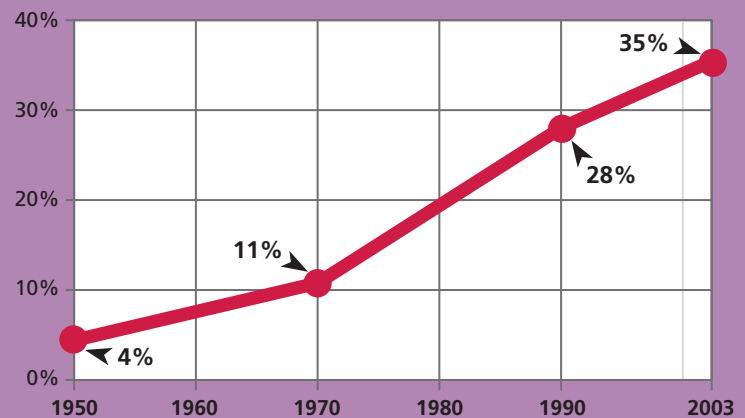


Parents & Families

The Data

- **Changing family structure.** In 1950, just 4% of children were born outside marriage; by 2003, 35% were (see Figure), including 69% of African-American children.¹ The poverty rate for children in married households is 8.4%; the rate in single-mother households is 38.4%.² Children growing up with two continuously married parents have fewer cognitive, emotional, and social problems than other children.³
- **More working mothers.** In 1970, 30.8% of mothers with young children (aged 0–5) were in the workforce; by 2000, 61.9% were.⁴
- **Child maltreatment rates are higher for younger children.** In 2002, children 3 and under had a maltreatment rate of 16 per 1,000, compared with 6 per 1,000 for youth ages 16–17.⁵ Most of those babies were victims of neglect by their parents.⁶ Nearly 80% of the 1,500 children who died in 2003 because of child maltreatment were under 4 years of age.⁶ Children are at increased risk if their parents struggle with substance abuse, domestic violence, poverty, homelessness, or mental illness.⁵
- **Maternal depression.** In 1998, 16% of all kindergartners' parents and 27% of poverty-level

Percentage of All Births Outside Marriage (1950–2003)



kindergartners' parents were at risk for depression. Young children with depressed mothers are more likely to have socioemotional and behavioral problems, difficulties in school, poor peer relationships, aggression, lower IQ scores, impulsivity, and developmental delays.⁵

The Issues

- **Strong parent-child relationships establish the foundation for healthy child development.** Young children flourish when their parents shower them with warmth and affection, protect them from violence, and provide them with regular routines (e.g., bedtimes, mealtimes, early literacy opportunities, consistent discipline). Children who enjoy strong parent-child relationships have greater confidence, self-esteem, and better academic achievement and relationships with others.⁵
- **High-quality programs to teach good parenting behaviors can be effective.** For example, the Nurse-Family Partnership, which provides home visits for low-income, first-time young mothers from pregnancy until their children reach 2 years of age, has produced long-term benefits for mothers (fewer subsequent pregnancies and births, less time on welfare or receiving food stamps, fewer problems due to substance abuse, and fewer arrests, and for children at age 15 (decreased rates of child abuse and neglect over a 15-year period, fewer arrests, convictions, and problems associated with drug or alcohol abuse).⁷ When offered to high-risk pregnant women, the program returns to society \$5.70 for every dollar invested.⁸ However, effectiveness of this and other parenting programs varies with service quality.
- **Parents balance economic need and time with their children.** Polls show that most parents of very young children (0–2) would prefer to stay home with their children, but parents feel they need to work to provide the basic necessities of food and shelter.⁴
- **Parent involvement in early childhood programs and school benefits children.** Parent involvement can mean: participation in class-

continued

rooms, parent-education activities, and program decision-making; interaction with other parents; undertaking activities at home that promote children's development; interaction with staff and other community programs.

Generally, greater involvement is associated with better school outcomes.⁹⁻¹¹

- **32 states have at least one couples and marriage education program**, but few programs have been tested or proven effective.¹²

Options for Philanthropy

- **Support efforts to build strong adult caregiver-child relationships**, including (1) paid family leave and workplace family-friendly policies that give parents more time with their children; (2) parent education and support services (via home visiting programs, parent education classes, parent drop in and play programs, and family resource centers); and (3) efforts to increase the availability of quality child care. (See Early Childhood Care & Education brief). Reach out to fathers and extended families (e.g., grandparents).
- **Support programs to help parents overcome conditions such as maternal depression, parental substance abuse, and domestic violence.** The National Center for Children in Poverty urges partnerships among agencies that do not usually work together (mental health, early childhood, domestic violence, substance abuse) so as to spark integrated approaches.¹³
- **Support efforts to promote healthy marriage**, including advocacy for policy changes to eliminate financial disincentives for marriage, father involvement programs, and research to determine effective marriage education programs, while assuring that women do not remain in abusive or violent relationships.
- **Support efforts to increase parental involvement in children's education.** For example, schools can hire outreach coordinators, locate social services on school sites, and hire community members as classroom aides.
- **Support efforts to enlist parents as advocates** for their children and for change in community programs or policies. Encourage parent leadership.
- **Support quality improvement efforts** to make sure that services are delivered well enough to produce benefits for families and children.

Resources

Family/Father involvement and parent advocacy:

Family Support America: www.familysupportamerica.org/content/parents.htm

Hepburn, K.S. (2004). *Families as Primary Partners in their Child's Development & School Readiness*.

Available on the Web at: www.aecf.org/publications/data/families_sr.pdf

Knitzer, J., & Lefkowitz, J. (2005). *Resources to Promote Social and Emotional Health and School Readiness in Young Children and Families*. Available on the Web at: www.nccp.org/media/tcl05_text.pdf

National Fatherhood Initiative: www.fatherhood.org

National Center on Fathers and Families: www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu

Culturally appropriate services for families:

Chang, H.J., & Tobiassen, D.P. (no date). *California's Racial, Cultural, and Linguistic Diversity: Implications for Implementing Proposition 10*. Available on the Web at: www.healthychild.ucla.edu/publications/Documents/Nurturing00.pdf

Hepburn, K.S. (2004). *Building Culturally & Linguistically Competent Services to Support Young Children, Their Families, and School Readiness*. Available on the Web at: www.aecf.org/publications/data/cctoolkit.pdf

Home visiting programs:

Nurse-Family Partnership: www.nursefamilypartnership.org

Home Visit Forum: www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/home-visit

Gomby, D.S. (2003) *Building School Readiness Through Home Visitation*. Available on the Web at: www.cfc.ca.gov/PDF/SRI/Main%20document%20final.pdf

Families and work issues:

Families and Work Institute: www.familiesandwork.org

National Partnership for Women and Families: www.nationalpartnership.org

Marriage:

Marriage and Child Wellbeing. *The Future of Children*, 15(2), Fall 2005. www.futureofchildren.org

Endnotes appear in separate document.

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