

Chapter 12

The Family System

pp. 400-430

Consider This:

- What factors do you think impact how well a child adjusts to major changes in family systems (e.g. divorce, parental job loss, parental death)?
- What is the parent's involvement in a child's schooling? How much/little do a parent's educational philosophies matter in the success of a child in school?

The Family System

- Average child home until they're 20
- One of the most important systems of influence
- Earliest transmission of culture, values, morality, education, etc.
 - Model, reinforce, punish, shape, and maintain new behaviors
- Across cultures, three goals:
 - Survival
 - Economic goals
 - Self-actualization

The Family System

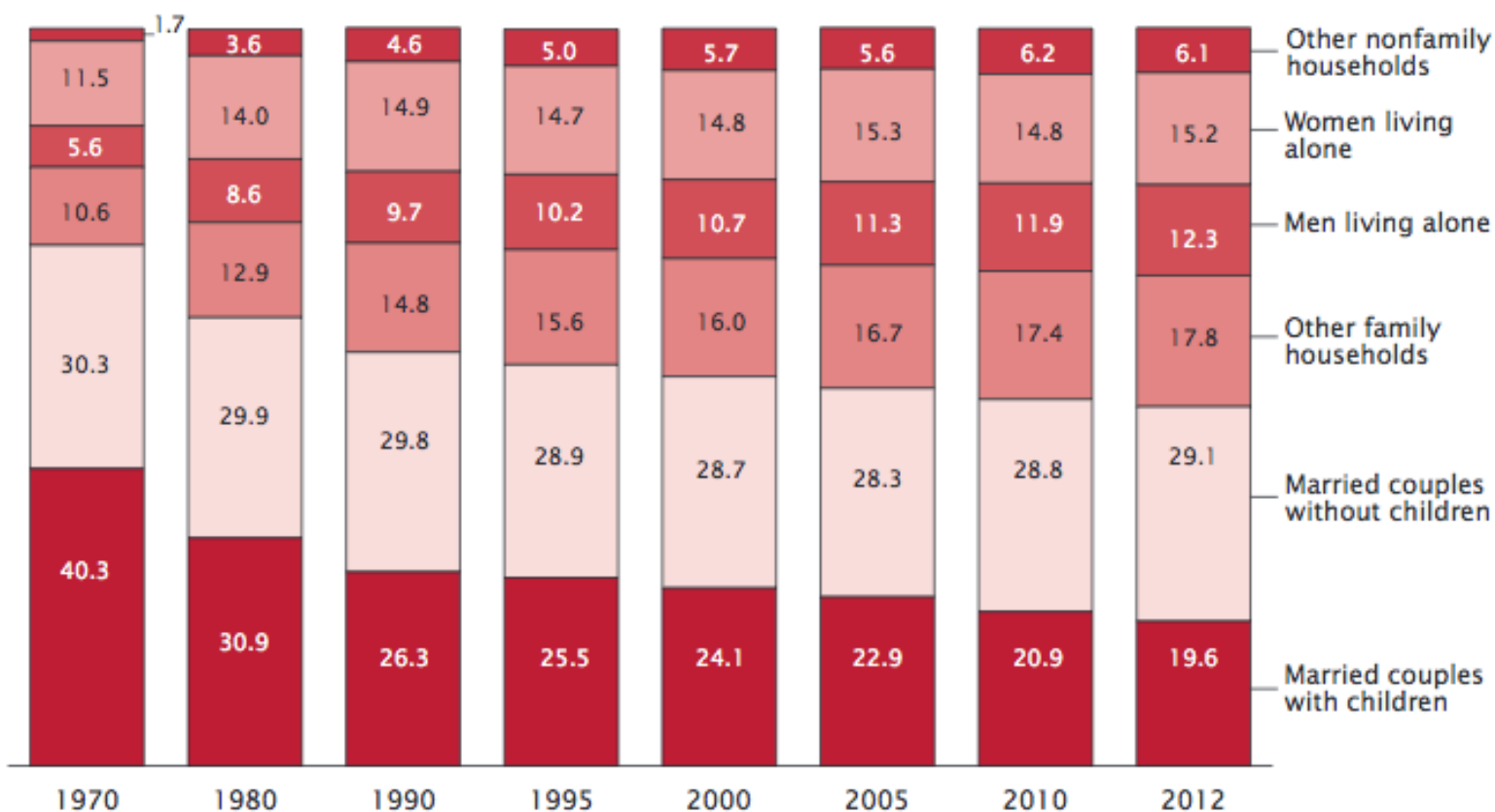
- Composition of families changing:
 - “Traditional/Nuclear families” = 40% in 1970; 24% in 2000; 19.6% in 2012
 - Family size dropped = 3.1 in 1970; 2.6 in 2012
 - Number of men and women living alone increased by 15% since 1970



