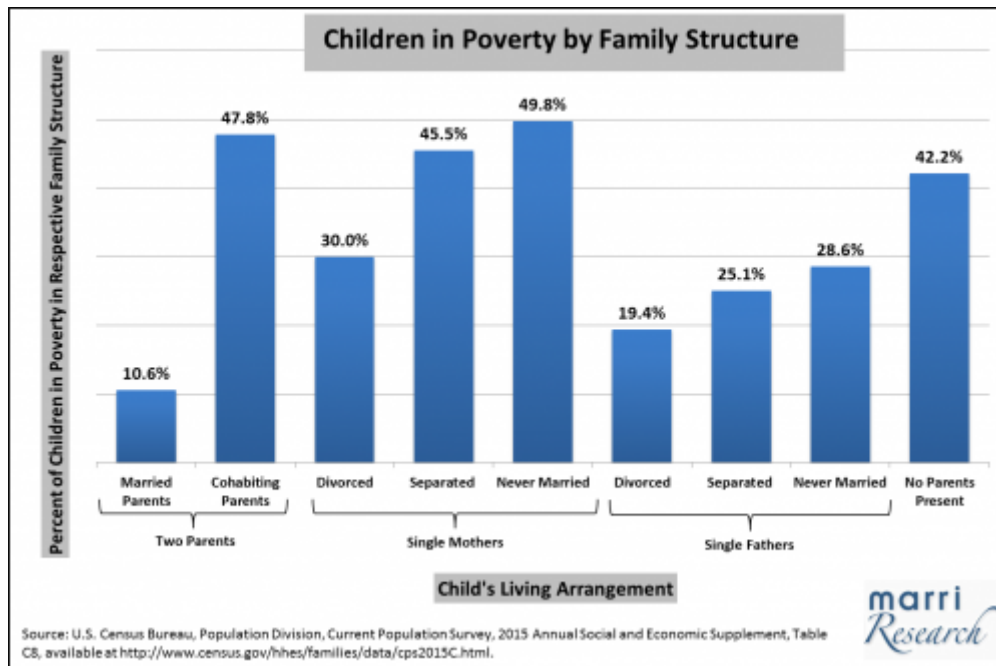
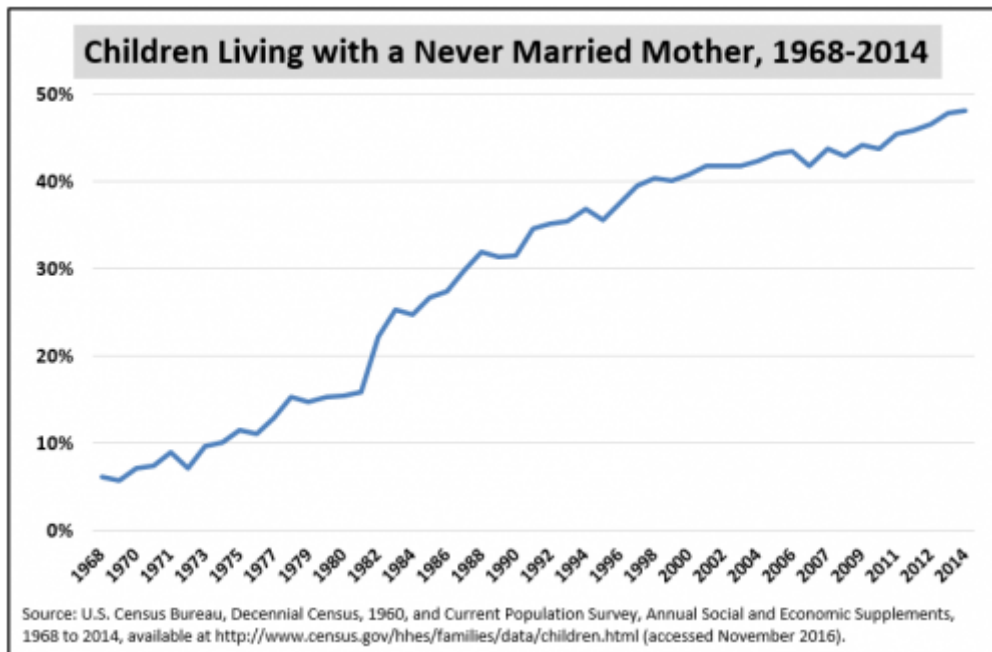


# Effects of Single Parenthood on Poverty

Despite government spending over \$22 trillion<sup>1)</sup> on anti-poverty programs since the 1960s War on Poverty began, the child poverty rate has barely decreased: from 20.7 percent in 1965 to 19.2 percent in 2015.<sup>2)</sup> The War on Poverty largely failed because it ignored the role of marriage in reducing poverty. Poverty is most prevalent in non-intact families. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, single-parent families are significantly more likely to fall into poverty than are married-couple families.<sup>3)</sup>



Over 2 million children reside in single-parent families.<sup>4)</sup> Never married single mother families constitute the greatest portion of single parent families. While the share of divorced and separated single mothers has decreased in recent years (although the numbers are still high), the share of never married single mothers continues to rapidly rise.<sup>5)</sup> This trend is particularly alarming because, of all family structures, children of never married mothers are the most likely to experience poverty. In 2015, 49.8 percent of children under age 18 who lived with a never married mother were in poverty.<sup>6)</sup> It is also notable in the chart above that cohabitation seems to make little difference in lowering the poverty rate.



