



MASSACHUSETTS
FAMILY INSTITUTE

Fatherlessness in Massachusetts

*The Economic and Social Costs
to Our Commonwealth*

2023 UPDATE

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INTRODUCTION

THE NEED FOR STRONG, INTACT, TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

“We know the statistics – that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and twenty times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, or run away from home, or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our community are weaker because of it.”

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, (2010, June 21).

President Obama Promotes Responsible Fatherhood: ‘No Excuses.’
The White House Blog. Web.

“If every kid in America had a loving father in the home, we would have far, far fewer problems that we would have to deal with as a society... There are more than 18 million children in our country who live without a father in their home... This has a severe impact on children, and often leads to dropping out of school, crime, and substance abuse.”

GOVERNOR RON DESANTIS, (2022, June 1).

DeSantis: Fatherlessness Is To Blame For Far Too Many Of Society’s Problems.
The Daily Wire. Web.

“On just about any measure of development you can think of, children who are born to unmarried women fare worse than the children of divorce and far worse than children raised in intact families. This unwelcome reality persists even after controlling for the income and education of the parents.”

CHARLES MURRAY, (2012, Jan. 21).

The New American Divide. *The Wall Street Journal. Web.*

“Six decades of social science have established that the most efficient way to increase dysfunction is to increase fatherlessness. And this the United States has done, for two generations now. Almost one in four children today grows up without a father in the home.”

MARY EBERSTADT, (2020, Dec. 1).

The Fury of the Fatherless. *First Things. Web.*

“No matter the problem — violent crime, rampant poverty, poor health outcomes, failing schools — we know that simply adding a father into the life of his child can make a difference for the child, father, and society.”

JACK BREWER AND SHAD WHITE, (2022, Sep. 14).

Our children and nation need fathers to step up. *Washington Examiner. Web.*

Sometimes the best solution to a problem is the simplest and most obvious. Amidst the clamor over many of the pressing social issues of our day — rising income inequality, disparity of educational opportunity, youth violence, and access to health care — one simple, obvious causal factor is often overlooked: the state of the American family.

The family has been described by William Bennett as “the first form of community and government” and, by Michael Novak, as “the first, best and original Department of Health, Education and Welfare.”¹ In Massachusetts, we may pride ourselves on our world-class educational and medical institutions and take comfort in our Commonwealth’s generous social services programs and welfare assistance, but none of these efforts, no matter how well-intended, can replace the fundamental advantage and security for children of going to sleep at night under the same roof as their mother and father. As a Commonwealth, we need to remind ourselves that all the programs and services to help children are merely a support, and never a replacement, for the family.

In fact, social science and census data consistently paint a compelling case of the need for strong, intact, two-parent families here and now in the 21st century. If we truly care about our children, particularly the most vulnerable among them, we must do everything in our power to ensure they are raised by a mother and a father.

As former President Barack Obama said so well on Father’s Day, 2010: “We can all agree that we’ve got too many mothers out there forced to do everything all by themselves. They’re doing a heroic job, often under trying circumstances. They deserve a lot of credit for that. But they shouldn’t have to do it alone. The work of raising our children is the most important job in this country, and it’s all of our responsibilities — mothers and fathers.”²

We wholeheartedly agree, and believe our Commonwealth’s culture, laws, and policies should reflect that same principle.

Andrew Beckwith
President & CEO
Massachusetts Family Institute



SECTION I

THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN FAMILY

Over the past 60 years, the family in America has changed dramatically. Of all the changes, perhaps the most significant is the increasing absence of the father from the home. At the end of the 1950s – before the social revolution took root – the percentage of children born out of wedlock in America was approximately 5 percent.³ By 2009, that percentage had grown to just over 40 percent, where it remains to this day.⁴

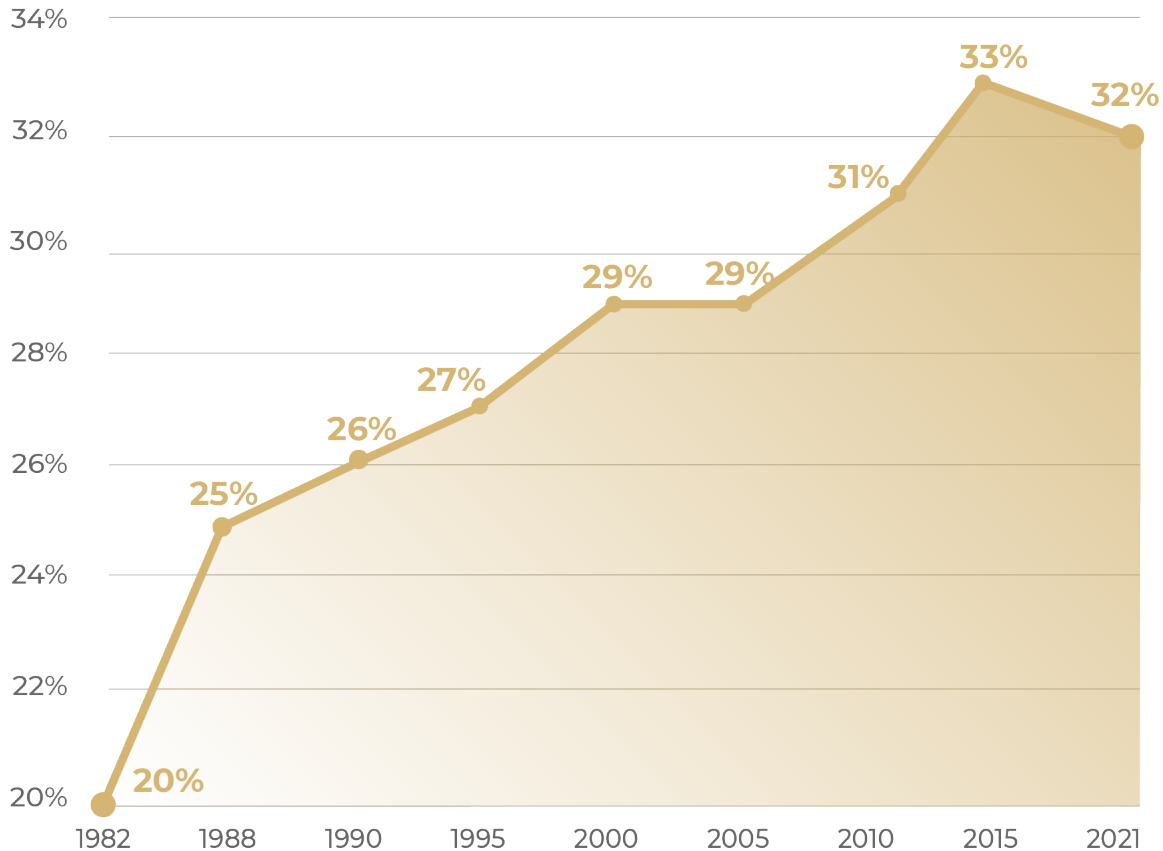
This along with increased rates of divorce has contributed to the fact that 24 million children in America, nearly one out of every three, now live in homes without both biological parents.⁵ For the overwhelming majority of these children, this means specifically growing up without a father.⁶ This is a sea change in American culture.

More than being simply another discouraging national statistic, this problem of fatherlessness has become a sustained challenge to the children of our Commonwealth.

Fifty years ago, as late as 1970, nearly all children born in Massachusetts went home from the hospital with a married mother and father.⁷ By the end of the century, just 30 years later, fewer than three-quarters of all children were born to a married mother.⁸ In the first two decades of the 21st century, the percentage of out-of-wedlock births in Massachusetts grew to one-third of all births, and that number seems to have solidified into a new norm.⁹

Since 1980, the fraction of Massachusetts children in single-parent families has grown from one in five to one in three.

Percentage of Massachusetts Children in Single-Parent Families

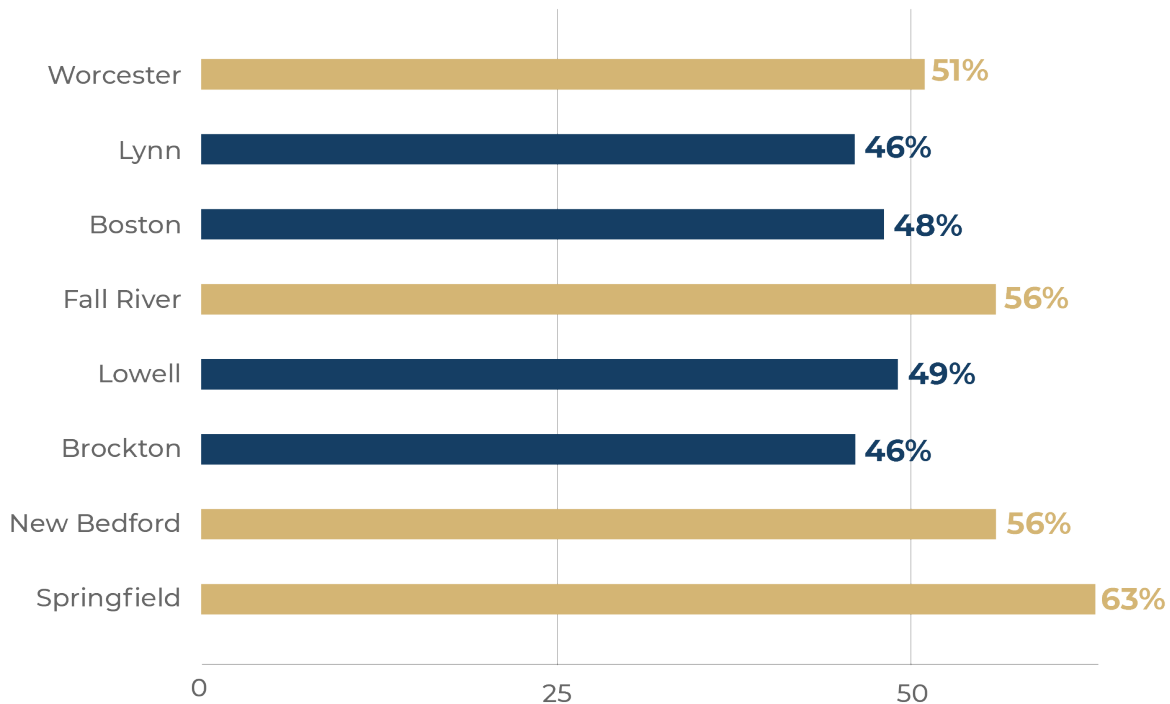


Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Census of the Population 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990*, U.S. Department of Commerce. Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Center. (2021). Children in single-parent families: Massachusetts, 2000-2021. Analysis by Population Reference Bureau of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Supplementary Survey, 2001 Supplementary Survey and 2002 through 2019, 2021 American Community Survey (ACS). Accessed May 5, 2023 via the Annie E. Casey Foundation, from datacenter.aecf.org

This has led, not surprisingly, to a concurrent increase in the number of children who spend their formative years in homes without a father. In the past 50 years, the percentage of children growing up in single-parent families in Massachusetts has increased from less than 10 percent¹⁰ to well over 30 percent.¹¹ This means that a third (over 420,000) of our children are growing up without the benefit of both a mother and a father in their home. The overwhelming majority of these children, nearly 80 percent, are not living with their biological father.¹²

As the chart below shows, the epidemic of fatherlessness is hitting the children of Massachusetts cities especially hard. In four of the largest urban areas in our Commonwealth, over half of all children are being raised by a single parent.

Massachusetts Children Living In Single-Parent Households, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). Children Characteristics, American Community Survey, (Table S0901) [Children under 18 years in households]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

Data in this figure reflects male and female single-parent households in Worcester, Lynn, Boston, Fall River, Lowell, Brockton, New Bedford, and Springfield cities, Massachusetts.

It is hard to believe that nearly half (48%) of all children in our capital city of Boston have to grow up without the benefit of having both a mother and a father in the home. Sadly, the children of Boston are not alone in this dilemma. What does this mean for our communities? For our Commonwealth?

This report first lays out the facts about fatherlessness in Massachusetts. It also delineates the economic as well as the social costs of fatherlessness, showing that fatherlessness in the great majority of cases leads to poverty and often intergenerational poverty. It is a major cause of the high school dropout rate. Due to lack of

In four of the ten largest cities in Massachusetts, a majority of children live in single-parent households.

education and absence of job skills, many of these children who fail to finish high school are condemned to a life of job insecurity, poverty, and welfare dependency. Fatherlessness also leads to higher crime rates and higher out-of-wedlock teen birth rates, reinforcing this cycle of broken families.

No Massachusetts community is immune from the problem of fatherlessness, and we must all face it together.

In brief, fatherlessness is a tragedy for the child, a disaster for the family, a blight on the community, and a catastrophe for the Commonwealth and the country! The consequences of fatherlessness do not stop at the door of the family home, but radiate out to the surrounding community and civic body in the form of increased crime and a ballooning economic burden of welfare costs. Fatherlessness affects us all, and our leaders in government, churches, academia, and the professions should unite to make it a high priority to bring fathers home.

This problem of family decline is not limited to any one demographic group in Massachusetts, as fatherlessness cuts across racial and ethnic lines. In New Bedford, where the largest racial group is white, 56 percent of all children live in single-parent families. In Springfield, where Hispanic children are the majority, 63 percent of all children live in single-parent families. In Brockton, where black children are the largest racial/ethnic group, 46 percent of all children live in single-parent families. And in Boston, in which no one racial/ethnic group predominates, 48 percent of all children live in single-parent families.¹³

The increase in fatherless families means that growing numbers of young people will reach adulthood ill-equipped to become self-supporting wage earners and taxpayers, and active, informed citizens. A single-parent upbringing puts a child at greater risk of academic underachievement, youthful idleness, teen parenthood, and adult criminality.¹⁴ No Massachusetts community is immune from the problem of fatherlessness, and we must all face it together.

