THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILY LIFE TO POVERTY / INCOME AND TO CRIME / ABUSE
Background Research Notes

Patrick F. Fagan
William H.G.FitzGerald Fellow in Family and Culture
The Heritage Foundation.

The Five Institutions

Social Geography: Function and Structures of the Five Basic Institutions in Society

For this study the framework of the five basic or major institutions was adopted. These institutions are the family, church, school, marketplace and government, and are deemed basic because they are organizations that spring up from the five basic tasks in an individual’s life and are also the main tasks of society.

The five tasks are:
- The affectional-sexual-procreative task of partnering and parenting (family)
- The task of learning (education);
- The task of procuring the material needs of life (market);
- The task of living with others in an ordered way that permits a common life (government);
- The task of making sense of existence, transcendence and the mysteries of human life (religion).

It is worth noting that all these institutional tasks or roles happen simultaneously not only at both the individual and societal level function but also at the level of the family. Within the family all five tasks are pursued: the affectional-sexual-procreative; learning; procuring material needs; ordering life for the common good; and attending to the transcendental-religious. The family as an organization is the smallest society with all five of the basic tasks needed to make it work. In that way it is different from all the other basic institutions. Moreover the other institutions need individuals and families to attain their composition.

Though distinct the institutions are also interdependent. The better the child or young member emerging from the family the more the other institutions can accomplish their work. The specialized human capacity harnessed by the family is that of the sexual, which produces the future members of society.

A corollary to this interdependence is the condition of thriving.

Not only are the basic institutions operating at the societal level, they are operating at the individual level. They are embodied in the life of the mature person in a life of family, worship, study, work, and citizenship. The person capable of living out all five roles lives a full human life, and is a valued member of society.
Demographic Overview

Data from the Federal Reserve Board’s Survey of Consumer Finance (Chart 3.10) illustrate the different levels of marketplace income (before transfers of payments) for different structures of families with children less than 18 years of age in the United States in 2000. There are significant differences in the median annual income between the married two parent family (always intact and step families) and all the other family types, ranging from $54,000 per year for the highest (the always intact married family) to $9,400 for the lowest, the never married single mother.
Asset formation shows a similar pattern. Smith (1995) in pioneering work on the assets of married couples in their fifties (who are approaching retirement) found that in 1994 the median assets by family structure were: married, $132,000; never married, $35,000; divorced, $33,000 and separated $7,600. Even when the household assets of the two single divorced persons are combined their combined asset base is half of that of married couples.
Turning to the incidence of poverty (as defined by US Census), Chart 3.12 illustrates that poverty occurs at very different rates in families with children, structure by structure, ranging from the lowest at 12 percent for the always intact married family to 67 percent for the always single mother family.
The number of hours worked in the marketplace will have a direct correspondence to the level of income of the worker or household involved. Chart 3.14 illustrates the capacity of the two-parent family to work more hours in the marketplace. However within all the two-parent and the single-parent family structures there are significant differences in the average numbers of hours worked by all individuals in each structure. These levels doubtless have their impact on the median income levels illustrated in Chart 3.10 above, for the different family structures.

The increase in single-parent families, particularly those of single mothers, kept poverty levels relatively constant throughout the 1990s, despite a continuous rise in GDP (Rector 2004). Whereas only 20 percent of children under 18 lived in a single-parent household in 1980, 25 percent did so in 1990, and 28 percent in both 1997 and 2002. During this period the ‘divorce revolution’ was in high gear also.

The demographics above give an outline of differences in economic well being by family structure. The dynamics behind the differences will be explored next.

Marriage and Income

Male economic status has always been and still remains an important determinant as to whether or not a man feels ready to marry, and whether a woman wants to marry him (Lichter et al. 1992). When the male partner is more economically secure marriage is more likely. During the late 1980’s and early 1990’s favorable economic circumstances among cohabiting men tended to accelerate marriage and reduce the likelihood of dissolution of the cohabiting relationship. The higher the man's earnings, the greater was the likelihood of marriage. (Smock & Manning 1997).

One phenomenon that has often given rise to feminist criticism is that marriage rates are most often highest in local areas that offer the fewest economic alternatives to marriage for women (Lichter et al. 1991). On the other hand the more women earn independently, the less attractive marriage appears to be in general (Nock 1995) Thus employment for husbands and for wives has different impacts on both marriage rates and on marital stability.

For men, more education means a greater likelihood of marriage and the recent decrease in marriage rates in the United States has been largely associated with those with lower education attainment. For women the pattern is different. For them the relationship between education and the likelihood of marriage is an inverted-U, peaking at about twelve years of education.

Cohabitation before marriage is linked to less income. Husbands who cohabited before marriage were less likely to be employed full time and more likely to have ‘lower occupational status’ than their
counterparts who had not cohabited before marriage. Meanwhile wives who had cohabited were more likely to be employed full time than their counterparts who had not, in their own way making their marriages more workable, financially (Cunningham & Antill 1994).

The Impact of Divorce on Income

Just as marriage has economic benefits, divorce has negative economic impacts on all involved, though in differing degrees for men, women and children. Divorce has greater economic consequences for women than for men and they come swiftly. Sorensen (1994) found that the economic position of divorced women who live alone with their children remains precarious. Although the custodial parent’s household after a divorce will contain fewer persons than the pre-divorce home, the income loss for the custodial parent’s home is generally great enough to cause the per capita income to fall when compared with pre-divorce conditions. Moreover, divorce causes both parents to lose the economies of scale that are implicit in the larger pre-divorce household. Given the rising rate of divorce (Chart 3.15 below) the impact is widespread.

