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2100 M Street NW
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August 15, 2003

Funding for this work comes from the Urban Institute’s Assessing the New Federalism (ANF) project. The ANF project is currently supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and The Ford Foundation. The authors would like to thank Elaine Sorensen for her thoughtful comments and suggestions. All errors are the responsibility of the authors. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the Urban Institute or its sponsors.

During the late 1990s, the share of children living in single-mother families declined significantly (Acs and Nelson 2001; Cherlin and Fomby 2002; Dupree and Primus 2001). Rather than a concomitant rise in the share of children living with married parents however, the data show an increase in cohabitation (Acs and Nelson 2001). This is a source of concern for policymakers and analysts because previous research demonstrates that living with cohabiters is not as beneficial to children as living with married parents and, in some cases, no better than living with a single parent (Acs and Nelson 2002; Nelson, Clark, and Acs 2001; Manning and Lichter 1996).

This paper examines whether these trends in living arrangements from the late 1990s continued into the new decade using data from the 2002 round of the National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF). Further, it investigates how the well-being of children in different living arrangements has evolved. Special focus is given to young children and children in low-income families.

Our major findings include:

• Between 1997 and 2002 the share of children living in single-mother families declined significantly while the share living in cohabiting families increased. These changes occurred during the early years of this period.

• Among young children and lower-income children, the shifts away from living with a single mother are offset by both a rise in living with married biological/adoptive parents as well as with unmarried cohabiting parents.

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1 The NSAF is nationally representative of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population under age 65, with data on over 44,000 households. For more information on the NSAF, see Dean Brick, et al. (1999).
• In 2002, children living with married parents (either married biological/adoptive parents or married stepparents) experience less material hardship than children living with single mothers, cohabiting parents, or cohabiting stepparents. In contrast, school-age children and teens living with their own two parents (whether married or not) are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems than children living with single mothers, married stepparents, and unmarried stepparents.

• Over the 1997 to 2002 period, children in single-mother families enjoyed larger improvements in material well-being than children in other arrangements. This is likely owing to increase in the work effort of single mothers.

Background, Data, and Methods

There are many possible factors underlying recent trends in children’s living arrangements. Indeed, social norms and customs, economic conditions, and public policy all affect living arrangement decisions in complex and interrelated ways. For example, over the last few decades, cohabitation has become more accepted in the U.S., and this evolving attitude surely plays some role in the rise in cohabitation. Similarly, the strengthening economy of the late 1990s afforded more young unwed parents the opportunity to find work and earn enough to set up a home together rather than living separately, with the mother and child relying on welfare for support. And as single mothers increased their work effort, their child care needs also increased which may have resulted in more single mothers living in shared arrangements. Further, the increase in housing costs that has accompanied the economic expansion of the last half of the decade
may have also induced formerly independent living single mothers to share living arrangements.²

And, of course, changes in public policy, like the Earned Income Tax Credit and 1996’s federal welfare reform,³ also may affect the decisions parents make about their children’s living arrangements. Policies that make it harder to qualify for and receive benefits make welfare less attractive and may discourage the formation and maintenance of independent single-mother families. These policies include short time limits, stringent work requirements, tough sanction policies, and family caps.⁴ Similarly, policy changes that make it easier for two-parent families to receive welfare may promote dual parenting.⁵

Changes in children’s living arrangements have important implications for child well-being. Indeed, a considerable volume of research documents that children living with single parents are materially worse off than children living with married parents and that children with single parents have worse socioeconomic outcomes than their counterparts with married parents even after income differences are taken into account. Children living with stepparents generally have outcomes that fall between those of children in single- and married-parent families (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Less is known about children living in cohabiting families.