The consequences of fatherlessness do not stop at the door of the family home but radiate out to the surrounding community.

SECTION II

THE COST OF FATHERLESSNESS

POVERTY

Young people who grow up in fatherless families are far more likely to live in poverty

“... [T]he proliferation of single-parent households accounts for virtually all of the increase in child poverty since the early 1970s.”

JONATHAN RAUCH, (2001, May 19).

“The Widening Marriage Gap: America’s New Class Divide.” *Reason.com*. Web.

“The truth is, the greatest tool to lift children and families from poverty is one that decreases the probability of child poverty by 82%. But it isn’t a government spending program. It’s called marriage.”

MARCO RUBIO, (2014, Jan. 8).

United States Senator for Florida. Reclaiming The Land of Opportunity: Conservative Reforms for Combatting Poverty. Web.

“Child poverty is an ongoing national concern, but few are aware of its principal cause: the absence of married fathers in the home.”

ROBERT RECTOR, (2012, Sep. 5).

Marriage: America’s Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty, *The Heritage Foundation*, Special Report No. 117.

“Nonmarital childbearing is one of the preeminent reasons this nation, despite spending about \$1 trillion a year on programs for disadvantaged families, is struggling to reduce poverty and increase economic mobility.”

RON HASKINS, (2014).

The Crisis of Nonmarital Childbearing, *The Heritage Foundation 2014 Index of Culture and Opportunity*, 45.

“If we could return marriage rates to what they were in the 1970s, the proportion of children who are poor would drop by about 4 percentage points (more than most safety net programs have accomplished.)”

ISABEL SAWHILL, (2014).

Generation Unbound: Drifting into Sex and Parenthood without Marriage, *Brookings Institution Press*, 10.

“... [W]hen parents fail to marry and stay married, children are more likely to experience deep and persistent poverty, even after controlling for race and family background.”

W. BRADFORD WILCOX ET. AL., (2005).

Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences, *rev. ed. Institute of American Values*, 19.

The importance of a father to the economic well-being of children cannot be overemphasized. Statistically, one of the greatest predictors of financial stability for children is the presence of a committed father. This is dramatically illustrated by the increased threat of poverty when a father is absent. Nationally, 40 percent of all homes where a married father is not present are in poverty.¹⁵ In 2021, the poverty rate for fatherless homes was more than twice the average for all families in America and nearly five times the rate of poverty for children living with a married mother and father.¹⁶

In Massachusetts, the economic disparity between married mother-father homes and fatherless households is even greater. For example, the poverty rate for fatherless families in the Commonwealth is more than seven times higher than the poverty rate for children who are living in married two-parent families.¹⁷ The poverty rate for children when both mother and father are present is 4.2 percent. In contrast, 34.8 percent of Massachusetts children living without a father are in households with incomes at or below the official poverty line.¹⁸

In Massachusetts, the poverty rate for fatherless families is more than seven times higher than the poverty rate for children who are living in married two-parent families.

These statistics are even more unsettling when we look at the real dollar value of what it means to be “in poverty.” The federal poverty threshold in 2023 for a mother and one child is \$19,720.¹⁹ For a mother and two children, it was \$24,860. Children in mother-father families, however, are significantly less vulnerable to falling below the poverty level. In fact, they are statistically less likely to get anywhere near it. A clear majority, nearly 60 percent, of Massachusetts children in intact, two-parent families live in what is termed “financially-secure households,” with annual incomes at least 400 percent of the official poverty level.²⁰

INCOME INEQUALITY

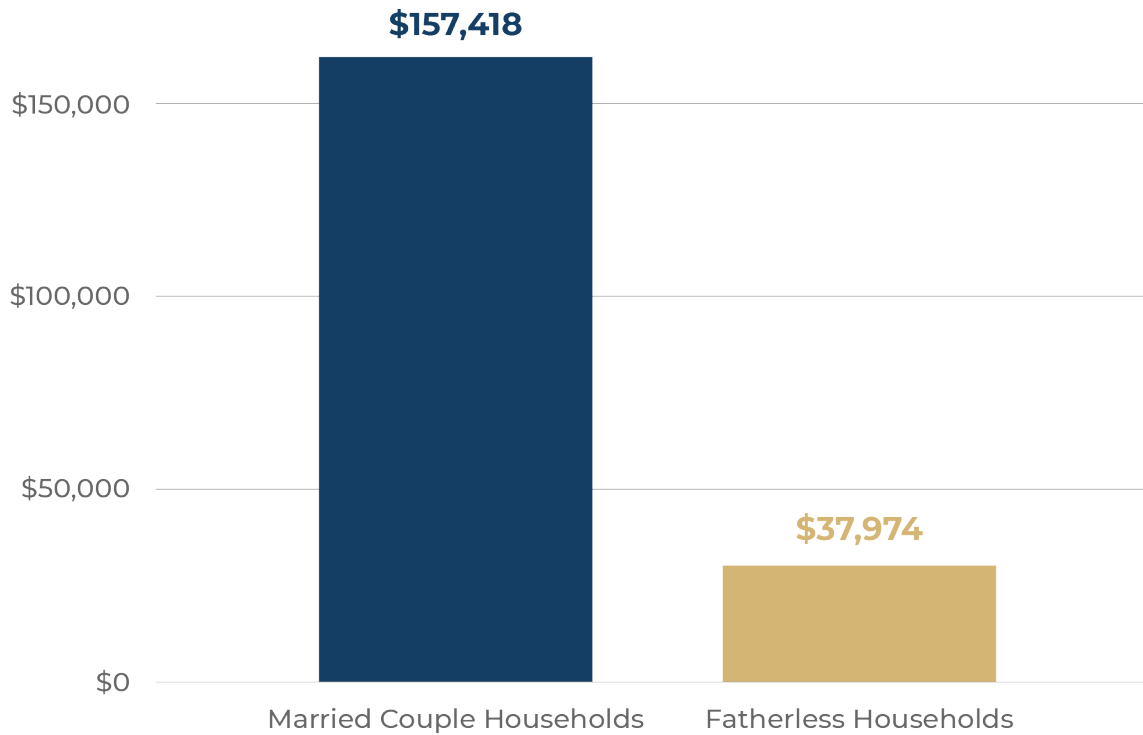
There has been much concern and discussion in recent years about the problem of “rising income inequality.” Many lament what is seen as a growing gulf between the super-rich and the working poor. Sadly, a critical factor in this discussion is often overlooked; that is, the increase in fatherless families is a significant contributor to income inequality. In the Commonwealth, for example, the median family income for married-couple households with children in 2021 was \$157,418. For female-headed households with children, it was less than a quarter as much, \$37,974.²¹

Nearly 70 percent of Massachusetts children in married-couple households have *both* parents in the labor force. By contrast, almost 30 percent of children with unmarried mothers have *no* parent working to support them.²² Eighty percent of children in married-couple households in Massachusetts live in houses or apartments that their parents own. Two-thirds of children in female-headed households have mothers who are renters.²³

Young people who grow up in fatherless families are far more likely to live in poverty than those who grow up in married-couple families.

In four of the ten largest cities in Massachusetts, at least 40% of children in fatherless homes are poor.

2021 Median Annual Income in Massachusetts

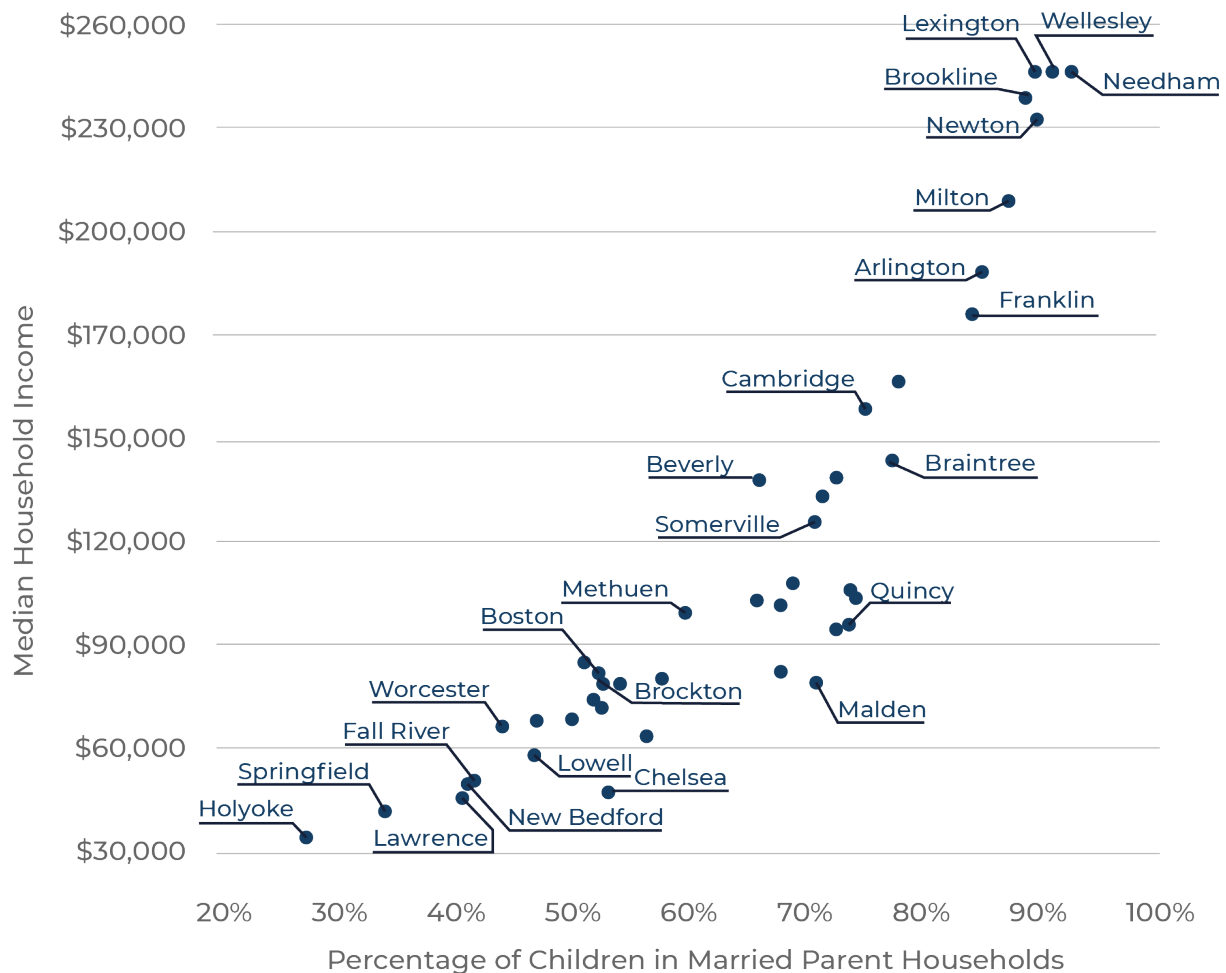


Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). Children Characteristics, American Community Survey, (Table S0901) [Median income (dollars)]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

A survey of 44 cities and towns in the Commonwealth demonstrates a similarly strong correlation between marriage and income. The chart below illustrates the dramatic rise in a community's median family income as the percentage of children who live with married parents increases.

For example, in Springfield, where barely a third of children live with both parents, the median annual household income for homes with children is just over \$40,000. On the other hand, in Lexington, where nearly 90 percent of children live with both their mother and father, the median annual income is more than five times higher. In fact, the three cities with the highest rates of married families (Wellesley, Lexington, and Needham—each at around 90 percent) were also the highest in terms of annual income, with the federal census having stopped counting once the median hit a quarter of a million dollars per year.²⁴

Marriage and Income Equality in MA Cities and Towns, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). Children Characteristics, American Community Survey, (Table S0901) [Median income (dollars)], in Massachusetts, in 44 Largest Cities. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

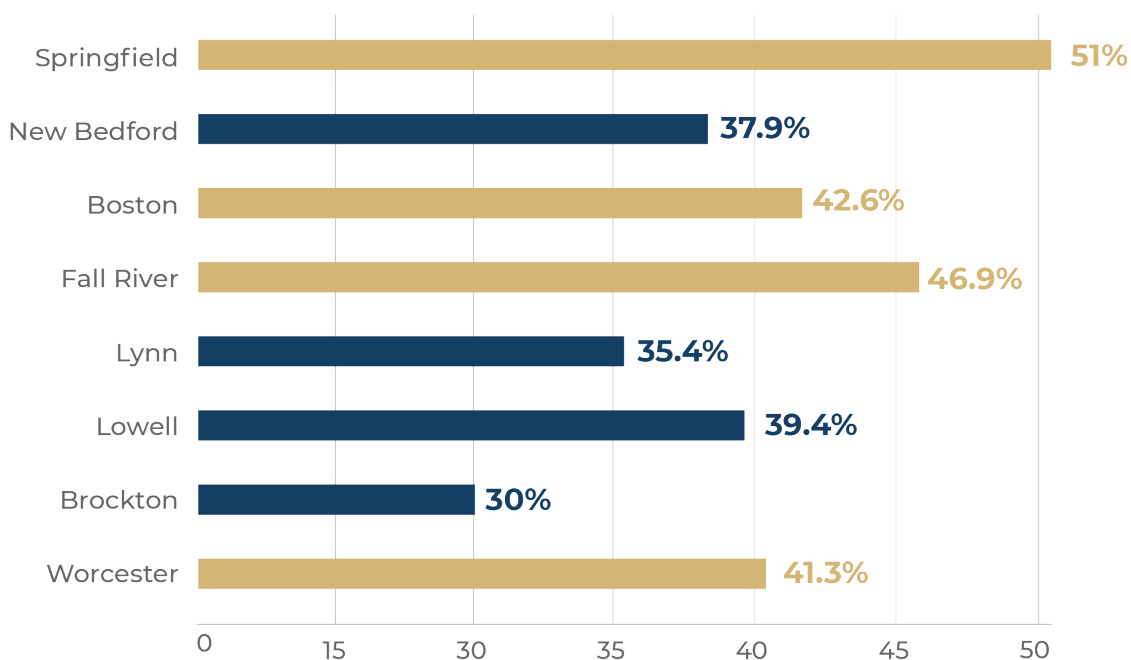
What we see in between these examples is a steady rise in income as the number of families headed by a married mother and father increases. Once a community has approximately four out of five children living in homes with both parents, the average household income skyrockets.

