

The Effects of Parental Marital Status on Adolescent Behavior in School

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Research Questions

- ❖ Are there differences in adolescent children's behavior in school between two-biological parent households and step-parent or single-parent households?
- ❖ Does this association differ for girls and boys?

Significance

- ❖ During adolescent years it is important for a child to have a support system to rely on to get them through school.
- ❖ Behavioral problems in school can lead to fewer efforts in school and eventually school drop outs.

Background

- ❖ The share of children residing with two biological married parents has been steadily declining, and the proportions of children residing in stepfamilies or families formed outside of marriage are at an all-time high (Brown, 2004).
- ❖ Female-headed families with children are 5 times as likely to be poor as married couple families are (44.8% vs. 8.7%) (Baughner & Lamison-White, 1996).
- ❖ The quality and characteristics of home and environment have important consequences for child outcomes. (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001).

Hypothesis

- ❖ Stepfamilies or single-mother families are related to higher odd of children's problem behavior at school than two-biological-parent families.
- ❖ These relationships are stronger for boys than girls.

Data

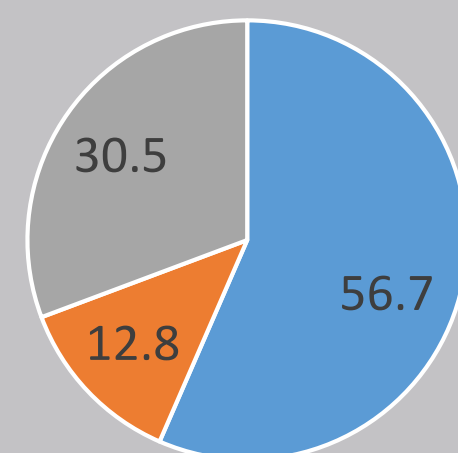
- ❖ National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)
- ❖ Wave 1 (1994-1995) public data (N = 6,504)
- ❖ U.S. adolescents in grades 7-12

Dependent Variable

- ❖ Adolescents' problems in school "Since school started, how often have you had trouble with A.) getting along with your teachers; B.) paying attention; C.) getting your homework done; D.) getting along with other students?"
- ❖ 0 = never, 1 = just a few times, 2 = about once a week, 3 = almost everyday, 4 = everyday.
- ❖ The sum of the 4 items (0-16)
- $M = 5.95, SD = 4.44$

Independent Variable

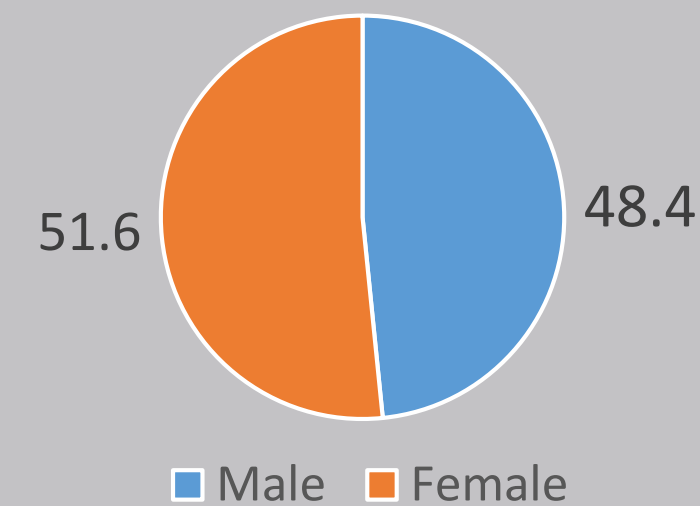
Figure 1. % Family Structure



- Two-biological-parent families
- Stepfamilies
- Single-mother families

Control Variable

Figure 2. % Gender of Respondents

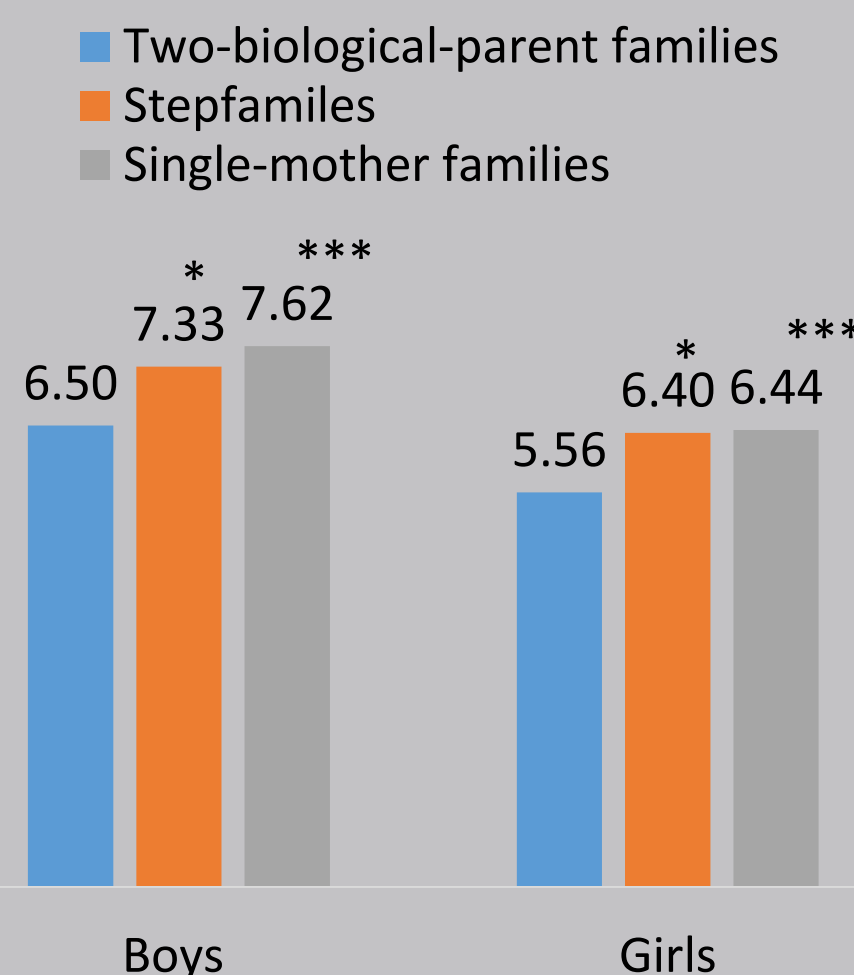


Analytical Plan

- ❖ Difference in means and T-tests using SPSS

Results

Figure 3. Mean School Problem Scale by Family Structure



Note. Differences in means between two-biological-parent families and stepfamilies or single-mother families are significant at * $p < .05$; and *** $p < .001$. Differences are not significant between stepfamilies and single-mother families.

Summary of the Results

- ❖ Boys and girls who live in stepfamilies or single-mother families are more likely than their counterparts living in two-biological-parent families to have school problems.
- ❖ There is no significant difference between stepfamilies and single-mother families.

Policy Implications

- ❖ Extra support in school such as seeing the guidance counselors may be necessary for adolescents living in single-mother families or stepfamilies.
- ❖ More support for single parents in the school could also be useful.
- ❖ Aftercare school programs for single parents may also increase the help needed for single parent households.

References

- Brown, S. L. (2004). Family structure and child well-being: The significance of parental cohabitation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(2), 351-367.
- Brown, S. L. (2006). Family structure transitions and adolescent well-being. *Demography*, 43(3), 447-461.
- Carlson, Marcia J., and Mary E. Corcoran. (2001). "Family structure and children's behavioral and cognitive outcomes." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63(3), 779-792.