**Chart 3.15**

Divorces per 100 Marriages

Sources: *US Bureau of Census Historical Stats. Of U.S.; NCHS Vit Stats*

Bartfeld (2000), from data drawn from the 1986-1991 panels of the U.S. Survey of Income and Program Participation, found that three months after divorce 45.2 percent of custodial mothers who were not receiving child support were living below the poverty line, as were 38.0 percent of those receiving child supports. Non-custodial fathers, in contrast, exhibited little impact: Studies vary on the average drop in household income following divorce but in all studies it is significantly large --- in the Great Depression range. Corcoran and Chaudry (1997) estimated in 1993 that after the divorce of parents with children the drop was estimated to be 42 percent, going from $43,000 before the divorce to $25,300 after the divorce. Bianchi et al (1999) using matched couples found that custodial mothers experienced a 36 percent decline in standard of living following separation, whereas non-custodial fathers experienced a 28 percent increase.
These estimates are larger than the drop the US economy experienced during the Great Depression (a 30.5 percent drop). Yet each and every year for the past 27 years, over one million children in the United States have experienced divorce in their families with an associated reduction in their household income ranging from 28 percent to 42 percent. Three-fourths of all U.S. women applying for welfare benefits did so because of divorce (OECD, 1989).

The Impact of Divorce on Mothers and on Fathers

Particularly for women whose pre-divorce family income was below the national median family income, divorce is the primary factor in determining the subsequent length of time in poverty (Committee on Ways and Means 1998).

However, mothers who are employed at the time of a divorce are much less likely to become welfare recipients than mothers who are not working at the time of divorce. Divorced mothers do not tend to stay in poverty as long as always-single mothers do. Divorced mothers who go on welfare stay on welfare for an average of three to four years, during which time they are able to work their way out of poverty. The always-single mother is less likely and takes longer to exit poverty (Fagan 2000).

The Impact of Divorce on Assets

Not only is annual income affected by divorce, but divorce significantly reduces the wealth and assets that already had been accumulated by the couple (Keister, 2004). This phenomenon has already been illustrated in Charts 3.10 and 3.11 above.

Smith (1995) found that the effect of divorce on asset formation is significant by the time a person reaches the sixth decade of life. He found that the assets of married couples in their fifties (who are approaching retirement) are four times greater than those of their divorced peers.

The Impact of Work on Divorce Proneness

Eggebeen and Hawkins (1990) reported that the rising proportion of married mothers entering the labor force in the 1950’s did so primarily to help the family meet basic needs. By 1980 the motive had changed predominantly to ‘standard-of-living’ preferences.

Edwards (2001) found that in the 1950s and 1960s, the promise of ‘increasing wages’ and ‘the continued presence of a male wage provider’ influenced young mothers to stay at home. The rate of wives’ participation in the marketplace accompanied a rise in the divorce rate: The number of wives participating in the marketplace jumped from 18 percent in 1950 to 64 percent in 1992. During the same period, the divorce ratio jumped from one in every four marriages to one in every two.

Conger et al. (1990) found that the risk of divorce is highest and that wives become less committed to their marriages when their economic contributions are similar to those of their husbands during times of economic distress, even when their husbands seem to become even more committed to the relationship. Nock (1995) found similar results.

A work-place phenomenon seems to play its part in increasing the divorce rate for working wives: Couples are more likely to divorce when the wife works in an occupation having a disproportionate number of men relative to women.
Economic Interdependence and Divorce Proneness

Data from the Current Population Survey show that the proportion of dual-earner couples in which wives earned more than their husbands increased from 16 percent in 1981 to 23 percent in 1996. Almost 20 percent earned more than their husbands, with 13 percent earning more than 25 percent more, and 13 percent earning 50 percent more. Almost all research which has looked at the issue has found a positive correlation between such increased economic resources for wives and the rate of divorce (e.g. Booth et al. 1984; Heidemann et al. 1998).

By contrast it seems that marital stability is enhanced by strong economic dependence by one spouse or the other and by complementary division of marital roles (Conger et al. 1990). Jalovaara (2003) found that the risk of divorce was lowest when the wife’s income was low and the husband’s income was high, whereas it was the highest when the wife’s income was relatively high and the husband’s income was low.

Cohabitation And Income

Though cohabiting couples avoid the permanent commitment that marriage entails the question remains whether cohabitation brings some of the same benefits in income or assets that marriage does.

Women’s Income and Hours of Work

The U.S. Census (2003) reported on the different economic arrangements between cohabiting and married households in the United States: Overall only 13 percent of married-couple households had a female head of household, but nearly half (46 percent) of all unmarried-partner households did, with a preponderance of these living in the North Eastern United States.

As Chart 3.14 above, illustrates, using data from the Federal Reserve Board’s Survey of Consumer Finance (2001), the average cohabiting mother works more hours per year (1,391 hours) in the marketplace than any other female partner (1,384 hours for the wife in the step-family and 1,199 hours for the wife in the always-intact-married family).

Casper and Bianchi (2002) found that cohabiting unmarried couples tend to share household activities more equally than married couples.

Though the average income of cohabitating men is almost twice that of cohabitating women (Smock & Manning 1997), a greater proportion of cohabiting women earned more income than their partners compared to the situation for wives in relation to husbands (Brines 1999).

Men’s Income and Hours of Work

Most cohabiting men are in the lower wage brackets. Brown and Lichter (2004) found that over 60 percent of cohabiting working men earned less than $25,000 annually, and only 6 percent earned at least $50,000.

Cohabiting fathers are less likely to work full-time and full-year than married fathers, and less likely to be working long hours. While among married fathers, 32 percent worked 45 hours or more during the week prior to the Current Population Survey (the annual mini-census in the United States) only 16 percent of cohabiting fathers did so (Brown 2000).

The disparity in incomes between married and cohabiting men is likely increasing over time. Between 1984 and 1996, the percentage of married fathers who completed more than 12 years of education increased from 46 percent to 56 percent, while rates for single fathers were stagnant. Not surprisingly,
during that same time period the household income of married fathers rose by 19 percent, while the income of cohabiting fathers stayed virtually the same (Brown 2000).