While statistics and social science data cannot predict the impact of fatherlessness on every child, they do indicate who will likely be hit the hardest by its effects. The burden of fatherlessness is disproportionately borne by the children of our urban communities. In four of the 10 largest cities in Massachusetts – Boston, Springfield, Fall River, and Worcester – more than 40 percent of children in fatherless families were poor during the 2017-2021 time period. In three additional cities – Lowell, Lynn, and New Bedford – child poverty rates in fatherless families were one in three or greater.²⁵

There are several reasons why single-parent families, particularly those without fathers, are more likely to be poorer than their mother-father counterparts:

- It is inherently more costly for two parents to live apart and maintain separate housing, separate appliances, separate transportation, etc.²⁶
- In Massachusetts, more fatherless families than married-couple families have no one in the household in the labor force. In 2021, 18.5 percent of fatherless households did not report any employment. By contrast, only 1.2 percent of children with married parents did not have at least one parent employed.²⁷
- For 40.6 percent of Massachusetts children living with a single parent, that parent had achieved only a high school education or less. This limited the earning potential of the household.²⁸

Child Poverty Rate in Fatherless Homes, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). Children Characteristics, American Community Survey, (Table S0901) [Income in the past 12 months below poverty level]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

This leads us to conclude that, in America, one of the principal causes of income inequality is the structure and health of the family. Young people who grow up in fatherless homes are simply far more likely to live in poverty than those with a married father and mother living together. This is true despite the heroic efforts of single mothers, and we do not mean to disparage in any way the sacrifice and exhausting work of raising children alone. Instead, we should work to minimize the number who must do so. As a society, we can no longer ignore the reality that marriage is the fault line between the middle class and the poor.

ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Students from fatherless families have a greater risk of academic and behavioral problems

“In comparison to children living with both biological parents, children living with a single mother score lower on academic achievement tests, have lower grades, [and] have a higher incidence of behavioral problems”

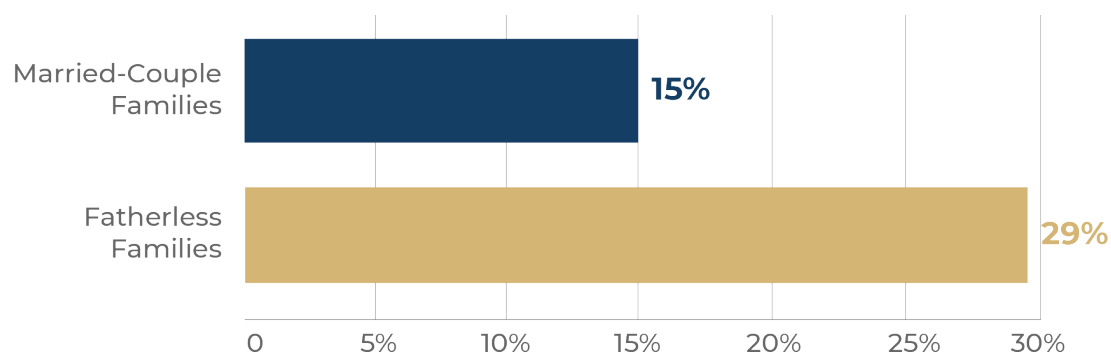
DAVID AUTOR AND MELANIE WASSERMAN, (2013, Mar. 20). *Wayward Sons: The Emerging Gender Gap in Labor Markets and Education, Third Way.*

“Married fathers can have an especially significant impact on their children’s success in school. Children raised in intact, married families fare far better than children from divorced or single-parent homes.”

SARAH TORRE, (2011, June 14). *Fathers Matter: Involved Dads Get an A+ for Increasing Academic Achievement. Daily Signal. Web.*

Education begins in the home. Numerous studies show that children living with married parents have a great advantage in academic achievement. Despite the millions of dollars poured into improving failing schools and raising graduation rates, the absence of a father in the home is a factor that simply cannot be overcome by money alone.

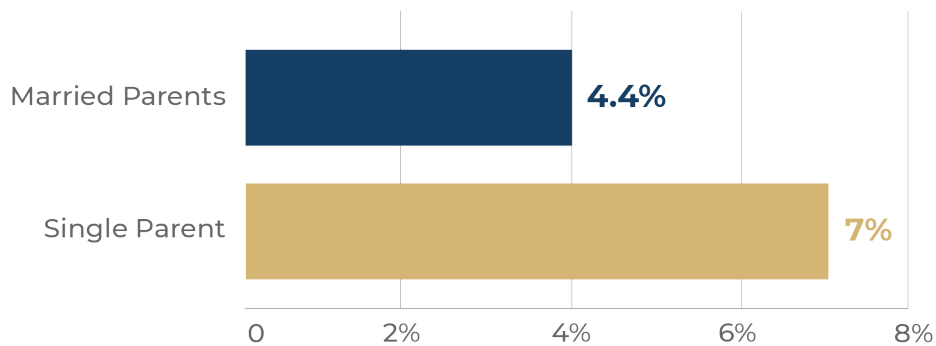
U.S. High School Dropout Rate



Source: McLanahan, S. S. (1999). *Father absence and the welfare of children*. In E. M. Hetherington (Ed.), *Coping with divorce, single parenting, and remarriage: A risk and resiliency perspective*, 117–145. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Students from single-parent families have an increased risk of dropping out of high school before getting a diploma. In the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), for example, 29 percent of students from fatherless families dropped out of high school, compared to 15 percent of students who lived with both their birth mother and biological father. The doubled dropout rate persisted even after controlling for other risk factors such as parent education and family income.²⁹

Massachusetts Students Repeating One or More Grades, 2020-2021



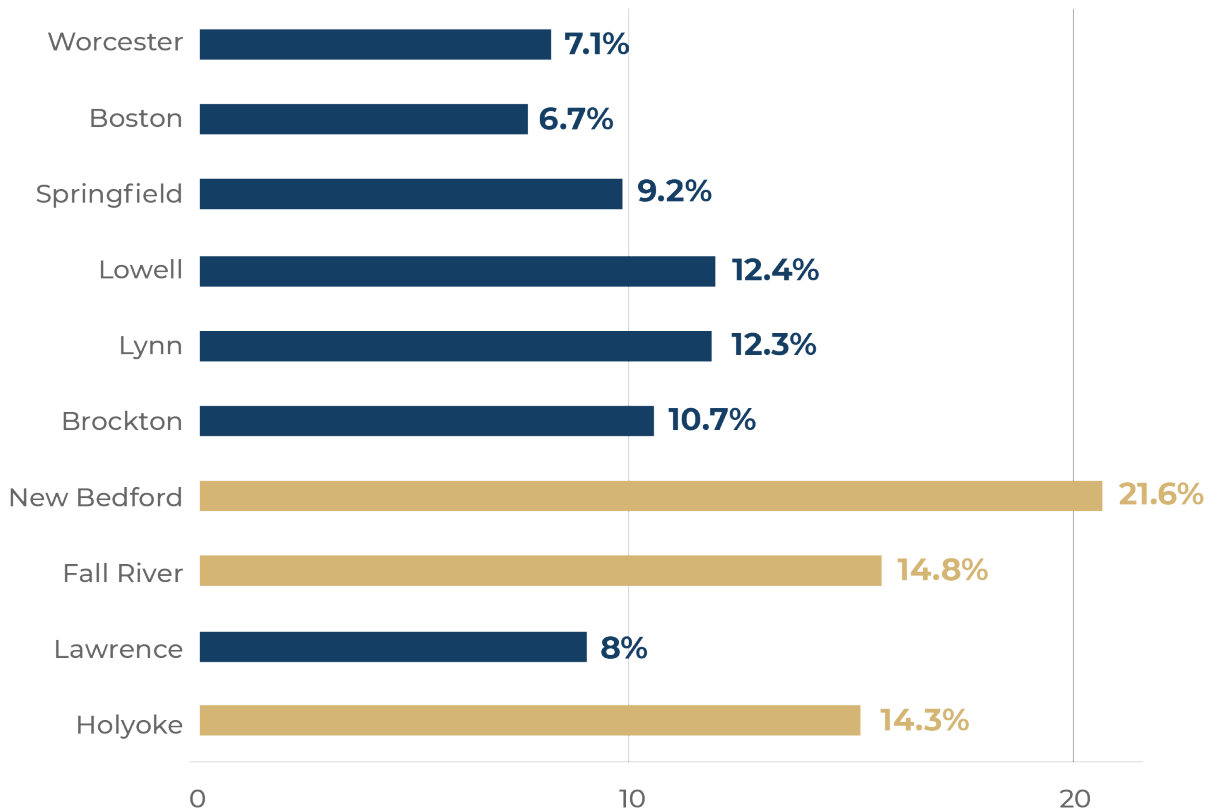
Source: *Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2020-2021). Community and School Activities, National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), [Repeated grade(s) in school, age 6-17 years]. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). Retrieved May 5, 2023 from www.childhealthdata.org.*

While there are no Massachusetts-specific statistics on the percentage of children from fatherless families who drop out of school, these children likely suffer much the same disadvantages as their counterparts across the nation. For example, having to repeat one or more grades in school is a frequent precursor to dropping out.³⁰ In the National Survey of Children's Health, 7 percent of Massachusetts schoolchildren ages 6 to 17 living with a single parent have repeated a grade. This was nearly 60 percent higher than the rate of grade retention among Massachusetts schoolchildren living with both parents – 4.4 percent.³¹

**Students from fatherless families have
twice the risk of high-school dropout
as those from married-couple families.**

Massachusetts schoolchildren who lived without both parents were nearly 60 percent more likely to repeat a grade.

Massachusetts Cities: Four-Year High School Dropout Rate, 2022



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2022). 2022 Graduation Rate Report (District) for All Students 4-Year Graduation Rate, State Reports [% Non-Grad Completers, % Dropped Out]. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from profiles.doe.mass.edu

Data in this figure reflects non-grad completers and dropped out percentages in Worcester, Boston, Springfield, Lowell, Lynn, Brockton, New Bedford, Fall River, Lawrence, and Holyoke cities, Massachusetts.

The current high school dropout rate for Massachusetts is 5 percent.³² When we turn our attention to the Massachusetts cities with the highest rates of fatherlessness, we see that the high school dropout rates in these cities are correspondingly elevated. Holyoke, Fall River, and New Bedford, three of the five Massachusetts cities with the highest rates of fatherlessness, also have some of the highest dropout rates, at 14, 15, and 22 percent respectively.³³

In addition to having higher dropout rates, students from fatherless families tend to be less engaged in school in general. In the National Survey of Children’s Health, 77.7 percent of Massachusetts schoolchildren who lived with a single parent were always or usually engaged in school. Among schoolchildren living with cohabiting parents, 76.9 percent were always or usually engaged in school. Children in both of these groups had consistently less school engagement than Massachusetts schoolchildren who lived with both parents – 85.9 percent.³⁴

Likewise, in the National Household Education Survey, students from mother-only families or stepfamilies were twice as likely to have been suspended from school as students from mother-father

families. After controlling for parent education, family income, race, and parent involvement, students from mother-only families and stepfamilies were still twice as likely to be suspended as those from two-parent families.³⁵

High school dropout rates are higher in Massachusetts cities with more fatherless families.

For students who do graduate from high school, their chances of enrolling in and then graduating from college are less if they come from fatherless families than if they come from two-parent families. In a study based on the second National Survey of Families and Households, 61 percent of students from mother-father families who graduated from high school went on to enroll in college, compared with 49 percent of high school graduates from mother-only families. Subsequently, 37 percent of the students from two-parent families earned a bachelor’s degree, compared with 17 percent of the students from fatherless families. This is consistent with research from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which showed that boys “who grew up with their biological fathers were more than twice as likely to graduate college by their late-20s, compared to those raised in families without their biological father (35% vs. 14%).”³⁶

Not completing high school has a long-term impact on a young person’s chances for stable employment and his or her prospects of earning a living wage. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in 2021 for workers aged 25 years and above who had less than a high school education was 8.3 percent. This was 34 percent higher than students who graduated high school and more than 80 percent higher than the unemployment rate for workers who had an associate’s degree. The median weekly earnings in 2021 for full-time wage and salary workers with less than a high school education was \$624. That’s only 77 percent of the weekly earnings for a worker with a high school diploma (\$809) and just 65 percent of the weekly earnings for workers with an associate’s degree (\$963).³⁷

One of the root causes of “income equality” is educational disparity. Young people who fail to obtain a high school diploma are far more likely to have difficulty finding employment and are more vulnerable to falling below the poverty level. The economic and familial stability of marriage gives children more opportunities and choices in education and puts them on the path to success.³⁸

CRIME

Young adults from fatherless families are more likely to commit crimes and be incarcerated

“Over 70 percent of long-term prison inmates come from broken homes, and young men raised in fatherless households are at least twice as likely to be incarcerated as those from intact families.”

