

Data appendix for EconoFact memo “Widening Socioeconomic Differences in Children’s Family Structure in the U.S.”

Author: Melissa S. Kearney, University of Maryland

Research assistant/Data programmer: Ben Layton, University of Maryland PhD student

June 13, 2019

We use a combination of [IPUMS](#) data from the decennial Census (1980, 1990, and 2000) and the American Community Survey (ACS) (2001-2017) to create the summary statistics presented.

We use IPUMS relationship variables to construct family structure indicators. The ACS and decennial census only report relationships between each individual and the householder. Consequently, the only parent/child relationships that are certain are when a child is recorded as the child of the householder. All other parental relationships are imputed by IPUMS using a series of nested logic steps. For details on the imputation logic steps used by IPUMS see [PUMS technical documentation](#). Our reading of the imputation of “mother” and “father” is that these imputations are fairly loose, and it might be more accurate to interpret these relationship pointers for mother and father as mother or father figure.

Given the complex household structures in which many children live, and the limitations in the way relationships are observed and recorded in the data, it is not entirely straightforward to define parsimonious family structure categories. We settled on the following mutually exclusive and exhaustive category definitions because they are relatively simple; they are observable given census variables; and they represent useful distinctions in terms of likely family stability and resources available to the children. They are as follows:

Married parent household – Households in which IPUMS imputation indicates both a mother and a father are present in the household and both of these individuals are married, or a mother and second mother or father and second father are present and married. This category includes biological parents, step parents, and adoptive parents.

Unmarried couple household – Households in which IPUMS imputation indicates both a mother and a father are present in the household and neither of these individuals is married, or a mother and second mother or father and second father are present and not married. In a small number of instances, one parent is recorded as married and the other parent figure is recorded as unmarried; we include those families in this category. This household type corresponds to what might often be referred to as a “cohabiting couple”.

Lone mother – Households in which IPUMS imputation indicates that a mother is present, but neither a father figure nor a second mother is present. Note that, by this definition, a lone mother could include a mother living with another relative, such as the child’s grandparent or aunt.

Lone father – Households in which IPUMS imputation indicates that a father is present, but neither a mother nor a second father is present. Note that, by this definition, a lone father could include a father living with another relative, such as the child’s grandparent or aunt.

No parent present – There is neither a mother nor a father identified in the household for the child.

We limit the data to include only children of age 18 or younger and we limit the sample to individuals living outside of group quarters. We do this to keep consistency across data file years, as group quarters are not included in the 2000-2005 ACS samples. We then drop observations where the relationship

appears to be a clear mistake in that a child's indicated relationship to the householder is "parent" or "parent-in-law".

We categorize race using a combination of the ACS race and ethnic origin variables. First we define any child flagged to be of Hispanic origin to be Hispanic. Then we aggregate indicators for Chinese, Japanese, and "Other Asian or Pacific Islander" into one broad category we term Asian. Finally, we use the race variable to define non-Hispanic and non-Asian children into White, not Hispanic and Black, Not Hispanic. These four race definitions do not include children recorded as being multiracial, American Indian or Alaska Native, or "other race."