Children's Economic Well-Being in Single-Parent Families: Gender and Lone Parent versus Multigenerational Households



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Background

- Extensive research has linked child poverty to a host of negative outcomes in adulthood, such as poor health, economic insecurity, and behavioral problems.
- 22% of all children are poor, and 2/3 of all poor children live in single-parent families, a diverse group with differences in child outcomes by parent's gender and household composition:
- Children of single mothers are at the greatest disadvantage.
- Parents who lack essential economic resources are more likely to live in multigenerational households.
- Household composition is linked to resource flows and shapes eligibility for public assistance.

Prior Research

Single-Parent Families:

 24% of US children live with single parents without cohabiting partners.

Gender:

- A growing share of single-parent families are father-only families.
- Single fathers have smaller families, are less likely to be poor, more likely to be employed, and are better off economically than single mothers.
- Poor and near poor father-only families are less likely to receive public assistance than poor and near poor mother-only families.

Household Composition:

- Single-parent families assuage financial burdens by living with their parents, though this decreases their likelihood of public assistance receipt.
- 2/3 of children in multigenerational households with their fathers would be poor if they only lived with their father.

Present Study: Research Questions

- Provides a demographic comparison of children's economic well-being in lone and multigenerational households.
- Examines share of children below official and relative poverty thresholds and the share of those receiving public assistance.
- Provides the odds of both poverty status and public assistance receipt, net of demographic characteristics.
- Expands on extant child poverty literature by examining the role of parent's gender and household types among single-parent families (without cohabiting partners).

Data and Sample

2011 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey

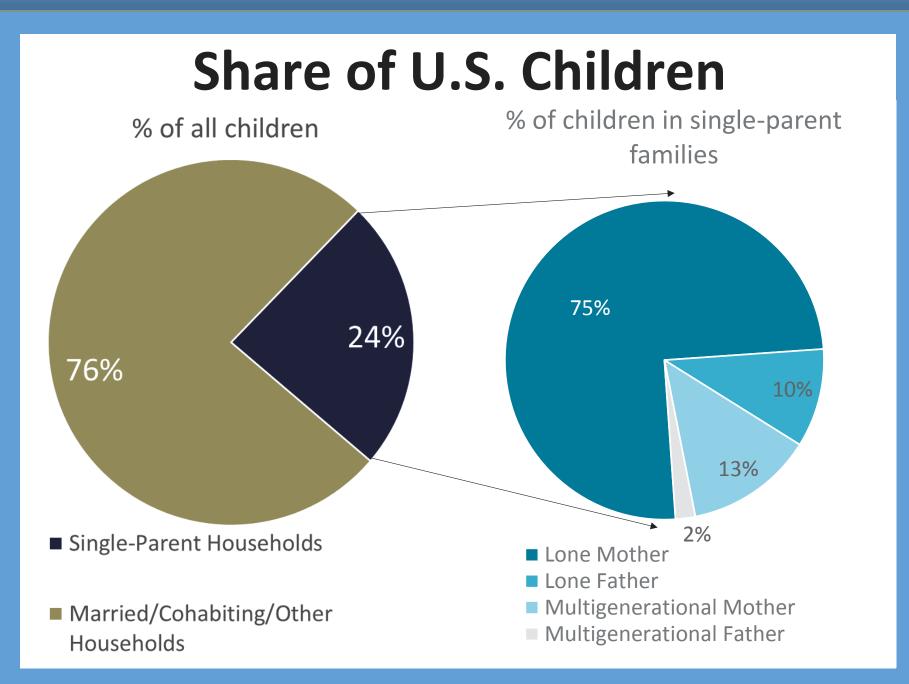
Lone household: Unmarried parent, no cohabiting partner, no other adults present.

Multigenerational household: Includes unmarried parent & grandparent, no cohabiting partner, no

