

## The Living Arrangements of Children, 2000

### Children live in a variety of family arrangements as a consequence of the marriage, divorce, and remarriage of their parents.

Where children live and grow up and the conditions that contribute to their well-being are all indicators monitored by the Census Bureau. Health care professionals, school planners, and childcare providers look to these numbers to decide if new facilities or services are needed. Census information on the living arrangements of children helps researchers understand the social implications of the different types of family situations that children experience while growing up.

### The majority of the 72 million children who live in the United States live with two parents.

In 1980, 77 percent of all children under age 18 lived with two parents.<sup>1</sup> However, this share fell to 73 percent in 1990 and to 69 percent by 2000, according to

<sup>1</sup> Both parents may or may not be biological parents.

the Current Population Survey (CPS).<sup>2</sup> Over the 20-year period, the share of children living with only their mother rose from 18 percent to 22 percent, and the share living with only their father grew from less than 2 percent to 4 percent. The remaining 4 percent of children lived with other relatives or nonrelatives.

In the early 1990s, researchers, policy makers, and the media began to notice an increase in the number of children living in their grandparent's household. By 2000, the CPS found 4 million children — about 5 percent of all children — living in the home of a grandparent. Only 14 percent of children who lived in a grandparent's home had both a mother and a father living with them. The greatest share, 45 percent, lived with a mother, but no father. Another 6 percent lived with a father, but no mother.<sup>3</sup> The remaining 35 percent of children who lived with a grandparent did not have a parent in the home.

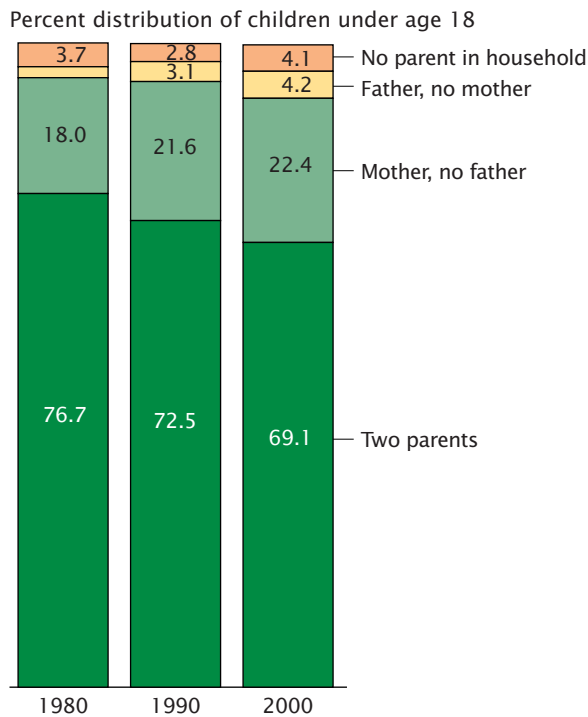
<sup>2</sup> This chapter includes estimates that are calculated using sample data from the Current Population Survey, weighted by population controls based on the 1990 decennial census. The population universe for the March CPS is the civilian noninstitutional population plus armed forces living off base or with their families on post. As such, these estimates will differ from population estimates computed from either the intercensal estimates program, or the 2000 decennial census.

<sup>3</sup> The percent of children who live in a grandparent's household with a father only is not significantly different than the percent of children who live in a grandparent's household.

### Words That Count

- **Children** are all people under age 18, excluding those who maintain households, families, or sub-families as a householder or spouse.
- **Own children** in a family are sons and daughters, including stepchildren and adopted children, of the householder. For each type of family unit identified in the Current Population Survey, the count of “own children under 18 years old” is limited to never-married children.
- **Related children** in a family include own children and all other children under 18 years old in the household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption, such as grandchildren.
- **Cohabiting parent-child families** are those in which the child's parent is living with at least one nonrelated adult of the opposite sex. This additional adult may or may not be the biological parent of the child.
- **Blended families** are formed when remarriages occur and when children living in a household share one or no parents. The presence of a step-parent, stepsibling, or half-sibling designates a family as blended.
- **A extended household** is a household where a child lives with at least one parent and someone other than their parents or siblings, either a relative or nonrelative.

Figure 6-1.  
Living Arrangements of Children Under Age 18: 1980, 1990, and 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Surveys, March 1980, 1990, and 2000.

