Children in Fragile Families

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Abstract

Families formed by unmarried parents increased dramatically in the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century. To learn more about these families, a team of researchers at Princeton and Columbia Universities designed and implemented a large, birth cohort study – *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study*. This chapter highlights several findings from the study. First, most unmarried parents have ‘high hopes’ for a future together at the time of their child’s birth; but their resources are low and most relationships do not last. Second, unmarried mothers experience high levels of partnership instability and family complexity, both of which are associated with lower quality parenting and poorer child wellbeing. Finally, welfare state, child support and criminal justice policies play a large role in the lives of fragile families.

Keywords: unmarried parents, partnership instability, parenting, child well-being, policies

Out-of-wedlock childbearing increased dramatically in the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century, changing the context in which many American children were raised and giving rise to a new family form—what we have termed “*fragile families*”—defined as families formed by unmarried parents. As shown in Figure 1, the proportion of children born to unmarried parents grew from just over 5 percent in 1960 to over 40 percent in 2014, an eightfold increase. Although Black and Hispanic children are more likely than White children to be born outside marriage, the increase was similar for all three racial and ethnic groups.

[Figure 1: Unmarried Births as a Percent of All Births in the U.S.]

The trend in non-marital childbearing stimulated considerable debate among analysts and policy makers over the underlying causes of family change as well as its consequences for parents and children. Some analysts argued that the change was a sign of progress, reflecting the expansion of individual freedom and the growing economic independence of women.¹ To support their claim, they noted that similar trends were occurring throughout Western industrialized countries and that families formed by unmarried parents were very similar to those formed by married parents in terms of parental resources and commitment. Other analysts were less sanguine. William Julius Wilson, a prominent sociologist, argued that the increase in non-marital childbearing was driven by changes in the labor market that led to a decline in ‘marriageable men.’² Pointing to high poverty rates among single mothers and growing evidence that divorce was negatively associated with child outcomes, other analysts argued that the increase in births to unmarried mothers did not bode well for children.³ Moreover, given that minority and low-income families were disproportionately affected, they argued that changes in

family formation were likely to perpetuate economic and racial disparities in future generations.⁴

To address this debate and to provide policymakers with more accurate information about the likely consequences of the rise in non-marital childbearing, a team of researchers led by Sara McLanahan at Princeton University and Irwin Garfinkel at Columbia University designed and implemented a large, birth cohort study – The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS). The study was based on a stratified, random sample of ~5000 births in large US cities between 1998 and 2000, including a large oversample of births to unmarried parents (~3600). When weighted, the data are representative of all births in large U.S. cities with populations of 200,000 or more people.⁵ (A more detailed description of the study design is provided in Appendix A).

FFCWS was designed to address four broad questions about the nature and consequences of fragile families:

- What is the nature of parents' relationships and resources at birth?
- What happens to parental relationships and resources over time?
- How do children fare?
- What role do government policies and programs play in the lives of fragile families?

In this paper we summarize what we have learned about each of these questions, drawing on data from the FFCWS and information spanning the first 15 years of children's lives. In addition to highlighting major findings, we include references to studies that provide more detailed analyses of each topic.

1. Q 1. What is the nature of parents' relationships and resources at birth?

One of the most surprising findings to emerge from FFCWS was the high level of

commitment among unmarried parents at the time of their child's birth. Over 80 percent of parents were romantically involved, 50 percent were living together (cohabiting), and 32 percent were romantically involved but living apart. Less than 10 percent of mothers reported having "little or no contact" with the father of their child. When these figures were examined separately by race and ethnicity, the proportion of parents who were romantically involved was similar, although Black parents were less likely to be cohabiting than White and Hispanic parents.

