

Family Structure and Adolescent's Self-Esteem

Research Questions

- Is living in a single-father household related to a child's lower self-esteem than living in a single-mother or two-parent household?
- Does the gender of the child make a difference in this association?

Significance

- There are roughly 15 million children living with a single mother, while 3 million are living with a single father (Livingston, 2018).
- Around one-thirds of teens in America will experience a form of anxiety disorder.
- These numbers have been on the rise since the early 2000's, with an increase of about 20% (McCarthy, 2019).

Background

- Self-esteem of a child was only affected when a parent was generally unhappy and not because of family structure (Long, 1986).
- Existing studies on single-father families tended to focus on father's well-being rather than children's well-being (Hilton et al., 2001).
- Single fathers' parenting practices for adolescent children are similar to single mothers' (Hook & Chalasani, 2008).

Hypotheses

- Children living in a single-parent household have lower self-esteem than living in a two-parent household.
- The effects of family structure on self-esteem are greater for girls than boys.

Data and Sample

- Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF)
- 2018 N = 29,980
- U.S. children in 8th and 10th grade

Dependent Measures

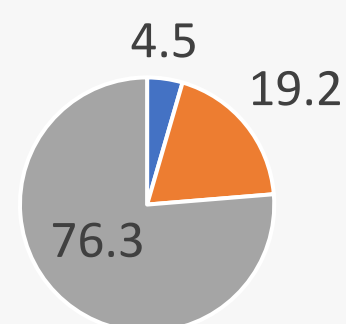
- Self-esteem scale
- The average of 4 items
 - "I take a positive attitude toward myself"
 - "I feel I am a person of worth, on equal plan with others"
 - "I enjoy life as much as anyone"
 - "I am able to do things as well as most"
- 1=Disagree, 2=Mostly Disagree, 3=Neither, 4=Mostly Agree, 5=Agree
- $M = 3.8$ ($SD = 1.1$)

Independent Measure

- Family Structure

Figure 1. % Distribution for Family Structure

- Single-Father Household
- Single-Mother Household
- Two-Parent Household



Control Measure

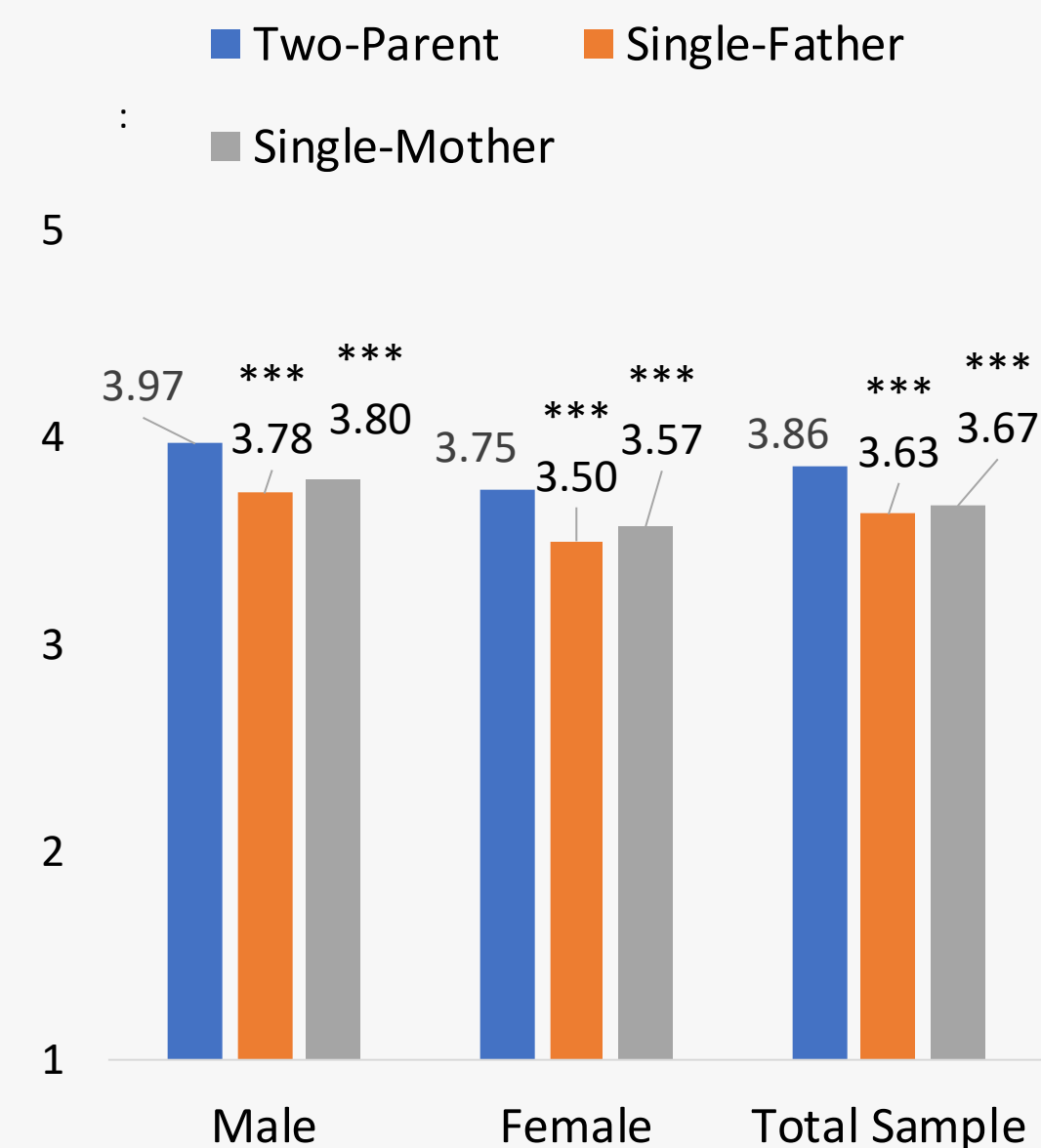
- Gender
 - Male: 50.3%
 - Female: 49.7%

Analysis

T-tests comparing the means, using SPSS

Results

Figure 2. Mean of Child's Self-Esteem by Family Structure and Gender



Differences from two-parent families are significant at ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Differences between single-father and single-mother families are not significant.

Summary of Findings

- Children living in single-parent households have lower self-esteem than those living in two-parent homes
- However, there is no difference in child's self-esteem between single-father and single-mother households.
- Girls report lower self-esteem than boys.
- The effects of family structure on child's self-esteem are similar for boys and girls.

Future Research Direction

- Future research should still focus on single-parent households, but expand to children's behavior such as deviance and success in school.
- Future research could also look at parents, such as single parents' self-esteem and their happiness, then compare these to their child's self-esteem and happiness.

References

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