Not surprisingly then, cohabitation in America—especially cohabitation as an alternative to marriage—is more common among disadvantaged white women, and poorer ethnic groups -- Blacks and Puerto Ricans especially (Manning & Landale 1996 The Income of Cohabitors with Children).

The survey which gives the most complete picture of cohabiting and out-of-wedlock births in the United States is The Fragile Families Survey (McLanahan 1999), the first wave of which was conducted in Spring 1998. This survey found that, just as in Ireland (Kiely 2000) most out-of-wedlock births occur among young adult women, not among teenagers in high school. The median age for women having their first child out-of-wedlock was twenty-two. Overall, the median annual income of the unmarried fathers was $17,500 and on average, during the year before the birth of the child, the earnings of these fathers were higher than those of the mothers.

Rector et al. (2003) analyzing data from the Fragile Families survey found that 55 percent of the mothers would live in poverty should they remain single and be employed part-time. By contrast, if the mothers married, their poverty rate would drop from 55 percent to 17 percent. In general however, despite their lower income, cohabiting couples are less likely to be financially supportive of each other (Waite & Gallagher 2000, p 117) and to not often pool financial resources, are more likely to assume that each partner is responsible for supporting himself or herself financially, and more likely to assume that each has no responsibility for the financial support of the other (Waite 2000).

Single Parenthood And Income

Single motherhood is increasing rather than decreasing, regardless of the measure used (Iceland 2003). One recent review with an oft-found conclusion was Christopher et al.’s (2002) analysis of seven Western nations, demonstrating that in every nation studied, households with single mothers and their children have the highest rates of poverty even after controlling for age and education.

The Single Mother Family

In the United States, by 1994, single motherhood was seen as the most important determinant of female poverty in the United States. The combination of out-of-wedlock births, the rising age of first marriage, the substantial increase in life-time singleness, and the increased divorce, especially among younger women with children, all contributed to the feminization of poverty (Starrels et al. 1994). The average family income for children who lived with their never-married mother was only about 40 percent of the family income for children who lived with either a divorced or a widowed mother (Bianchi 1990).

Intergenerational aspects of out-of-wedlock births are often at play in these effects, because the adverse economic consequences of premarital childbearing are not limited to the women experiencing such births. Their increased likelihood of future poverty is likely to have an intergenerational spill over effect: their children are less likely to complete high school, more likely to experience poverty, and more likely to receive welfare payments (Bennett et al. 1995). Furthermore, those who are doing poorly in school and have low aspirations are more likely to be sexually engaged, leading in turn to increased likelihood of childbearing, and of dropping out of school (Brooks-Gunn 1987; Gunn & Furstenberg 1989).
Teenage Out-of-Wedlock Birth

Within single motherhood, one group stands out and causes the greatest concern: teenage mothers who give birth outside of marriage. They spend more of their lives as single parents, and their children spend more time in poverty than do the children of any other family form (Hotz et al. 1997), and over 75 percent go on welfare within five years (Jacobson & Maynard 1995). Less than one-third of those who have a baby before reaching age 18 complete high school, compared with the 50 percent completion rate for teenagers of similar backgrounds who avoid pregnancy (Hotz et al. 1997). Young women who have a baby before reaching age 18 put themselves and their children more definitely on the poverty track: less than one third complete high school, compared with the 50 percent completion rate for teenagers of similar backgrounds who avoid pregnancy (Hotz et al. 1997). Chart 3.20

**OWB Rate per 1,000 Teens vs. Mid 20’s; 1980-2000**

![Chart 3.20](image)

**Source:** National Vital Statistics Report Vol. 50, #5, Feb. 12, 2002

In the U.S. the number of babies born to teenagers has not changed much over the last decades; rather it is that marriage within this age group has virtually vanished.

**Chart 3.21**

**Birth Rates Per 1,000 Married and Unmarried Women Aged 15-44**

![Chart 3.21](image)

**Sources:** National Centre for Health Statistics, Monthly Vital Statistics Report
The Potential Downward Spiral Effect of Low Education Attainment on Children

Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and the Infant Health and Development Program, Smith et al. (1997) found a clear relationship between family income and children’s scores on standardized tests of IQ, verbal ability and achievement tests. Their scores correlated positively and with high significance with the level of poverty. As income levels increased children’s IQ scores also increased correspondingly.

Duncan et al. (1998) found that poverty was strongly associated with a low level of preschool ability in the child, which in turn was associated with low test scores later in childhood as well as grade failure, school disengagement, and dropping out of school, even when controls for family characteristics such as maternal schooling, family structure, and welfare receipt are included. Improvements in family income had the strongest effects on improving the quality of home environment for children who were born to a poor family.

The number of years of education received translates into a better first job and better jobs later at higher salaries (Hill & Sandfort 1995) and thus large economic gains for the next generation of parents can be realized by completing high school, and still more by completing college. These achievements lead to gains both in the level of income that will be earned and in the more intense work habits acquired.

Discussion

The two-parent household has enormous advantage in the task of earning the minimum needed to escape poverty, and, other things being equal, that material advantage can never be erased because two people can work longer in the marketplace than one can. Furthermore the emerging evidence of the marriage premium in the earnings capacity for married men adds even more weight to the superiority of this family structure in income generation. Marriage gives advantages that no other family structure has.

Cohabitation, an ambivalent form of belonging for many, which keeps their option to reject more open, economically is not nearly as robust as marriage. Women work longer hours in cohabitation and their men work shorter hours, shorter than married men, and shorter than their female partner as well, evidencing, by contrast with the marriage premium, something that could be called ‘a cohabitation penalty’. Further, reflecting the lack of belonging inherent in this family arrangement, cohabiters, even though they need to support each other more financially given their relative needs, actually support each other less.