Consistent with high levels of romantic involvement, we found that most unmarried fathers had provided support to the mothers of their child during the pregnancy and around the time of the child's birth. Nearly all of the cohabiting fathers had provided economic support, visited the mother and child in the hospital, and put their name on the birth certificate. Non-resident fathers in romantic relationships had also provided high levels of support, though not as high as cohabiting fathers. Most important, perhaps, 98 percent of mothers who were cohabiting or in a romantic relationship said they wanted the fathers to be involved in raising the child, and 98 percent of the fathers said they wanted to be involved. Finally, most unmarried parents were optimistic about their chances of marriage. At the time their child was born, 92 percent of cohabiting mothers and 95 percent of cohabiting fathers thought their chances of marriage were "fifty-fifty" or better.⁶

The level of resources in these families, however, was quite low. As shown in Table 1, only 20 percent of cohabiting mothers and only 17 percent of single mothers (mothers not living with their child's father) had any post-secondary education as compared with 57 percent of married mothers. A similar pattern appeared for fathers' education. Only 21 percent of cohabiting and non-resident fathers had any post-secondary education compared to 60 percent of married fathers. Not surprisingly, families formed by unmarried parents had much lower

earnings and much higher poverty rates than families formed by married parents.

Table 1. Parents' Human Capital at Birth of Their Child

We found similar disparities in parents' health and health behaviors. When asked to assess their overall health, unmarried parents were more likely than married parents to report that their health was "fair or poor" as opposed to "excellent or good." They also were more likely to report health limitations, depression, and use of illicit drugs. While married and unmarried fathers were similar with respect to drinking alcohol, unmarried mothers were much more likely than their married counterparts to have consumed alcohol during the pregnancy. Finally, and most striking, unmarried fathers (both cohabiting and non-resident) were about five times more likely than married fathers to have spent time in jail. In sum, although we found very little evidence to support the argument that children born to unmarried parents were the product of casual unions, we also found little support for the claim that families formed by unmarried parents were similar to married parents in terms of economic resources and wellbeing.

2. Q 2. What happens to parental relationships and resources over time?

Given the tension between parents' "high hopes and low capabilities" at the time of their child's birth, the question of how relationships and resources evolve over time was of great interest, not only to researchers but also to policy makers. Were unmarried parents able to maintain stable families? Were they able to close the resource gap with married parents that existed when their child was born?

2.1 Relationship Trajectories

Despite their optimism, most unmarried parents were not able to maintain stable unions. By the time of the Year 15 survey, completed in 2017, only 20 percent of unmarried parents were still living together as compared with 60 percent of married parents. The former were also more likely than the latter to have formed new partnerships. By the time their child was age 15, about 26 percent of cohabiting mothers had experienced one partnership change (the exit of a biological father), 27 percent of cohabiting mothers had experienced two partnership changes (the exit of the biological father followed by the entrance of a new partner), and another 26 percent had experienced three or more transitions. Note that the numbers presented in Figure 2 are an undercount of the total amount of instability in children's lives in that we only counted residential changes. Many unmarried mothers experienced changes in dating relationships that did not involve co-residence.

[Figure 2. Family Instability by Age 15]

Along with the increase in family instability, children born to unmarried parents were more likely to live in complex families – defined as families in which the siblings have one shared parent and a second non-shared parent. Although the rise in divorce after 1960 increased the likelihood of family complexity, the fact that divorce occurred later in the family life course (7 years after marriage on average) meant that most married parents had completed their fertility prior to divorce, and thus new partnerships did not typically lead to new children. The growth in non-marital childbearing altered this picture. Since families formed by unmarried parents dissolve much earlier in the family life course than families formed by married parents, and since

unmarried parents are younger, on average, than married parents, new partnerships often result in new children.

Figure 3 shows the prevalence of mothers' family complexity by the time the children in our study were age 15. Here complexity is measured as the number of partners with whom a mother has a child. Among children born to married mothers, 15 percent had a sibling with a different father by age 15. Among children born to cohabiting mothers, the figure was 41 percent, and among those born to single mothers it was 55 percent.

[Figure 3. Family Complexity by Year 15]

2.2 Resource Trajectories

At the time their child was born, there were large disparities in the economic resources of married, cohabiting, and single mothers. Figure 4 reports what happened over time. According to the figure, about 10 percent of married mothers were living in a poor household in the year before their child was born. The percentage increased during the first year after the birth, ranged between 14 and 16 percent over the next nine years, and fell back to 13 percent when the children were age 15. For families formed by unmarried parents, the conditions were much more bleak. In the year prior to the child's birth, 38 percent of cohabiting mothers and 48 percent of single mothers were living below the poverty line. Both groups experienced sharp increases in poverty in the year after the birth, followed by a gradual decline. At Year 15, 32 percent of cohabiting mothers and 42 percent of single mothers were living in poverty, as compared with only 13 percent of married mothers.