The Family System

Households by Type, 1970 to 2012: CPS

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, selected years, 1970 to 2012.

The Family System

- Role Expectations for:
 - Mother?
 - Father?
 - Brother?
 - Sister?
- Family system responsible for the earliest socialization of the child
 - Gender
 - Prosociality
 - Hobbies
 - Language learning

The Family System

- When system is disrupted, the interactions of those in the system must change to accommodate new roles
 - Think: extinction
- Maternal employment
 - In 71% of two parent families, both are wage-earners
 - “morale-booster” for mothers with disphoria
 - Positive or negative effect on father; dependent on father’s values
 - Effects on marriage depend on gender roles
 - Little lasting effect on children
 - Positive for daughters



The Family System

- When system is disrupted, the interactions of those in the system must change to accommodate new roles
 - Think: extinction
- Paternal (or maternal) job loss:
 - Effects on father depend on “breadwinner” mentality
 - For many job=sense of self; identity crisis, depression
 - Effects the family socioeconomically
 - Children less \$\$ for social things, parents scrimping and saving
 - Goals and Aspirations
 - Increases pessimism about future – really effects kids
 - Can be the setting event for many coercive family interactions

Divorce

- Loss of a parent through death or divorce is one of the most disruptive changes in a family system
- Majority of children will deal with this in their lifetimes
- 75% of mothers and 80% of fathers remarry
 - Kids have to do a lot of adjusting
 - This adjustment can be more or less difficult
 - Like going to a new country – new contingencies!
- Some children more vulnerable to the negative effects, and some show improved development with divorce

Divorce

- Three main factors effect how easy/hard a divorce will be on children (Heatherington et al, 1989):
 1. Characteristics of the child
 2. Characteristics of the family
 3. Factors outside the family (school, peer group, etc.)



Divorce

1. Characteristics of the child:

- Cumulative amount of stress
 - Amount of parental conflict, economic stress
 - Positive impact seen both when children transition from hostile environment to a more calm one, but also when parents are highly cooperative – both ends of the spectrum
- Temperament and personality
 - Difficult children react more negatively
 - Aggressive and noncompliant children add stress to the divorce

Divorce

1. Characteristics of the child (cont.):

- Developmental status
 - Younger children react more negatively at first, but recover the most completely over time
 - Limited understanding hurts, then helps (adjust more quickly)
 - Older children turn to peers (good or bad)
- Gender
 - Boys react more negatively (increase in behavior problems), girls less so
 - Effects on boys more long lasting. Why???
 - Girls internalize (depression) boys externalize (aggression)

Divorce

1. Characteristics of the child (cont.):

- Gender (cont.)
 - Not only how they react, but that 90% of kids live primarily with mother
 - Girls become “friends” with mother and are treated like peers and helpers in the household
 - Girls have more trouble with remarriage (taking a mother and friend)
 - Step-father – daughter relationships the least defined in our society
 - Step-father withdraws from parenting role or comes on too strong

Divorce

2. Characteristics of the Family

- Children may benefit if high marital conflict
- Economic effects
 - How financially stable?
 - Mother goes back to work, “extras” decrease
 - May move to neighborhoods with more crime, poorer schools, etc.
- Reduced child monitoring
 - “falls through the cracks”
- Grandparents and other family
 - Grandparents can take on some maternal/paternal roles – this helps kids adjust better

Divorce

3. Extra-Familial factors

- Peers
 - Having someone to confide in (and reinforce adaptive behavior) helps
 - Intimacy more important than number
- Schools
 - Schools that are more structured and consistent (with both routines and personnel) help children adjust
- These extra-familial factors are constant and stable environments during the disruption of divorce.