The goal of this paper is to document recent changes in children’s living arrangements and in child well-being using straightforward tabular comparisons. This

² For a thorough review of the relationship between economic circumstances and family outcomes, see White and Rogers (2000).
³ Many states began the process of reforming welfare prior to the passage of federal welfare reform under federal waivers to the rules of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program.
⁴ Under a family cap, if a welfare mother has (or in some cases conceives) another child while on welfare, her family’s benefits do not rise to reflect the increase in family size.
⁵ Some states have removed restrictions like work hours limitations and work history requirements that applied to two-parent but not single-parent families seeking welfare.
purely descriptive exercise provides up-to-date pictures of the types of families in which children live, how children’s well-being differs across living arrangements, and the extent to which the relative well-being of children across living arrangements is changing over time.6

The 1997, 1999, and 2002 rounds of the NSAF are ideal data sources for this analysis. In addition to providing considerable detail on children’s living arrangements—for example, by allowing researchers to distinguish between children living with their unmarried biological parents from those living with a single parent and cohabiting partner—the NSAF also contains a rich set of child well-being measures. Further, the NSAF income and poverty calculations use a broad concept of family, referred to as the social family, which includes all persons related by blood, marriage, adoption, or through a cohabiting relationship. We consider how poverty, food insecurity, cognitive stimulation (for children under 6), and behavioral problems (for 6- to 11-year-olds and teens) vary across living arrangement and over time.

**Children’s Living Arrangements, 1997 to 2002**

Before discussing children’s living arrangements during the 1997 to 2002 period, we will define the eight living arrangements referred to in the text and tables.

- Married biological/adoptive parents (married parents): includes children living with either two biological or two adoptive parents who are married.
- Married stepparents: includes children living with a biological parent who is married to either a stepparent or an adoptive parent.

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6 We do not attempt to explain why children’s living arrangements are changing, nor do we attempt to assess why the levels and trends in measures of child well-being vary across living arrangements and over time.
• Single mother: includes children living with a biological, adoptive, or step mother who is not living with a spouse or a partner.

• Single father: includes children living with a biological, adoptive, or step father who is not living with a spouse or a partner.

• Cohabiting parents: includes children living with either their two biological or two adoptive parents who are not married to each other.

• Cohabiting stepparents: includes children living with a biological, adoptive, or stepparent and that parent’s boy/girlfriend, who is not a parent of the child.

• No parents: includes children living without a parent present; emancipated minors and children in foster and kinship care are included in this category.

• Other: includes children living with same-sex couples, or in complex arrangements not classifiable elsewhere.

Figure 1 shows that in 2002, three out of five children live with their married biological or adoptive parents, and another 8 percent live with married stepparents. Nearly one in five live with a single mother, and 6 percent live with cohabiting couples, equally divided between those living with both of their unmarried biological/adoptive parents (cohabiting parents) and those living with one parent and that parent’s nonparent partner (cohabiting stepparents). One in twenty-five live with neither parent, and the remaining 3 percent live in single-father or other complex households.

Between 1997 and 2002, there has been a notable decrease in the share of children living in single-mother families accompanied by increases in the share living with cohabiting parents. Table 1 shows that the share of children living in single-mother families fell by 2.4 percentage points from 21.5 to 19.2 while the share living with their cohabiting biological/adoptive parents rose by 0.9 percentage points from 2.0 to 2.9 percent. There are also statistically significant increases in the share of children living

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7 All NSAF data presented here are adjusted using weights from the 2000 Census. Earlier tabulations of NSAF data from the 1997 and 1999 rounds published elsewhere are computed using weights from the 1990 Census.
with cohabiting stepparents (+0.4 percentage points) and in families with neither parent present (+0.4 percentage points). Finally, the share of children living with their married biological or adoptive parents also rose by 0.4 percentage points, but for this group, the change is not statistically significant. Note that the bulk of these changes occurred during the early years of federal welfare reform between 1997 and 1999; indeed, children’s living arrangements are virtually identical in 1999 and 2002.

To the extent that changes in policy influence childbearing, the effects of policy changes may be most apparent among young children. Indeed, children ages five and under in 2002 were all born during the era of welfare reform. Further, because the targets of welfare and current marriage promotion policies are lower-income families, it is also useful to consider changes in living arrangement among children in these families.

