

## Childhood Family Structure: The Influence on Adolescent Romance and Union Formation in Early Adulthood

This study examines the junctures between family structure history, adolescent romance, and union formation in young adulthood. Major shifts in the types of households found in the U.S. have led to an increase in the diversity of family arrangements, such as single-parent households, step-families, and cohabiting couples. In addition to adults experiencing these changes in household composition, children are having to adjust as well. In 1970, 85% of children lived with two parents. This percentage declined to 70% in 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau).

There has been increasing concern about the consequences of family structure for children's wellbeing. Children from two-biological parent households tend to fare better than children from other types of households. For example, past research indicates that children from divorced and single-parent living arrangements are more likely to have more behavioral problems compared to their counterparts raised in two-biological parent homes (Emery, Hetherington, and DiLalla 1985; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox 1982). Furthermore, children from single-parent households, compared to children from two-biological parent households, have higher usage of alcohol and drugs, higher rates of dropping out of high school, leave home at a younger age, and tend to have earlier experiences of sexual activity (e.g. Carlson and Corcoran 2001; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Compared to children from two-biological parent households, children from single-parent households are more likely to be in a romantic relationship, and among those in a relationship, one marked by conflict (Cavanagh, Crissey, and Raley 2008).

Not only do children's living arrangements influence relationships in adolescence, but research also indicates that family structure may have an impact on children's future relationship formation. Some studies have found that children from divorced parents tend to marry early (Aquilino 1994; Axinn and Thornton 1992, 1993; Carlson 1979; Glenn and Kramer 1987; Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1993, 1998; Keith and Finlay 1988; Kiernan 1992; McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; McLeod 1991; Michael and Tuma 1985; Mueller and Pope 1977; Ross and Mirowsky 1999; Thornton 1991; Waite and Spitze 1981). However, other studies have found that the childhood experience of divorce deters or delays marriage (Avery, Goldscheider, and Speare 1992; Goldscheider and Waite 1986, 1991; Kobrin and Waite 1984; Li and Wojtkiewicz 1994; South 2001). Single parenting more generally tends to be associated with early, non marital union formation and union dissolution (Bumpass, Musick, and Meier 2006-working paper), whereas individuals from stable married households tend to experience lower rates of marital dissolution (Amato and Booth 1991).

Because adolescent relationships are strongly associated with young adult relationship quality (Seiffge-Krenke 2003), I will be using a national sample drawn from three waves of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). I will examine the association between family structure at Wave 1 and the likelihood that adolescents were involved in a romantic relationship at Wave 2 and, among those in a relationship at Wave 2, the likelihood of having a romantic relationship at Wave 3, when respondents are 18-26 years of age.

Based on past research, I hypothesize that adolescents from step-families, single-parent families, and cohabiting families are more likely to be in a romantic relationship at an earlier age

than their peers raised in two-biological parent families. I also speculate that the relationships of these young people may be more likely marked by instability. Conversely, I expect that adolescents from two-biological parent households are more likely to enter romantic relationships at a later age and to have more stability within those relationships. I also hypothesize that among adolescents who experienced a relationship during adolescence, those from step-families, single-parent families, and cohabiting families are will be more likely to have entered into a cohabiting or married relationship during their early adult years (at 18-26 years of age).