

American Children's Family Structure: Single-Parent Families

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Recent trends in nonmarital childbearing and divorce over the past half century have resulted in an increase in children living with single parents (Ellwood and Jencks, 2004). Single-parent families were the second-most common living arrangement of minor children in 2016, with just over 20 million children living with a single mother or father (U.S. Census, 2016). Using recent data from the 2016 Current Population Survey (CPS), this third and final profile in a series on children's family structure (see also, FP-17-15 on two-biological parent families and FP-17-16 on stepparent families) focuses on children living with single parents.

- About one-quarter (24%) of children were living with a single parent in 2016 (Figure 1).
- Of the 24% of children living in a single-parent family, only 3% were living with a single father.

Parental Educational Attainment

- A slight majority of all children living in a single parent family had parents who reported having some college education or more in 2016.
 - Fewer single mothers than fathers reported having at least a Bachelor's degree (18% compared to 23%).
- The share of single mothers without a high school degree was slightly higher than single fathers.

Figure 2. Variation in Parental Educational Attainment Among Children in Single-Parent Families, 2016

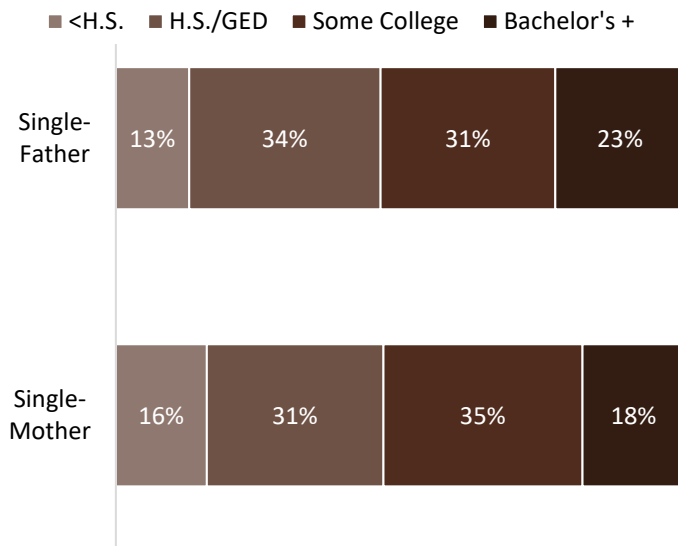
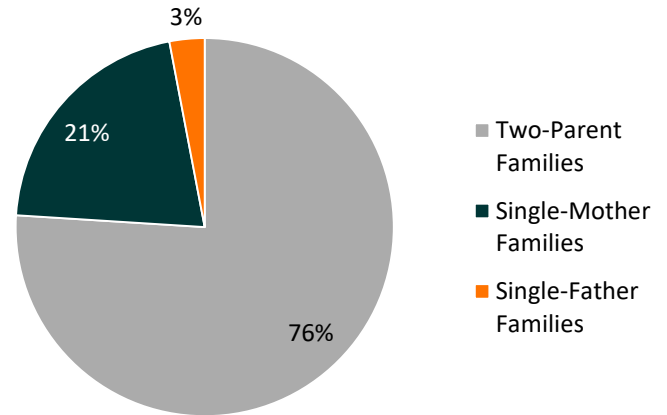


Figure 1. Share of Children Living with Single Mothers or Single Fathers, 2016

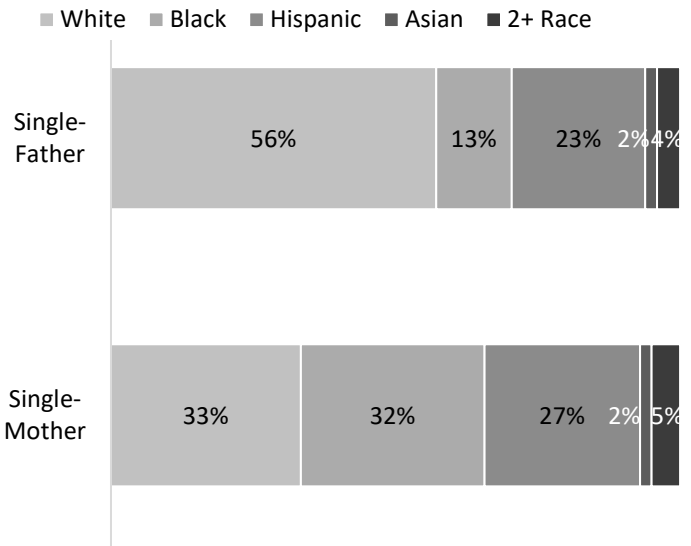


Source: NCFMR analyses of Current Population Survey, 2016

Racial & Ethnic Composition

- In 2016, the racial and ethnic composition of children living in single- mother and single-father families differed.
 - Almost equal shares of children living with single mothers identified as White or Black (33% and 32%), while a majority of children living with single fathers identified as White (56%).
 - Over twice as many children living with single mothers identified as Black than children living with single fathers.