Table 2 shows several striking, statistically significant changes in living arrangements of young children between 1997 and 2002: Among children ages five and under, the share living in single-mother families declined by 3.8 percentage points, from 21.0 to 17.3 percent. About two-thirds of the drop occurred between 1997 and 1999. Unlike the case for all children, this decline in single parenting is partially offset by a rise in the share of young children living with two married parents (+2.5 percentage points), with the increase occurring mostly after 1999. In addition, more young children are living with cohabiting parents in 2002 than in 1997 (an increase of 1.2 percentage points); however this increase occurred between 1997 and 1999. The share of young children living in all other arrangements remained fairly stable over the five-year period. 

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8 Differences may not be precise due to rounding.
These changes are even more pronounced among children in the lowest income quartile (see table 3). Between 1997 and 2002, the share of lower-income children living with a single mother fell by 6.7 percentage points, from 48.5 to 41.7 percent; the share living with married parents rose by 3.5 percentage points, from 32.7 to 36.2 percent, and the share living with cohabiting parents rose by 2.1 percentage points, from 3.3 to 5.4 percent. Again, the bulk of the decline in the share of lower-income children living in single-mother families occurred during the early years of welfare reform; however about two-thirds of the increases in the shares living with married and cohabiting parents occurred between 1999 and 2002.

**Living Arrangements and Child Well-Being**

Next, we examine how children’s well-being varies across living arrangements and how well-being has changed over time. Keep in mind that these findings are purely descriptive; differences in living arrangements themselves do not necessarily cause differences in child well-being. Here we focus on the five living arrangements most relevant to marriage promotion policies. The paragon of marriage promotion is the two married biological or adoptive parents family, while the single-mother family is its *bête noire*. Between these two are married stepparents, cohabiting parents, and cohabiting stepparents in which a child lives with one parent and the parent’s current partner who is unrelated to the child.

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9 We use social family income (roughly equivalent to household income) relative to a family’s needs to determine if a child is in the lowest income quartile; this broadly captures the resources available to the child and adjusts for differences in family size. A benefit of using this definition of lower-income children is that it allows us to always compare the poorest 25 percent of children in one year to the poorest 25 percent in another.
Differences in Well-Being across Living Arrangements

Table 4 shows how well-being varies across these five living arrangements in 2002. Poverty rates are appreciably lower for children living with married parents and with married stepparents than for children in other living arrangements. In 2002 when 15.1 percent of all children were poor, the poverty rate for children living with married parents is just 7.9 percent. The poverty rate for children living with married stepparents is also 7.9 percent. Interestingly, the poverty rate for children living with cohabiting parents (26.2 percent) is significantly higher than the poverty rate for children living with cohabiting stepparents. The poverty rate for children in single-mother families is highest of all: 37.6 percent.

An alternative to poverty as a measure of material well-being is food insecurity; this captures whether a child lives in a family that has some difficulty providing sufficient food. In general, food insecurity rates are higher than poverty rates. In 2002, nearly three in ten children lived in food-insecure families. Food insecurity rates are lowest for children living with their married parents (20.0 percent) and highest for those living with single mothers (51.3 percent). Interestingly, children living with their cohabiting parents are basically just as food-insecure as those living with a single mother (48.2 percent). The food insecurity rate for children living with married stepparents is 30.9 percent; the

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10 Poverty rates are based on social family income and needs.
11 Living arrangements are measured at the time of the survey while income reflects a family’s resources from the prior calendar year. For consistency, we always refer to the year in which living arrangements are measured. Thus, the poverty rate we refer to as 2002 reflects family incomes from 2001.
12 Food insecurity is defined as whether the respondent or anyone in their family experienced at least one of the following food-related concerns in the past 12 months: (1) often or sometimes worried that food would run out before they got money to buy more; (2) the food they bought often or sometimes ran out; or (3) one or more adults ate less or skipped meals because there was not enough money to pay for food. These questions indicate financial stresses related to food purchases over the past 12 months. They do not indicate caloric intake or the adequacy of a family’s diet. For a complete description of this indicator, see Zedlewski and Brauner (1999).
rate for children with cohabiting stepparents is 43.9 percent, significantly lower than the rate for single mothers.