## 1. Government Dependence

According to the 2015 American Community Survey, single mother families have a median family income of \$33,342—less than half the family income of married families (\$82,078).<sup>7)</sup> Non-intact families are more likely to receive welfare than are married couples.<sup>8)</sup> According to the 2016 Annual and Social Economic Supplement, children raised by single mothers are almost six times more likely than children raised by married parents to receive public assistance.<sup>9)</sup> The same Census report shows that 10.4 percent of married-parent families receive food stamps, versus 44.9 percent of single mother families and 22.3 percent of single father families.<sup>10)</sup> Moreover, the anti-marriage bias in the welfare system penalizes single mothers who marry an employed husband, therefore perpetuating single parenthood and out of wedlock birth, and necessitating continued reliance on government benefits.<sup>11)</sup> Dependence on government welfare programs can have harmful effects on children. After controlling for relevant social and economic factors, Congressional Budget Office Director June O'Neill and Anne Hill of Queens College report that the more years a child spends on welfare, the lower the child's IQ.<sup>12)</sup> A similar study found that welfare also has negative effects on the long-term employment and earnings capacity of young boys.<sup>13)</sup>

## 2. Long-Term Effects on Children

While many single mothers work wonders and raise their children well despite the obstacles they encounter, for many others the challenge is too great and their children suffer the consequences. Children raised in a single parent family tend to complete fewer years of schooling,<sup>14)</sup> exhibit behavior problems,<sup>15)</sup> commit acts of delinquency,<sup>16)</sup> and participate in increased sexual activity.<sup>17)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> \$22 trillion in constant 2012 dollars; Robert Rector and Rachel Sheffield, "The War on Poverty After 50 Years" Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 2955 (September 2014), [http://thf\\_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2014/pdf/BG2955.pdf](http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2014/pdf/BG2955.pdf) (accessed November 2016).

<sup>2)</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Poverty Tables: People and Families 1959 to 2015," Poverty Status of People, by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin Table 3,

<http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-people.html> (accessed November 2016).

<sup>3)</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2015 and 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplements, "Table 4: Families in Poverty by Type of Family: 2014 and 2015".

<sup>4)</sup> , <sup>5)</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1960, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1968 to 2014, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/children.html> (accessed November 2016).

<sup>6)</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Current Population Survey, 2015 Annual and Social Economic Supplement, Table C8, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2015C.html> (accessed November 2016).

<sup>7)</sup> U.S. Census Bureau/ American FactFinder, B19126: Median Family Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2015 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) By Family Type by Presence of Own Children Under 18 Years), 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, available at <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (accessed November 2016).

<sup>8)</sup> Daphne Hernandez and Kathleen M. Ziol-Guest, "Income Volatility and Family Structure Patterns: Association with Stability and Change in Food Stamp Program Participation," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 30, no. 4 (2009): 366. As cited in Patrick F. Fagan, Andrew J. Kidd, and Henry Potrykus, "Marriage and Economic Well-Being: The Economy of the Family Rises or Falls with Marriage," (May 2011). Available at <http://marri.frc.org/get.cfm?i=RS11E03>. Accessed 20 July 2011.

<sup>9)</sup> , <sup>10)</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table C8, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2016C.html> (accessed November 2016).

<sup>11)</sup> Patrick F. Fagan, Robert W. Patterson, Robert Rector, "Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence that Marriage Education Works," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder #1606 (October 2002), available at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2002/10/marriage-and-welfare-reform> (accessed November 2016).

<sup>12)</sup> M. Anne Hill and June O'Neill, "Family Endowments and the Achievement of Young Children With Special Reference to the Underclass," *Journal of Human Resources*, Fall 1994, pp. 1090-1091.

<sup>13)</sup> Mary Corcoran, Roger Gordon, Deborah Loren, and Gary Solon, "The Association Between Men's Economic Status and Their Family and Community Origins," *Journal of Human Resources*, Fall 1992, pp. 575-601.

<sup>14)</sup> Donna K. Ginther, "Family Structure and Children's Educational Outcomes: Blended Families, Stylized Facts, and Descriptive Regressions," *Demography*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (November 2004), pp. 671-696.

<sup>15)</sup> Wendy Manning and Kathleen Lamb, "Adolescent Well-Being in Cohabiting, Married, and Single-Parent Families," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 65 (November 2003), pp. 876-893.

<sup>16)</sup> Chris Knoester and Dana L. Haynie, "Community Context, Social Integration Into Family, and Youth Violence," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, no. 3 (2005): 767-780.

<sup>17)</sup> Samuel W. Sturgeon, "The Relationship Between Family Structure and Adolescent Sexual Activity," Heritage Foundation FamilyFacts.org Special Report No.1 (November 2008), available at [http://www.familyfacts.org/featuredfinding/ff\\_01.pdf](http://www.familyfacts.org/featuredfinding/ff_01.pdf) (accessed November 2016).

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