Figure 3. Variation in Racial & Ethnic Composition Among Children in Single-Parent Families, 2016

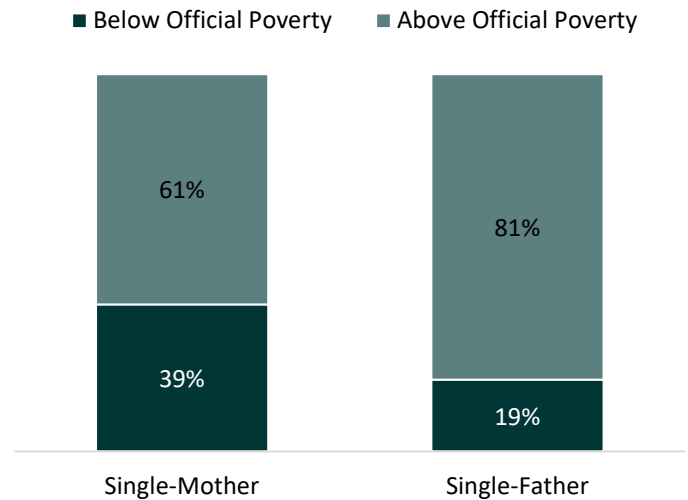


Source: NCFMR analyses of Current Population Survey, 2016

Measures of Poverty

- The majority of children in single-parent families were living above the official poverty line in 2016.
- Compared to children living with single fathers, the share living in poverty (based on the official indicator) in single-mother families was twice as high (19% and 39%, respectively).
- Using the supplemental poverty measure (U.S. Census Bureau)-which accounts for noncash benefits and is represented by the dotted line-the share of children in single-mother families living in poverty in 2016 fell to 31%, while the share of children in single-father families living in poverty increased slightly to 22%.

Figure 4. Poverty (Official and Supplemental) Among Children in Single-Parent Families, 2016

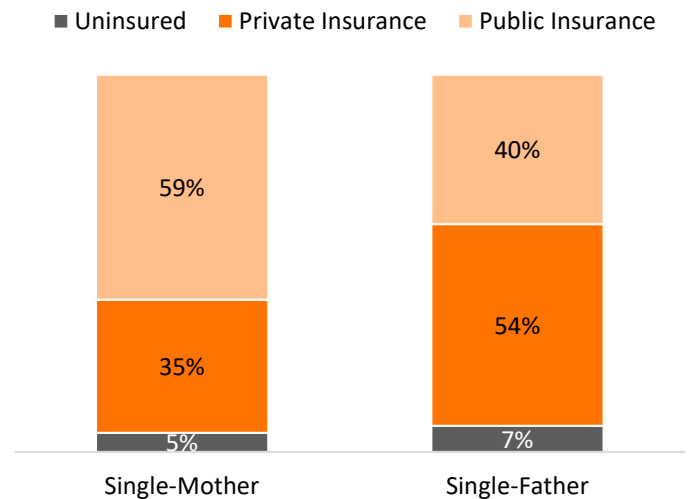


Source: NCFMR analyses of Current Population Survey, 2016

Health Insurance Coverage

- In 2016, the vast majority of children living with single parents were covered by health insurance. The levels were only slightly lower among single mothers than fathers.
- Just over one-third (35%) of children living with single mothers were covered by private health insurance, compared to about half (54%) of children living with single fathers. About three in five (59%) children living with single mothers were covered by public insurance.

Figure 5. Health Insurance Coverage Among Children in Single-Parent Families, 2016



Source: NCFMR analyses of Current Population Survey, 2016

*For more information on the history of the poverty measure, please visit the United States Census Bureau's website link.

Data Sources:

Flood, S., King, M., Ruggles, S., and Warren, J.R. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 4.0* [dataset]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015. <http://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V4.0>.

References:

Ellwood, D. T. and C. Jencks. (2004). The spread of single-parent families in the United States since 1960. D. P. Moynihan, L. Rainwater, and T. Smeeding (Eds.), *The Future of the Family, Chapter 2*. New York, New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). *Living arrangements of children under 18 years old: 1960 to present, Table CH-1*.

Suggested Citation:

Eickmeyer, K. J. (2017). American children's family structure: Single-parent families. *Family Profiles*, FP-17-17. Bowling Green, OH: National Center for Family & Marriage Research. <https://doi.org/10.25035/ncfmr/fp-17-17>