Turning to other measures of well-being, we examine whether young children (ages 1 to 5) are read to infrequently (fewer than three times per week)\(^{13}\) and whether older children (ages 6 to 11) and teens (ages 12 to 17) exhibit behavioral problems.\(^{14}\) With these well-being measures, the hierarchy of outcomes across living arrangements evident for measures of material well-being (married best, single worst, others in between) breaks down.

About one in seven children between the ages of 1 and 5 are read to infrequently. Children living with their married parents are the least likely to be read to infrequently (11.8 percent); this is lower than the rates among children living with single mothers (18.8 percent) and children with cohabiting stepparents (15.6 percent), but not significantly so. Children living with married stepparents are just as likely to be read to infrequently as children living with single mothers. Finally, children living with their cohabiting parents are the most likely to be read to infrequently (23.9 percent).

Among children ages 6 to 11, 7.0 percent are reported to have behavioral problems in 2002. Having two biological or adoptive parents present regardless of their marital status reduces the incidence of behavioral problems. The rate of behavioral problems for school-age children living with married parents is 4.7 percent; for those living with unmarried cohabiting parents, the rate is 5.7 percent. In contrast, about one

\(^{13}\) Children who are read to infrequently are more likely to have trouble in school later in life.

\(^{14}\) A measure of behavioral and emotional problems was derived from a series of questions in which all parents were asked to report the extent to which, in the past month, their children did not get along with other kids, could not concentrate or pay attention for long, or were unhappy, sad or depressed. Parents of 6- to 11-year-olds were also asked how often during the past month their children felt worthless or inferior; were nervous, high-strung, or tense; or acted too young for their age. Likewise, parents of 12- to 17-year-olds were additionally asked how often during the past month their children had trouble sleeping, lied or cheated, or did poorly at schoolwork (Ehrle and Moore 1999).
of every 10 school-age children living with a single mother, married stepparents, or cohabiting stepparents experience behavioral problems.

The pattern of behavioral problems across living arrangements for teens is similar to that of school-age children. Overall, 8.4 percent of teens are reported to have behavioral problems in 2002. The rate of behavioral problems for school-age children living with married parents is 4.9 percent; for those living with unmarried cohabiting parents, the rate is 6.4 percent. More than one of every nine children living with a single mother and one in 10 living with married stepparents or cohabiting stepparents exhibit behavioral problems.

These tabulations suggest that in terms of their material well-being, the marital status of the adults with whom a child lives matters: children living with their two married parents or with married stepparents are less likely to be poor and experience food insecurity than children living in cohabiting or single-mother families. In contrast, when we consider nonmarital measures of well-being, school-age children and teens living with their biological or adoptive parents, regardless of marital status, fare better than children living with stepparents or single mothers.

*Trends in Well-Being*

Between 1997 and 2002, the well-being of children improved on several fronts. It is useful to examine whether these changes differ across the various living arrangements we consider. Any differences in the trends in well-being across living arrangements could indicate that the relative differences in well-being across living arrangements may be shifting.
Table 5 shows that overall child poverty rates fell by 4.8 percentage points between 1997 and 2002. Interestingly, children living with single mothers enjoyed a 10.8 percentage point drop in poverty, the single largest decline among all living arrangements. Poverty rates also declined significantly for children living with cohabiting parents (8.9 percentage points). The 2.9 and 5.6 percentage point declines in poverty among children living with married stepparents and cohabiting stepparents, respectively, are not statistically significant. Poverty rates among children living with married parents fell by a modest but statistically significant 1.8 percentage points.

Between 1997 and 2002, there was a small but significant 2.8 percentage point decline in food insecurity rates. Food insecurity dropped by a statistically significant 4.4 percentage points among children living with single mothers and by 2.2 percentage points for children living with their married parents. The food insecurity rate also dropped among children with cohabiting stepparents, but the change is not statistically significant. Children living with married stepparents and cohabiting parents experienced statistically insignificant increases in food insecurity.