CHUCK COLSON, *as quoted by Eric Metaxas, (2013, May 15).*

“Be a Heroic Dad.” *Breakpoint Commentaries, Web.*

“Even after controlling for income, youths in father-absent households still had significantly higher odds of incarceration than those in mother-father families. Youths who never had a father in the household experienced the highest odds.”

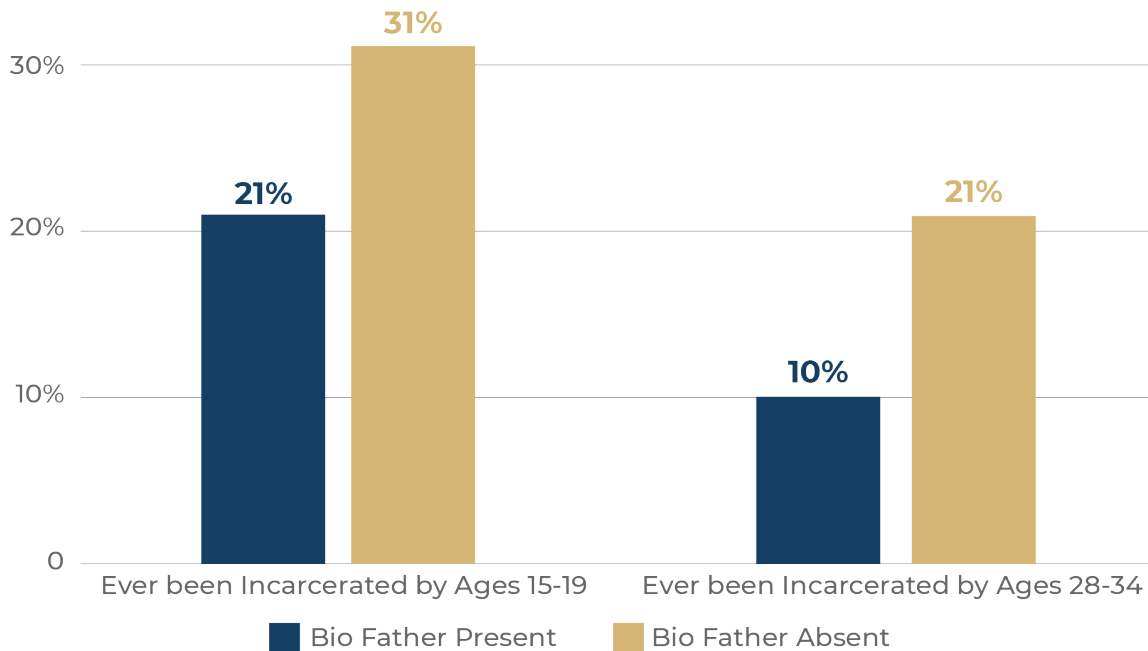
CYNTHIA HARPER AND SARA S. MCLANAHAN, *(Sept. 2004).*

“Father Absence and Youth Incarceration.” *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 14: 369-397.*

Children growing up outside of two-parent homes, particularly those without a father, have a substantially higher incidence of incarceration as adults. When the Department of Justice conducted surveys looking at the family backgrounds of prisoners in state and federal prisons in the United States, it found that the majority of prisoners, male and female, grew up in fatherless families or lived apart from both parents, with relatives, or in foster care.³⁹

In the year 2004, for example, 54 percent of prisoners in state penal institutions and 51 percent of those in federal prisons were raised apart from their fathers or from both biological parents. By comparison, 24 percent of the U.S. young adult population at that time grew up in single-parent or no-parent households.⁴⁰ This disproportionate representation of children from fatherless families behind bars demonstrates the tragic relationship between family decline and crime.

Percentage of Young Men Who've Been Arrested or Incarcerated, By Father Presence



Source: From 'Life Without Father': Less College, Less Work, and More Prison for Young Men Growing Up Without Their Biological Father by W. B. Wilcox, W. Wang, and A. ElHage, 2022, published by Institute for Family Studies. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 cohort (NLSY97).

When compared to children raised in homes with both biological parents, the impact of a broken family on a child's future criminal involvement is even starker. A study that followed boys from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth showed that "in addition to being markedly more likely to have been arrested during their teen years, young men who did not grow up with their father in the home are about twice as likely as those raised with their biological father in the household to have spent time in jail by around age 30. These associations remain strong and statistically significant even after controlling for family income, race, maternal education, age, and AFQT scores."⁴¹

Young men from mother-only or mother-stepfather families were incarcerated at three times the rate of young men from mother-father families. And young men raised by relatives or in foster care had a nearly five times higher rate of incarceration. When adjustments were made for low parent education levels, family poverty, minority/ethnic status, and other related risk factors, the young men from mother-only families were still incarcerated twice as often, those from mother-stepfather families nearly three times as often, and those raised by relatives or in foster care three times as often as those raised by both biological parents.⁴²

VIOLENCE

Children in fatherless families are more likely to be victims of violent crime

“There’s no more important ingredient for success, nothing that would be more important for us reducing violence than strong, stable families — which means we should do more to promote marriage and encourage fatherhood.”

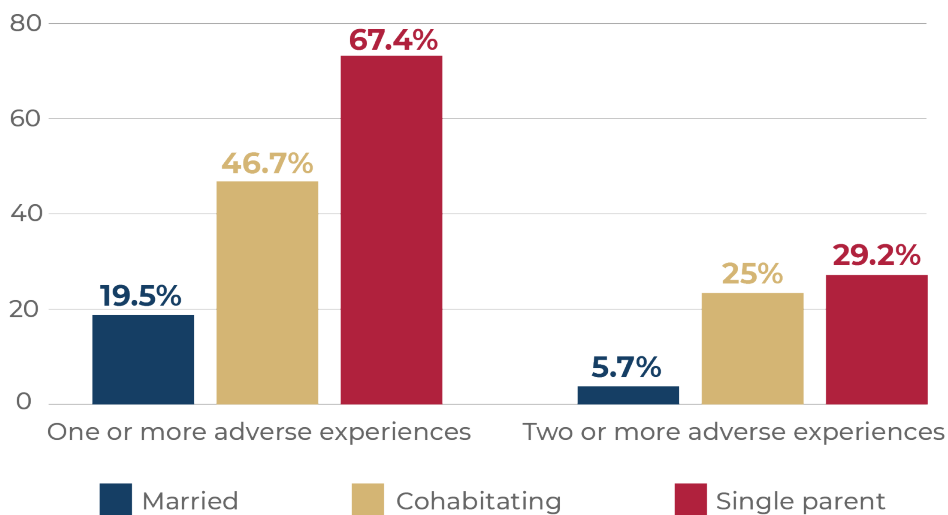
PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, (2013, Feb. 15).

Remarks by the President on Strengthening the Economy for the Middle Class, speech given at Hyde Park Academy, Chicago, IL. *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Web.*

The presence of two married parents in the home not only significantly reduces the chances of their children perpetrating a crime; it also serves to shield those children from a wide range of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) “are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years).”⁴³ They include emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, emotional or physical neglect, a mother treated violently, substance abuse, mental illness, or an instance of separation, divorce, or incarceration in the household.⁴⁴

Percentage of MA Children with Adverse Childhood Experiences, by Family Type, 2020-2021

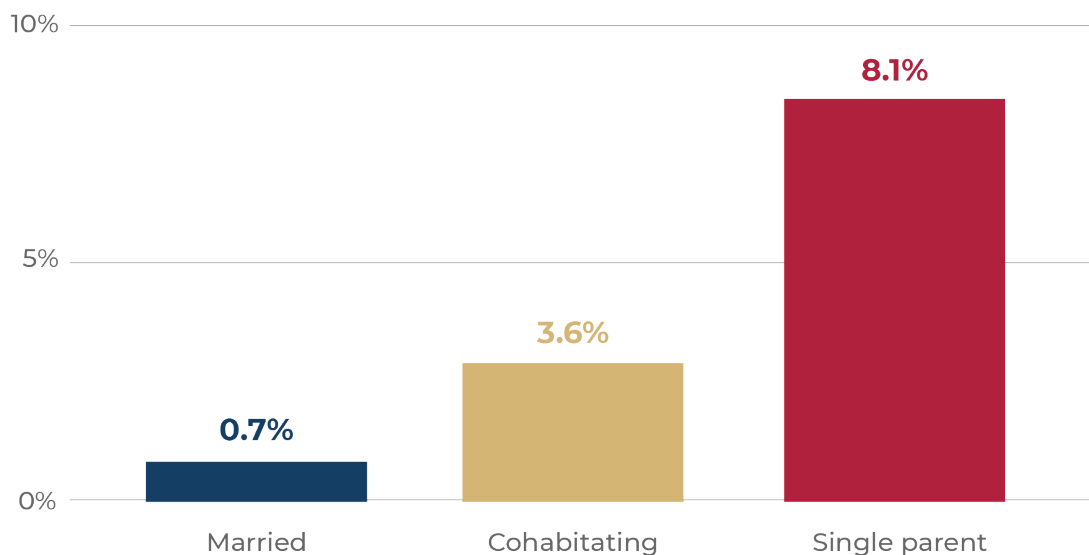


Source: *Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2020-2021). Family Health and Activities, National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH), [Adverse childhood experiences]. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). Retrieved May 5, 2023 from www.childhealthdata.org.*

Massachusetts children in single-parent homes had over **ten times the risk** of having witnessed violence within their own households.

In the 2020-2021 National Survey of Children's Health, 67 percent of Massachusetts children under the age of 18 living with a single parent had experienced one or more ACEs. Children without married parents in the home were more than five times as likely to experience two or more ACEs. This disparity is particularly evident when it comes to domestic violence. Children without a married mother and father were almost twelve times as likely to witness violent altercations in the home.⁴⁵

Massachusetts Children Who Have Witnessed Violence in Their Own Home, 2020-2021



Source: *Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2020-2021). Family Health and Activities, National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), [Witnessed domestic violence]. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). Retrieved May 5, 2023 from www.childhealthdata.org.*

Parent respondents in the National Survey of Children’s Health were also asked whether their child had ever seen or heard “any parents, guardians, or any other adults in the home slap, hit, kick, punch, or beat each other up.” Over 8 percent of single parents admitted that their children had witnessed violence within their own households. This is more than ten times the rate at which children with married parents witness domestic violence (0.7 percent). Children with cohabitating but unmarried parents fall somewhere in the middle, with an estimated 3.6 percent exposed to violence at home. Using the NSCH’s estimates, this would mean that Massachusetts children in single-parent homes likely comprise over 70 percent of all Massachusetts children who have witnessed domestic violence.⁴⁶

TEEN PREGNANCY

Young women from fatherless families are more likely to become teen mothers

“... [F]ather absence places daughters at special risk for early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy.”

B. J. ELLIS ET AL., (2003).

“Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?” *Child Development*, 74: 801–821.

Young women who become mothers when they are teenagers are less likely to attain a high school diploma or college degree and achieve economic security. Unmarried adolescent mothers are more likely to be poor and welfare dependent than young women from similar backgrounds who delay childbearing. When daughters of poor single women then have babies as unmarried adolescents themselves, the wheel of persistent poverty keeps turning.

Large-scale longitudinal studies that have followed national samples of youth from adolescence into adulthood have found that young women from fatherless families are more than twice as likely to become teen mothers as those from mother-father families. Girls whose father was never present or whose father left home at an early age were especially at risk, becoming pregnant as teenagers at a rate five to seven times that of girls with a father in the home.⁴⁷

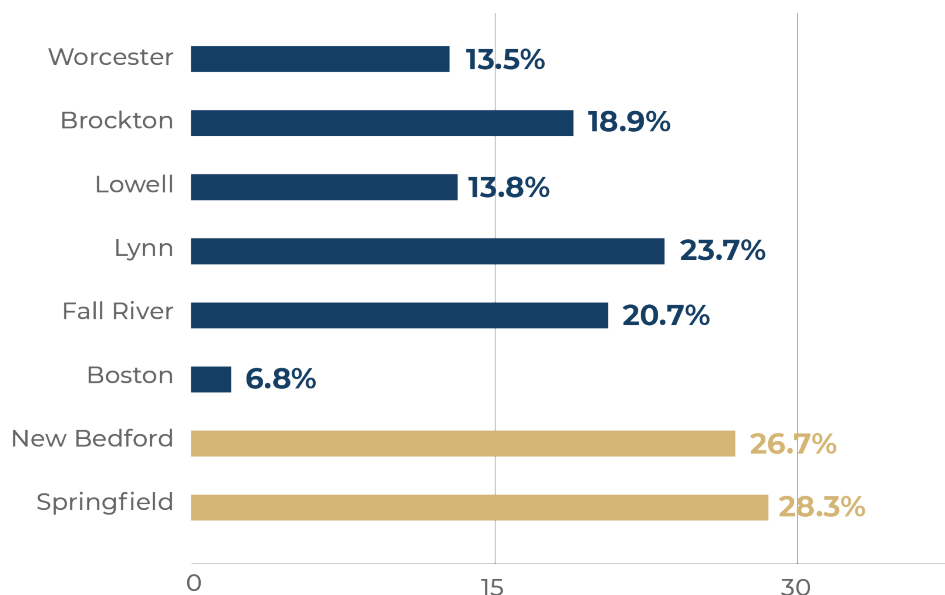
Young women from fatherless families are five times more likely to become pregnant as teenagers.