[Figure 4. Percent of Resident Mothers Below Poverty Line]

The story for mothers' health is equally discouraging. At the time of their child's birth, less than 10 percent of all mothers described their health as 'fair or poor,' with cohabiting and non-resident mothers reporting worse health than married mothers. By Year 15 the proportion of mothers reporting fair or poor health had more than doubled, and the gap between married and unmarried mothers had grown from less than 5 percentage points to over 10 percentage points. The increase in health disparities was particularly large between the Year 5 and Year 15 surveys.

[Figure 5. Percent of Mothers in Poor or Fair Health]

3. Q 3. How do children fare?

A primary motivation for FFCWS was to learn how the increase in non-marital childbearing was likely to affect the next generation of children. To this end, we asked mothers a set of questions designed to assess how their child was doing in three domains: health and health behavior, cognitive development, and social emotional adjustment. Each of these domains has been shown to be associated with children's long-term economic success and social-emotional wellbeing. To measure overall health, we asked mothers whether their child's health was 'excellent, very good, good, fair or poor.' We also collected data on the child's birth weight, BMI, and whether he/she had been diagnosed with asthma. To measure cognitive development, we administered standardized tests of vocabulary and reading ability when children were ages 3, 5 and 9. At age 15, we asked parents and teens about school performance and educational expectations. Finally, to measure social emotional development, we asked parents a set of

questions from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and used their responses to construct scores for externalizing behavior (e.g. aggression and rule breaking) and internalizing behavior (e.g. shy, anxious) at ages 3, 5, 9, and 15.

[Table 2. Child Wellbeing by Family Structure and Instability]

Numerous researchers have used the information described above to examine the association between children's family structure growing up and health and wellbeing in early and middle childhood. The findings from many of these studies are summarized in panel A of Table 2 and include studies that look at child's overall health, asthma, and BMI, vocabulary and reading test scores (PPVT-R), and externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. Column three reports findings from studies that compare children raised in fragile families (i.e. cohabiting or single-parent families) with children raised in married-parent families. Column four reports results from studies that compare children exposed to changes in family structure with children raised in stable families. With one exception, we find consistent evidence that children raised in fragile families have worse outcomes across a variety of domains than children raised in married-parent families, including poorer health, more behavior problems, and lower cognitive skills. The findings for family instability are more nuanced. Whereas the exit of a biological father from the household shows a consistently negative association with child wellbeing, the entrance of a biological father into the household shows a positive association. There is also some evidence that the exit of a biological father is more negative for children born to married parents than for those born to unmarried parents.⁷ We should note that these findings (as well as those reported below) are based on correlational rather than experimental evidence.

Although most studies control for parental characteristics that predate family structure, such as income, education, age, race, and nativity, we cannot rule out the possibility that the correlations we observe are due to unmeasured family characteristics (e.g. domestic violence or parental anti-social behavior) that are causing both non-traditional family structures and child health and development. For a review of the evidence for causal effects see McLanahan et al.⁸

In addition to examining child outcomes in three domains, numerous researchers have looked at the association between family structure growing up and family characteristics that are believed to account for some of the negative association between living in a non-traditional family and poor child outcomes. Findings from these studies are summarized in panel B of Table 2. Again, there is consistent evidence that non-traditional family structures and family instability are associated with multiple indicators of a poor home environment, including material hardship, maternal stress and depression, poor parental relationships, and low quality parenting. These associations persist even after taking account of differences in parents' race/ethnicity and education.

Nearly all of the studies summarized in Table 2 use information from the first 5 waves of data collection that cover the period from child's birth to age 9. In Table 3 below, we present our own estimates from the Year 15 survey. Columns 1 and 2 compare outcomes of children born to married parents in stable unions versus unstable unions. Columns 4 and 6 compare children born to cohabiting parents in stable versus unstable unions, and columns 8 and 10 compare children raised in stable, single-mother families versus unstable single-mother families. Columns 3, 7, and 11 indicate whether the differences between stable and unstable families are statistically significant across all family types. Looking at the asterisks in column 3, we see that for children born to married parents, instability is consistently associated with negative outcomes in three

domains, including school performance, behavior problems and health behaviors. Instability does not appear to be associated with poor health for children born to married parents. Column 7 indicates that instability is important for some outcomes among children born to cohabiting parents, including school suspension, behavior problems, and poor health. Finally, column 11 indicates that, with the exception of becoming smokers, instability is not an important factor for children born to single mothers. The finding that instability is most adverse for children born to married parents is consistent with recent work by Bzostek and Berger.⁹