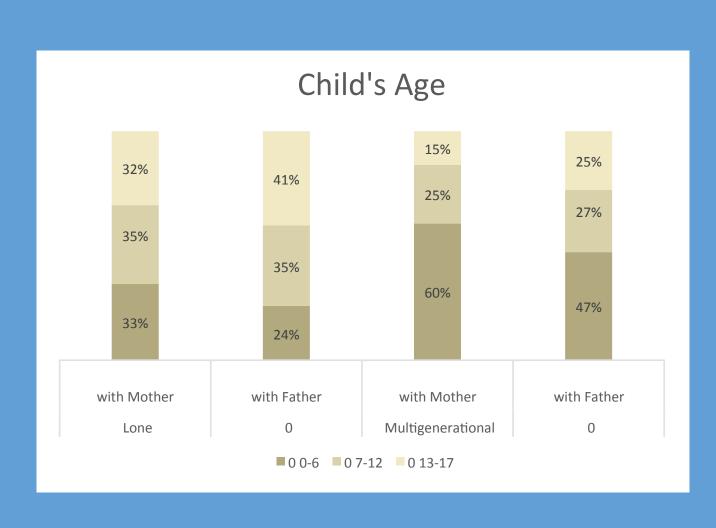
other adults present.

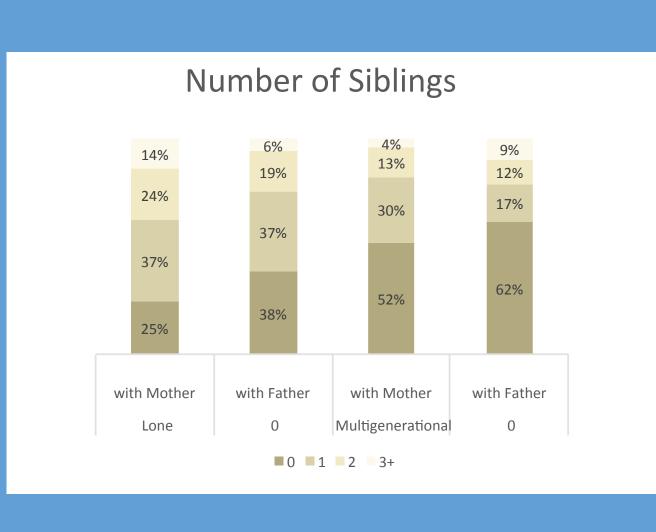
Sample Size:

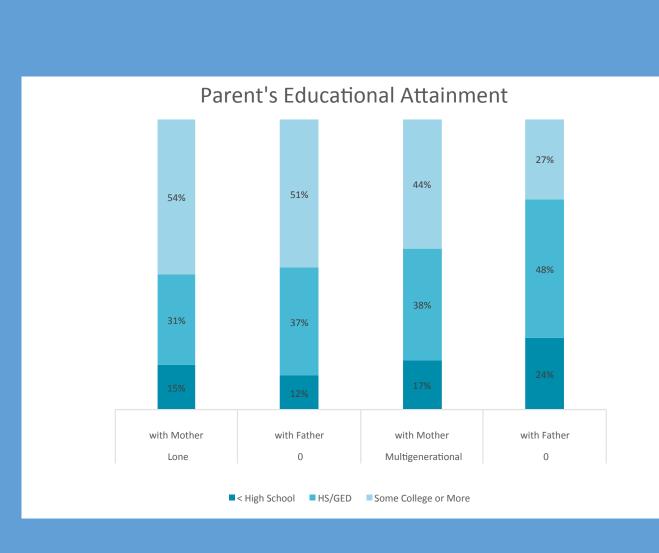
- Lone, with Mother: 6,891
- Lone, with Father: 1,038
- Multigenerational, with Mother: 1,138
- Multigenerational, with Father: 196
- Note: Analyses are weighted to provide representative data.

