



# **CENTER FOR OPPORTUNITY NOW**

*Fatherlessness and Its Effects on American Society*



# FATHERLESSNESS AND ITS EFFECTS ON AMERICAN SOCIETY

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At the America First Policy Institute (AFPI), we are motivated by a simple truth: American greatness relies on the strength of American families. A genuinely “America First” vision understands that families are at the very core of society—stable families form stable communities, and stable communities create a stable Nation.

Americans are united in the belief that strong families are a net positive for society. For example, according to a Rasmussen poll of 1,200 registered voters conducted on January 20-21, 2022, 84 percent of those polled believe a strong family is foundational to a strong America and that parents should bear the primary responsibility for raising children. Only 11 percent say raising children is a community responsibility. Of those polled, 67 percent believe that the decline of the family is harmful to American growth and prosperity, and 65 percent think that children who grow up fatherless are at a significant disadvantage in life.

Unfortunately, decades of political mismanagement—no matter how well the initial intentions—have exacerbated the problem. AFPI believes that we must judge all policies by results rather than intentions. There is nothing “compassionate” about leaving entire communities mired in vicious cycles of poverty perpetuated by outdated and counterproductive government programs.

The effects of broken families have been staggering.

Across America, there are approximately 18.3 million children who live without a father in the home, comprising about 1 in 4 US children ([Father Absence Statistics](#)). The United States has the highest rate of children living in single-parent households of any nation in the world ([Kramer, 2021](#)). About 80 percent of single-parent homes are led by single mothers ([Single Mother Statistics, 2021](#)). At a rate of 23 percent of children living with one parent and no other adults, the United States stands over three times the world average of 7 percent of children raised by one parent. For reference, the number stands at 3 percent for China and 4 percent for India. ([Kramer, 2021](#)).

The United States has the **HIGHEST RATE** of children living in single-parent households of any nation in the world. At a rate of **23%** of children living with one parent and no other adults, the United States stands **OVER THREE TIMES** the world average of **7%** of children raised by one parent. Other nations of note include China at **3%**, India at **4%**, and Nigeria at **5%**.



Of all births in the US today, about 41 percent of children are born to unwed mothers. For women under the age of 30, the demographic that bears two-thirds of children in general, the out of wedlock rate increases to 53 percent ([Coulombe, 2015](#)).

While many unmarried women cohabit with a partner at the time of giving birth, these relationships fail at twice the rate of marriages. Data suggests that more kids are likely growing up with a television in their bedroom than with both biological parents in the home ([Coulombe, 2015](#)).

**The average school-age boy only spends about 30 MINUTES per week in one-on-one conversations with his father. For comparison, the same boy on average will spend about 44 HOURS per week watching television, playing video games, and surfing the internet.**



Even for children with a father present in the home, the average school-age boy only spends about 30 minutes per week in one-on-one conversations with his father. For comparison, the same boy, on average, will spend about 44 hours per week watching television, playing video games, and surfing the internet ([Coulombe, 2015](#)).

Children from fatherless homes fare far worse in metrics of overall well-being and mental and behavioral health. These children are often burdened with lower self-esteem than other children, and they do not understand why their father abandoned them ([Brown](#)). This leads to a number of emotional problems like anxiety, social withdrawal, and depression, and it also leads to an increased risk of suicide and other forms of self-harm ([Brown](#)).

Overall, children from single-parent families are twice as likely to suffer from mental health problems as those living with married parents ([Batty, 2006](#)). Research also suggests that high-risk children in single-parent homes have nearly five times greater a chance of developing mood disorders than those in dual-parent households, even when controlling for household income, age, and depression status of parents ([Teel, 2016](#)). This research suggests that fatherlessness is a significant contributor to mental health issues in children.

In light of these statistics, it is no surprise that **90%** of all homeless and runaway children, **63%** of teen suicides, and **85%** of children and teens with behavioral disorders come from **FATHERLESS HOMES.**



In light of these statistics, it is no surprise that 90 percent of all homeless and runaway children ([Research and Statistics](#)), 63 percent of teen suicides, and 85 percent of children and teens with behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes ([Martinez, 2011](#)).

