

## Overview

### Child Trends Databank Research on Family Structure

Compared to children in two-parent families, young children living in single-parent households or with no biological parents:

- Exhibit less behavioral self-control, higher levels of aggravated parenting

Children living with two married adults (biological or adoptive):

- Better health and access to health care
- Fewer emotional or behavioral issues

Children in two-parent families, compared to step-parent families:

- Do better on a host of outcomes

Children of step-parent families:

- Similar to children in single-parent families

Children of divorced parents, compared to children with married parents:

- Lower academic performance
- Lower social achievement
- Lower psychological adjustment

# Family Structure and Outcomes for Children

## Child Trends Databank

### Family Structure

**The proportion of children living with both parents, following a marked decline between 1970 and 1990, has fallen more slowly over the most recent two decades, dropping from 69 percent in 2000 to 64 percent in 2014.**

## IMPORTANCE

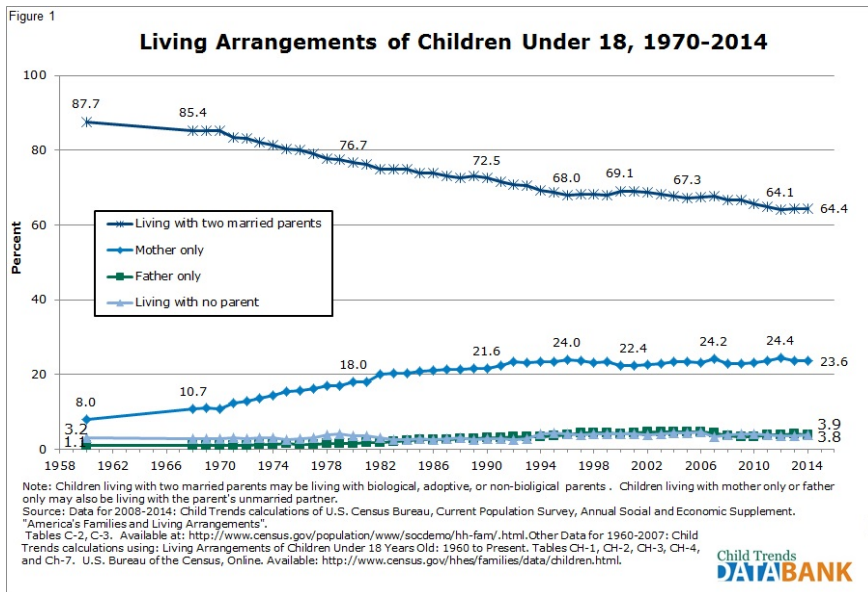
Both mothers and fathers play important roles in the growth and development of children. The number and the type of parents (e.g., biological, step) in the household, as well as the relationship between the parents, are consistently linked to a child's well-being. [1] (Nationally representative data on adoptive families are relatively new, and warrant a separate treatment.[2])

Among young children, for example, those living with no biological parents, or in single-parent households, are less likely than children with two biological parents to exhibit behavioral self-control, and more likely to be exposed to high levels of aggravated parenting, than are children living with two biological parents.[3] Children living with two married adults (biological or adoptive parents) have, in general, better health, greater access to health care, and fewer emotional or behavioral problems than children living in other types of families.[4]

Among children in two-parent families, those living with both biological parents in a low-conflict marriage tend to do better on a host of outcomes than those living in step-parent families. Outcomes for children in step-parent families are in many cases similar to those for children growing up in single-parent families.[5],[6] Children whose parents are divorced also have lower academic performance, social achievement, and psychological adjustment than children with married parents.[7] Reliance on kin networks (for example, living with grandparents) can provide social and financial support for some families, particularly single-parent families. However, the evidence suggests that children who live in households with single mothers in some cases fare better, and in other cases worse, when also living with a grandparent.[8]