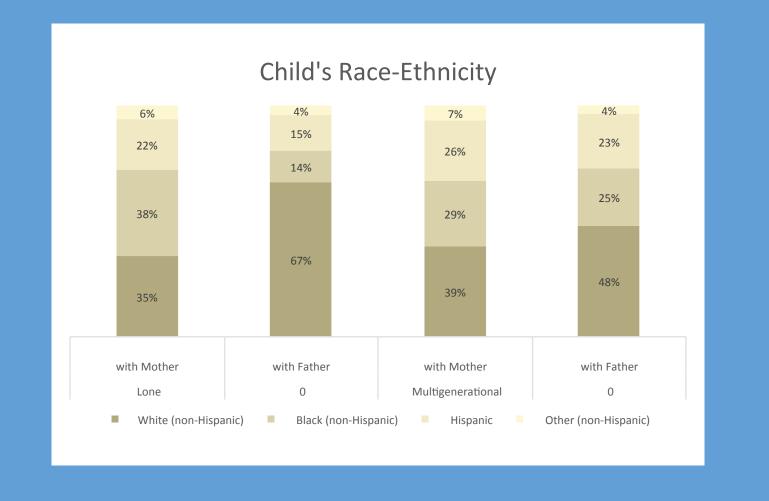


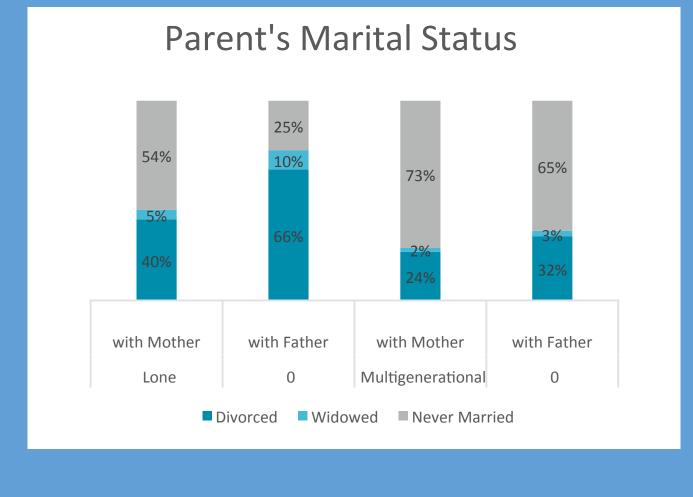
Heterogeneity Among Children in Single-Parent Families