Where poverty is concerned one family form stands out as the generator of poverty rather than income and wealth: the single parent family, especially the always-single-parent family, the one rejected at birth or close thereto by the father (who may also have been rejected as a spouse by the mother). This family form is the greatest generator of poverty, especially for children, but also for mothers.

For the welfare state there is a major implication from these findings: Had the level of married households remained constant over the past five decades there would have been a direct impact on the level of poverty that would have been enormous, and also an intergenerational effect that would have compounded the benefits upwards.
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY LIFE AND THE WORK OF GOVERNMENT IN PROTECTING SOCIETY AGAINST CRIME

Introduction to Family and Government

This section will look at the family’s relationship to government. Government has two key roles: first, maintaining the peace and second, setting the rules of the marketplace. A third derivative role is that of taxation and distribution of these monies to pay for government’s activities in these and other roles it chooses to take onto itself.

Crime and Family

There are many types of crime but those against the person (violent assault, homicide and rape) and against personal property (grand theft and robbery) are the most serious, and those most feared by citizens.

In reviewing the data and the literature on violent crime in the United States over the one hundred and fifty years, in both frontier times of the settlement of the western states (the ‘Wild West’ depicted in cowboy movies) and in present-day inner cities, Courtwright (1996) concluded that the total amount of violence and disorder in U.S. society was correlated negatively with the percentage of males from intact families of origin. He found that the lifestyle of those growing up without a father were are more likely to be anomic lifestyles without an adult family life of their own and they were more than twice as likely as their peers from intact families to become involved in shoot-outs or run afoul of the law.

Studying crime demographics in large cities in the United States, with populations over 100,000, Messner and Sampson (1991) found that it was not the large number of males in a population that was correlated with violent crime but rather the patterns of family structure. Malik et al. (1997) also found that the marital status of parents was a significant predictor of involvement of adolescent children in community violence. Children living with both parents were the least involved in committing acts of violence or of being the victims of such. By contrast they found that three other family groups – step family, single parent family and “other” -- were all significantly more involved in greater levels of violence, but especially the children from step families.

The data in Chart 3.23 illustrate a correlation over the last 40 years for the United States: The greater the number of out-of-wedlock births and divorces the greater the amount of serious theft and violent crime that occurs.
Pampei and Williamson (2001) studying data from 18 developed nations over forty years concluded that an increase in family change from traditional family norms (a composite index based upon national rates for marriage, divorce, female employment, and fertility) was significantly correlated with an increase in youth violence. Homicide is similarly correlated with these patterns in the United States, and at the community level these same patterns emerge in even greater detail. Brewer and Smith (1995) analyzing data from 177 cities in the United States with populations of 250,000 or more found that living in a neighborhood marked by high rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births increased the resident’s risk of becoming a homicide victim. Liska et al. (1998) found that the percentage of female-headed households in a community predicted violent crime rates in 1970, 1980, and 1990. Land et al. (1990), comparing homicide rates for metropolitan areas in the United States in 1960, 1970 and 1980 found that areas with a greater percentage of males who are divorced tend to have higher homicide rates, while comparable areas with a smaller percentage of divorced males tend to have a lower homicide rates.

Almgren et al. (1998), using census data and vital records for 75 Chicago neighborhoods, found that higher rates of family disruption were associated with higher rates of homicide and accidental death. The association was strengthened between 1970 and 1990 as the rates of family disruption grew. Kubrin (2003) came to similar conclusions studying the data for the city of St. Louis.

Foster and Forsyth (1994) studying the trend in the United States noted that although the U.S. juvenile population declined between 1963 and 1988 by 6 million yielding a slight decline in juvenile arrests, per-capita arrest rates jumped dramatically. The murder rate among Americans ages ten to 17, was four times higher in 1988 than it had been in 1963. During the same period, forcible rape and robbery rates tripled, and aggravated assault more than quadrupled. Lester and Abe (1993) concluded that divorce in the United States was strongly associated with a variety of manifestations of 'social disintegration’, chief among them homicide and suicide. In a meta-analysis of homicide rates in eight nations, Lester (2001) found that there are five consistent correlates of homicide rates, one of them was divorce. The others were: suicide, unemployment, higher population and higher capita income.
Chart 3.24
EU Homicide Rate for 2001

**Source:** Interpol International Crime Statistics

By contrast Ireland's relatively high rate of belonging in family may well be related to its very low rate of homicide. Chart 3.24, above, shows its comparative standing in Europe.

**Crime, Delinquency and Family**

Just as with crime in general so too with juvenile delinquency: Rates of delinquency are highly correlated not only with a breakdown in the marriage of parents, but also with the lack of marriage formation in the first place. The research has been pointing in this direction for some decades starting with Glueck and Glueck’s classic study ‘Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency’ (1950), and Bandura’s (1959) observation that delinquents suffer from an absence of father’s affection.

Matsueda and Heimer (1987) concluded that teenagers from single parent families are much more likely to become delinquent than are teenagers from intact families, while Beck and Kline (1988) reported that 70 percent of juveniles in state custody did not live with both parents while growing up, and almost three quarters of those lived primarily in a single parent family, and Hill and O’Neill (1990) found that the likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity increases substantially if he is raised without a father, while Flouri and Buchanan (2002) found that for girls, non-intact family structure at age 7 was significantly associated with later trouble with the police.

Sheline et al. (1994) found that children who got into trouble for violent misbehavior in school were 11 times as likely not to live with their fathers and 6 times as likely to have parents who were not married. Bachman and Peralta (1995) confirmed the pattern and found that teenagers residing in households with both parents present were less likely to use violence compared to those residing with only one parent.

Homicide and rape by youth are also similarly correlated.
Ricke1 and Langer (1985) a decade earlier had also tracked 1,000 families with children aged six to 18 for six years and also found that children living in intact married families exhibited the least delinquency, while children with stepfathers were more likely to demonstrate the most disruptive behaviors.