Single-parent families tend to have much lower incomes than do two-parent families, while cohabiting families fall in-between. Research indicates, however, that the income differential only partially accounts for the negative effects on many areas of child and youth well-being (including health, educational attainment and assessments, behavior problems, and psychological well-being) associated with living outside of a married, two-parent family.[9],[10]

## TRENDS

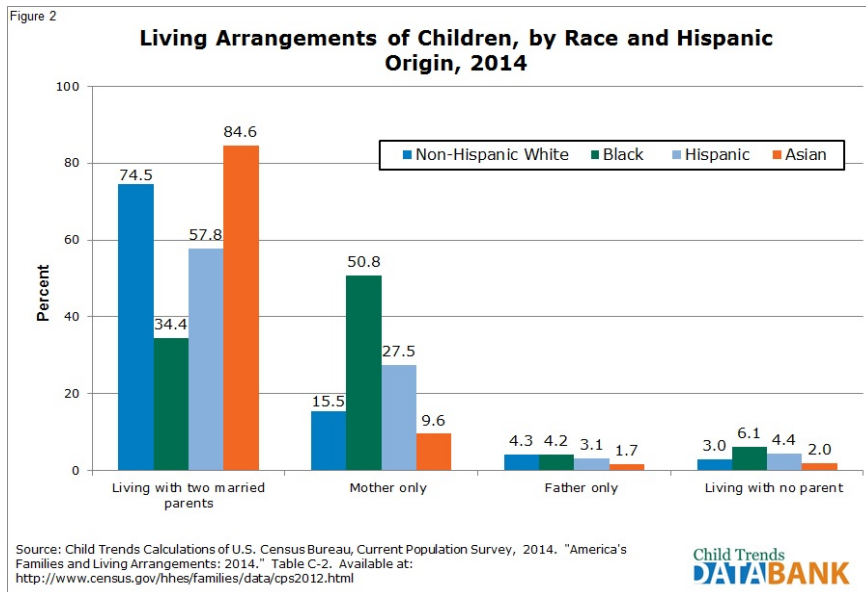


Between 1960 and 1996, the proportion of all children under age 18 who were living with two married parents decreased steadily, from 85 to 68 percent. This share was stable during much of the late 1990s and into the 2000s, but by 2012 it had decreased to 64 percent. The rate was stable between 2012 and 2014. (Figure 1)

In 1960, the proportion of children living in mother-only families was eight percent, but by 1996 that proportion had tripled, to 24 percent. Since then, it has fluctuated between 22 and 24 percent, and was at 24 percent in 2014. Between 1990 and 2013, the share of children living in father-only families has fluctuated between three and five percent, and was at four percent in 2014. The proportion living without either parent (with either relatives or with non-relatives) has remained steady, at approximately four percent. (Figure 1)

In 2014, seven percent of all children lived in the home of their grandparents. In two-thirds of these families, one or both parents were also present. The proportion living with grandparents increased until the mid-1990s, from three to six percent of children. After remaining at around five percent until 2006, the proportion increased in 2010, but has since remained steady, at around six percent. (Appendix 2)