[Table 3. Adolescent Wellbeing by Family Structure and Stability]

The numbers in Table 3 also allow us to compare children raised in traditional and non-traditional families. Column 5 indicates whether the differences between stable, cohabiting-parent families and stable, married-parent families are statistically significant. Column 9 indicates whether the differences between stable, single-mother families and stable, married-parent families are significant. By comparing children in stable families, we remove the confounding effect of instability. The asterisks in columns 4 show that children raised in stable, cohabiting-parent families are more likely have failed a class, to be in poor or fair health, and to have higher BMI than children raised in stable, married-parent families. They also are more likely to have tried marijuana and to have had sex. Finally, the asterisks in column 9 show that children raised in stable, single-mother families have lower grade point averages, more externalizing behaviors, and earlier sexual initiation than children raised in stable, married-parent families.

4. Q4. What role do government policies and practices play?

Given the economic insecurity and social vulnerability that many fragile families face, a final goal of our study was to understand the role that government policies and practices play in the lives of these families. Do government programs reduce economic insecurity? Do they reduce family instability? In this section we summarize research that focuses on three government institutions: the welfare state system (taxes and transfers), the child support enforcement system, and the criminal justice system.

Welfare State Benefits

Welfare state benefits, defined as cash and in-kind transfers to individuals that reduce economic insecurity, play an important role in the lives of families with children, especially families in the lower part of the income distribution.¹⁰ Garfinkel and his colleagues argue that the U.S. welfare state is distinct from that of other countries with respect to the relative size of in-kind versus cash transfers and the extent to which benefits are provided by employers and through the income tax system rather than through universal government programs.¹¹ In-kind benefits, which include education, health insurance, food, housing, and childcare, account for a much larger portion of the welfare state in the U.S. than in other countries. Cash benefits include Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Supplementary Security Income (SSI), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit. With the exception of K-12 education, middle-income families receive benefits through their employers and the income tax system (e.g. employer-based health insurance, mortgage deductions, EITC), whereas low-income families receive benefits through government programs (e.g. Medicaid, housing subsidies, TANF).

[Figure 6. Welfare State Benefits]

Figure 6 shows that one year after their child's birth, average total welfare state benefits were about \$27,000 for fragile families and \$22,000 for married-parent families.¹² For both types of families, close to 40 percent of benefits come from K-12 education, indicating that many families had at least one school-aged child at the time their new child was born (about 38 percent of fragile families and 47 percent of married-parent families). Health insurance was the next most important benefit, accounting for 22 percent of benefits to fragile families and 29 percent of benefits to married parents. Cash benefits accounted for only 24 percent and 14 percent, respectively, of benefits going to fragile families and married-parents.

Although the absolute value of welfare state benefits is not very different among married-parent families and fragile families, their relative value is much more important among fragile families. Welfare state benefits account for 50 percent of fragile families' full incomes (post-tax, post-transfers) as compared to less than 25 percent of married-parents' full incomes. In sum, our findings indicate that American welfare state benefits for families with children: 1) are dominated by education and health, 2) loom large in the lives of both married and unmarried parent families, but especially the latter, and 3) narrow the difference in total resources available to unmarried and married parent families.

4.1 Child Support Enforcement

In addition to providing support through the tax and transfer systems, federal and state governments play an important role in regulating child support payments from non-resident parents. The Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement was established in 1976 with the aim of increasing child support awards and collections. New policies and practices were adopted in

the 1980s and 1990s, including policies to 1) increase hospital based paternity establishment, 2) standardize child support awards, and 3) increase collections (via wage withholding).¹³ A large body of research finds that child support payments are associated with positive outcomes in children, including increased educational attainment, schooling, and cognitive development.¹⁴ The key question is: how well are these policies working for children born to unmarried parents?

