

Benefits of Two Married Parents for Children – A Research Summary

Children do better with two parents in an intact or stable marriage than any other family arrangement on almost every measure of child well-being. Numerous research studies over several decades have repeatedly confirmed this finding.¹ This backgrounder briefly summarizes the major findings. For more detail or defense on any point, please consult the endnote references. *Dr. Paul Sullins, Catholic University of America and Marriage and Religion Research Institute (MARRI), sullins@cua.edu*

--In 1994, Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, using evidence from four nationally representative data sets, compared the outcomes of children growing up with both biological parents, with single parents, and with step-parents.² McLanahan and Sandefur found that children who did not live with both biological parents were roughly **twice as likely**:

- **to be poor**
- **to have a birth outside of marriage**
- **to have behavioral and psychological problems, and**
- **to not graduate from high school.**

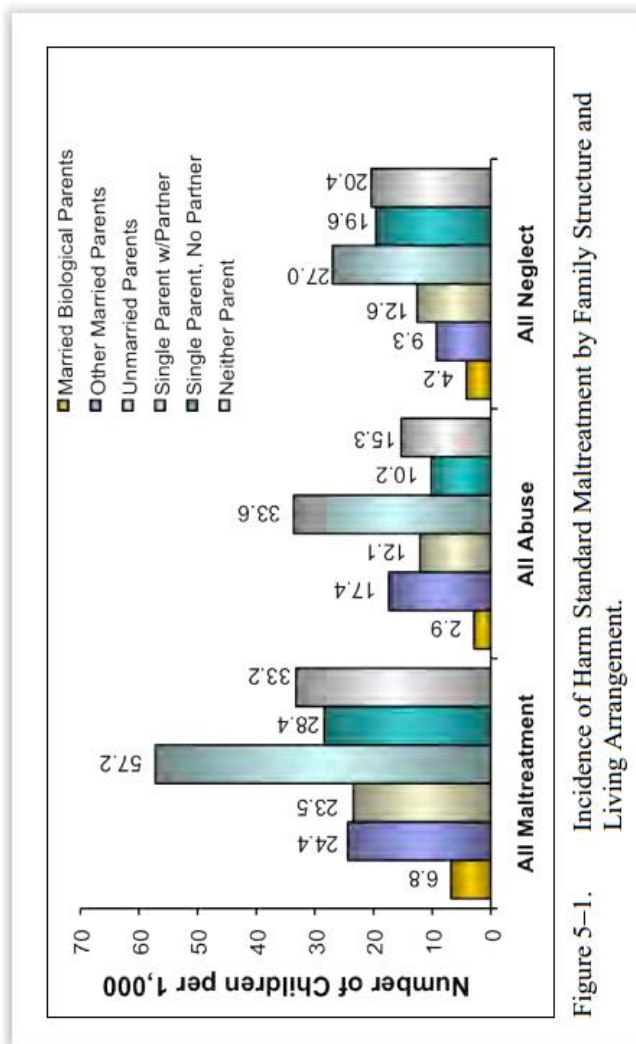
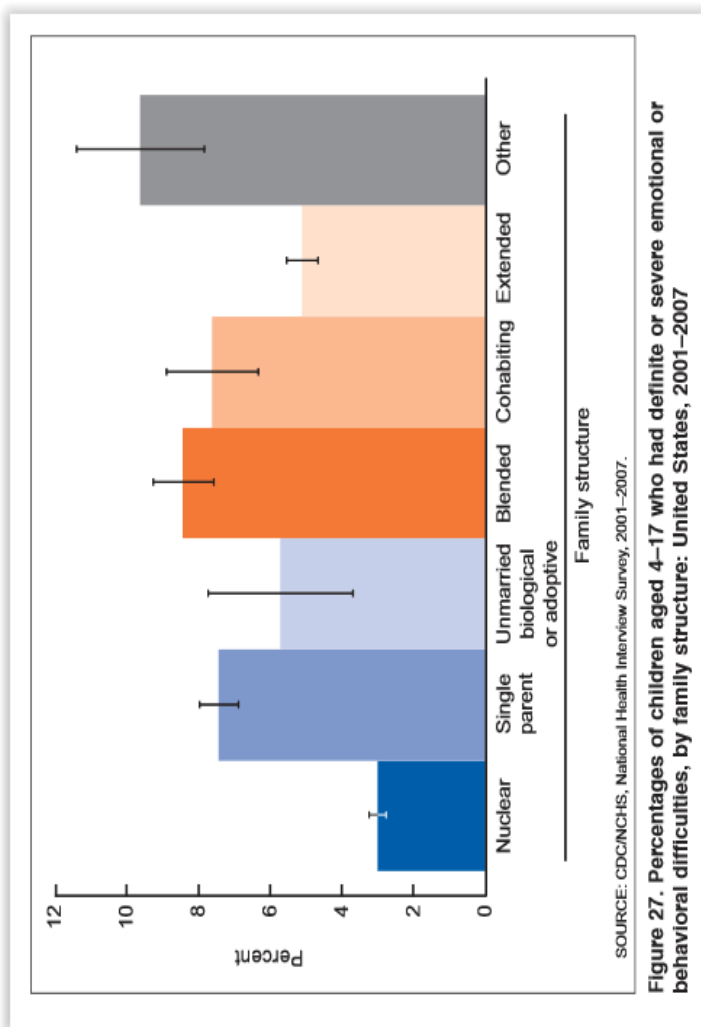
--In 2005 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, summarized the findings to that date as follows: **Researchers have found many benefits for children and youth who are raised by parents in healthy marriages ..., including the following:**