The Effects of Poverty

Poverty

- Lack of money means survival goals at the forefront of the family
- Look at poverty as an overarching setting event
 - Poor education
 - Neighborhoods with higher crime/drug use
 - Hunger and cognitive performance
 - Lesser resources and “extras”
 - Fewer hobbies
 - College?
 - Coercive family systems

Poverty

- It effects a HUGE chunk of our population:
 - 2000: 16.1% of children are living in poverty (12 million)
 - 2012: 21.9% of children are living in poverty (16 million)
 - Caucasian = 17%
 - African-American = 35.5%
 - Latin-American = 32.5%
 - 2-3 times higher than most industrialized countries
- Why?
 - Loss of industry jobs (“blue collar”) for lower-skilled workers
 - Higher % of children living with only one parent
 - Decreased government benefits (1970’s & 1980’s)
 - Poor children under 6 receiving benefits decreased from 53% to 36%

Effects of Poverty

- Nutrition
- Poor health care
- Inadequate housing
- More environmental toxins
- Violent neighborhoods
- Stressors on parents
 - More coercive parenting
- Cognitive delays

- “Double-jeopardy”

Effects of Poverty

- Nutrition
 - Study in Kenya on the effects of nutrition on development (McDonald, Sigman, Espinoza, & Neumann, 1994)
 - Two groups: one with food shortage, one without
 - When nutrition is impacted:
 - Less time spent interacting with environment
 - Fewer positive peer interactions
 - Less general activity
 - Poorer in-class attending
- What does this mean for psychological development?

Effects of Poverty

- Poor parental discipline
 - Delinquency correlated with poverty
 - More coercive parenting (think Patterson)
 - Less time/resources
 - Taxing jobs
 - Lack of parenting skills
 - Children left to their own devices as parents are busy with survival needs (“latch-key”) – delinquent peer groups

Poverty as Setting Event

Economic stressors



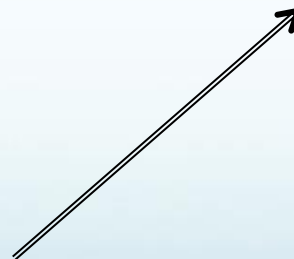
Marital Conflict



Depressive Moods



Hostility Towards Children



Child Withdraws

Child Acts Out

Out

Effects of Poverty

- Variation? Of course!
 - Depends on the genetics, interactional history, current psychological conditions, and current environmental conditions of the child
- Study by Bradley et al. (1995)
 - Out of 243 premature, low birth weight children living in poverty, 26 were in normal range of cognitive and health measures
 - Those parents provided a “responsive, accepting, stimulating, and organized environment”

Preventing Poverty's Effects

- Early Intervention Services and parent training
 - Grantham-McGregor et al. (1994)
 - Effects of malnutrition in early childhood can be reversed when mothers are taught to shape cognitive and social behaviors
 - Even 14 years later, showed normal IQs and school achievement
 - Control group = significant delays in IQ and school achievement
 - Howard, Williams, McLaughlin (1994)
 - Reviewed 18 studies
 - Parent training = eliminate behavior problems in children prenatally exposed to drugs and are living in poverty
 - SO MANY MORE!
- Look to schools to provide remediation
 - Data show schools in impoverished neighborhoods are of a lower-overall quality than other schools
 - Yet another environment that lets kids down

Preventing Poverty's Effects

- Interventions should include:
 1. Parent-child training (behavior management)
 2. Assertiveness training
 3. Basic skills training (for children)
 4. Health maintenance and nutrition
 5. Job finding
 6. Family activities
 7. Problem solving techniques
 8. Money management
 9. Abuse prevention
 10. Self- control training
 11. Stress reduction