

Household expenditures on children, 2007–08

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ABSTRACT

Regression results suggest that household income and parental education are the main factors influencing expenditures on children's education, entertainment, and books; that children in single-parent or cohabiting households are disadvantaged is thus due mainly to the lower income and education levels of these households, not their marital status.

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EXCERPT

An increasing number of children living in nontraditional families has led researchers to study these children and their families. In 2004, two-thirds of children were living with married parents; about a quarter of children were living in a one-parent household, the majority with their mother; and the rest were living in other types of households.¹ Numerous studies show that children in single-parent households, especially mother-only households, are disadvantaged, compared with children in two-parent households.² These studies find that children from one-parent households are significantly less likely to complete their high school education³ and significantly more likely to obtain lower grades⁴ than their counterparts in two-parent households. Also, children in single-parent households are deprived economically and socially⁵ and show more problem behaviors than children in two-parent households.⁶ Differences in children's well-being between two-parent and single-parent households are often attributed to differences in household income.⁷ The economic disadvantage of single households is clearly seen in the following statistics: in 2006, the median income for married-couple households was \$69,716, while that for single-father and single-mother households was \$47,078 and \$31,818, respectively. Moreover, less than 5 percent of married-couple households were below the poverty level, whereas the percentages were 13.2 percent for single-father households and 28.2 percent for single-mother households.⁸

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Footnotes

[1](#) Rose M. Kreider, *Living Arrangements of Children: 2004*, Current Population Reports (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), pp. 70?14.

[2](#) See Sara S. McLanahan and Gary D. Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1994); Elizabeth Thomson, Thomas L. Hanson, and Sara S. McLanahan, "Family Structure and Child Well-being: Economic Resources vs. Parental Behavior," *Social Forces*, September 1994, pp. 221?2; William S. Aquilino, "The Life Course of Children Born to Unmarried mothers: Childhood Living Arrangements and Young Adult Outcomes," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, May 1996, pp. 293?10; John P. Hoffmann, "Family Structure, Community Context, and Adolescent Problem Behaviors," *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, November 2006, pp. 867?0; and Ming Wen, "Family Structure and Children's Health and Behavior: Data from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families," *Journal of Family Issues*, November 2008, 1492?519.

[3](#) Aquilino, "The Life Course of Children Born to Unmarried Mothers."

[4](#) See Douglas B. Downey, "The School Performance of Children from Single-Mother and Single-Father families: Economic or Interpersonal Deprivation?" *Journal of Family Issues*, March 1994, pp. 129?7; and Thomson, Hanson, and McLanahan, "Family Structure and Child Well-being."

[5](#) Downey, "The School Performance of Children"; and McLanahan and Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*.

[6](#) See Wendy D. Manning and Kathleen A. Lamb, "Adolescent Well-being in Cohabiting, Married, and Single-Parent Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, November 2003, pp. 876?3; Hoffmann, "Family Structure"; and Wen, "Family Structure and Children's Health and Behavior."

[7](#) See Thomson, Hanson, and McLanahan, "Family Structure and Child Well-being"; McLanahan and Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*; Doris R. Entwisle and Karl L. Alexander, "Family Type and Children's Growth in Reading and Math over the Primary Grades," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, May 1996, pp. 341?5; and Manning and Lamb, "Adolescent Well-being."

[8](#) Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica Smith, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2006*, Current Population Reports, P60?33 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

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