1. **More likely to attend college**
2. **More likely to succeed academically**
3. **Physically healthier**
4. **Emotionally healthier**
5. **Less likely to attempt or commit suicide**
6. **Demonstrate less behavioral problems in school**
7. **Less likely to be a victim of physical or sexual abuse**
8. **Less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol**
9. **Less likely to commit delinquent behaviors**
10. **Have a better relationship with their mothers and fathers**
11. **Decreases their chances of divorcing when they get married**
12. **Less likely to become pregnant as a teenager, or impregnate someone.**
13. **Less likely to be sexually active as teenagers**
14. **Less likely to contract STD's**
15. **Less likely to be raised in poverty³**

--In 2010 demographers from the Centers for Disease Control's National Center for Health Statistics reported findings from the 2001-2007 National Health Information Surveys comparing children in intact married families with those in post-divorce single mother, single father, or blended families (among others) on a wide range of indicators of physical and emotional health. ***On every indicator examined, children being raised in single mother or blended families exhibited poorer health than those in intact married families.*** For example, the proportion of children in post-divorce single/blended families compared to the proportion in intact married families for a variety of emotional health measures was as follows:

- **5.0/5.1% (divorced single/step) to 2% (nuclear) for not being generally well-behaved or obeying adults.**
- **7.4/8.4% (divorced single/step) to 3.0% (nuclear) for definite or severe emotional or behavioral difficulties. See Figure 27 below.**
- **7.3/8.5% (divorced single/step) to 4.1% (nuclear) for having many worries.**

- 3.7/4.4% (divorced single/step) to 2.0% (nuclear) for being often unhappy, depressed or tearful.
- 14.9/16.1% (divorced single/step) to 8.1% (nuclear) for having been diagnosed with a learning disability or ADHD.⁴



--The 2012 National Incidence Study, a congressionally-mandated report on child abuse and neglect in the United States, found that rates of child abuse and neglect were several times lower with married biological parents than all other family arrangements.⁵ See Figure 5-1 from the study above.

¹ Some studies distinguish “healthy” marriages from marriages of short duration or high conflict levels. For these studies this document reports results for healthy marriages. The Marriage and Religion Research Institute (www.marri.us) reports a database of hundreds of improved outcomes for children with married parents who worship weekly.

² Sara McLanahan and Gary D. Sandefur, *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Harvard University Press, 1994).

³ “ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative: Benefits of the Healthy Marriage Initiative,” accessed November 10, 2015, <http://archive.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/benefits/index.html>.

⁴ DL Blackwell, “Family Structure and Children’s Health in the United States: Findings from the National Health Interview Survey, 2001–2007,” *National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Health Stat*, no. 246 (2010): 20–34.

⁵ AJ Sedlak et al., “Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress” (Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2010), Archived at the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) website http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/natl_incident/index.html.

Harms Suffered by Children with Same-sex Parents – A Research Summary

Research that compares children in the care of homosexual couples with those with man-woman parents has begun to show substantial harm in psychological and developmental outcomes. This backgrounder briefly summarizes the major findings. For more detail or defense on any point, please consult the endnote references.

Despite politicized claims based on biased research by the major social science associations, all scientifically valid random-sample studies to date of children in the care of same-sex parents have found evidence of harm relative to children raised by a man and a woman.¹ At this time, the three largest statistically representative datasets used to address the question—Regnerus’s New Family Structures Survey, with 3,000 cases; the National Health Interview Survey, with 1.6 million cases; and the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, with 20,000 cases—have all found that children with same-sex parents fare substantially worse—most measures show at least twice the level of distress—than do children with opposite-sex parents on a range of psychological, developmental and emotional outcomes.