Somewhat linked to these findings, Frost and Pakiz (1990) found that children of divorced parents are significantly more likely to become delinquent by age 15, regardless of when the divorce took place, than are children whose parents remain married. Farrington (1990), in a longitudinal British study of males aged 8 to 32, found that the divorce of parents before a child reached age 10 is a major predictor of increased adolescent delinquency and adult criminality.

The work of Videon (2002), using the Add Health Survey, clarifies a dynamic involved in much of this crime related to the separated or divorced family: boy’s relationship with their fathers. The higher the boys’ satisfaction with their relationship with their fathers, prior to their parents’ separation, the greater the increase in delinquent behavior after their separation from their fathers. Also, those boys who were unsatisfied with their relationship with their fathers will be less delinquent after the separation than those dissatisfied boys who continue to live with their fathers after the separation. The same pattern held for girls in their relationships with their mothers.

A phenomenon related to father separation is the rise in gangs. There is a large and, by now, historical literature on the substantive relationship between crime and gang membership (Fleisher 1995). However, gangs are in turn linked to higher the levels of family fragmentation in a community (correlating with single-parent, unmarried couple, and extended-kinship households) and their presence leads to higher levels of violence even within the family, resulting in higher levels of acquaintance and family homicide (Li 2002; Parker & Johns 2002). And in a major international comparison the divorce rate increase was significantly correlated to lethal youth violence, while marriage had a protective effect (Pampei & Williamson 2001).

The pattern of delinquency is not confined to boys. Among adolescent girls, there is a strong correlation between family structure, delinquency (Heimer 1996), hostile behavior (Pakiz et al. 1997), drug use, larceny, skipping school (Kalter et al. 1986), and alcohol abuse (Frost & Pakiz 1990), all crime related.

Sampson (1987, p. 378) in a little discussed but, what for the United States is a rather iconoclastic piece of research, found that, when controls for family structure are added, the picture changes radically. Sampson states: “In fact the predictors of white robbery are in large part identical in sign and magnitude to those for

---

**Chart 3.25**

**Family Structure: Comparative Rates of Youth Incarceration, U.S.**

blacks.” In other words, controlling for family structure, violent crime and robbery rates are no different for Blacks and Whites.

Smith and Jarjoura (1988) also found the race neutral effect of rejection between the parents in a study of 11,000. They found that the percentage of single-parent households with children between the ages of 12 and 20 is significantly associated with rates of violent crime and burglary. They found that the absence of marriage, and the failure to form and maintain intact families explains the incidence of high crime among Whites as well as among Blacks. This study also concluded that, not only did poverty not explain the incidence of crime, but even suggested instead that it had a negative effect on crime, and that among the poor, intact married families are likely to have even less crime than those who are not poor. This is a dramatic challenge to the conventional U.S. wisdom on race, poverty and crime.

**Crime**

**Homicide**

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime offers substantive insight into the background of a killer. The three most frequent factors in the history of a murderer are physical or sexual abuse, a failure in emotional attachment to the mother, and the failure of parents as role models. Particularly serious or prolonged abuse leads to higher rates of crime and delinquency. The FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (1990) has noted that the three factors most frequently present in the development of a murderer are (1) trauma in the form of physical or sexual abuse; (2) failure of the child to attach readily to his mother; and (3) failure of the parents to serve as role models for the developing child. In an abusing family, the likelihood that all three factors are operating is greater. Child sexual abuse also can play a major role in shaping the future sex criminal (Ford & Linney 1995).

**Juvenile Delinquency**

Family breakdown is linked to a rise in juvenile crime: For every 10 percent rise in out-of-wedlock births during the latter part of the 20th century, serious violent crime by juveniles increased 17 percent (Fagan 1995). Fukyama (1999), in his analyses and regressions on macro data covering Europe and the United States, comes to a similar conclusion. However the route to this delinquency may be less direct and mediated instead by the abuse that tends to increase with family breakdown and which developmentally precedes the juvenile delinquency.

Abused adolescents have some idea that the abuse changed them in ways likely to get them into trouble (Sternberg et al. 1993), for they know society does not respond favorably to the antisocial behavior they display, even in the little world of kindergarten (Simons et al. 1989). Aggressive first graders are rejected by their peers and as a consequence tend to form friendships with other deviant youth (Gottman & Parkhurst 1980).
Abuse and the Forms of the Family

Introduction to Abuse

Across many outcomes that are of concern in public policy abuse within the family is one of the highest, given its many deleterious ramifications for the emerging generation. Bowlby (1984) linked abuse with the absence of sensitive, loving care in one's childhood that leads often to more abusive behavior toward one's own children. This lack of early attachment can result in life-long damage to the child's emotional life and to the capacity for developing social relations, thus weakening future relationships with peers, spouse, and offspring.

There are many forms of abuse within the family: child physical abuse, child sexual abuse, neglect, and spouse and partner abuse both physical and sexual and emotional abuse, which for children involves, often, the witnessing of abuse between the adults in the household. All tend to be correlated with significantly destructive outcomes.

Demography of Family Abuse

The best available estimates of child abuse in the United States are found in a series of particular studies conducted by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These National Incidence Studies (NIS) of Child Abuse and Neglect, conducted in 1980 (NIS-1), 1986 (NIS-2), and 1993 (NIS-3), focused on reported or recognized cases of abuse. According to NIS-3, child abuse and neglect increased by 67 percent between 1986 and 1993 (an average of almost 10 percent per year) and 149 percent between 1980 and 1993. Some of the biggest increases in recent times were reported in physical abuse (102 percent, or almost 15 percent per year) and sexual abuse (83 percent, or almost 12 percent per year).

