What role has policy played in shaping trends?
• How did slavery and past and ongoing institutionalized racism contribute to these “changes”?
• Is policy responsive, or is it used to privilege a certain type of family, maintain inequality, and uphold a racial hierarchy?
English Poor Laws

• Colonial officials demarcated between “deserving” and “undeserving” mothers based upon willingness to work and how well they followed the “family ethic”
  Abramovitz, 1988

• Settlement laws could leave husbandless white women without a place to claim assistance
Social Security Act

• Aid to Dependent Children
  • Widows and their children

• Exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers
  • One mechanism through which wealth accumulation is stalled
    • GI Bill
    • Lending and housing discrimination
Slavery, Sharecropping, and the Great Migration

• No legal marriage for slaves
• Separation of families for sales
• Reconstitution of families during Reconstruction
• Sharecropping creates a system of **economic hardship**
• Great Migration does not bring promised **economic opportunity**
Might economic opportunity matter?

• Fragile Families research and *Promises I Can Keep*
  • Single parents value marriage
  • Want economic stability before entering into it

• Why not postpone childbearing?
  • Lack of meaningful economic opportunities?
More Recent Policy

• Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI)
• Responsible Fatherhood programs
• Child support
• Earned Income Tax Credit
HMI and Responsible Fatherhood

• Focus on giving couples/fathers tools they need to engage in positive relationships

• HHS-funded HMI evaluations:
  • Some improvement in relationship quality for some couples (more economically secure; already married)
  • No increases in marriage

• HHS-funded Responsible Fatherhood evaluations:
  • Increases in self-reported nurturing and engagement with child
  • Increased duration of employment (2.07 consecutive quarters vs 1.97 in 1st year)
  • No impact on co-parenting
Child Support

• Must cooperate in order to receive other public benefits
• Complex family structures and low earnings of many non-custodial parents makes collection difficult
• Just over half of custodial mothers have a child support order
• Fewer than half of those receive payment (a quarter receive nothing)
Earned Income Tax Credit

- Large anti-poverty effects: 3.3 million children lifted out of poverty
- Does not penalize single (custodial) parents
- Only available to those with earnings
Other Family Types

• LGBTQIA households
• Grandparent households
• Multi-generation households
• Mixed status families
What’s the goal?

• Supporting children regardless of family type?
• Promoting and rewarding a certain family type?

Possibilities
• Universal Child Allowance
• Baby bonds
• Meaningful economic opportunity
  • Free college
  • Federal jobs guarantee