Family Structure Impacts Poverty

**Issue:** Poverty and income disparity are closely linked to the presence or absence of marriage.

**Marriage**
- A child’s likelihood of living in poverty is reduced by 82 percent if he is raised in a married two-parent family with a mother and father.\(^1\)
- Intact married families have the largest annual income of all family structures with children under 18.\(^2\)
- In 2012 6.3 percent of married families were living in poverty, compared to 16.4 percent of male householders and 30.9 percent of female householders.\(^3\)

**Divorce**
- Almost 50 percent of American families experience poverty following a divorce.\(^4\)
- Divorcing or separating mothers are 2.83 times more likely to be in poverty than those who remain married.\(^5\)
- Single women’s median income dropped by 45 percent following their divorce.\(^6\)

**Single Parent Household**
- About 71 percent of impoverished families with children are headed by single parents.\(^7\)
- Children living with a single mother are over four times more likely to live in poverty than are children whose parents are married.\(^8\)

**Out-of-Wedlock Births**
- Children born out-of-wedlock spend more time in poverty than do the children of any other family structure.\(^9\)
- Over 75 percent of mothers who give birth out-of-wedlock will be on welfare within five years.\(^10\)

**Conclusion:** Promoting the intact, married family is an essential component to reducing poverty in America. MARRI research available online\(^11\) shows the significant relationship between family structure and poverty.
“Married two-parent families,” “married-couple families,” and similar terms within this document all refer to families in which there is a married mother and father present. Note, according to the US Census Bureau, “Family households and married-couple families do not include same-sex married couples even if the marriage was performed in a state issuing marriage certificates for same-sex couples.”


According to the ACS, a married-couple family consists of “A family in which the householder and his or her spouse are listed as members of the same household.”


U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-2009

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