That the material well-being of children improved is not surprising given the relatively strong economic environment during the late 1990s. However, it is somewhat surprising that children living with single mothers enjoyed particularly large gains. One might have expected that as single parenting declined between 1997 and 2002, the composition of single-mother families would change. Specifically, one might have expected that the average attributes of single mothers—the characteristics that make them attractive to employers and potential partners as well the resources that make them effective parents—would deteriorate. Consequently, one would have expected the
outcomes of children in single-mother families to, if not deteriorate, at least not keep up with improvements of children in other living arrangements. It is not clear why children living in single-mother families enjoyed the bigger than average improvements in material well-being.15

Among children in other living arrangements, we find that children living with their cohabiting parents also enjoyed particularly large decreases in poverty, although they were no less likely to be food insecure in 2002 than in 1997. Previous research that examines declining poverty rates among children with unmarried parents suggests that in addition to the secular decline in poverty in the late 1990s, increases in the work effort of cohabiting mothers account for most of the decline in poverty among this group of children (Acs and Nelson 2002).

Turning to nonmaterial measures of well-being, we find that the share of children ages 1 to 5 read to infrequently fell by 2.9 percentage points. Among children living in single-mother families, the share read to infrequently fell by 5.5 percentage points; for those living with married parents, there was a 2.1 percentage point drop. There were statistically insignificant declines among children with cohabiting parents (-1.6 percentage points) and children with cohabiting stepparents (-2.3 percentage points), and a statistically insignificant increase for children living with married stepparents (+2.6 percentage points).

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15 One possible explanation centers on work. The employment rate for single mothers rose from 64.5 to 69.7 percent between 1997 and 2002 while the employment rates for married mothers and fathers in both biological/adoptive and stepfamilies declined slightly. It is also possible that they received more income from child support.
Among 6- to 11-year-old children, there were no significant changes in the incidence of behavioral problems overall or for any of the living arrangements we consider between 1997 and 2002.

Among teenagers, there is virtually no difference in the incidence of behavioral problems overall; however, among teens living with single mothers, the share with reported behavioral problems fell by 3.7 percentage points. Interestingly, the incidence of behavioral problems also dropped significantly for teens living with cohabiting stepparents but not for teens living with married parents, unmarried parents, or married stepparents.

Though it is less pronounced for these nonmaterial measures than for the measures of material well-being, we again find that children in single-mother families enjoyed disproportionately large improvements.

**Population Subgroups**

Next we examine how the well-being of young children and children in lower-income families varies across living arrangements and how the well-being of these children has changed over time. Because sample sizes are smaller when examining these subgroups, apparently large differences may not be statistically significant.

First, consider young children. Looking across the five living arrangements we consider, the level and trend in material well-being of children under age 6 across living arrangements is quite similar to the level and trend for all children. Consequently, we do not discuss them in detail. The only nonmaterial measure of well-being we examine for young children is being read to infrequently, and these findings are discussed in the previous section.
Next, consider children living in the poorest 25 percent of all families. The poverty rates for this group, not surprisingly, are quite high (table 6). Three out of five children in the bottom income quartile are poor in 2002. Interestingly, for lower-income children unlike for all children, poverty rates are similar across all arrangements in which two partnered adults are present. About one half the lower-income children living with married parents and married stepparents are poor, and the poverty rates for lower-income children living with cohabiting parents and cohabiting stepparents are 56.2 and 50.6 percent, respectively. The poverty rate for lower-income children living with a single mother (69.2 percent) is significantly higher than the rate for lower-income children in all of the other living arrangements considered.

The trends in poverty for lower-income children also differ somewhat from the trends observed for all children. Between 1997 and 2002, the share of lower-income children in poverty dropped by 19.1 percentage points. The declines are particularly pronounced for lower-income children living with cohabiting parents (-29.4 percentage points). Declines for lower-income children in other arrangements range from a low of 16.9 percentage points for those living with a single mother to a high of 22.3 percentage points for those living with cohabiting stepparents. Recall that when we examined all children, the decline in poverty was largest among children in single-mother families.

Food insecurity rates are also much higher for children in the bottom income quartile than for all children (57.1 vs. 29.3 percent). Unlike the case for poverty rates, when we look at lower-income children, we find that there is little difference in food security between children living with single-mothers (64.0 percent), cohabiting parents (61.8 percent), cohabiting stepparents (71.0 percent), and married stepparents (65.2
percent). Recall that when we consider all children, we find that the food insecurity rates are significantly lower for children living with married stepparents than for children with cohabiting parents or single-mother families. Finally, food insecurity rates are significantly lower for lower-income children living with their married biological/adoptive parents (46.8 percent) than for all other groups considered.