# DIFFERENCES BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN<sup>[11]</sup>

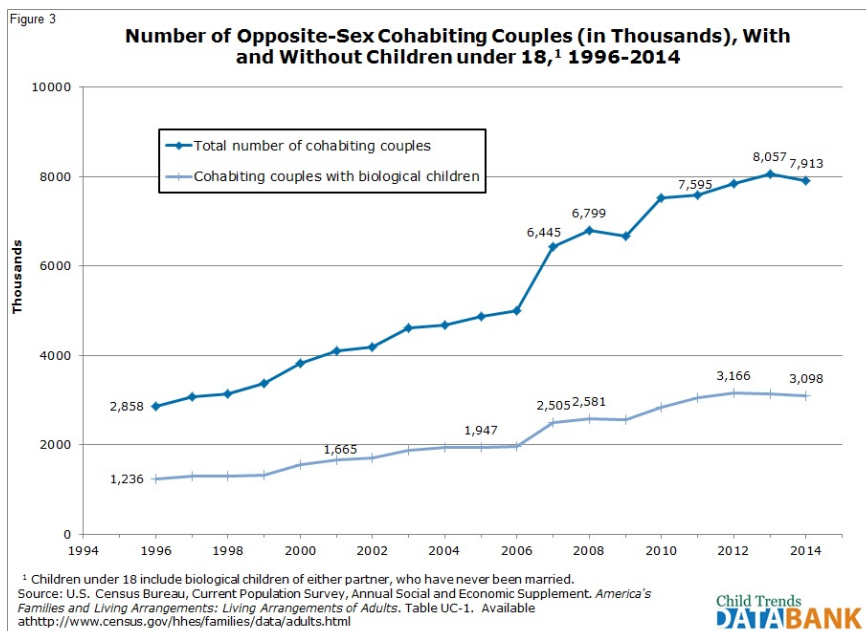


Black children are significantly less likely than other children to be living with two married parents. In 2014, 34 percent of black children were living with two parents, compared with 85 percent of Asian children, 75 percent of white children, and 58 percent of Hispanic children. (Figure 2)

Most children who live with just one parent, regardless of race or Hispanic origin, live with their mothers. This is the case for more than half of all black children, and more than one-quarter of all Hispanic children; among white and Asian children, smaller proportions (about one in seven, and one in ten, respectively) live with their mothers only. (Figure 2)

In 2014, six percent of all black children did not live with either parent, compared with four percent of Hispanic children, three percent of white children, and two percent of Asian children. (Figure 2)

## COHABITING COUPLES



In 2014, there were 3.1 million cohabiting couples (unmarried) with children under 18. This number has been steadily increasing: in 1996, it was 1.2 million. However, the number of all unmarried couples (with or without children) has increased even more during the same time period. (Figure 3)

Compared with married couples with children, cohabiting couples with children tend to be younger, less educated, lower-income, and with less secure employment. In cohabiting couples with children, four in ten parents are between 25 and 34 years old, compared with less than a third of parents in married couples. Less than a third of parents in cohabiting couples are between 35 and 44 years old, compared with four in ten parents in married couples. Among women in cohabiting couples, 18 percent have no high school diploma, and another 34 percent have no college-level education. Among mothers in married couples, nine percent have no high school diploma, and 21 percent have no college-level education. In cohabiting couples with children, 62 percent of women, and 81 percent of men, were employed, compared with 65 and 91 percent of mothers and fathers, respectively, in married couples. In eight percent of unmarried couples with children, neither person was employed in 2014, compared with only four percent among married couples with children. (Appendix 3)