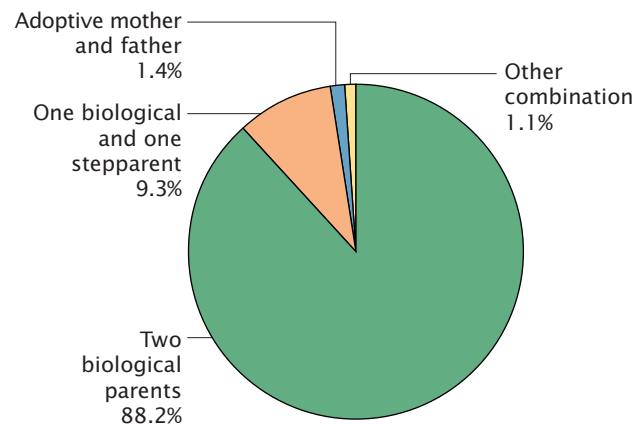
## SPOTLIGHT ON CHILD WELL-BEING

Blended and extended families, half siblings and stepsiblings, and cohabiting parents are all part of the vocabulary of children's living arrangements.

- **Eighty-eight percent of children living with two parents lived with both their biological mother and biological father in 1996, according to the Survey of Income and Program Participation.**<sup>4</sup> An additional 9 percent lived with a biological parent and a stepparent, usually a biological mother and a stepfather. Just over 2 percent of children in two-parent households lived with two

<sup>4</sup> This sidebar includes estimates that are calculated using sample data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, weighted by population controls based on the 1990 decennial census. The population universe for the SIPP is the civilian noninstitutional population. As such, these estimates will differ from population estimates computed from either the intercensal estimates program, or the 2000 decennial census.

Figure 6-2.  
Children Living With Two Parents by Type of Parent: 1996



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1996 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation.

adoptive parents or a combination of adoptive, biological, or stepparents.

- **The rapid increase in cohabiting among adults over the past several decades<sup>5</sup> has led to significant proportions of children living with parents who are cohabiting with partners.** In 1996, about 5 percent of all children lived with an unmarried parent and their parent's partner.
- **Blended families are typically formed when remarriages occur and when stepparents enter the household accompanied by their children from previous marriages.** They may also form when a remarried parent has a child with the new spouse, producing a new half-brother or sister. In 1996, 17 percent of all children lived in blended families.
- **Seventy-nine percent of children lived with at least one sibling.** While 39 percent lived with one sibling, 34 percent lived with two or three siblings. Regardless of the household total, 11 percent of children lived with a half-sibling and 3 percent lived with a stepsibling.
- **Extended households are those where a child lives with at least one parent and someone other than their parents or siblings.** The majority of extended households are formed by the presence of

<sup>5</sup> Lynne M. Casper, Phillip N. Cohen, and Tavia Simmons, *How Does POSSLQ Measure Up?: Historical Estimates of Cohabitation*, Working Paper Series No. 36. Washington, DC, U.S. Census Bureau, 1999.

an additional relative. In 1996, 14 percent of all children lived in extended family households.

## Living arrangements, economic and social environments, and types of neighborhoods contribute to child well-being and future development.

- **Children in two-parent families fare better developmentally than children in single-parent families.** Children with married parents are read to more frequently than children with separated, divorced, widowed, or never married parents, according to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). They are also more likely than other children to participate in sports, clubs, and lessons.

- **Diminished contact with the noncustodial parent can result in a loss of emotional support and supervision from adults.** Children in single-parent families generally have a lower economic standard of living and more frequently participate in government assistance programs than do children from two-parent families. Studies indicate all of these circumstances have a cumulative effect on the way children grow up and how prepared they are for young adulthood.

- **Neighborhood safety concerns, trust in neighbors to look out for each other, and the presence of negative influences in their children's environment were just a few of the topics explored in the 1993 panel of the SIPP.** Responses to questions on neighborhood trust and safety were combined into an index where a score of one indicated the worst neighborhood situation and a score of ten indicated the best neighborhood situation. Parents gave their neighborhoods an average rating of 6.6, indicating children were living in neighborhoods that were not ideal, but were far from unsatisfactory. However, the neighborhood index was higher for children living with two working parents (7.1) than for children in other types of households. Among single parents, the neighborhood score was 6.1 when the parent was employed and 5.1 when the parent was unemployed.