In the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), 27 percent of young women from fatherless families became mothers as teenagers, compared with 11 percent of young women from two-parent families. Thirteen percent of the women from fatherless families were unmarried teens when they gave birth for the first time, versus 6 percent of those from mother-father families. These contrasts were adjusted for related risk factors such as low parent education and family income levels and minority ethnic background.⁴⁸

Having married parents reduces the chances of a young woman becoming a teen mother even in households with very low levels of education. In the NLSY sample, young women whose mothers have less than a high-school education and whose mothers are unmarried are especially vulnerable to giving birth before age twenty. Forty-four percent of white women from such backgrounds became teen mothers, as did 45 percent of black women and 46 percent of Hispanic women with similar family backgrounds. These rates of teen parenthood were one-and-a-half to two times higher than those for young women whose parents had low education levels but were married to one another.⁴⁹ This demonstrates that the problem of unwed teen pregnancy will not be solved by education alone but rather requires the intergenerational support of marriage.

Teen birth rates are higher in Massachusetts cities with high concentrations of fatherless families.

Massachusetts Cities: Number of Teen Births per 1,000 Teenagers, 2019



Source: *Executive Office of Health and Human Services. (2022). Number and Teen Birth Rates by Race/Hispanic Ethnicity for Selected Communities, Massachusetts Birth Rates 2019, (Table 6) [Teen births]. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from mass.gov*

Once again, in communities where marriage is in decline, the damaging effects of multi-generational fatherlessness are the most ominous. Rates of birth to teen mothers are far higher in Massachusetts cities with high proportions of single-parent families than in cities with relatively low concentrations of single-parent families.

For example, in Springfield in 2019, there were 28 teen births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in the city's population, whereas, in Waltham, where more than three-quarters of children are in homes with married parents, there were 5 teen births per 1,000 young women in the same age range. In New Bedford in the same year, there were 27 teen births per 1,000 young women. In Lawrence there were 33 per 1,000 young women, but only 9 in Revere, where the rate of fatherlessness is closer to one in four.⁵⁰

TAX BURDEN

Children in fatherless families are more likely to receive welfare benefits

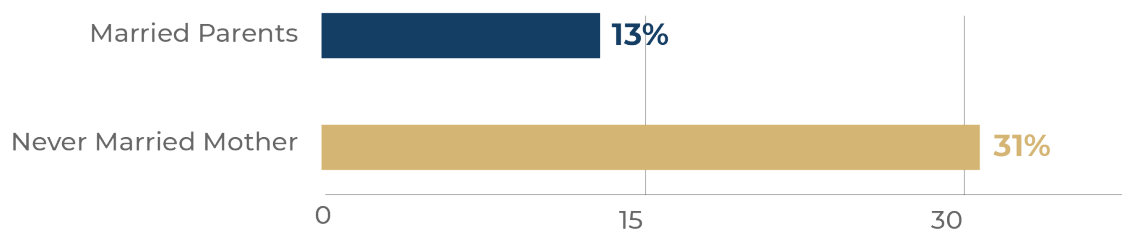
“... [W]here the marriage culture collapses and families fail to form or easily dissolve ... the health, education, and welfare functions of the family will have to be undertaken by someone, or some institution, and that will sooner or later be the government.”

ROBERT GEORGE, (2012, Nov. 16).

“No Mere Marriage of Convenience: The Unity of Economic and Social Conservatism.” *First Things*. Web.

While the costs of fatherlessness and family decline borne by children are profound and tragic, the financial costs to our Commonwealth are significant. When single mothers are unable to earn enough for their families or absent fathers do not provide support for their children, the citizens of Massachusetts end up supporting them.

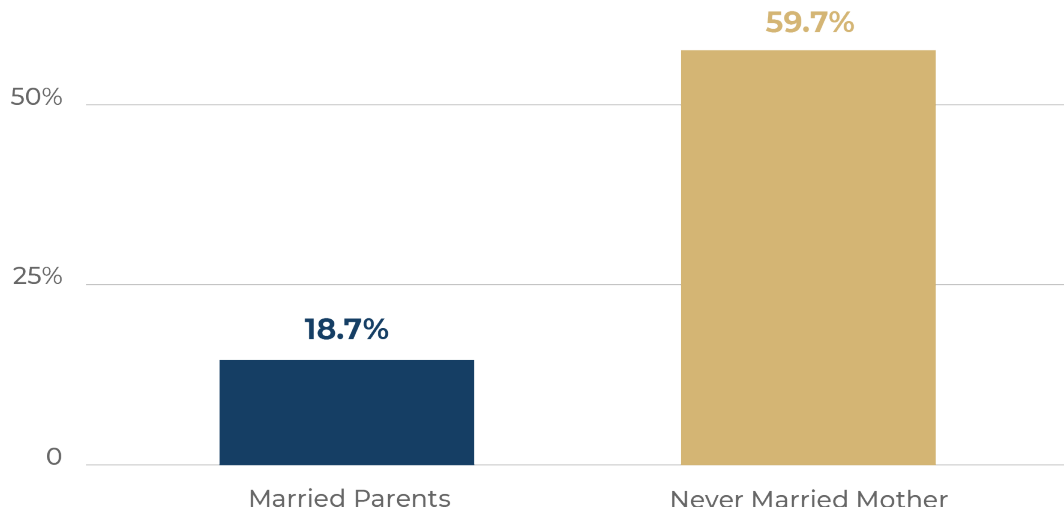
Percentage of Massachusetts Children Receiving Food Stamps, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample, American Community Survey, [Yearly food stamp/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) reciprocity]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

In 2021, 31 percent of Massachusetts children with never-married mothers were in households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly the food stamp program), as opposed to only 13 percent of children living with both married parents.⁵¹ SNAP benefits for needy families in Massachusetts will cost taxpayers over \$550 million in 2023.⁵²

Percentage of Massachusetts Children Covered by Publicly-Subsidized Health Insurance, 2021

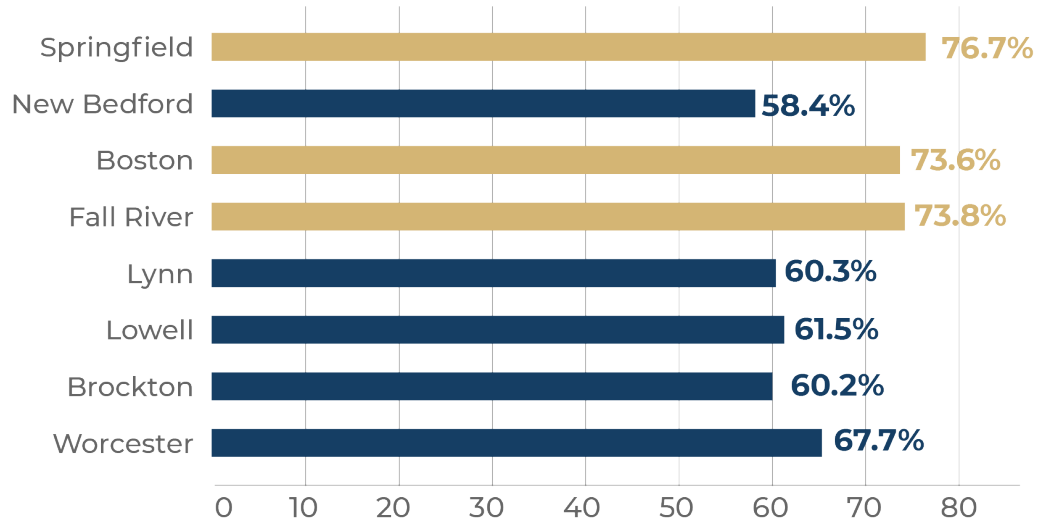


Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample, American Community Survey, (HINS4 [Medicaid, Medical Assistance, or any kind of government-assistance plan for those with low incomes]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

The cost of putting food on the table is dwarfed by the additional expense of providing health care for fatherless families. As of 2021, 59.7 percent of Massachusetts children in fatherless homes were receiving publicly subsidized medical insurance such as Medicaid/MassHealth, or CommonHealth. By comparison, among children living with both married parents, only 18.7 percent received publicly subsidized health care.⁵³ The projected cost of subsidizing health insurance to families in Massachusetts for 2023 is nearly \$16 billion.⁵⁴

In eight of the ten largest cities in Massachusetts, a majority of children in fatherless families receive welfare.

Percentage of Children in Fatherless Families Receiving Food Stamps, Cash Welfare, or SSI, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). Children Characteristics, American Community Survey, (Table S0901) [Children living in households with Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash public assistance income, or Food Stamp/SNAP benefits]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

Once again, these problems are intensified in communities with high levels of fatherlessness. For example, in 2021, roughly three-quarters of children in fatherless families in Boston, Springfield, and Fall River were receiving food benefits, cash welfare, or supplemental Social Security Income (SSI). The same was true for over 60 percent of children in fatherless families in Worcester, Lynn, Lowell, Brockton, and New Bedford.⁵⁵

Across the state, 58.2 percent of Massachusetts children in fatherless families received these welfare benefits. This number is nearly three times higher than the rate of welfare receipt for children in married-couple families (16.7%). The percentage of all children in the state who received welfare benefits in 2021 was 28.1%.⁵⁶

What these figures demonstrate is that fatherlessness, particularly in communities where the rate of fatherlessness is high, is strongly associated with higher levels of social ills and their corresponding tax burden.

Children in fatherless families are three times more likely to receive welfare benefits than children in married-couple families.

SECTION III

THE INCREASE IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

“Trends in marriage are important not just with regard to the organization of communities, but because they are associated with large effects on the socialization of the next generation. No matter what the outcome being examined – the quality of the mother-infant relationship, externalizing behavior in childhood (aggression, delinquency, and hyperactivity), delinquency in adolescence, criminality as adults, illness and injury in childhood, early mortality, sexual decision-making in adolescence, school problems and dropping out, emotional health, or any other measure of how well or poorly children do in life – the family structure that produces the best outcomes for children, on average, are two biological parents who remain married.”

CHARLES A. MURRAY, (2012).

Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010. *Crown Forum*, 159.

Over the past two decades, the rate of fatherlessness in Massachusetts has continued to rise. This has occurred despite awareness of the dramatic social and financial costs that accompany it. So why has this costly trend persisted?

The increase in single-parent families is partly due to high rates of marital separation and divorce, as has always been the case. But three newer trends are also at play: a decline in the marriage rate, a decline in the birth rate, and a greater cultural acceptance of having and raising children outside marriage.⁵⁷

FEWER MARRIAGES

More young people are postponing marriage or not getting married at all

Young couples, particularly those with college educations, are postponing marriage and children until they are in their thirties or even forties. Between 1990 and 2021, the marriage rate per year in Massachusetts declined by 41.7 percent, from 7.9 per 1,000 residents to 4.6.⁵⁸

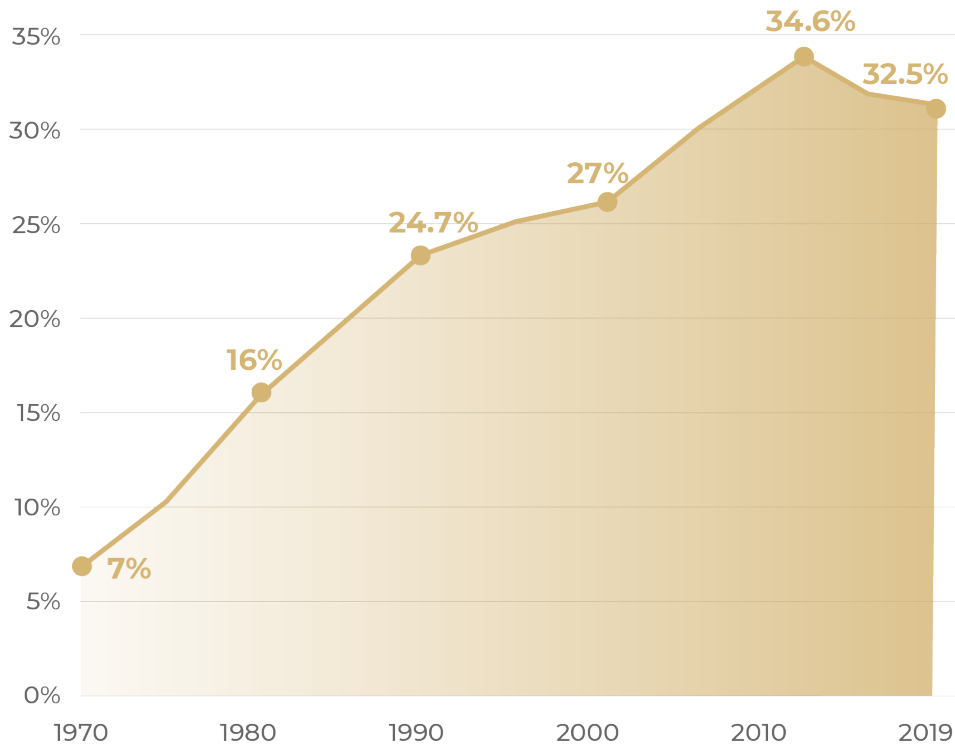
The Massachusetts marriage rate has been consistently lower than the average U.S. rate, ranging from 70 to 85 percent of the national rate. In the year 2000, the median age at first marriage was later in Massachusetts – 29 for men, 27 for women – than in any other state in the Union.⁵⁹ As of 2021, the ages for first marriage in Massachusetts rose to 32 and 31, respectively.⁶⁰ Between 2006 and 2021, the proportion of 25-to-34-year-old Massachusetts women who were currently married fell from 42 percent to 37 percent, while the proportion of never-married women rose from 48 to 60 percent.⁶¹

In the past, many of these women would have married before or shortly after the birth of their child or put the child up for adoption. Now many are giving birth and raising the child on their own, without getting married.⁶² Hence, the decline in the state’s marriage rate can largely be attributed to two demographics that formerly would have been counted among the married.