For a long time it has been clear that the incidence of child abuse decreases significantly as family income increases. The impression that there is a high incidence of abuse among the very poor is reinforced by the results of research into child abuse. Though higher income rates are often thought to conceal abuse by avoiding detection by less involvement with the state systems, the results of the National Incidence Surveys, are significant, for they were designed to get around this difficulty by tapping into many other sources of reports of suspected abuse (e.g. school counsellors and paediatricians and other middle class community sentinels). In 1993, the overall rate of maltreatment (abuse and neglect combined) in the United States was lowest in families with incomes above $30,000 per year; 10 times higher in families with incomes between $15,000 and $30,000 per year; and 22 times higher for families with incomes below $15,000 per year (Sedlak & Broadhurst 1996).

However, Richard Gelles (1989, 1992), a recognized expert on abuse, has shown that it is the presence or absence of adult support, especially that of a father, rather than poverty, that makes the greatest difference in determining whether child abuse is likely to be present or absent within poor families.
Abuse Effects

Concern about the abuse of women and children is high in the public discourse on social issues. An exploration of the ramifications of abuse and its effects on the victims indicates why the concern should be so high.

Child Abuse and Neglect

The longer the child experiences abuse, the more likely he or she is to become an adult abuser and the more varied the forms of abuse, the deeper the effect will be (Milner et al. 1990; Polusny & Follette 1996). Significantly, education attainment is affected by abuse. Maltreated children are significantly more likely to have low reading, spelling, and arithmetic scores (Kinard 2001).

There are, it should be noted, circumstances that lessen the impact of abuse. If the consequences of abuse are small, or if the child does not like the aggressive parent or the cohabiting adult, then there is less likelihood that a child will become an abuser as an adult (MacEwen 1994). This mirrors the differential effects of divorce when the child does not like the distal parent reported above (Rebellon 2002), and the different rates of crime for boys on separation from fathers they do not like.

Abuse affects boys and girls in different ways. Girls are less likely to show the effects in external behavior but instead to internalize them with resulting problems of low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, mood swings, and lower levels of social skills. Boys suffer both internalizing problems and externalizing problems (such as hitting, cruelty to others, truancy, lying, stealing, skipping school, destroying things, and associating with bad friends who get into similar trouble) as well as lower levels of social skills (Jaffe et al., 1986). Also, for girls a history of physical abuse doubles the teenager pregnancy risk (Chandy et al. 1994).
Maltreated youngsters have higher rates of both chronic offending and occasional offending than do the never-maltreated youth. Although the impact of childhood-only maltreatment is not significant, both adolescence-only maltreatment and persistent maltreatment have a substantial impact on the prevalence of arrest in early and in late adolescence and childhood abuse does not seem to have the same deleterious effect on boys as on girls who later are much more likely to be involved in violent offences (Herrera & McCloskey 2001). For both boys and girls, however, maltreatment that extends through to adolescence or that begins in adolescence is often a precursor to early arrest for crimes committed (Ireland et al. 2002).

Neglect, as differentiated from abuse, is less often noticed but much more prevalent (Child Trends 2003) and research on its effects indicates that it has even deeper and longer lasting consequences than physical abuse: Neglected children often are more seriously disturbed than abused children, for the neglected child is treated more as if he were not there, or as if his parents wished he were not there, and this insidious and fundamental rejection can inflict deep psychological wounds. By contrast, physically abused children frequently are cared for in other ways by their abusing parents. They are given food, clothing, playthings, and even enjoy good times with others in the family (Emery 1989).

Witnessing Conflict

Witnessing conflict between parents, even married parents, hurts the child. The now-classic Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study, conducted by Sheldon and Glueck (1950) of Harvard in the late 1940s, found that the incidence of delinquent behaviour was higher in intact homes characterized by a degree of conflict and neglect than it was in broken homes without conflict. The more frequent or intense the conflict, the more the child is hurt emotionally, and the more likely he or she is to become delinquent as an adolescent and violent as an adult (Wright & Wright 1992). In fact, children who witness abuse are more likely to abuse spouses and children when they are adults than are children who suffer abuse themselves (Crites & Coker 1988). Children who saw their mother being abused, compared with those who did not, are 24 times more likely to commit sexual assault crimes, 50 times more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, 74 times more likely to commit crimes against another person, and 6 times more likely to commit suicide (Jackson 1992).

No wonder that Lackey (2003) found that children who had witnessed inter-parental aggression had a significantly lower commitment to their future spouses or partners. (Lackey used data from the National Youth Survey, a longitudinal study of problem behavior involving a national probability sample of 1,725 youth in the United States. It began in 1976 with Wave I and went through to Wave 9 in 1992 when the respondents were 27 to 33 years old.) Herrera and McCloskey (2001) found that children who have witnessed marital violence are almost twice as likely to end up in court as those who do not witness any such violence.

Such abuse during the teenage years has intergenerational effects: Adolescent victimization by parents significantly correlates not only with increased violence during adolescence but also with increased partner violence later in life. This victimization by parents significantly decreases commitment to both the child’s future partner and to work and work effort, both of which in turn significantly increase subsequent partner violence later in life (Lackey 2003). Abused or neglected children are approximately twice as likely to have ever walked out on a romantic partner, twice as likely to have divorced, and, if married, females (but not males) are significantly more likely to have committed infidelity with multiple partners (Colman & Widom 2004).

The Child Abusing Mother

Severe child abuse of the very young, as reflected in the homicide rate of children under one year of age, has been on the rise for some time now as Chart 3.29 illustrates.
Contrary to public perception, research shows that the most likely physical abuser of a young and very young child will be that child's mother (Emery 1989), not the male in the household, although the mother's plight often is founded on or complicated by her relationship with an abusing male partner, and often has had an abusing father, as the literature above indicates.