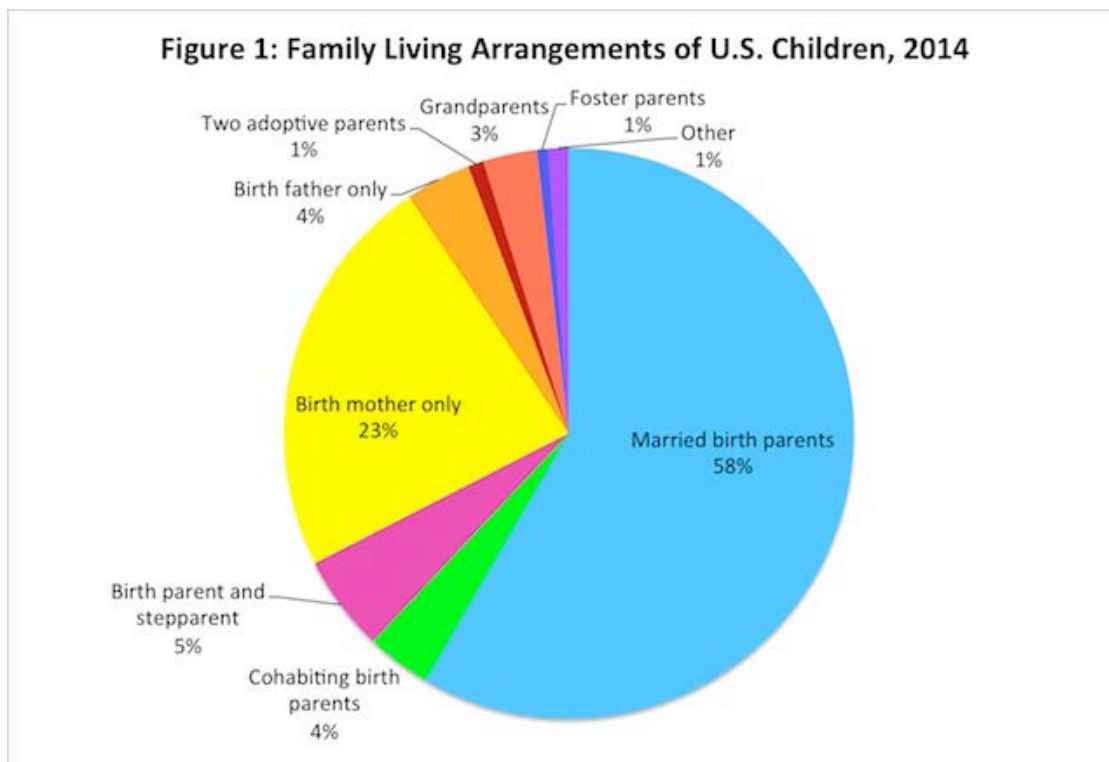
- See more at: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=family-structure#sthash.YuVSBv6J.dpuf>

## More Than 60% of U.S. Kids Live with Two Biological Parents

By Nicholas Zill, February 2, 2015

Each year the Census Bureau captures a snapshot of the living arrangements of U.S. children through its Current Population Survey. The 2014 results were released by the Bureau last week, and the portrait they present of the family lives of 73.7 million American kids is certainly a variegated one.

Yet despite all the talk about the growing irrelevance of marriage, 43 million children, a 58-percent majority, were living with both their birth mother and biological father in a traditional married-couple family. (See Figure 1.) Only 2.7 million—4 percent—were living with two birth parents who had not bothered to get married, at least not as yet. (These numbers are different from those recently [released by the Pew Research Center](#) based on another Census survey because Pew incorporated parents' marital histories, not just parents' current marital status and relationship to their kids.)



