

# Snapshots of America's Families

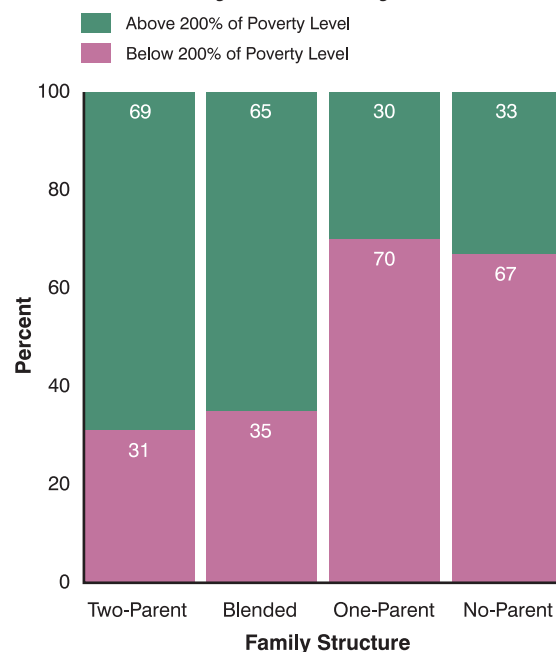
## Children's Environment and Behavior

### Family Structure

**M**ost American children live in two-parent families, whether biological or adoptive. Many children, however, do not live with both of their biological parents. Divorce and separation, births outside of marriage, remarriages, and child abuse or neglect are among the reasons these children spend at least part of their childhood with only one or neither biological parent.

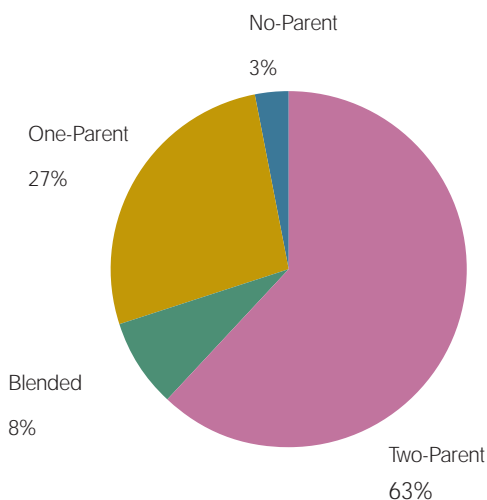
Families are the primary source of a child's economic and emotional resources, and the adults with whom children live are their earliest role models. The time and economic resources associated with raising children may be less for a single parent, especially if he or she is the only breadwinner. Children raised by two parents are more likely to benefit from higher household income and more attention from their parents. Recognizing the importance of family structure to the well-being of children, lawmakers have turned their attention recently to developing incentives for the formation and maintenance of marriage. The promotion of two-parent families is also a goal of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

Children's Family Structure, by Income, 1997



Source: Urban Institute

Children's Family Structure, 1997



Source: Urban Institute

Primary caregivers were asked about their relationship to the children living in their household. On the basis of their responses, children were grouped into one of four types of families. Two-parent families consist of children living with two parents, whether biological or adoptive. Blended families contain one biological or adoptive parent married to one stepparent who has not adopted the child. (Children who have been adopted by the stepparent are likely to have greater access to the stepparent's resources than children who have not been adopted.) One-parent families are headed by a biological or adoptive parent and may or may not include an unmarried partner or related adults living in the household. Children

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Assessing  
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This *Snapshot* presents findings from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a 1997 survey of 44,461 households with and without telephones that are representative of the nation as a whole and of 13 states. As in all surveys, the data are subject to sampling variability and other sources of error.

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living with relatives other than their parents or with unrelated adults are grouped into the no-parent family category.

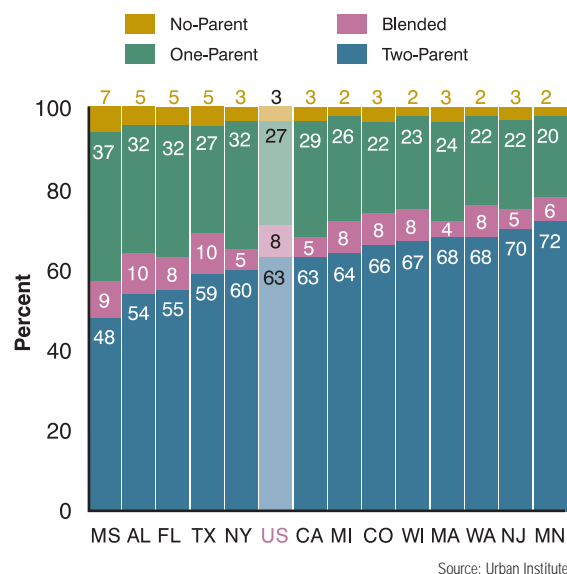
On the national level, 63 percent of children lived in two-parent families, and the vast majority of those parents were married—only 3 percent of children lived with two unmarried biological or adoptive parents. Twenty-seven percent of children lived in one-parent families. Relatively small percentages of children lived in the other family structures: 8 percent in blended families and 3 percent in no-parent families.

As pointed out above, children living in one-parent or no-parent families are far more likely to experience economic hardship than children raised in two-parent or blended families. Nationally, 31 percent of children in two-parent families and 35 percent of children in blended families had low incomes (below 200 percent of the poverty level), compared to 70 percent in one-parent families and 67 percent in no-parent families.

The structure of families with children also varies by state. Among the states surveyed, Minnesota had the highest proportion of children living in two-parent families, 72 percent, and the lowest proportion of children in one-parent families, 20 percent. In contrast, 48 percent of children

in Mississippi lived in two-parent families, and 37 percent lived in one-parent families. Compared to the national average of 63 percent, six states had more children living in two-parent families: Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Washington, and Wisconsin. Fewer children in Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas lived in this type of family.

**Children's Family Structure, by State, 1997**



**Children (%) Living in Various Family Structures, 1997**

Family Structure	AL	CA	CO	FL	MA	MI	MN	MS	NJ	NY	TX	WA	WI	US
Two-parent	53.8	63.1	66.4	54.6	68.2	64.2	72.3	47.7	70.1	60.3	59.0	67.9	66.6	62.6
Blended	9.6	5.1	8.4	8.2	4.2	7.7	5.9	8.8	4.9	5.0	9.5	8.2	7.7	7.6
One-parent	31.7	29.2	22.4	32.3	24.5	25.7	20.0	36.6	22.2	31.5	27.0	21.9	23.4	26.7
No-parent	4.9	2.6	2.9	5.0	3.1	2.4	1.7	7.0	2.9	3.2	4.5	2.1	2.3	3.2

Figures in color represent statistically significant differences from the national average at the .05 confidence level. Figures in black are not statistically significantly different from the national average. All figures in text, charts, and table are rounded. Source: Urban Institute