- **Being cared for by someone other than a family member is an increasingly common experience in a child's preschool years, according to the SIPP.** In 1993, 53 percent of all children under age 12 had been cared for regularly by someone other than

immediate family members. Among children less than 3 years old, 46 percent had been in regular child care. On average, children less than 3 years old began their first child care experience at 6 months old and spent 30 hours each week in care.

- **Government assistance<sup>6</sup> does not appear to be a contributing factor in whether a child has been in a regular child care arrangement, according to the SIPP.** In 1993, the share of poor children aged 3 to 5 who were in child care was about the same whether or not they received government assistance – 47 percent and 49 percent, respectively. For children in families with incomes of 100 percent to 199 percent of the poverty threshold, 60 percent of those in families using assistance were in child care, compared with 56 percent of those in families who did not receive assistance.

In Spring 1998, 14 million parents had custody of 23 million children under 21 years of age<sup>7</sup> whose other parent lived somewhere else, according to the Current Population Survey (CPS).

- **More custodial parents worked and participation in public programs declined.** Between 1993 and 1997, the CPS found that the proportion of custodial parents employed in full-time, year-round jobs increased from 46 percent to 51 percent. At the same time the proportion participating in at least one public assistance program declined from 41 percent to 34 percent.

- **Between 1993 and 1997, poverty rates, although still quite high, declined for custodial parents.** While the 1997 poverty rate for all families was about 16 percent, the rate for custodial mothers (32 percent) was nearly three times higher than it was for custodial fathers (11 percent), according to the CPS.

- **Fifty-six percent of custodial parents had child support agreements, according to the 1998 CPS.** Most of these agreements were considered legal and were established by a court or

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on children in poverty and government assistance programs, see the chapter on poverty.

<sup>7</sup> Because child support is frequently ordered until a child is 21 years old or completes college, this report specifically includes "own children" under 21 rather than the usual definition used by the Census Bureau of children under 18 years of age.

other government entity. However, 4 percent of custodial parents had nonlegal informal agreements or understandings. Custodial mothers were more likely than custodial fathers to be awarded child support, 59 percent compared with 38 percent.

- In 1997, more custodial parents were receiving the full payments and fewer received partial payments, according to the CPS.** Of the 7.9 million parents with child support agreements or awards, about 7.0 million were due payments in 1997. Of these, about two-thirds reported receiving either part or full payment, statistically

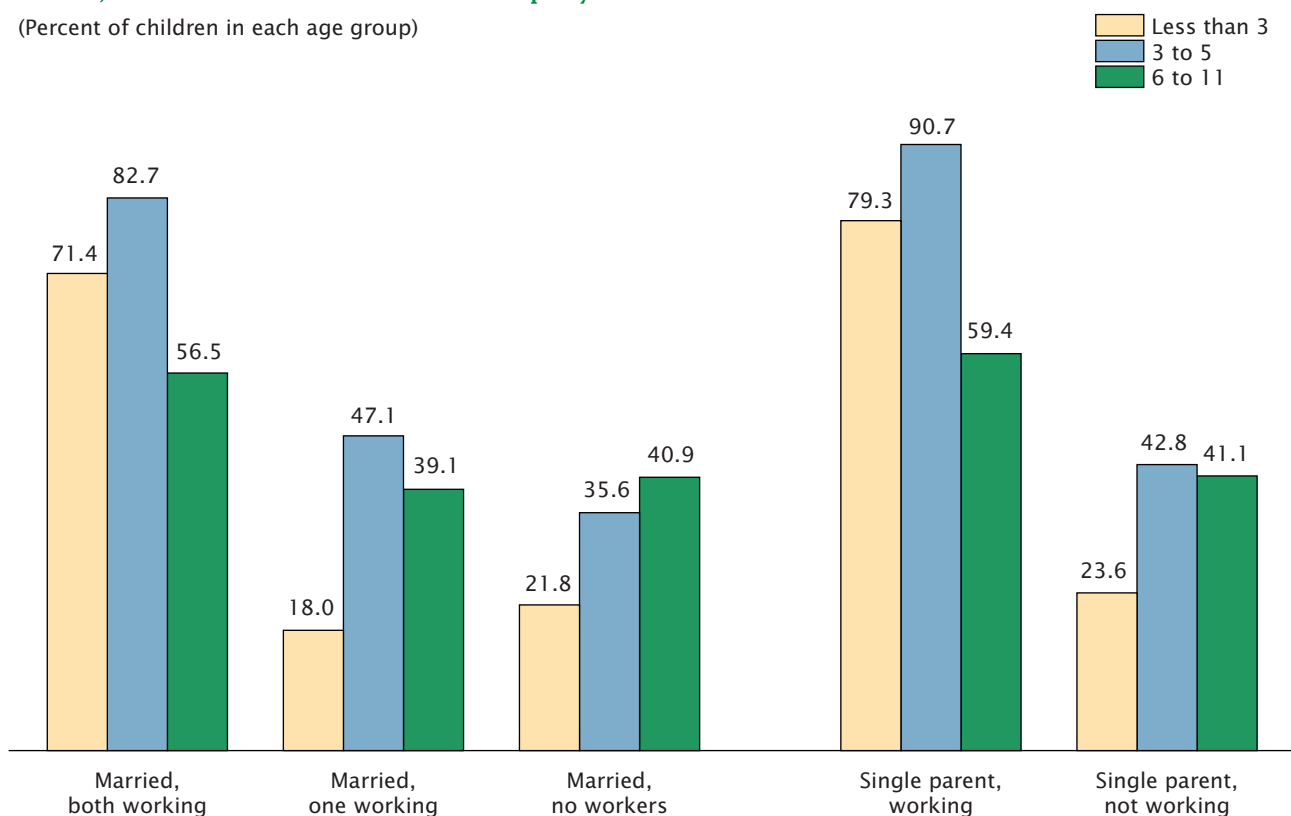
unchanged from 1993. However, the proportion of custodial parents receiving all payments they were due increased from 35 percent to 41 percent, while those receiving partial payments fell from 35 percent to 27 percent. The average amount of support received by custodial mothers who received any payment in 1997 was \$3,700, not statistically different from the amount received by custodial fathers — \$3,300.