Similarly, fatherless families are 25 percent more likely to raise children in poverty ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2020](#)). Children without fathers are also 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances, and 71 percent of all children who abuse substances come from fatherless homes ([National Center for Fathering](#)). Conversely, “at-risk youth” ([defined](#) as “a child who is less likely to transition successfully into adulthood”) with a mentor in their lives are 46 percent less likely to use drugs and 81 percent more likely to participate in sports or other forms of extracurricular activities ([No Longer Fatherless](#)).

Unsurprisingly, those without a father in the home fare far worse in educational achievement than their two-parent counterparts. Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of high school than children with both parents at home ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2021](#)).

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The fatherless are also 40 percent more likely to repeat a class and 70 percent more likely to drop out of school (*Ibid*). Likewise, “at-risk youth” who have a mentor are 55 percent more likely to enroll in college than those without a mentor in their lives activities ([No Longer Fatherless](#)).

Fatherlessness also has a link to abortion rates. Perhaps counterintuitively, data shows that upon legalization of abortion, the fatherlessness rate in a country rises dramatically. For

example, within years after abortion was legalized in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, the percentage of children living with a single mother doubled ([Voice for the Voiceless](#)). In the same vein, one out of every three pregnancies in a fatherless home end in abortion. ([Beckwith, 2019](#)).

Fatherlessness likewise has a direct link to teen pregnancy and sexual activity ([Schwarzwalder](#)). Roughly 70 percent of teenage pregnancies come from women raised in fatherless homes, and these same women have significantly higher abortion rates than women raised by both a father and a mother ([Voice for the Voiceless](#)).

Criminal activity and fatherlessness are closely related as well. Of all the youths in state-operated institutions, roughly 70 percent come from fatherless homes, and 85 percent of all youths in prison come from fatherless homes ([Rochester Area Fatherhood Network](#)).

Of all the youths in state-operated institutions, roughly **70%** come from fatherless homes, and **85%** of all youths in prison come from fatherless homes. On the whole, fatherless kids are **20 times** more likely to be incarcerated and **11 times** more likely to exhibit violent behavior than children from two-parent households.



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Another unfortunate reality is that America's prisons are full of fathers separated from their children. Of America's roughly 2 million prisoners, over 800,000 are parents—and 92 percent of those are fathers. This leads to a total of just over 1.7 million children with a parent in prison, or 2.3 percent of the total US resident population below the age of 18 ([Fatherhood.gov](#)). In 2016, the average age of a minor child with parents in federal prison was 10 years old, and 9 years old for minors with a parent in state prison ([Department of Justice, 2021](#)).

The unfortunate reality is that single parenthood does not only affect the health and well-being of the children—it affects the single parents as well. Both lone fathers and lone mothers have higher rates of mood disorders and substance use disorders than married parents, and single mothers fare about twice as poorly as single fathers in this regard. Both lone fathers and lone mothers are at far greater risk of psychiatric disorders than married couples ([Wade, 2011](#)).

Of course, there is no “one size fits all” solution to the fatherlessness crisis in America today. However, through targeted legislative priorities, progress can be made in reversing the disincentives currently endemic throughout national policy. For example, officials can promote healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood through legislation.

New regulations on marriage tax brackets can help stabilize lower-income families by financially incentivizing two-parent households, and we can address the education gaps in the country with real solutions like school choice. Officials can support an all-out pro-fatherhood messaging campaign to amplify the importance of fatherhood across the Nation. Amplification from athletes, celebrities, musicians, actors, and even political leaders can push the importance of fatherhood to the forefront of public consciousness. In this way, fatherhood and its importance can become a unifying issue for all swaths of the country.

Americans believe that it is the community's responsibility, more so than the government, to take care of fatherless children. Local churches and faith-based organizations can be of assistance in the entire fatherhood space. Churches are well situated to lead in this space, as they have the personnel and mentorship potential to guide fathers to their highest potential, provide community-based resources, and mentor those without fathers. In the same manner, mentorship programs, police athletic leagues, civic service and engagement opportunities, and family resource programs can help equip fathers and families to form stable families.

To address this crisis, we must first speak openly about the problem of fatherless children. Then, we must focus on fixing it, by promoting strong families, confronting cultural malaise, and sharing the joys of fatherhood. It is a tall task but a worthwhile one.

AFPI believes it is time for a new vision for American families. The costs of broken homes and fatherlessness have plagued society, and today we are reaping the effects.

For America's families, the best is yet to come.

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