MORE BIRTHS OUT OF WEDLOCK

More women are having babies without being married

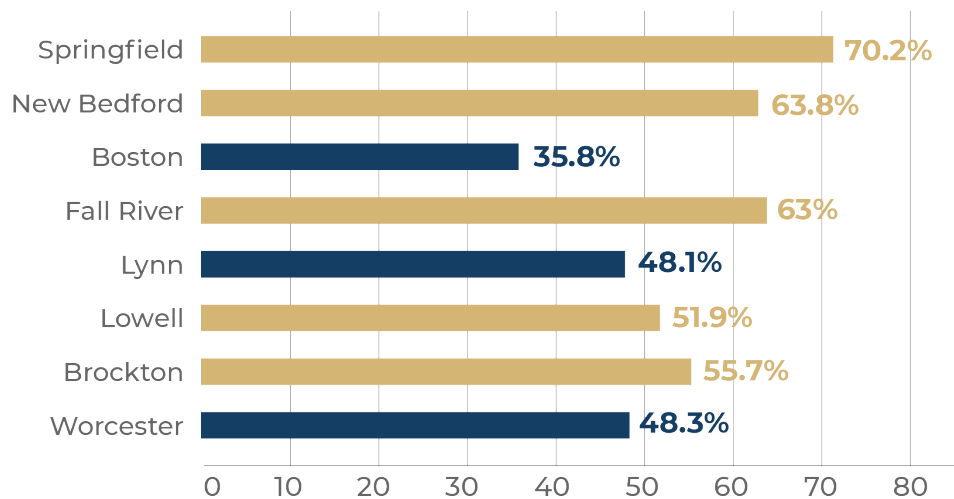
Percentage of Births to Unmarried Mothers in Massachusetts



Source: *Executive Office of Health and Human Services. (2022). Number and Teen Birth Rates by Race/Hispanic Ethnicity for Selected Communities, Massachusetts Birth Rates 2019, (Table 1) [Births to Unmarried]. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from mass.gov. See also: Advance Data Births 1999, Bureau of Health Statistics, Research and Evaluations, Bureau of Family and Community Health, MA Department of Health.; Massachusetts Births 2010, op. cit., Table 1.*

One of the driving forces behind the increase in fatherless families is the ubiquity of out-of-wedlock births. From 1970 until 2010, the number of children born to unwed mothers in Massachusetts exploded by 500 percent. Even when compared to the rate of unmarried childbirth as recently as 2000, which was just over 26 percent, the current rate of 33 percent shows little sign of this trend correcting itself.⁶³

Percentage of All Live Births That Were to Unmarried Mothers, 2019



Source: *Executive Office of Health and Human Services. (2022). Resident Birth Characteristics, 30 Largest Municipalities, Massachusetts Birth Rates 2019, (Table 12) [Teen births]. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from mass.gov*

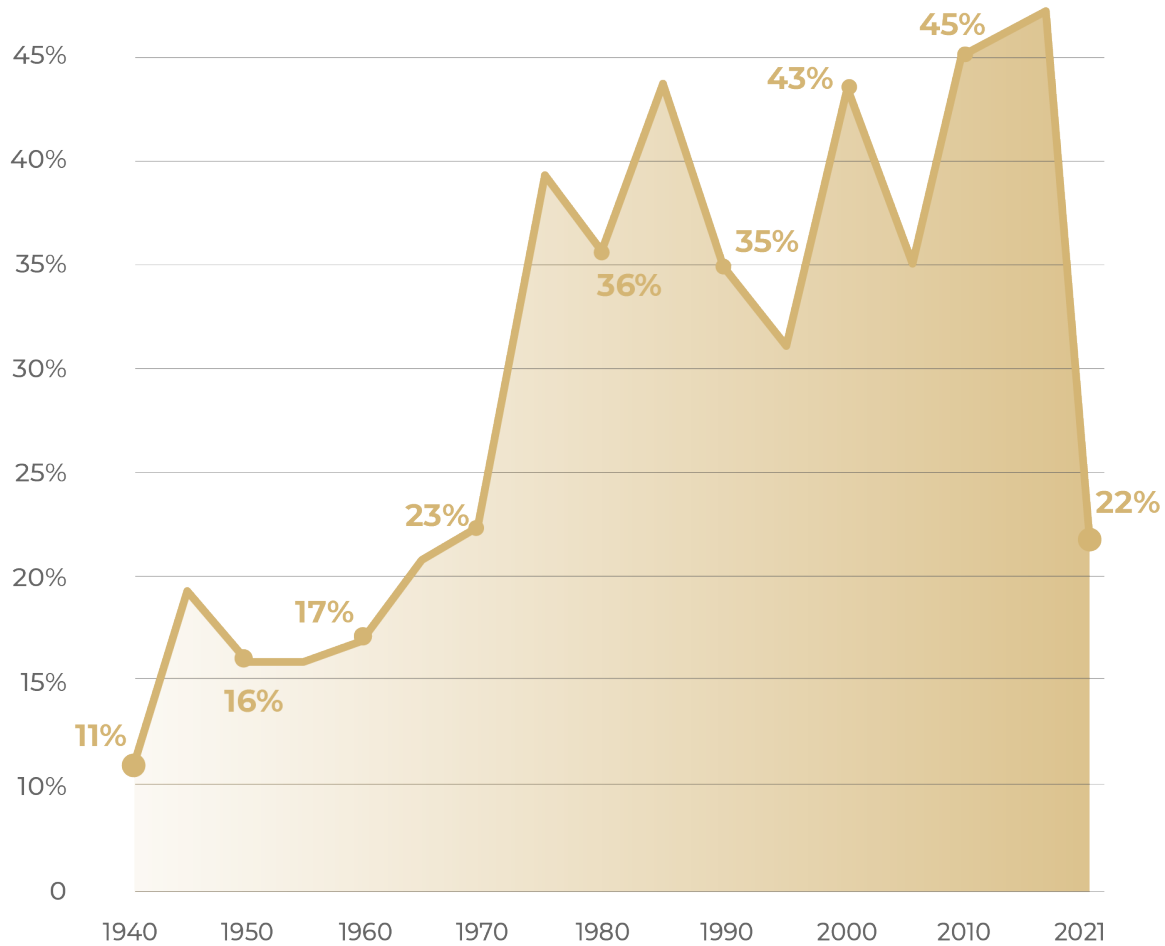
In five of the 10 largest cities of Massachusetts, a majority of births were to unmarried women. For example, 70 percent of births in Springfield in 2019 were to unmarried women, as were 63 percent of those in Fall River and 64 percent in New Bedford.⁶⁴ Here we can begin to see why the rates of fatherless are so high in some of the Commonwealth's largest cities.

HIGH DIVORCE RATE

Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce

Even for children born into a home with a married mother and father, divorce is a common hazard. During the first half of the 20th century, the U.S. divorce rate, defined as the number of divorces per 1,000 people, represented less than one-fifth of marriages. The rate then began to rise sharply starting in the early 1960s. By the end of the 1970s, the national rate had more than doubled. It peaked in 1979 and then declined somewhat, but has since remained well above the levels of the 1960s.⁶⁵

Massachusetts Divorce Rate as Percentage of Marriage Rate



Source: CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, Marriage rates by State: 1990, 1995, and 1999-2021 and Divorce rates by State: 1990, 1995, and 1999-2021. Accessed via CDC website: www.cdc.gov

Births to unmarried mothers in Massachusetts have increased by nearly 500% since 1970.

In Massachusetts, divorce trends have followed a similar pattern over the last half-century, though divorce rates have been lower in the Commonwealth than in the nation as a whole, and peaked later, in the mid-1980s.

The ratio of the divorce rate to the marriage rate gives a rough indication of the proportion of Massachusetts marriages that will end in divorce. That ratio rose from 17 percent in 1960 to nearly 50 percent a decade ago but has fallen dramatically in just the past few years. As of 2021, the ratio of divorce to marriage was 22 percent, a level not seen since the

The ratio of Massachusetts marriages that will end in divorce has fluctuated from 22% to nearly 50% in the last decade.

1960s. In fact, the divorce rate in Massachusetts is currently the lowest in the nation, at 1 per 1,000. While we welcome this development, it is in large part a result of an equally precipitous drop in the marriage rate, which at 4.6 per 1,000 people, is the second lowest in the nation.⁶⁶ Fewer people may be ending their marriages, but it is largely because fewer people are even bothering to enter into them in the first place.

SECTION IV

THE COSTS OF REPLACING THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY

COHABITATION & PARENTING: A MOTHER AND FATHER WITHOUT MARRIAGE

When it comes to the welfare of children, cohabitation is no substitute for marriage.

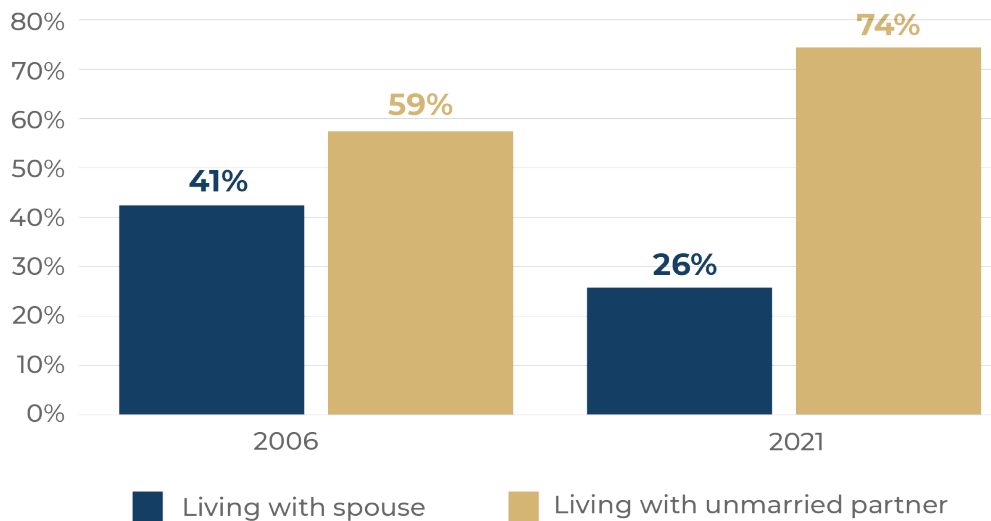
“**F**or Young Adults, Cohabitation Is Up, Marriage Is Down,” is both the title and the unfortunate conclusion of an analysis by the U.S. Census Bureau in their annual America’s Families and Living Arrangements tables.⁶⁷ Historically, the breakdown of the family, and thus the fatherlessness crisis, could be attributed to young people postponing marriage, having more out-of-wedlock births, and increased divorce rates. However, a growing number of men and women are contributing to this societal dilemma by not only postponing marriage but *foregoing it altogether*.

Cohabitation, better known as living together outside of marriage, has become increasingly popular in recent years. 14.5 percent of U.S. couples were unmarried in 2021.⁶⁸ Massachusetts exceeded the national average by 11 percent, with nearly one in six Bay State couples being unmarried.⁶⁹ Overall, from 2000 to 2021, Massachusetts saw couples living together outside of marriage increase by 77 percent.⁷⁰

The data is even bleaker for our young men and women. Of all currently cohabiting households in Massachusetts, 48 percent are between the ages of 18 and 34.⁷¹ This type of living arrangement, once considered scandalous, now has widespread approval amongst that age cohort. The Pew Research Center reports that “about eight-in-ten adults younger than age 30 (78 percent) say that cohabitation is acceptable even if the couple doesn’t plan to marry.”⁷² As a society, we once believed that marriage should precede sexual union. We now can no longer even assume that sexual union will eventually lead to marriage.

As an example, take a further look at our youngest couples. Since 2005, when Massachusetts started recording cohabitation among couples aged 18-24, the gap between married and unmarried couples has steadily grown. 2021 saw the largest gap the Commonwealth has experienced—74 percent of couples ages 18-24 were living together unmarried, while only 26 percent were married.⁷³ Among Generation Z, it appears cohabitation may be simply replacing marriage.

Living Arrangements for Massachusetts Couples Ages 18-24



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2006-2021). ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample, American Community Survey, (PARTNER) [Unmarried partner household]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

This data correlates with national trends; the National Survey of Family Growth found that nearly 80 percent of teens expect to cohabit when adults.⁷⁴ As the Institute for Family Studies summarizes: “Cohabitation has greatly increased in large measure because, while people are delaying marriage to ever greater ages, they are not delaying sex, living together, or childbearing.”⁷⁵

Cohabitation is in, marriage is out.

