

The Effect That Family Structure Has On Child Delinquency

Research Questions

- Do single mother households increase the likelihood of young adult delinquency compared to two biological parent families and step parent families?
- Does such likelihood vary by race?

Significance

- 28.3% of children experienced living in single mother households in 2001-2002 (ADD Health).
- Single motherhood has long been seen as a significant factor of violent crime once children reach adulthood (Barber, 2004).
- Survey data of unprosecuted crimes eliminates claims of profiling or other external factors.

Background

- Children raised in single mother homes show lower levels of happiness, education and occupations as adults (Biblarz et al., 2000) and more likely to develop alcohol and drug abuse problems (Thomas et al., 1996).
- The current child support system fails to provide sufficient economic and parental involvement (Edin et al., 2019).
- Whites are thought to be more affected because blacks have tighter extended families to fill in for missing fathers (Thomas et al., 1996).

Hypotheses

- Young adults who lived in single mother families during adolescence are more likely to report committing delinquency than young adults who lived in two biological parent or step parent families.
- The association is similar across all races.

Data and Sample

- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)
- Wave 1 (1994 – 1995) Public Use Data (N = 6,504), aged 12 – 18
- Wave 3 (2001 – 2002) Public Use Data (N = 4,785), aged 18 – 26

Dependent Measures

- Delinquency in Wave 3
A dichotomous variable using the 12 questions
 - E.g. “How often did you steal something more than \$50?”
 - “How often did you sell marijuana or other drugs?”
 - “How often did you use a weapon in a fight?”
- | | |
|-------------------|-------|
| ➤ Any delinquency | 26.6% |
| ➤ No delinquency | 73.4% |

Independent Measure

- Family structure in Wave 1
 - Two Biological Parent Families 59.3%
 - Step Families 12.4%
 - Single Mother Families 28.3%

Control Measure

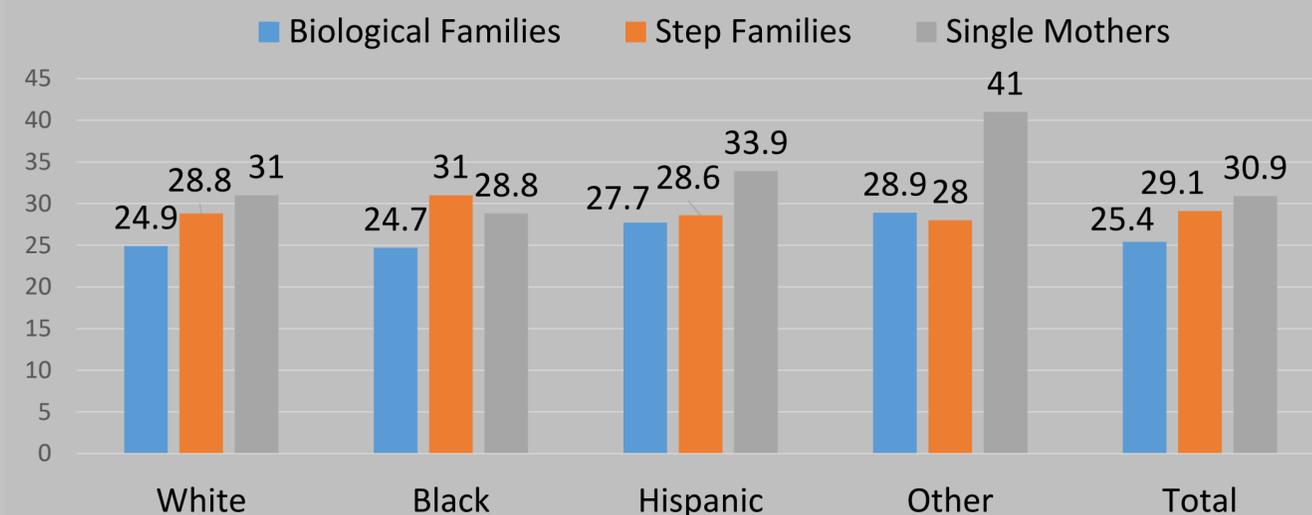
- Race
 - White 58.9%
 - Black 24.1%
 - Hispanic 10.7%
 - Other 6.3%

Analytical Plan

- Cross tabulation and Chi-square test using SPSS

Results

Figure 1. % Delinquency in Young Adulthood by Family Structure in Adolescence



Note: The association between delinquency and family structure was significant for Whites ($p = .015$), but not for Blacks, Hispanics, or other races. The association was a significance for the total sample ($p = .002$).

Summary of the Findings

- The relationship between living in single mother families in adolescence and young adult delinquency is strong when looking at all races together.
- Whites show the same relationship.
- Although three other racial ethnic groups exhibit higher rates of delinquency for single mother families than two biological families, the differences are not significant, perhaps due to the small sample sizes for racial minority groups.
- For Blacks, it could be due to the stronger role of extended families (Thomas et al., 1996).

Policy Implications

- Create policies that will support the formation and retention of two biological parent families.
- Strive for family court rulings that will create both economic security and parental involvement for divorced families.

References

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- Thomas, G., Farrell, M., & Barnes, G. (1996). The effects of single-mother families and nonresident fathers on delinquency and substance abuse in Black and White adolescents. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 58(4), 884 – 894.