Garfinkel and his colleagues have used the FFCWS data to examine trajectories in child support payments for children with a non-resident father and to assess whether payments vary by parents' marital status at birth.¹⁵ These researchers argue that child support payments are a function of 1) fathers' ability to pay (which should increase over time, as fathers get older and gain more work experience), 2) fathers' willingness to pay (which should decline over time as fathers form new partnerships and have children with new partners), and 3) the effectiveness of the child support enforcement system. They also argue that informal child support should decrease over time whereas formal child support payments should increase, with total payments reflecting the product of these two trends. According to their estimates, total monthly child support payments declined during the first 4 years after separation, from \$250 to \$120 among formerly cohabiting mothers and from \$300 to \$237 among formerly married mothers. After four years, total payments leveled off for both groups. The initial decline in payments was due to a sharp decrease in informal support. For single mothers the story was somewhat different. The overall level of support at the time of separation was quite low, \$94 a month. However, after a small initial decline, payments increased and were actually higher 15 years post birth - \$120 – than they were one year after birth.

The child support system has long been criticized for being both ineffective and too harsh on low-income fathers. According to Garfinkel and Nepomnyaschy, in spite of all the changes in

policies and practices, and in spite of dramatic increase in collections reported by the Office of Child Support Collection, the total amount of child support paid to single mothers has increased very little.¹⁶ The increase in child support collections reported by the OCSE is due primarily to the fact that a larger proportion of non-resident fathers are now counted as part of the federal system. Prior to the passage of federal legislation in 1976, child support orders were typically handled through the county court system and by private lawyers. Since many of these fathers were already paying support, bringing them into the federal system did not lead to an increase in payments received by eligible mothers.

There is evidence that low-income fathers are treated more harshly by the system than higher income fathers. Huang et al. find that child support orders for low-income fathers are more likely to exceed state guidelines than orders for high-income fathers.¹⁷ Low-income fathers might also accumulate arrearages when they are unemployed. Finally, the system has been criticized for its treatment of mothers receiving welfare benefits--namely, that child support payments are used to reimburse states for welfare costs rather than to improve the economic wellbeing of poor mothers and children.

4.2 The Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system looms large in the lives of fragile families. As reported earlier, a surprising finding during the early stages of FFCWS was that a large proportion of unmarried fathers had been incarcerated (spent at least one night in jail/prison) prior to their child's birth, 34 percent of cohabiting fathers and 39 percent of non-resident fathers, as compared with only 7 percent of married fathers. By the time of the Year 15 survey, these numbers had grown to 41 percent among cohabiting fathers and 64 percent among non-resident fathers, as compared with 19 percent among married fathers. Though much less common, mothers' incarceration also varies

by relationship status at birth. Five percent of cohabiting mothers, seven percent of non-resident mothers, and one percent of married mothers reported having been incarcerated by Year 15.

According to a recent report of the National Academy of Sciences, incarceration rates in the U.S. increased dramatically, beginning in the mid-1970s and extending into the 2000s. In 1980, the incarceration rate was 139 per 100,000 men; in 2006, it was 506 per 100,000 men. The increase was due in large part to changes in criminal justice policies that called for mandatory minimum sentences and targeted drug-related crime. The changes in incarceration policy disproportionately affected men of color. In 2010, the imprisonment rate for people of color was 4.6 times that for whites.¹⁸

In addition to documenting the dramatic increase in incarceration, the NAS report examined the collateral consequences of these policies, including the consequences for fathers, their families, and their communities. With respect to the fathers themselves, men who spend time in jail or prison are less likely to be employed, and they have lower wages and earnings than fathers who have never been incarcerated. Although some of this difference is due to the characteristics of the men who become incarcerated, there is strong evidence that men with a criminal record are ‘marked’ in ways that lower their employment opportunities and wages.¹⁹ Incarceration also affects men’s physical and mental health. Although men who become incarcerated receive better health care for their problems than they received prior to incarceration, they face multiple risks when they are released, including drug overdoses and suicide. With respect to families and children, a large number of studies find that fathers’ incarceration is positively associated with material hardship for mothers and children and negatively associated with child wellbeing, especially among boys and especially if the father was living with the child before the incarceration. These studies are correlational, and thus it is

difficult to say whether incarceration is causing the poor outcomes or whether both are due to a third factor that the researcher has not taken into account.²⁰ Finally, with respect to the communities of incarcerated fathers, there is mixed evidence as to the costs and benefits of incarceration.