The share of lower-income children who are food-insecure declined by 4.0 percentage points between 1997 and 2002. Food insecurity rates fell for lower-income children living with married parents, married stepparents, and single mothers but went up for children with cohabiting parents, although none of these changes are statistically significant.

Finally, children in lower-income families, on average, fare worse on non-material measures of well-being (being read to infrequently for 1- to 5-year-olds, and exhibiting behavior problems for 6- to 11-year-olds and teens) than all children in general. The patterns across living arrangements, however, are quite similar to those observed for all children. Further, the trends in nonmaterial measures of well-being across living arrangements for lower-income children are also similar to those observed for all children. Consequently, we do not discuss them in detail.

**Conclusion**

In 2002, three of five children lived with their married biological or adoptive parents, about the same portion as in 1997. Between 1997 and 2002, however, the share of children living with a single mother declined while the share living with cohabiting
parents and cohabiting stepparents rose. The bulk of these changes occurred during the 1997 to 1999 period rather than between 1999 and 2002.

The year 1997 marks the implementation of federal welfare reform and the trends in living arrangements for children most likely to be affected by welfare policies—the very young and lower-income children—differ slightly from those of all children. For young and lower-income children, the decline in single-mother families was accompanied by a rise in the share living with two married parents and in the share living with two unmarried cohabiting parents. For young and lower-income children, shifts in living arrangements occurred throughout the 1997 to 2002 period.

The well-being of children varies considerably across living arrangements. The benefits of marriage are clearly illustrated when we make simple tabular comparisons of material well-being (poverty and food insecurity) across living arrangements. In 2002, children living with at least one married parent (in married parent or stepfamilies) experience less material hardship than children with a single mother, cohabiting parents or cohabiting stepparents.

The importance of living with two parents, but not necessarily marriage, is illustrated by our comparisons of child behavior across living arrangements. School-age children and teens living with their own two parents (whether married or not) fare better on nonmaterial measures of well-being than children living with single mothers, married stepparents, and unmarried stepparents.

It is important to note that all differences across living arrangements presented here are purely descriptive and are measured at a single point in time. Indeed, the well-being of children is likely to be affected by the amount of time they spend in any given
arrangement and how often their living arrangements change. In addition, the relationship between living arrangements and well-being likely vary with age, sex, and race/ethnicity of the child.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that if single mothers or cohabiting couples were to marry, their children’s well-being is unlikely to equal that of children currently living in married-parent families. The parents of children in married-parent families likely differ in both observable and unobservable ways from the parents of children in other living arrangements, and these differences account for some of the differences in child well-being across living arrangements. Nevertheless, these descriptive comparisons suggest that marriage promotion may help to improve the well-being of children. How great these improvements will be and whether marriage promotion is the most cost-effective alternative for improving well-being are important questions confronting policymakers and policy researchers alike.
References


Figure 1: Children's Living Arrangements, 2002

Married parents 60%
Single mother 19%
Married stepparents 8%
Cohabiting parents 3%
Cohabiting stepparents 3%
No parents 4%
Other 3%

Source: Urban Institute calculations of the 2002 NSAF.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Arrangement</th>
<th>1997 (%)</th>
<th>1999 (%)</th>
<th>2002 (%)</th>
<th>Change 1997-2002</th>
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<tr>
<td>Married biological/adoptive parents</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>59.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married stepparents(^1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single mother</td>
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<td>19.2</td>
<td>19.2</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>-0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohabitating parents with common children(^2)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>+0.9 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohabitating stepparents with no children in common(^3)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>+0.4 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>No parents (foster or kinship or nonrelative parents)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>+0.4 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>+0.2 *</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* indicates statistically significant difference at the 90 percent confidence level.
\(^1\)The category "married stepparents" refers to children living with a biological parent who is married to either a stepparent or an adoptive parent.
\(^2\)Children living with cohabiting parents with common children are living with both of their biological parents who are unmarried.
\(^3\)Children living with cohabiting stepparents with no children in common are living with one biological parent and that parent's boy/girlfriend.

