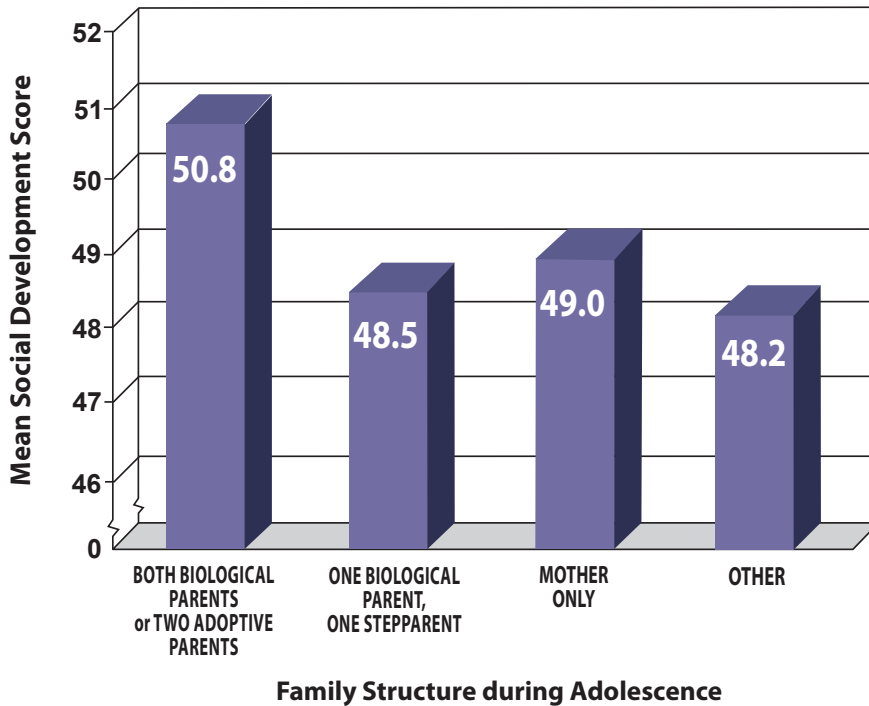




Children’s Positive Social Development and Family Structure

Children’s Positive Social Development by Family Structure



Source: National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH, 2003)

Nicholas Zill, Ph.D.¹ provided the data for this chart.²

Children who live with both biological parents or two adoptive parents are more socially developed than those who do not.

According to the National Survey of Children’s Health, children who live with both biological parents or two adoptive parents score higher on the social development scale (50.8) than children who live within other family configurations (48.2), such as with their father only or foster parents.³ In between are those who live with a biological

parent and a stepparent (48.5) and those who live with single mothers (49.0).⁴

Positive social development is shown by behaviors such as getting along with other children, showing respect for teachers and neighbors, trying to understand other people’s feelings, and trying to resolve conflicts between people.

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Robert Apel of the University of Albany and Catherine Kaukinen of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs reported that youths living with both biological parents “commit the fewest kinds of antisocial behaviors.”⁵ Ronald Simons of Iowa State University and colleagues also found that “[c]hildren living in

communities with a large number of single-parent households are more apt to be involved in a deviant peer group and to engage in antisocial behavior.”⁶

As the data indicate, children who live with both biological parents are more likely to engage in and develop prosocial behavior.

Nicholas Zill, Ph.D.
Research Psychologist
Former Vice President of Westat
Founding President of Child Trends

-
- 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 "Other family configurations" also include children living with grandparent or other relatives.
 - 4 Most of the parents in the "biological parent and a stepparent" category are married.
 - 5 Robert Apel and Catherine Kaukinen, "On the Relationship between Family Structure and Antisocial Behavior: Parental Cohabitation and Blended Households," *Criminology*, vol. 46 (2008): 35-70.
 - 6 Ronald L. Simons, et al., "Parents and Peer Group as Mediators of the Effect of Community Structure on Adolescent Problem Behavior," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 24 (1996): 145-171.



FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL
801 G STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20001
800-225-4008
WWW.FRC.ORG

Mapping America
Editor: Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.
Managing Editor: Michael Leaser

Please feel free to make additional copies of this resource. We only ask that you comply with standard norms of attribution to the Family Research Council and to Mapping America.

WWW.MAPPINGAMERICAPROJECT.ORG