The criminal justice system also plays a direct role in the lives of children. The Year 15 interview asked adolescents about their experiences with the police. Forty percent of boys in families formed by unmarried parents reported having been stopped by police by their fifteenth birthday as compared to 26 percent of boys born to married parents. Although girls were much less likely than boys to report being stopped by police, the marital status gap was even larger in percentage terms, 19 percent versus 10 percent. Finally, early findings show that teens who report being stopped by police report higher levels of anxiety and mental health symptoms than teens who are not stopped.²¹ These results are robust to controls for individual characteristics (mental health at age 9, delinquency at ages 9 and 15) as well as family and neighborhood characteristics.

[Figure 7: Percent of Teens Stopped by Police by Year 15]

5. Summary and Conclusions

We began this paper by identifying four questions that were motivated by the increase in non-marital childbearing: 1) what is the nature of parents' relationships and resources at birth, 2) what happens to relationships and resources over time, 3) how do children fare, and 4) what role do government policies and practices play in the lives of fragile families? FFCWS was designed to shed new light on these questions and, in particular, to gain a better understanding of how the

changes in family formation were likely to affect the children who were growing up in these families. To recap the major findings, we found that unmarried parents had ‘high hopes’ for their relationships at the time their child was born, but their resources were low, much lower than those of married parents. Not surprisingly, we found that unmarried parents experienced a good deal of relationship instability, leading to greater family complexity and growing disparities in parental resources. In short, children born to unmarried parents experience lower quality parenting and worse outcomes across multiple domains than children born to married parents, contributing to the ‘reproduction of inequalities’ across generations. Finally, government programs and policies play an important role in the lives of fragile families with mixed effects; welfare state benefits do a good job of reducing material hardship and closing the income gap between children born to married and unmarried parents, but the child support system is woefully inadequate and the criminal justice system exacerbates disparities between parents as well as children.

FIGURE 1: Unmarried Births as a Percent of All Births in the U.S.

FIGURE 2. Family Instability by Age 15, by Parents' Relationship Status at Birth

FIGURE 3. Family Complexity by Year 15, by Parent's Relationship Status at Birth

FIGURE 4. Percent of Resident Mothers Below Poverty Line by Marital Status at Birth

FIGURE 5. Percent of Mothers Who Reported Poor/Fair Health, by Parents' Relationship Status at Birth

FIGURE 6. Welfare State Benefits at Year 1 (2016 Dollars)

FIGURE 7. Percent of Teens Stopped by Police by Year 15, by Parent's Relationship Status at Birth

TABLE 1: Parents' Human Capital at Birth of Their Child (Percent unless otherwise indicated)

Parents' human capital	Mothers			Fathers		
	Married	Cohabiting	Single	Married	Cohabiting	Single
Education						
Less than HS	17.8	41.0	48.8	18.8	40.0	44.9
HS or equivalent	25.5	39.2	34.1	21.4	39.8	34.2
Some college	21.1	17.3	14.3	30.3	17.6	17.2
College or higher	35.7	2.4	2.4	29.5	3.6	3.8
Income						
Earnings (mean)	\$25,619	\$11,434	\$10,764	\$38,568	\$20,461	\$15,893
Worked last year	79.3	83.4	79.4	95.7	91.0	84.3
Poverty status	14.0	32.5	53.1	13.2	33.7	34.1
Not working at birth	--	--	--	5.7	17.0	34.0
Health*						
Poor/fair health	10.4	14.4	17.1	8.1	15.4	12.9
Health limitation	7.1	9.1	11.1	5.4	10.5	14.1
Depression	13.2	16.2	15.7	8.1	9.2	18.0
Heavy drinking	2.0	8.0	7.7	25.1	32.0	21.1
Illegal drugs	0.3	1.7	3.1	1.6	6.0	12.4
Prior incarceration**	--	--	--	7.3	34.1	39.3

-- Not applicable

* Analyses based on baseline and one-year data.