The abusing mother is more likely to function at a lower intellectual level--with less ability to reason and understand her children and with fewer appropriate ways to handle them--than the nurturing mother. Further, abusive mothers frequently are isolated and lack the parental and extended family or peer support that is necessary or very helpful in maintaining self-esteem and in buffering the stress of raising children (Milner et al. 1990). Without this support, such mothers often seek care and comfort from their children, treating these children as if they were older than they really are. When children fail to provide this support, the mother can become impatient, angry, and sometimes abusive, even when the child is only a crying infant. Some of these mothers find any social stimulation from their babies, whether it be smiling or crying, to be much more irritating than normal mothers do. Their subsequent abuse of their child in turn adds to their anxiety and feelings of helplessness (Frodi & Lamb 1980). If the woman is a second-generation or later generation out-of-wedlock mother, or if she is a teenager, she is much less likely to know what to expect of a young child (Ney 1993).

The most likely causes of child abuse by a mother can often be traced to the violence and substance abuse present in the mother's own childhood, followed by the stress and discord in her current household (Salzinger et al. 1992). This is capped by her own victimization (Milner et al. 1990) and leads to increased illness and a hypersensitivity to the normal annoyances that children cause (Simons et al. 1993).

**Childhood Sexual Abuse**

Most sexual abuse takes place within the family setting, and most child sexual abuse is done by men, not women, and the incidence is much less in the married family (Finkelhor et al. 1997). Child sexual abuse, from unwanted kissing and fondling to sexual intercourse, has numerous--and possibly some of the most debilitating effects on a child. Men who sexually abuse children frequently have histories of impoverished early infant emotional attachment to their mothers, desertion by fathers, family dissolution, and early departure from home. These deficits have increased significantly in recent decades and lead to severe emotional dependence on others later in life (Vevier & Tharinger 1986). In its intergenerational effects child sexual abuse in turn affects women who as girls were the victims of these men. Truly in child abuse the adage that the victim becomes the victimizer frequently holds true.
In one clinical study, adolescents reporting unwanted sexual experiences identified the perpetrators as adult family members (36 percent), adult acquaintances (24 percent), strangers (15 percent), peer acquaintances (15 percent), and peer family members (6 percent) and gang related (4 percent). In addition, 42 reported more than one perpetrator (Kellogg & Huston 1995).

Effects of Sexual Abuse

Among the psychological disorders known to occur with frequency among those who have suffered sexual abuse as children are major depression, borderline personality disorder, somatisation disorders, substance abuse disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, disassociative identity disorder, and bulimia nervosa. Problematic behaviours and neurobiological alterations are also associated with these psychological problems (Putnam 2003).

Frequently very early sexual initiation indicates sexual abuse in the family and such sexual abuse distorts the child's inner psychosexual dynamics, its effects becoming more apparent in adolescence and adulthood, particularly if the abuse is forced or violent (Laumann 1992). Unlike other maltreated children, sexually abused children are much more likely to display behaviors indicative of deviant or precocious sexual development (Gelles & Conte 1990), engaging in high-risk sexual behavior (Cosentino et al. 1995) but also including severe difficulty in establishing and maintaining close friendships (Ornduff & Kelsey 1996). These behaviors often persist in some form into adulthood (Wolfe & Jaffe 1991), leading to further sexual re-victimization (Polusny & Follette 1995). Women who have had more than ten sexual partners are more than three times as likely to have had sexual experiences forced upon them in childhood (Laumann 1992). Women who were sexually abused as children have much more health problems later in life. Other effects abound. For instance Bush and Pargament (1995) found that 60 percent of suicidal preadolescent children were reported to have been physically or sexually abused by adults.

Sexually abused adolescents are more likely to use drugs, to be delinquent, to have poor relationships with the rest of their families, to feel they have received less emotional support from families and friends, and to perform more poorly at school; they also tend to move between domiciles more frequently, thus adding to their levels of anxiety and stress (Lanz 1995).

Abusing Partners

Growing up in a violent home is strongly linked to becoming the victim or the perpetrator of domestic violence, especially so in clinical sample research though less so in community sample research, according to a meta-analysis of 160 research articles by Smith et al. (2000). Harsh physical punishment of children in childhood is directly and significantly linked to abuse of spouse or partner in adulthood (Swinford 2000).

A boy severely abused by his father is very likely to become a violent parent himself (Alexander et al. 1991), and men who had seen parents physically attack each other are three times as likely to hit their own wives or partners (Carlson 1984; MacEwen 1988). Moreover, the effects of these early experiences with abuse and violence begin to show up at the beginning of their relationships with women in later years. Many of the background characteristics of wife-batterers exist in college men who engage in low-level courtship violence (MacEwen 1994; Ryan 1995). The evidence is aptly summarized by Cathy Spatz Widom (1989): "Violence begets violence."

Cohabitation and Abuse

As the British data (see Chart 22) indicate cohabitation increases the risk of child abuse quite significantly, especially when the mother is cohabiting with a boyfriend. Margolin (1992) tends to confirm the direction of this data and found that nearly half (47 percent) of all non-parental child abuse was committed by mothers’ boyfriends though they provided less than 2 percent of non-parental childcare, i.e.
the abuse was 27 times greater than would be predicted on the basis of the hours they served as caregivers. Stets and Straus (1988) had found that the highest rate of assault and the most severe violence between couples was found among cohabiting couples: During a one-year period, about 35 of every 100 cohabiting couples had abused one another physically, compared with 15 out of every 100 married couples (Stets 1991).

Fights about infidelity and jealousy are the most frequent cause of violence (Salzinger et al. 1992). Such couples are less able to talk through differences and difficulties and come to agreement (Yegidis 1992), and their violence also was more severe than among married couples of similar backgrounds (Bly 1988).

**Divorce and Abuse**

Divorce has a significant correlation with abuse. Adults who were separated or divorced were twice as likely to neglect and to abuse their children as were their married peers (Egami et al. 1996). In New Zealand, adults who were sexually abused as children were likely to have experienced parental divorce, and were more likely to have lived with a stepparent (Fergusson et al. 1996). Neglect of children, which can be psychologically more damaging than physical abuse (Emery, 1989), is twice as high among separated and divorced parents, compared to intact families (Egami 1996).

