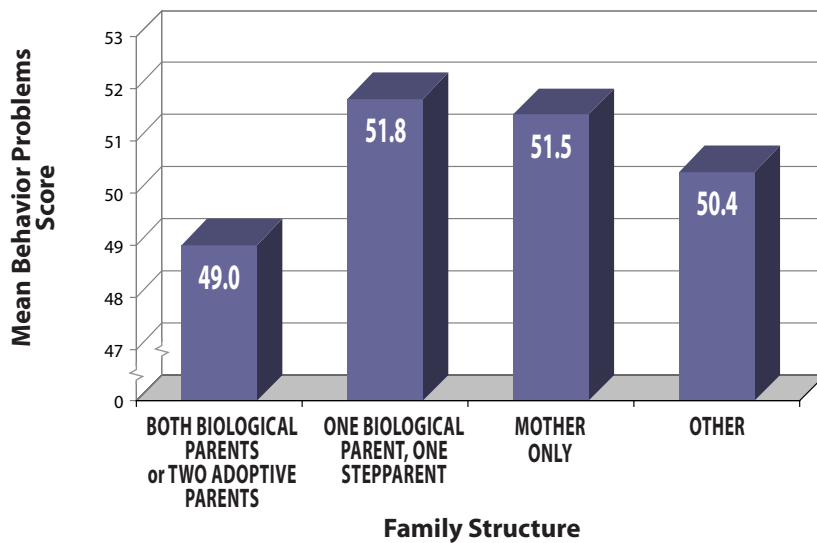




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 29

Behavior Problems and Family Structure

Behavior Problems by Family Structure



Source: National Survey of Children's Health

This chart is taken from a study conducted by Nicholas Zill, Ph.D.¹ for Family Research Council.²

Children who live with both their biological parents are less likely to exhibit behavior problems than those who do not.³

According to the National Survey of Children's Health, children who live with both biological parents score lower on the behavior problems scale (49.0)⁴ than those who live with a biological parent and a stepparent (51.8).⁵ In between are those who only live with their biological

mother (51.5) or those who live within another family structure (50.4).⁶ Items measured on the behavior problems scale include bullying, disobedience, and acting depressed.⁷

Other Studies

Several other studies support the direction of these findings. Yongmin Sun of Ohio State University found that adolescents in non-biological-parent families had more behavioral problems than children in stepfather, two-biological parent or single mother families.⁸

Examining the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Robert Apel of the University of Albany and Catherine Kaukinen of the University of Colorado reported "that youths who reside with

two biological parents as a group have the lowest rate of antisocial behavior among all family structure types.”⁹

Sandra Hofferth of the University of Maryland also found “that children of unmarried biological parents experienced higher levels of behavioral problems than those of married biological parents.”¹⁰

When it comes to raising well-adjusted, well-behaved children, the intact family tops all other family structures.

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- 1 Nicholas Zill is a research psychologist and consultant. Until his recent retirement, he was a vice president of Westat, Inc. He was the founder of Child Trends and its executive director for 13 years.
 - 2 This chart draws on data collected by the National Center for Health Statistics in the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) in 2003. The data sample consisted of parents of 102,353 children and teens in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. 68,996 of these children and teens were between six and 17 years old, the age group that was the focus of the study. The survey sample in this age range represented a population of nearly 49 million young people nationwide.
 - 3 These relationships still hold up after controlling for parent education, family income, poverty, and race/ethnicity.
 - 4 A small sample of “two adoptive parents” is also included in this score.
 - 5 Most of the parents in the “biological parent and a stepparent” category are married.
 - 6 Categories covered under “other” include children with father only, foster parent, and children living with grandparent or other relatives.
 - 7 The behavior problems scale has a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of ten.
 - 8 Yongmin Sun, “The Well-Being of Adolescents in Households with No Biological Parents,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65 (2003): 894-909.
 - 9 Robert Apel and Catherine Kaukinen, “On the Relationship between Family Structure and Antisocial Behavior: Parental Cohabitation and Blended Households,” *Criminology* 46 (2008): 35-70.
 - 10 Sandra L. Hofferth, “Residential Father Family Type and Child Well-Being: Investment versus Selection,” *Demography* 43 (2006): 53-77.



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