** Information gathered for fathers only.

TABLE 2: Child Wellbeing, Family Structure, and Family Instability

	Outcomes	Nontraditional/Fragile Family Structure	Family Instability
CHILD WELLBEING			
Bzostek (2008)	Behavior/ health	No (positive)	
Bzostek & Beck (2011)	Obesity/asthma/health	Yes	Yes
Bzostek & Berger (2017)	Behavior	Yes	Yes ^a
Cooper, et al. (2011)	PPVT-R/behavior		Yes
Craigie (2008)	PPVT-R	Yes	Yes
Fomby & Osborne (2010)	Behavior		mixed
Harknett (2009)	Asthma	Yes	
Heiland & Liu (2006)	Asthma	Yes	Yes
	PPVT-		
Liu and Heiland (2012)	R/asthma/behavior	Yes	
Mitchell, et al. (2015)	Behavior	Yes	Yes ^d
Mitchell, et al. (2017)	Telomere length		Yes
Osborne, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn (2004)	Behavior	Yes ^d	
Osborne (2007)	Behavior	Yes	
Osborne & McLanahan (2007)	Behavior		Yes
Padilla & Reichman (2001)	Low birth weight	Yes	
Schmeer (2011)	Health	Yes	
	Asthma/BMI/behavior/		
Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn (2010)	PPVT	Yes	Yes ^c
HOME ENVIRONMENT			
Beck, et al. (2010)	<i>Parenting quality</i>		Yes
Berger, Paxson, & Waldfogel (2009)	<i>Child abuse</i>	Yes	
Cooper, et al. (2009)	<i>Maternal stress</i>		Yes

Fomby (2018)	<i>Maternal stress</i>		Yes
Guterman, et al. (2009)	<i>Child abuse</i>	Yes	
Martin, et al. (2017)	<i>Bio-parents' RQ</i>		Yes
Meadows, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn (2008)	<i>Maternal depression</i>	Yes	
Meadows, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn (2007)	<i>Maternal depression</i>	Yes	
Osborne, Berger, & Magnuson (2012)	<i>Material hardship</i>		Yes ^d
Schneider (2016)	<i>Child abuse/neglect</i>	Yes	
Schneider (2017)	<i>Child abuse/neglect</i>	Yes ^e	

Note: This table is adapted and updated from a similar table in Waldfogel, et al. 2010.

a more negative for married at birth

b more negative for unmarried at birth

c negative for health and cognitive

d entrance of bio dad is positive

e neglect only

TABLE 3: Adolescent Wellbeing at Age 15 by Family Structure and Stability

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	Married			Cohabiting				Single			
	Stable (n=501)	Unstable (n=292)		Stable (n=244)		Unstable (n=841)		Stable (n=55)		Unstable (n=1202)	
School											
GPA	3.04	2.85	***	2.98		2.91		2.85	+	2.86	
College graduate intention (very likely) ¹	0.991	0.97	*	0.994		0.992		0.987		0.987	
Ever suspended/expelled ¹	0.11	0.25	***	0.14		0.24	**	0.19		0.27	
Ever failed a class ¹	0.33	0.51	***	0.42	+	0.49		0.4		0.5	
Behavior											
Internalizing ²	0.16	0.28	***	0.23		0.29	*	0.2		0.28	
Externalizing ²	0.16	0.24	***	0.16		0.23	***	0.25	*	0.24	
Health											
Fair/poor health (self-report) ¹	0.06	0.09		0.09	+	0.05	*	0.06		0.07	
Asthma ¹	0.19	0.18		0.18		0.27	**	0.24		0.28	
BMI	23.25	23.92		24.11	+	24.09		23.8		24.15	
Health Behavior											
Drinking (without parents) ¹	0.11	0.18	*	0.16		0.18		0.08		0.17	
Ever smoked ¹	0.02	0.05	*	0.03		0.04		-		0.04	*
Ever tried marijuana ¹	0.09	0.25	***	0.17	**	0.21		0.15		0.23	
Ever had sex ¹	0.06	0.21	***	0.16	**	0.17		0.19	**	0.18	

Note: Controls include child's sex and parental age, race/ethnicity, nativity, and education

1 - Binary (0=no, 1=yes)

2 - Scale of 0-2, 2 equals high behavior problems

APPENDIX

FIGURE 1A

Notes

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