Source: Urban Institute calculations of the 1997, 1999 and 2002 rounds of the NSAF.
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<th>2002 (%)</th>
<th>Change 1997-2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Married biological/adoptive parents</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>66.6</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
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<td>Single mother</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>-3.8 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single father</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>+0.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohabiting parents with common children²</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>+1.2 *</td>
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<td>Cohabiting stepparents with no children in common³</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>No parents (foster or kinship or nonrelative parents)</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>+0.1</td>
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* indicates statistically significant difference at the 90 percent confidence level.

¹The category "married stepparents" refers to children living with a biological parent who is married to either a stepparent or an adoptive parent.

²Children living with cohabiting parents with common children are living with both of their biological parents who are unmarried.

³Children living with cohabiting stepparents with no children in common are living with one biological parent and that parent's boy/girlfriend.

Source: Urban Institute calculations of the 1997, 1999 and 2002 rounds of the NSAF.
Table 3: Trends in Children's Living Arrangements 1997-2002: Lowest Quartile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Living Arrangement</th>
<th>1997 (%)</th>
<th>1999 (%)</th>
<th>2002 (%)</th>
<th>Change 1997-2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married biological/adoptive parents</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>+3.5 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married stepparents</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>-6.7 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single father</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>+0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting parents with common children</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>+2.1 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting stepparents with no children in common</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>+0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No parents (foster or kinship or nonrelative parents)</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>+0.3 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Urban Institute calculations of the 1997, 1999 and 2002 rounds of the NSAF.

* indicates statistically significant difference at the 90 percent confidence level.

1The category "married stepparents" refers to children living with a biological parent who is married to either a stepparent or an adoptive parent.

2Children living with cohabiting parents with common children are living with both of their biological parents who are unmarried.

3Children living with cohabiting stepparents with no children in common are living with one biological parent and that parent's boy/girlfriend.
## Table 4: Well-being of Children Across Living Arrangements, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Food Insecure&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Read to Infrequently&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; (1 to 5 Year Olds)</th>
<th>Behavior Problems&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt; 6-11 Year Olds</th>
<th>Behavior Problems&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt; 12-17 Year Olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All children</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married biological/adoptive parents</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married stepparents&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7.9 b</td>
<td>30.9 ab</td>
<td>18.0 a</td>
<td>9.7 a</td>
<td>11.8 a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitating parents with common children&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>26.2 abc</td>
<td>48.2 ac</td>
<td>23.9 a</td>
<td>5.7 b</td>
<td>6.4 bc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitating stepparents with no children in common&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12.3 abc</td>
<td>43.9 abc</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>10.4 a</td>
<td>10.5 a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Urban Institute calculations of the 1997, 1999 and 2002 rounds of the NSAF.

"a" indicates statistically significantly different from the 2002 level for children living with married biological or adoptive parents at the 90% confidence level.

"b" indicates statistically significantly different from the 2002 level for children living with a single mother at the 90% confidence level.

"c" indicates statistically significantly different from the 2002 level for children living with married stepparents at the 90% confidence level.

<sup>1</sup>Food insecurity is defined as whether the respondent or anyone in their family experienced at least one of the following food related concerns in the past 12 months: (1) often or sometimes worried that food would run out before they got money to buy more; (2) the food they bought often or sometimes ran out; or (3) one or more adults ate less or skipped meals because there was not enough money to pay for food. These questions indicate financial stresses related to food purchases over the past 12 months. They do not indicate caloric intake or the adequacy of a family’s diet. For a complete description of this indicator, see Zedlewski and Brauner 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Parents were asked how many days during the week they read or told stories to their children. Children read to infrequently were those who were read to or told stories fewer than three days per week.