Compared to opposite-sex parents, children in the care of same-sex couples are:

- At more than twice the risk of emotional problems, including depression, anxiety, misbehavior, poor relationships with peers and inability to concentrate. They are twice as likely to have seen a doctor or to have taken medication for a psychological condition in the past year.²
- Twice as likely to have been diagnosed with a developmental disability such as a learning disability or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).³
- Ten times more likely to have been sexually touched by a parent or other adult and four times more likely to have been forced to have sex against their will. Abuse is more likely if the same-sex parents are married.⁴
- *Less likely* to have been bullied or picked on in school, despite widespread speculation to the contrary.⁵
- Much more likely to have already experienced one parental breakup prior to landing with their same-sex parents, and remain more likely to experience yet another breakup of the same-sex couple and transition to a third set of parents.⁶
- In adolescence, they are less likely to have romantic relationships or to envision themselves in a future relationship involving pregnancy or marriage.⁷
- Problems persist into adulthood. As adults, persons who report having same-sex parents are more likely to be depressed, smoke, use marijuana, to have been arrested and to have pled guilty when they were arrested. They are over three times more likely to have had a marital affair or to be unemployed and receiving public assistance.⁸ By age 30, women who had same-sex parents are only half as likely to be married or to be in any

relationship that has lasted three years or longer, and only a third as likely to have ever been pregnant.⁹

- EVERY CHILD WITH A SAME-SEX COUPLE IS DEPRIVED OF THE CARE OF ONE OR BOTH OF HIS/HER NATURAL PARENTS. In every case there is at least one absentee parent of the opposite sex of the homosexual partners with no access or only greatly restricted access to care for the child. Sullins found, “Biological parentage uniquely and powerfully distinguishes child outcomes between children with opposite-sex parents and those with same-sex parents.”¹⁰ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says, “The child shall have the right from birth ... to know and be cared for by his or her parents” (Art. 7), and that governments “shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents” (Art. 9).
- Dozens of adults have published accounts of their difficulties growing up as children raised by lesbian couples. Some report horrendous abuse and instability, but the most common complaint is that, despite having loving mothers, they struggled and felt incomplete without a relationship with a father.¹¹

For questions/comments, contact:

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¹ Of the several dozen extant studies on same-sex parenting, only eight have used a random sample large enough to find evidence of lower well-being for children with same-sex parents if it exists. Of these eight, the four most recent studies, by Dr. Mark Regnerus, Dr. Douglas Allen and two by Dr. Paul Sullins, report substantial and pertinent negative outcomes for children with same-sex parents. The American Psychological Association ignores these studies. The four earlier studies, by Dr. Michael Rosenfeld and three by Dr. Jennifer Wainright and colleagues, find no differences for children with same-sex parents because, due to errors in file coding and analysis, a large portion of their same-sex parent samples actually consists of children with heterosexual parents. When the sample used by Wainright’s three studies is corrected of this error and re-analyzed, these data also show negative outcomes for children with same-sex parents similar to those reported by Regnerus and Sullins.

² Sullins, Donald Paul, Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents: Difference by Definition (January 25, 2015). *British Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science* 7(2):99-120, 2015. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2500537> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2500537>

³ Sullins, “Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents: Difference by Definition.”

⁴ Regnerus, “How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study”; Sullins, “Sullins, Unexpected Harm.”

⁵ Sullins, Emotional Problems.

⁶ Schumm, “Comparative Relationship Stability of Lesbian Mother and Heterosexual Mother Families.”

⁷ Sullins, “Family Formation and Sexual Identity Development among Children with Same-Sex Parents”.

Unpublished research in process; details available by request via sullins@cua.edu.

⁸ Regnerus, “How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study.”

⁹ Sullins, Family Formation.

¹⁰ Sullins, “Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents.”

¹¹ Shick and Gramckow, *My Daddy’s Secret*; Stefanowicz, *Out From Under*; Lopez and Edelman, *Jephtah’s Daughters*.

A link to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report published in 2010 [Blackwell DL. Family structure and children's health in the United States: Findings from the National Health Interview Survey, 2001-2007. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 10 (246). 2010.] provided by Dr. Sullins is provided below. Dr. Sullivan described the report as entirely non-partisan and noted it provides data based on hundreds of thousands of cases on dozens of child outcomes by family structure, with helpful charts for many of the findings.

www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_246.pdf