Source: U.S. Census

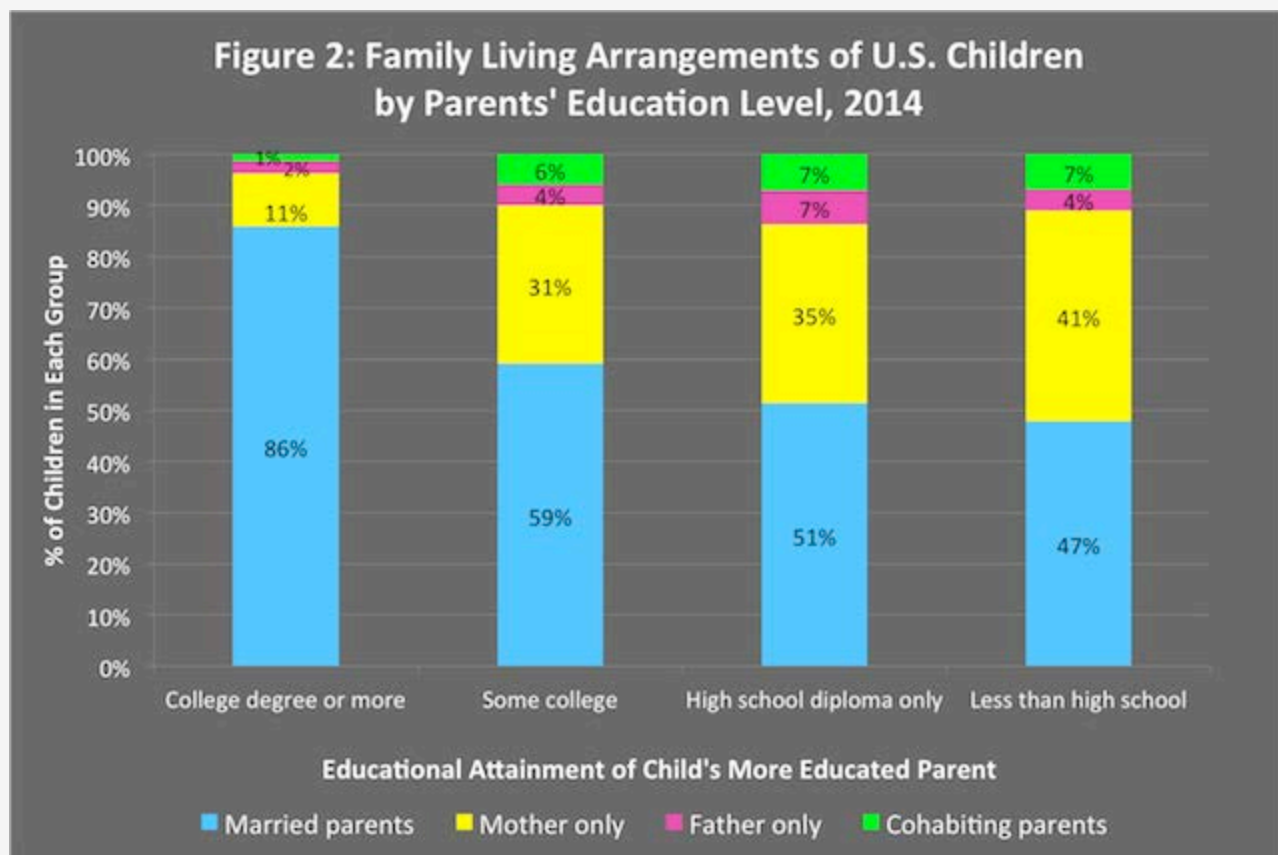
Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2014 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Of course, the proportion of children who live with married birth parents, 58 percent, is considerably lower than it was in the early 1980s (two-thirds), or the even higher proportions who did so prior to rise of unmarried childbearing or the late 1960s divorce revolution.

Twenty million of today's children—more than a quarter—live in single-parent families, and six times as many of them reside with their birth mothers (23 percent) as with their birth fathers (4 percent). Four million children—about 5 percent—reside with one biological parent and a stepparent, following a divorce or nonmarital birth. Three times as many live with a birth mother and stepfather (3 percent) as with a biological father and stepmother (1 percent). In addition, some 650,000 are growing up with two adoptive parents.