- Child support compliance was highly influenced by joint custody and visitation.** Among the 7 million custodial parents due child support in 1997, the CPS found most (84 percent) had arrangements with

Figure 6-3.

### Children Under Age 12 Who Have Ever Been in Child Care by Age of Child, and Parents' Marital and Employment Status: 1994

(Percent of children in each age group)



Note: Employment status is for the month before the survey.

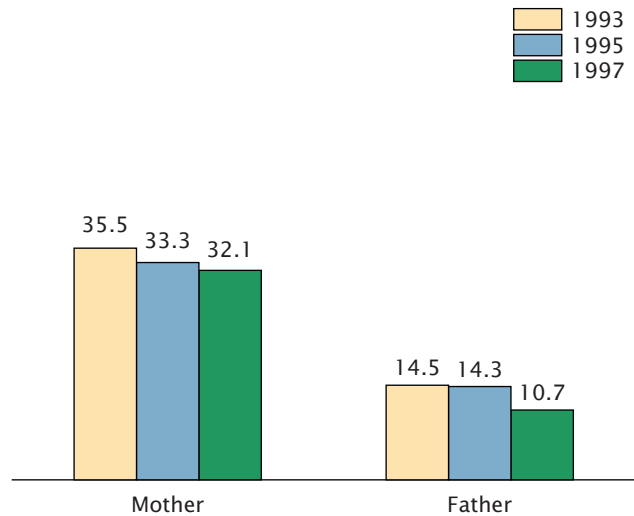
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Wave 9 (October 1994 - January 1995) of the 1992 Panel of the the Survey of Income and Program Participation and Wave 6 (October 1994-January 1995) of the 1993 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation.

the nonresident parents for joint custody or visitation privileges with their children. Although about 73 percent of these parents received at least some of their child support payments, only 36 percent without joint custody or visitation arrangements received any payment.

Figure 6-4.

### Poverty Status of Custodial Mothers and Fathers: 1993, 1995, and 1997

(Percent of custodial parents in poverty)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, April 1994, 1996, and 1998 Current Population Surveys.

## The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau reports: *A Child's Day: Home, School, and Play (Selected Indicators of Child Well-Being): 1994* by Jason M. Fields, Kristen Smith, Loretta E. Bass, and Terry Lugaila; *Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care: Fall 1995* by Kristen Smith; *Living Arrangements of Children: 1996* by Jason Fields; and *Child Support for Custodial Mothers and Fathers: 1997* by Timothy Grall.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). Click on "M" and select "Marital Status and Living Arrangements," "H" and select "Households," or "C" and select "Child Care" or "Child Support."
- Contact the Fertility and Family Statistics Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2465 or e-mail [pop@census.gov](mailto:pop@census.gov).
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.