<sup>3</sup>A measure of behavioral and emotional problems was derived from a series of questions in which all parents were asked to report the extent to which, in the past month, their children did not get along with other kids, could not concentrate or pay attention for long, or were unhappy, sad or depressed. Parents of 6- to 11-year olds were also asked how often during the past month their children felt worthless or inferior; were nervous, high-strung, or tense; or acted too young for their age. Likewise, parents of 12- to 17-year olds were additionally asked how often during the past month their children had trouble sleeping, lied or cheated, or did poorly at schoolwork (Ehrle and Moore 1999).

<sup>4</sup>The category "married stepparents" refers to children living with a biological parent who is married to either a stepparent or an adoptive parent.

<sup>5</sup>Children living with cohabiting parents are living with both of their parents who are unmarried.

<sup>6</sup>Children living with cohabiting stepparents are living with one parent and that parent's boy/girlfriend.
Table 5: Changes in Child Well-being Across Living Arrangements, 1997-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Food Insecure&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Read to Infrequently&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; (1 to 5 Year Olds)</th>
<th>Behavior Problems&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt; 6-11 Year Olds</th>
<th>12-17 Year Olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All children</td>
<td>-4.8 *</td>
<td>-2.8 *</td>
<td>-2.9 *</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married biological/adoptive parents</td>
<td>-1.8 *</td>
<td>-2.2 *</td>
<td>-2.1 *</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married stepparents&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting parents with common children&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-8.9 *</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting stepparents with no children in common&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-5.6</td>
<td>-7.5</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-11.5 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>-10.8 *</td>
<td>-4.4 *</td>
<td>-5.5 *</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-3.7 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup>Food insecurity is defined as whether the respondent or anyone in their family experienced at least one of the following food related concerns in the past 12 months: (1) often or sometimes worried that food would run out before they got money to buy more; (2) the food they bought often or sometimes ran out; or (3) one or more adults ate less or skipped meals because there was not enough money to pay for food. These questions indicate financial stresses related to food purchases over the past 12 months. They do not indicate caloric intake or the adequacy of a family’s diet. For a complete description of this indicator, see Zedlewski and Brauner (1999).

<sup>2</sup>Parents were asked how many days during the week they read or told stories to their children. Children read to infrequently were those who were read to or told stories fewer than three days per week.

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<sup>4</sup>The category “married stepparents” refers to children living with a biological parent who is married to either a stepparent or an adoptive parent.

<sup>5</sup>Children living with cohabiting parents are living with both of their parents who are unmarried.

<sup>6</sup>Children living with cohabiting stepparents are living with one parent and that parent’s boy/girlfriend.
Table 6: Level and Trend in Material Well-being of Children in Lower Income Families by Living Arrangement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor (%)</th>
<th>Food Insecure (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All children</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married biological/adoptive parents</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married stepparents</td>
<td>69.8 b</td>
<td>49.5 b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting parents with common children</td>
<td>85.6 ac</td>
<td>56.2 b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting stepparents with no children in common</td>
<td>72.9 b</td>
<td>50.6 b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates a statistically significant change 1997-2002 at the 90% confidence level.
"a" indicates statistically significantly different from the level for children living with married biological or adoptive parents at the 90% confidence level.
"b" indicates statistically significantly different from the level for children living with a single mother at the 90% confidence level.
"c" indicates statistically significantly different from the level for children living with married stepparents at the 90% confidence level.
1Children in lower income families include those with social family income relative to a family's need in the lowest quartile.
2Food insecurity is defined as whether the respondent or anyone in their family experienced at least one of the following food related concerns in the past 12 months: (1) often or sometimes worried that food would run out before they got money to buy more; (2) the food they bought often or sometimes ran out; or (3) one or more adults ate less or skipped meals because there was not enough money to pay for food. These questions indicate financial stresses related to food purchases over the past 12 months. They do not indicate caloric intake or the adequacy of a family’s diet. For a complete description of this indicator, see Zedlewski and Brauner (1999).
3The category "married stepparent" refers to children living with a biological parent who is married to either a stepparent or an adoptive parent.
4Children living with cohabiting parents are living with both of their parents who are unmarried.
5Children living with cohabiting stepparents are living with one parent and that parent's boy/girlfriend.