While cohabitation may be the norm for young men and women, 95.5 percent of teens expect to marry eventually. Eighty-seven percent of teens also intend to have children.⁷⁶ So how does cohabitation line up with those goals? Is cohabitation a good way to “test-run” a relationship? Is it an effective substitute for marriage?

The answer is a resounding “No.”

Marriage is a public, legal union between a man and woman that represents their lifelong commitment and is designed to provide a stable home for the children it produces. Cohabitation is a casual arrangement to live together as if married—without the legal or

societal commitment. Cohabitation can easily be terminated by one party moving out. Marriage requires a legal process to dissolve it.

Thus, while many may assume that cohabitation is simply a step toward marriage,⁷⁷ research continues to prove that they differ in many key ways.

Some claim that cohabitation is justified as an effective test for compatibility,⁷⁸ but that is not what those who actually cohabit say. Less than 14 percent of cohabiting men and women cite testing compatibility before marriage as the reason for moving in together.⁷⁹ For men and women who report cohabiting to test the relationship, it is “associated with higher levels of attachment insecurity and more symptoms of depression and anxiety.”⁸⁰

Those who cohabit also report far lower levels of relationship satisfaction, commitment, and stability than their married counterparts. In categories of fidelity, truthfulness, and responsible use of money, “by double digits, married adults are more likely than those who are cohabiting to express a great deal of trust in their spouse or partner in each of these areas.”⁸¹ In fact, not only is cohabitation no substitute for marriage, but cohabitation is actually negatively associated with intending to get married in the future.⁸²

Parental Cohabitation without Marriage is Bad for Children

About 32 percent of Massachusetts children live with an unmarried parent.⁸³ Of those children, 23 percent live in a cohabiting household.⁸⁴ Besides cohabitation being an inferior option for couples themselves, cohabitation has become an additional factor in the breakdown of the family as a whole.

On the surface, it might seem that cohabiting parents are not as concerning an issue as fatherless homes. And while married parents offer their children a stable and intact family, we might assume that a child with cohabiting parents should at least reap most of the benefits of living with both mother and father.

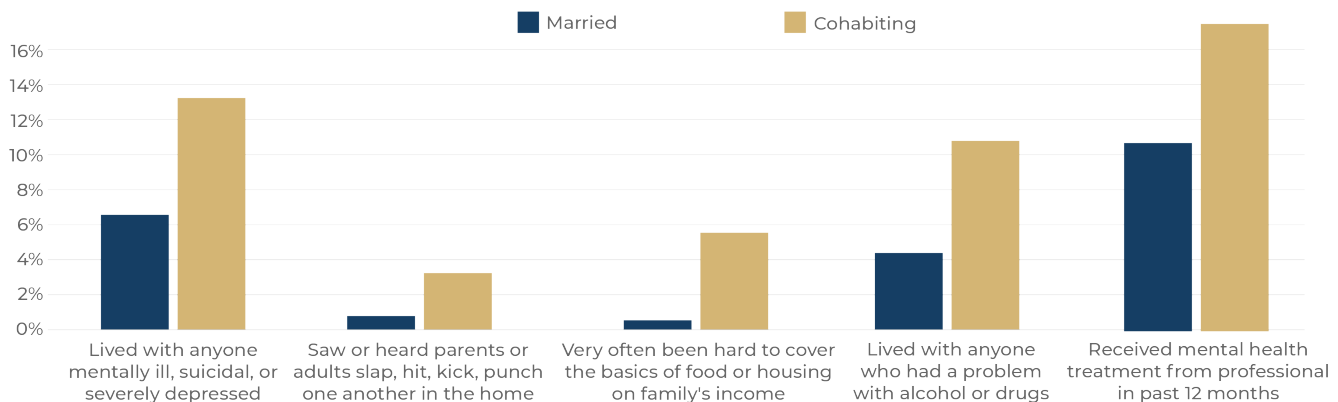
Sadly, the data does not confirm such an assumption. When it comes to their well-being, children with cohabiting parents fall behind their peers in married mother-father homes. Cohabitation’s higher rate of family transitions, such as breakups or separations, contribute to conflict and stress in the household, and affect parental engagement, child behavior, and both parent and child’s mental and physical health.⁸⁵ These transitions also increase a child’s chance of living in poverty due to division of economic resources.⁸⁶

Nationally, children born to cohabiting parents are twice as likely to experience the loss of one of their parents leaving the home compared to their peers born to married parents.⁸⁷

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study also shows that once two cohabiting parents end their relationship, their children continue to experience stressful familial changes. For example, 27 percent of mothers who are not married to their child’s father at birth will form new residential partnerships within five years.⁸⁸ Thus, experts have noted that “empirical evidence about other family types, including unmarried cohabiting couples, shows that the attributes and stability of such relationships more closely resemble those of single-parent families than of two-parent married families.”⁸⁹

Some of those attributes come in the form of higher rates of poverty. Compared to a married, two-parent home, cohabiting respondents in the National Survey of Children’s Health indicate that their children are more than nine times as likely to have food and housing insecurity.

Percentage of Children Experiencing Adverse Circumstances, by Parental Relationship, 2020-2021



Source: *Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2020-2021). Family Health and Activities, National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH), [Adverse childhood experiences]. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). Retrieved May 5, 2023 from www.childhealthdata.org.*

Without the commitment that married parents make toward raising their children together, there is a greater chance that adverse circumstances in adolescence will occur to children of cohabiting parents. Only 64 percent of parents in Massachusetts cohabiting households say they receive emotional support with parenting from their partner, contrasting with 80.4 percent of parents in married-couple households.⁹⁰ Massachusetts children with cohabiting parents face a far greater likelihood of experiencing risk factors such as domestic violence, parental incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse, and parental mental illness, than their peers in married-parent homes. In fact, compared to a married, two-parent home, Massachusetts children in cohabiting homes are more than twice as likely to see substance

abuse, more than five times as likely to see their parents involved in domestic violence, and more than nine times as likely to have a parent serve time in prison.

According to a recent federal study on child abuse and neglect,⁹¹ the most dangerous place for a child is in a home with her parent's unmarried partner. Using data from over a hundred Child Protective Service (CPS) branches, their rate of maltreatment "is more than 8 times greater than the rate for children living with two married biological parents" (57.2 per 1,000 vs. 6.8 per 1,000).⁹² Children in that particular cohabiting relationship were also abused at a rate of 33.6 per 1,000 children, compared to a rate of 2.9 in married-couple households. Far from being a mere formality, marriage once again seems to be the best protection for children's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

SAME-SEX PARENTING: 'MARRIAGE' EXCLUDING EITHER A MOTHER OR FATHER

Children raised by same-sex parents fare worse than children raised by opposite-sex parents on a number of different psychological and developmental indicators.

"On 25 out of 40 outcomes evaluated, there were statistically significant differences between children from IBFs [intact biological families] and those of MLRs [*mother* who had a *lesbian relationship* with another woman] in many areas that are unambiguously suboptimal, such as receiving welfare, need for therapy, infidelity, STIs, sexual victimization, educational attainment, safety of the family of origin, depression, attachments and dependencies, marijuana use, frequency of smoking, and criminal behavior."

ANA SAMUEL, (2012, Aug. 9).

New Family Structures Research and the 'No Differences' Claim.
*Family Structure Studies. Web.*⁹³

"When 'marriage' is used to institutionalize arrangements that thwart biological parentage, as with remarriage or same-sex marriage by partners who already have children by another partner, it can even degrade the best interests of the child."

PAUL SULLINS, (2021).

The Case for Mom and Dad. *The Linacre Quarterly*, Vol. 88(2): 184-20.

“Their basic argument is that States formalize and promote marriage, unlike other fulfilling human relationships, in order to encourage potentially procreative conduct to take place within a lasting unit that has long been thought to provide the best atmosphere for raising children... If this traditional understanding of the purpose of marriage does not ring true to all ears today, that is probably because the tie between marriage and procreation has frayed. Today, for instance, more than 40% of all children in this country are born to unmarried women. This development undoubtedly is both a cause and a result of changes in our society’s understanding of marriage.”

OBERGEFELL V. HODGES,
576 U.S. 644, 739 (2015) (Alito, S.A., dissenting).

Twenty years ago, the Commonwealth was the first in the nation to redefine marriage as something other than the union of one man and one woman. In November 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled in *Goodridge v. Dept of Public Health* that the Massachusetts Constitution required legal recognition of same-sex marriages. Over the following decade, a majority of U.S. states responded by amending their own constitutions to preserve marriage as an institution based on sex complementarity.

However, in 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court overruled this electoral consensus and redefined marriage to include same-sex couples. The Court did so despite the arguments that children do best when raised by both their father and their mother and that elevating same-sex relationships to the status of “married” would inevitably lead to some children being intentionally deprived of either a mother or a father. Two decades into such an unprecedented social experiment, what can we learn about how children have fared in this newest kind of family formation?

The New Family Structures Study, conducted by Mark Regnerus from the University of Texas at Austin and published in 2012, is considered one of the most robust studies of its kind. Regnerus’ team surveyed 15,000 Americans aged 18-39 from various kinds of family structures: married intact biological, lesbian, gay, adopted, divorced, step- and single-parent families.

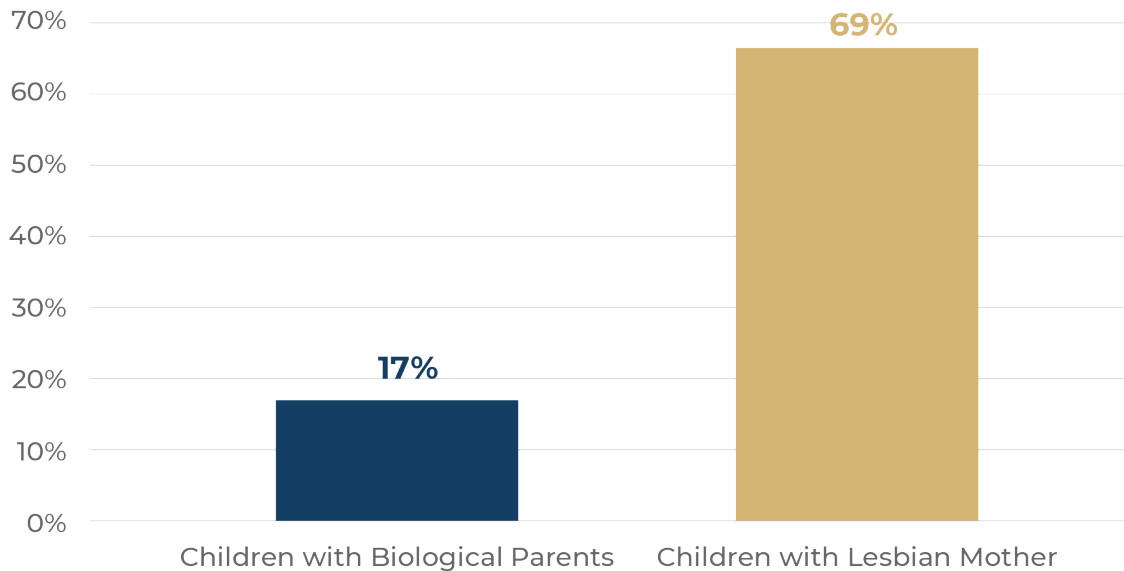
The study results indicate that there were noticeable and often statistically significant differences in health and well-being between respondents from intact biological families and the other family structures, with the optimal outcome favoring intact biological families. Across all family forms, the starkest contrasts were observed between children in intact, biological families and those with lesbian mothers. This is instructive since the

overwhelming majority of children with same-sex families are in homes with a lesbian mother and her partner.

Specifically, the New Family Structure Study showed that compared to children living with their biological parents, children with a lesbian mother were⁹⁴:

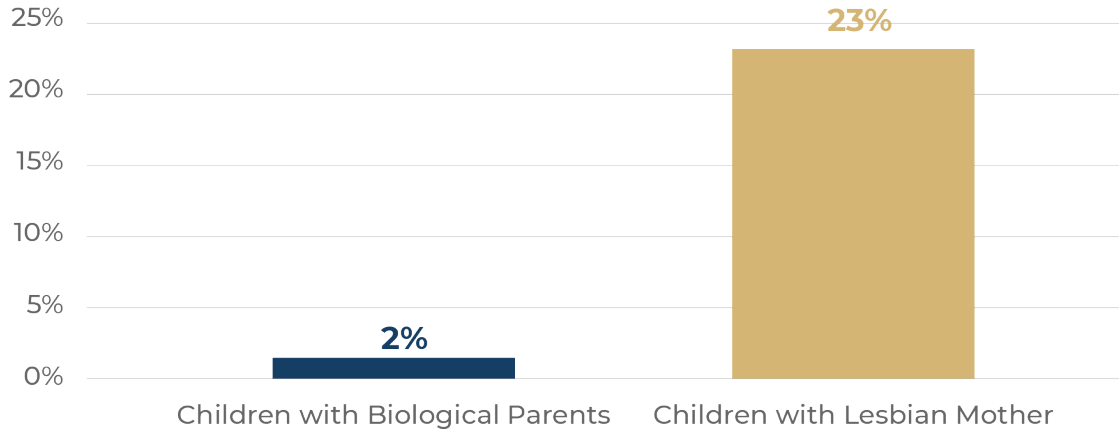
- Four times as likely to be on welfare growing up (69% vs. 17%)
- Almost four times as likely to be on welfare at the time of the study (38% vs. 10%)
- Half as likely to be employed full-time (26% vs. 49%)
- More than three times more likely to be unemployed (28% vs. 8%)
- Three times as likely to have an affair while married/cohabitating (40% vs. 13%)
- Ten times as likely to have been touched sexually by a parent/adult (23% vs. 2%)
- Almost four times as likely to have been forced to have sex against their will (31% vs. 8%)

Percentage of Children on Welfare by Household Structure



Source: Source: Regnerus, Mark. (2012). "How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study" *Social Science Research* 41, 752-770.