**Chart 3.30**

**Partner / Spouse Violence Against Mothers Over 20 With Children Under 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate Per 1,000 Mother</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Widowed</th>
<th>Married+Div+Sep Combined</th>
<th>Never Married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Department of Justice National Crime Victimization Survey 1999

**Single Parenthood and Abuse**

The permanent non-belonging between the parents of children (the always-single-mother) increases the risk of abuse for the children of these parents, as many studies have confirmed in different ways over the decades. For instance McKibbion et al. (1989) found that abused children were four times as likely to have abused mothers if she was a single parent rather than being married; Margolin (1992) found that 84 percent of non-parental child abuse occurred in single-parent homes (confirmed by Gelles 1989). Brown et al. (1998) found that children living with single parents were more than twice as likely as children living with both parents to suffer from physical abuse, and children who were separated from their mothers at an early age were four times as likely to experience abuse than children who remained with their mothers during their
early years, and Yexley et al. (2002) found that teenagers not living with both biological parents were twice as likely to witness and to experience violence in their families.

**Step Family and Abuse**

Whether it be the cohabiting boyfriend family (Whelan 1993) or the stepfamily (Wilson & Daly 1987) it is the family configuration of mother living with a man who is not the biological father of her children that is most linked to child abuse. The stepfamily certainly is one of the most frequently mentioned risk factors in the literature for an increase in child abuse, especially child sexual abuse. Interestingly and significantly, poverty is not the deleterious characteristic in the stepfamily that it is in the single parent family. Instead of poverty the stepfamily’s greatest challenge is bonding together. One study found that only 53 percent of stepfathers and 25 percent of stepmothers have ‘parental feelings’ toward their stepchildren, and still fewer report having ‘love’ for them (Popenoe 1995).

Serious abuse is much higher among stepchildren than among children of intact families, and adults who were sexually abused as children are more likely to have been raised in stepfamilies than in intact married families (Fergusson et al. 1996). The rate of sexual abuse of girls by their stepfathers is at least six to seven times higher (Russell 1984), and may be as much as 40 times greater (Wilson & Daly 1987) than sexual abuse of daughters by their biological fathers who remain in intact families. Children two years of age and younger are 70 to 100 times more likely to be killed at the hands of their stepparents than by their biological parents (Wilson & Daly 1987).

It is not always the men who are the abusers: Though Margolin and Craft (1989) found that while nonbiological 'father caretakers' (stepfathers, foster fathers, and adoptive fathers) were nearly four times as likely to sexually abuse children as were biological fathers, they also found that "mother caretakers" were nearly three times more likely to abuse children sexually as were biological mothers.

**Community and Abuse**

For the family to be family the community needs to be a community where it is easier for children to grow up safely. Exploitation in communities is most to be found in poor, urban, female-headed household communities where the men or women have rejected each other and in that process leave their children unattended more (Coulton et al. 1995).

In studying the relationship between neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse in the United States, Drake and Pandey (1995) found the strongest relationship between neighborhood poverty and neglect. Kalmuss and Seltzer (1989) found that within these communities, stable marriages had been replaced by unstable families characterized by frequent changes of partners, confirmed again by Cherlin (2002) in his 3 cities study of Boston, Chicago and San Antonio. For the mother in such a family, this frequently results in greater and increasing stress and isolation from family and neighbors, which in turn, for the child, increases the likelihood of psychosexual distortions because the child has fewer opportunities to experience the good influence of other adults or the friendship of other children. (Bowlby 1984; Gorney 1989; Vevier & Tharinger 1986; Yegidis 1992).

By contrast the more socially integrated the community the more protective it is of its children: In South Africa there child sexual abuse was lowest among racial groups and in schools where family and social ties were the strongest.

The embedded-ness of a person in their family and community seems to have restraining effects, even on those who do commit of violence and abuse: The recidivism rates of child molesters were higher among those who were strangers or acquaintances of victims than among those who were immediate family members of victims and the rates got higher the more removed from kinship with the child the perpetrator was, as the following data illustrate. The largest groups of molesters, those known but unrelated to their victims, were the likeliest to commit a ‘sexual re-offense’. Within 15 years of the first crime, 16.2 of the men
in this category were re-arrested for a similar crime and 35.9 were re-arrested for ‘any crime’. Of the men who were stepfathers of the victims, these figures were 5.1 percent and 25.6 percent, respectively; for members of the victims' extended families, 10.8 percent and 40.0 percent; the biological fathers of their victims, 4.8 percent were re-arrested for a sex-related crime and 19.0 were re-arrested for ‘any crime’ (Greenberg et al. 2000).

Conclusions on Abuse

The problem of abuse has many facets to it: the effects on the partners and the children, the effects on family norms and on stability within the community, the effect of poverty on levels of abuse and the effect of contact with monitors from welfare state bureaucracies on the reported incidences of abuse.. Add to these the effect of drug or alcohol addiction, often compounded by low levels of education that, for males especially, lead to a greater likelihood of unemployment which further fuels frustration and hopelessness. Such ingredients increase the levels of abuse or neglect across generations.

All that being said, the levels of the breakdown of the family among the poor of the United States, sometimes with extraordinarily high levels of out-of-wedlock births (for instance, 92 percent in inner city Milwaukee in the mid 1990’s) and a rising rate of serial cohabitation, the very level of partner rejection and the anger and jealousy involved increases the probability of violent conflict. In these settings the children are not only frequently traumatized but also experience a modelling that will be difficult to erase. Thus the likelihood of increased abuse increases in the next generation.

For more details on studies and outcomes do a search of those topics you are interested in:

www.familyfacts.org

There you will get many more studies from the literature.


Council of Europe 2000, Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2000, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.


Rector, R., Johnson, K.A. & Noyes, L. 2003, ‘Sexually active adolescents are more likely to be depressed and to attempt suicide’, Paper 03-04, Center for Data Analysis, The Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC.