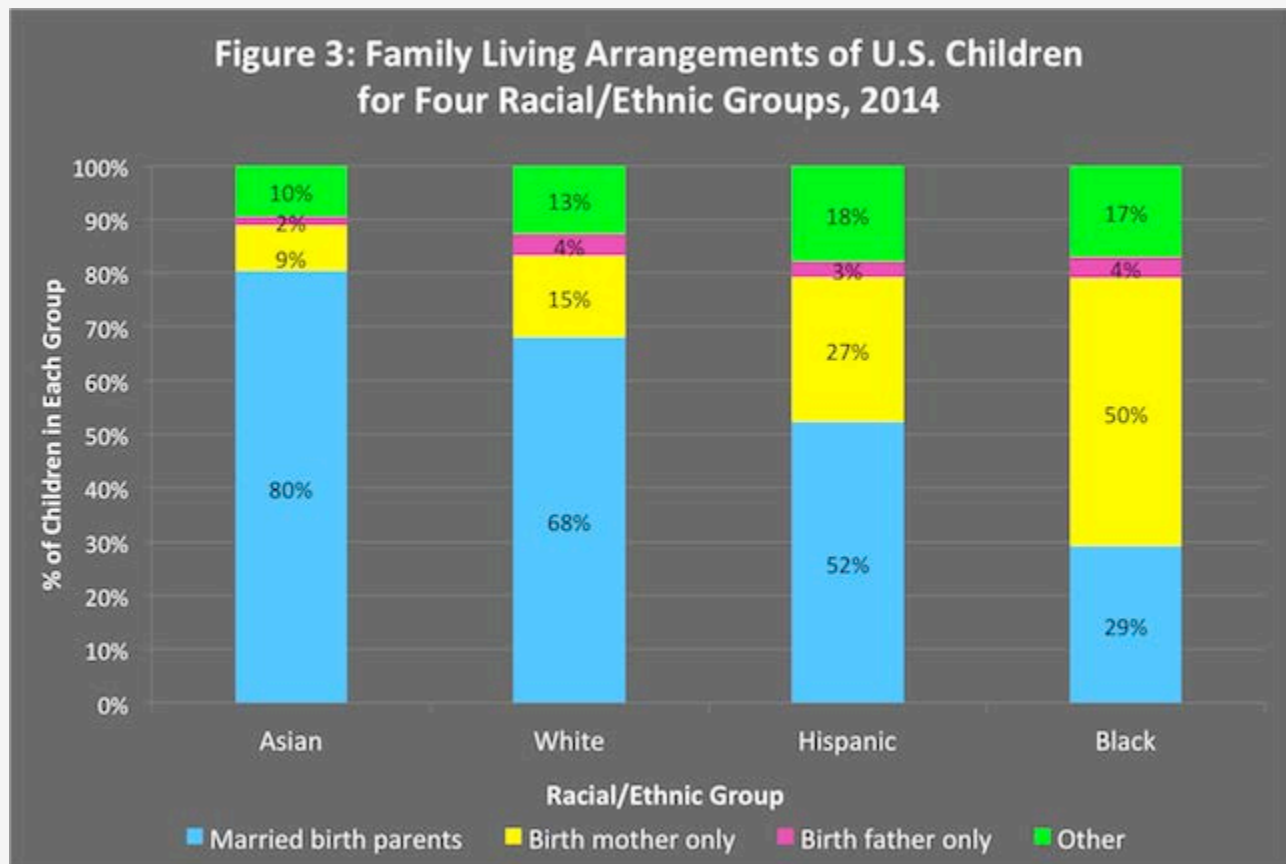
Perhaps the group at greatest risk is composed of the nearly 3 million children who live with neither mother nor father, but with grandparents or other relatives (3 percent) or in non-relative foster care (1 percent).

The family portrait becomes even more varied when the nation's children are divided into groups based on parent education levels. Even though they may support the notion that single parents can raise children as well as married couples, when it comes to bringing up their own children, American women with college degrees choose to do so within the bonds of matrimony: 86 percent of children with college-educated parents live in married-couple families. By contrast, less than half (47 percent) of children whose parents have not completed high school live in married-couple families. Almost as many (45 percent) live in single-parent families, most with their mothers only. The higher the parents' educational attainment, the more likely is it that their children will be growing up in two-parent families. (See Figure 2.)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2014 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Strikingly different pictures also emerge when American children are grouped based on their race and ethnicity. Eight in ten Asian-American kids live with married birth parents, compared with about seven in ten European-American kids, five in ten Hispanic-American kids, and only about three in ten African-American kids. Half of black children live with their mothers only, compared to three in ten Hispanic children, less than two in ten white children and less than one in ten Asian children. (See Figure 3.)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2014 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

The Census picture of children's living arrangements is only a snapshot at a single point in time. It does not portray family relationships between children and parents that cross household boundaries. Nor does it show us changes in arrangements and relationships that occur as children grow and develop: for instance, if current trends hold steady, by the time they reach 17 years old, less than half of today's youth will have spent their entire childhood in a two-parent family. But the Census findings do give an indication of the challenges we face in trying to ensure that all children experience a stable and supportive family life.