Percentage of Children Sexually Touched by a Parent or Adult Caregiver



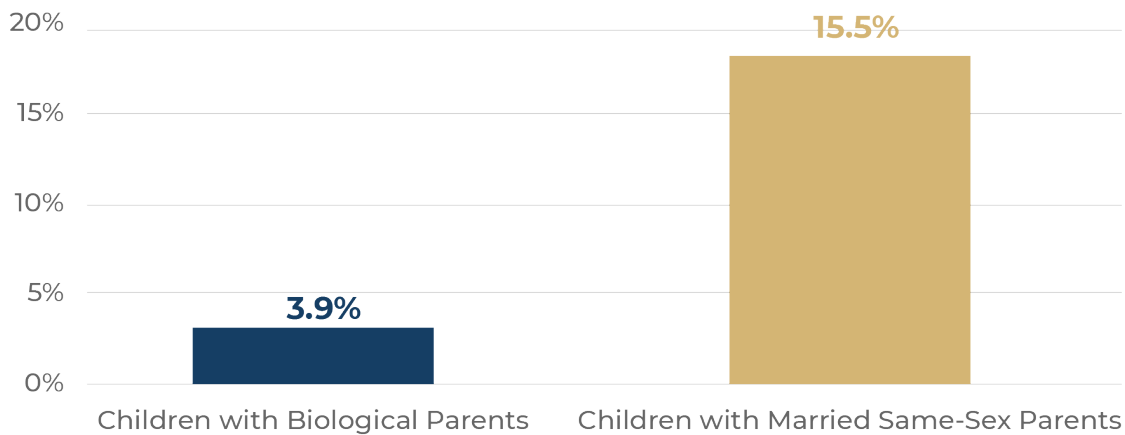
Source: Regnerus, Mark. (2012). "How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study." *Social Science Research* 41, 752-770.

Recent studies using other robust population samples bolster some of Regnerus' findings. Specifically, Paul Sullins, Senior Research Associate of the Ruth Institute and retired Professor of Sociology at the Catholic University of America, has examined child outcomes across family structures using data from the U.S. National Health Interview Survey, a federally mandated survey initiated in 1957 and conducted by the CDC, which is representative of all U.S. children.

Sullins' 2015 study of over 200,000 children using NHIS data revealed that those living with a parent in a same-sex relationship fared worse on nine of twelve measures of emotional or developmental problems and were two to three times more likely to experience such problems as compared to children living with their married biological parents.⁹⁵ In another study, Sullins found that about one-third of children with a parent in a same-sex marriage reported having been sexually abused by a parent or caregiver, more than five times as high as children from other kinds of family structures.⁹⁶

In his more recent 2021 paper, *The Case for Mom and Dad*, which examined a decade of NHIS data (2008-2018) and analyzed a population sample of over 80,000, Sullins found that compared to children in intact biological families, children with married same-sex parents were three-and-a-half to four times more likely to experience emotional problems (15.5% vs. 3.9%), to be diagnosed with ADD (21% vs. 5.9%), to be diagnosed with a learning disability (18.9% vs. 5.3%), and to be retained in school (2.9% vs. 0.8%).⁹⁷

Percentage of Children Experiencing Emotional Problems



Source: Regnerus, Mark. (2012). "How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study." *Social Science Research* 41, 752-770.

These findings counter the claims of many in favor of same-sex parenting, who assert that children living with same-sex parents fare no worse than other children. Proponents of same-sex parenting point to multiple studies which appear to promote the 'no difference' hypothesis. However, it is important to note that most of these studies reach the conclusion of 'no difference' by using very small sample sizes and omitting control groups. Furthermore, nearly **all** of the studies promoting 'no difference' do not use randomly selected samples.

In contrast, the Regnerus and Sullins studies all use large, randomly selected samples representative of the U.S. population. As a result, their findings provide meaningful information that is instructive beyond the individual study participants and can be extrapolated into the broader population.

The Regnerus and Sullins studies, which examine outcomes for children across large cohorts of randomly selected families, point to the fact that measurable differences do exist between family structures. And particularly, these studies indicate that there are indeed statistically significant variations in emotional, academic, and developmental indicators between children being raised by same-sex parents and those being raised by their married, biological parents.

This is important data given that Massachusetts ranks among the top states in the nation with regard to the number and percentage of same-sex couple households. Massachusetts is also home to the county with the highest percentage of same-sex households with children in the whole eastern portion of the U.S. As of 2021, there were over 20,000 same-sex households in Massachusetts involving children.⁹⁸

UCLA's Williams Institute provides detailed, county-level data on same-sex couple households across the nation. According to the Williams Institute, several Massachusetts counties rank among the highest in the nation in percentages of same-sex couples raising children. Specifically, 35 percent of Hampshire County's same-sex households (two-thirds of whom are lesbian couples) are raising children and between 20 to 25 percent of same-sex couples in Franklin, Worcester, and Hampden counties are also raising children. As in Hampshire County, the vast majority of same-sex households in these counties are also lesbian households (80%, 70%, and 64%, respectively).⁹⁹

Although there has been no large-scale study examining Massachusetts children in same-sex versus opposite-sex households, it stands to reason that the outcomes detailed by Sullins and Regnerus in their various studies apply to children from same-sex households in the Commonwealth.

It seems that those who sought to preserve traditional marriage as a social and legal institution based on its capacity to provide children with their own mother and father were correct in their concerns. When the sexual expression and fulfillment of adults are prioritized over the biologically based security and stability found in the traditional family, children often pay the price. Children raised by same-sex parents are no exception to this. In fact, those in households where the same-sex parents marry, as opposed to merely cohabit, actually fare worse in several categories.¹⁰⁰ The research continues to show that children do best when they are raised by their own married, biological mother and father; no other combination of adults is a substitute for intact, biological parents.

SECTION V

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR STRENGTHENING TRADITIONAL FAMILIES

1. **Traditional families are our most important social resource**

Two-parent families composed of a man and a woman united by marriage and by a mutual commitment to raising their biological or adopted children are the foundation of a healthy society. No other public or private social institution can compare with the tremendously positive impact that traditional families have upon the society around them. Traditional families produce more productive citizens, more stable communities, lower crime rates, lower rates of child poverty, and less drain on the social welfare system of our Commonwealth.

2. **Children have the best chance of success in a traditional family**

Social science research strongly indicates that children have the best chance of success when they are raised by a mother and a father in an intact family. Although a small minority of traditional families are seriously dysfunctional, the vast majority of traditional families provide the best environment for raising children to become healthy and responsible citizens.

3. **Traditional families are vital to the social and economic health of Massachusetts**

The social and economic costs of family decline, particularly fatherlessness, are legion. Intergenerational poverty, academic failure, crime, and violence plague our children and our communities when the traditional family breaks down. Massachusetts taxpayers then bear an enormous financial burden from attempting, often in vain, to ameliorate these failings through government programs and spending.

4. **Parents should be the primary caregivers and educators in their children's lives**

Parents have the primary responsibility to provide for and protect the physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual health and well-being of their children. They also have the right not to have that role challenged or usurped unless there is clear and convincing evidence that the physical, emotional, or psychological health of the child is in imminent danger.

5. Public policies that strengthen traditional families strengthen all of society

Social science research strongly indicates that a wide range of social pathologies results from a decline in traditional families. For this reason, public policies that strengthen traditional families simultaneously strengthen all of society. Indeed, the government has a compelling interest in pursuing public policies that strengthen traditional families because of the social benefits that traditional families provide to our entire society.

6. State welfare agencies are a poor substitute for parents

In most sectors of the economy, government agencies are a poor substitute for private enterprise. Similarly, in the vast majority of cases, parents are far better guardians of the health and well-being of their own children than any state agency. For this reason, public policies that seek to replace parental authority with the impersonal authority of a government agency are harmful both to children and to the social prosperity and well-being of the Commonwealth.

7. The state should seek to support parents rather than replace them

The state government should do everything within its power to support parents in their social role as primary caregivers for their own children rather than seek to replace them. For example, state agencies should not use a limited delegation of parental authority over children (such as the limited delegation of authority over the education of children during school hours) to usurp parental authority in other areas.

8. No legislation should be passed without considering the impact on families

In the same manner that studies are prepared to evaluate the impact of proposed legislation on private enterprise or the environment, the government should carefully consider the impact that proposed legislation will have upon families. To this end, proposed legislation that may have a significant impact on families should be accompanied by a “Family Impact Statement” which will explain the direct and indirect effects of the proposed policy on families in Massachusetts.

SECTION VI

THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN TRADITIONAL FAMILIES

“The principal social objective of American government at every level should be to see that children are born to intact families and that they remain so.”

SEN. DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN, (1993, Sept. 19).
Interview on Meet the Press.

“I think that my half of the political spectrum — the left half — too often dismisses the importance of family structure... Partly out of a worthy desire to celebrate the heroism of single parents, progressives too often downplay family structure. Social science is usually messy, with correlation and causation difficult to separate. But the evidence, when viewed objectively, points strongly to the value of two-parent households.”

DAVID LEONHARDT, (2018, Oct. 4).
A One-Question Quiz on the Poverty Trap. *The New York Times. Editorial.*

All sectors of society, including local communities, businesses, and religious communities, have a critical role to play in building strong traditional mother-father families in Massachusetts. Nothing in this report is intended to imply that reforms designed to strengthen traditional families must come primarily or exclusively from the public sector. On the contrary, this report is intended in significant part to encourage community leaders, business leaders, opinion leaders, community activists, and religious leaders to pursue reforms that will help to reverse the destructive decline of the traditional family in Massachusetts.

At the same time, in light of the grave social threat posed by the decline in the percentage of traditional families within the Commonwealth, there is also an urgent need for a bipartisan campaign to encourage and strengthen traditional families in Massachusetts. In the war on poverty and the fight against income inequality, there is one strategy that has consistently proven effective – promoting intact families with a married mother and father. The most powerful educational program we can employ is not providing every student with the latest smart tablet to take home, it’s working to ensure the home they return to at the end of the school day contains a married mother and father. Keeping criminals off the

street is important for ensuring children’s safety, but equally so is bringing fathers back to their children’s homes. When children have both a mother and a father working together to support their family, the state doesn’t have to cover those expenses, and we all benefit.

This is common sense, and the social science data backs it up. The harm caused by fatherlessness and family decline is undeniable and the need to address the root cause is clear. We must work together, across the political and ideological spectrum, to promote the timeless and irreplaceable institution of a married mother and father for the benefit of our children and our Commonwealth.

PUBLIC POLICY

“Family decline will be stemmed only when it is widely understood that care provided by both biological parents is the most powerful social and economic advantage that any child can enjoy.”

HEATHER MAC DONALD, (2014, July 8).

“Encourage Two-Parent Families.” *The Wall Street Journal*. Web.

In keeping with the principles outlined above, state legislators and government officials should reject public policies that weaken and undermine the critical social institution of the two-parent family. More importantly, state legislators and government officials should undertake a bi-partisan effort to pursue a wide range of public policies specifically designed to protect and strengthen traditional families.

As part of this effort, state legislators and government officials should consider action in the following public policy areas:

- **Fatherhood Initiatives:** Campaigns to alert the public as well as business, community, and religious leaders to the urgent need to actively address the social crisis of father absence and the decline of the traditional family.
- **Tax Relief for Families:** Reforms to reduce the heavy tax burden on families so that a more reasonable share of family economic resources are available to parents raising children.
- **Welfare Reform:** Reforms to help encourage marriage among those receiving public assistance.
- **Gambling Reform:** Public policies that will protect both adults and children from the destructive impact of compulsive gambling behavior upon families.

- **Parental Rights:** Legislation to recognize and strengthen the unique role of mothers and fathers, particularly in the education and healthcare decisions for their children.

CONCLUSION

The health of the traditional family is foundational to the health of American society. That’s a bold claim, we know. And any report that takes a strong stance on an issue like this is vulnerable to criticism. So we want to be clear about two points:

- No simple solutions exist for the pressing social issues of our day – rising income inequality, disparity of educational opportunity, youth violence, and access to health care.
- Single mothers, as President Obama said, “are doing a heroic job, often under trying circumstances. ... But they shouldn’t have to do it alone.”

It should surprise no one that an organization called Massachusetts Family Institute would publish a report promoting the benefits of the traditional family – mother, father, and children living in the same home. Of course, we would hope that married people who read this report will be encouraged by the findings affirming that their commitment to their marriage is of great benefit to their children and a common good for our society as a whole. But there is a negative message in this report as well: Children who grow up in single-parent homes are at a decided disadvantage in every critical area of their lives. They are much more likely to be poor, have problems in school, commit crime, be exposed to violence, and have difficulty accessing good healthcare.

Publicizing the disadvantages of single parenthood does not mean condemning or demonizing women or men who are already single parents.

Rather, it means pointing out the risks and burdens involved in lone parenthood to young women and men who are not yet parents. It means making them aware that there are choices they can make – such as to complete their educations, find jobs, and get married before they start families – that will dramatically lower the odds that their children will grow up in poverty.

We believe these facts need to be disseminated widely, confidently, and repeatedly.

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