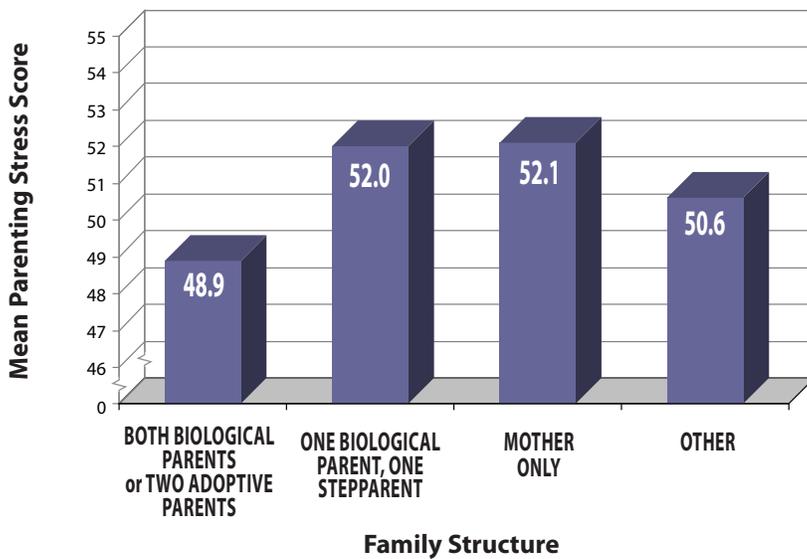




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 35

Parenting Stress and Family Structure

Parenting Stress by Family Structure



Source: National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH)

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

Biological parents and adoptive parents who live together report less parenting stress than those who do not live together.

According to the National Survey of Children’s Health, biological parents and adoptive parents who live together report less parenting stress (48.9)³ than single mothers (52.1). In between are parents who live within an “other” family structure (50.6)⁴ and biological parent/stepparent families (52.0).⁵

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Paul Amato of the Pennsylvania State University reported that “adults and children from divorced families, as a group, score lower than their counterparts in married-couple families on a variety of indicators of well-being,” including happiness, self-conceptions, and psychological distress.⁶

John Cairney of the University of Toronto and colleagues also found that single mothers reported “higher levels of chronic stress” than married mothers did.⁷

Rukmalie Jayakody and Dawn Stauffer of the Pennsylvania State University found that, compared to married mothers, single mothers exhibit a significantly higher rate of psychiatric disorders, the most common being depression.⁸

As the evidence shows, biological parents who live together are less stressed and much healthier than their single and divorced counterparts.

Nicholas Zill, Ph.D.
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Former Vice President of Westat
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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 A small sample of "two adoptive parents" is also included in this score.
 - 4 Categories covered under "other" include children with father only, foster parent, and children living with grandparent or other relatives.
 - 5 Most of the parents in the "biological parent and a stepparent" category are married.
 - 6 Paul R. Amato, "The Consequence of Divorce for Adults and Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 62 (2000): 1269-1287.
 - 7 John Cairney, et al., "Stress, Social Support, and Depression in Single and Married Mothers," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, vol. 38 (2003): 442-449.
 - 8 Rukmalie Jayakody and Dawn Stauffer, "Mental Health Problems among Single Mothers: Implications for Work and Welfare Reform," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 56 (2000): 617-634.



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