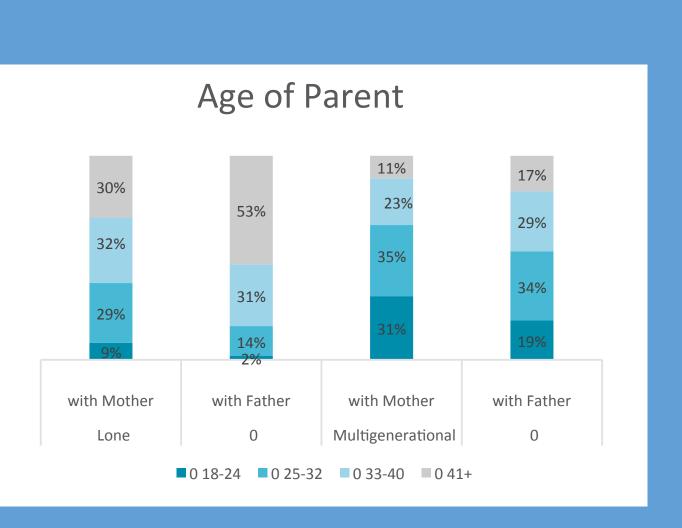




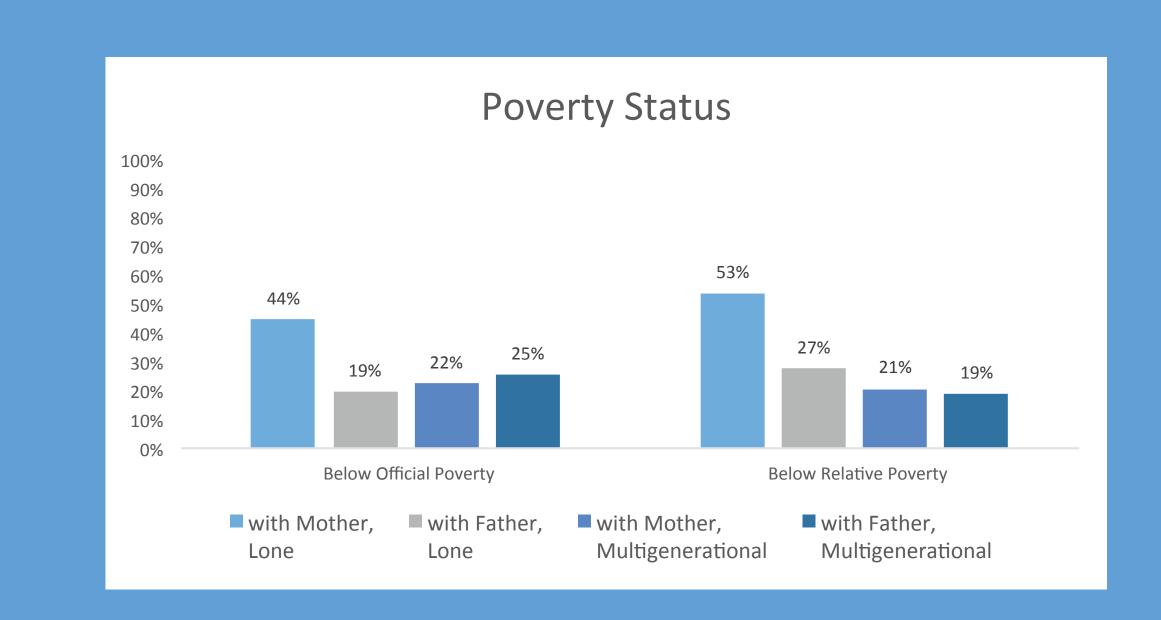




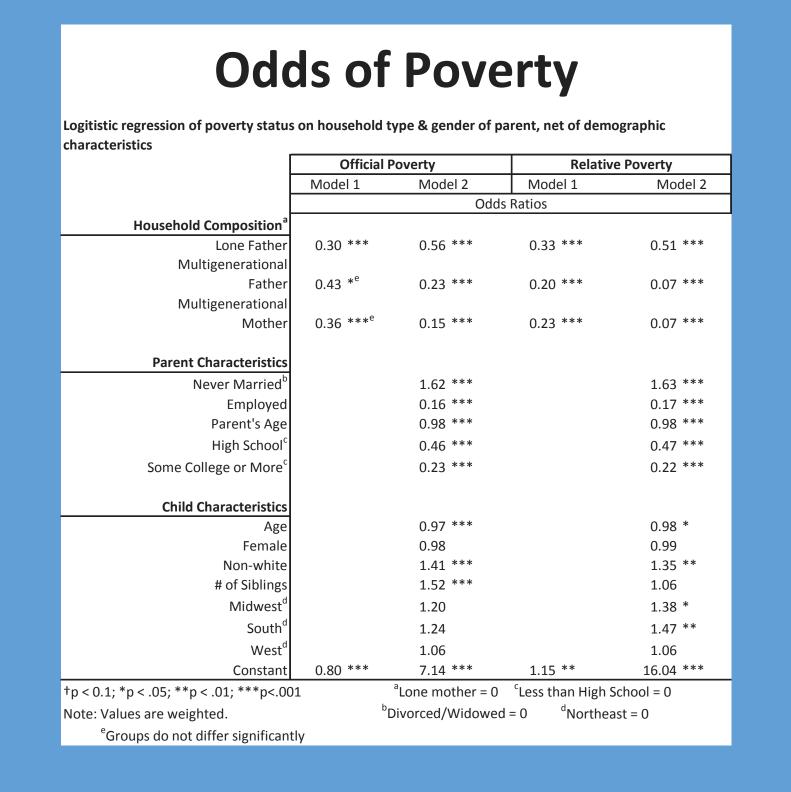


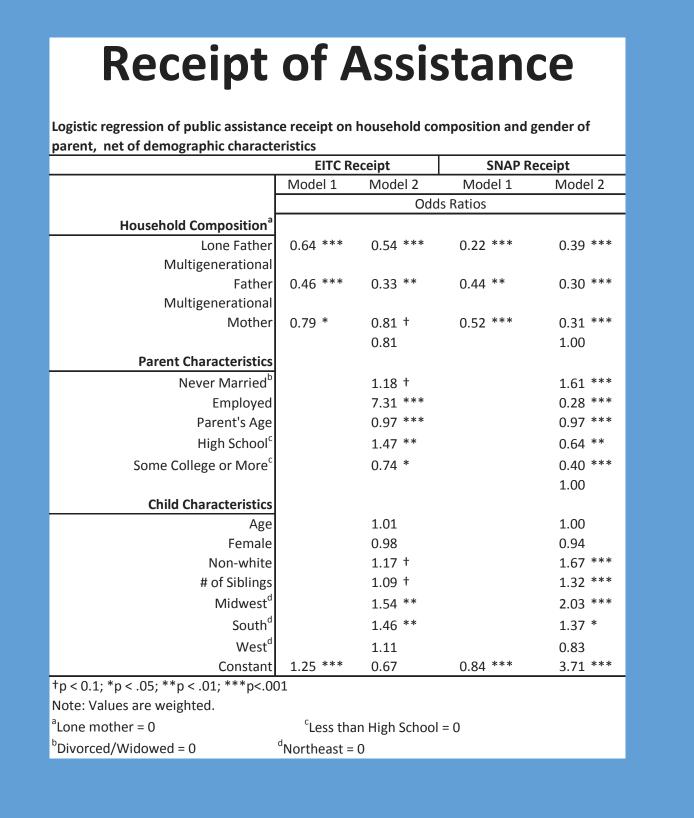


Percentage of Children in Poverty

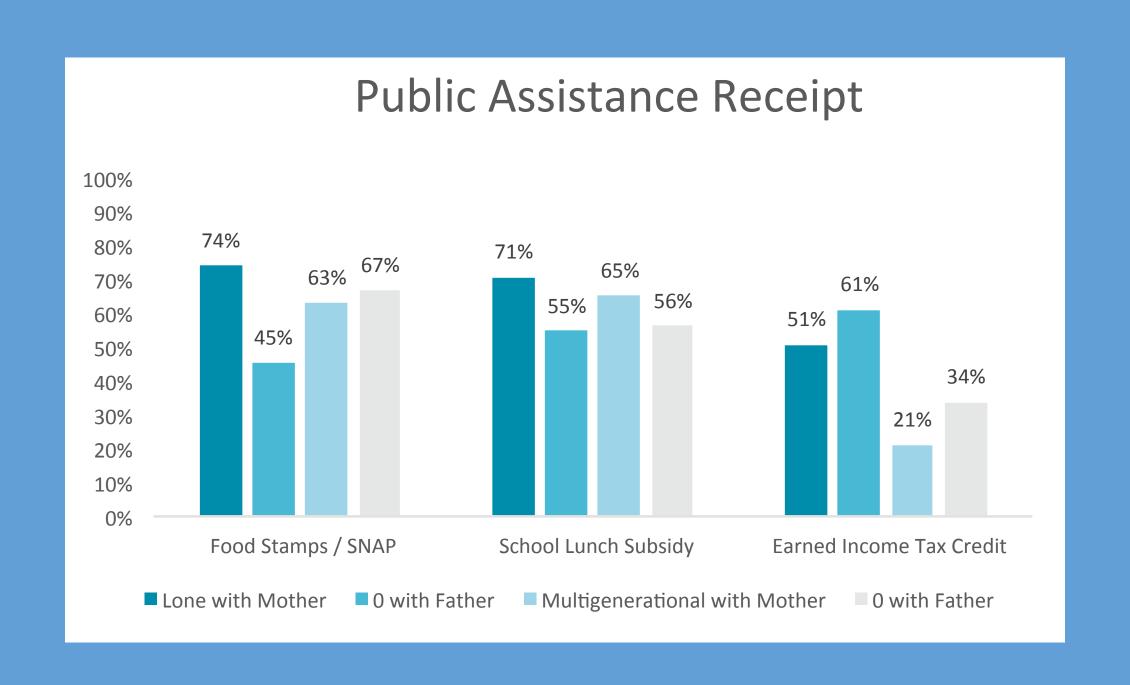


Odds of Poverty & Receipt of Assistance





Percentage of Children in Poverty Receiving Assistance



Conclusions

This study shows the considerable diversity of children in single-parent families and highlights the importance of both parent's gender and household composition for children's economic well-being.

Gender:

- Parent's gender remains a significant predictor of poverty among children in lone households. Children of lone mothers have the highest odds of falling into poverty compared to all other groups.
- The odds of falling into poverty do not differ significantly by parent's gender among those in multigenerational households.
- Children living with single fathers are less likely than those living with single-mothers to receive school lunch subsidies.
- Children with their mothers have higher odds of receiving EITC than those with their fathers.

Household Composition:

- Net of demographic characteristics, children in lone parent households are more likely than their counterparts in multigenerational households to be in poverty.
- Children in multigenerational homes are less likely to gain assistance through the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Children in multigenerational households are younger, and are more likely to have young, never married parents than those in lone households. They are less likely to have a highly educated parent or to live with siblings.
- Children in lone households have higher odds of receiving SNAP and school lunch assistance than those in multigenerational homes.

Limitations & Future Directions

Limitations:

- I limit my analysis to households without other adults present. Future research should examine how children's poverty and public assistance receipt is impacted by residence in these household types.
- This study is unable to address the issue of selection into these household types children in multigenerational households benefit from having grandparents who are willing and have the resources to take them in.

Questions to be addressed in future research include:

- How are children's movements in and out of poverty influenced by changes in family structure and household composition?
- What other factors encourage or discourage public assistance receipt among single-father families?

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