

The Effects of Family Structure and Family Process on the Psychological  
Well-Being of Children: From the Children's Point of View

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The impact of family structure on children's outcomes is a highly debated topic in literature on the family. This research made an attempt to engage in this debate by testing the family process perspective. Theorists who favor this perspective believe that the effects of family structure on children can be mediated by the family processes occurring within families, such as the quality of parent-child relationships. The psychological well-being of children from six family structures were compared. After controlling for family processes and background variables the majority of the effects of family structure on children's psychological well-being disappeared. Only children from stepfamilies had significantly lower levels of psychological well-being than children from intact homes. Stepfamilies, however, are a very complex family form and this research could not account for the possible unique processes occurring within stepfamilies. Finally, children from divorced homes did not have significantly lower levels of psychological well-being even before family processes and background variables were controlled. Overall, this research shows support for the family process perspective.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

Children in the United States grow up in a variety of family structures. Single-parent families and two-parent families are created and recreated through marriage, divorce, remarriage, cohabitation and births outside of marriage. One-third of all children are born to unmarried mothers (Bumpass, 1984). In fact, single-parent families are the fastest growing family structure. In 1992, 26% of children were living in a single-parent family and this number has been increasing since the 1960's (U.S. Census, 1992). The majority of single-parent families are created through divorce. Half of all marriages may end in divorce, although about 65% of women and 75% of men who divorce will eventually remarry. However, the remarriage rate has been declining since 1960 (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). This may be a result of the increase in cohabitation. With the increasing diversity of family structures, it has been estimated that in 1992 only 59% of children lived with both biological parents (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). The question researchers ask is what are the effects of these family structures are on children.

The purpose of this research is to address that question. Family structure is hypothesized to indirectly influence children's psychological well-being by affecting family processes, such as parent-child relationships and parental conflict, background variables, such as income, and individual characteristics, such as mother's psychological well-being. Thus, family processes and other variables are predicted to mediate the effects of family structure on children's psychological well-being. Furthermore, family processes are predicted to have a largest impact on children's psychological well-being (Acock and Demo, 1994).

The psychological well-being of children is important for several reasons. First, depressed mood impacts their social relations and their performance abilities (Compas

and Hammen, 1994; Peterson et al., 1993). Second, psychological well-being in youth predicts future adult well-being. Depressive episodes in youth are likely to be chronic and recurrent throughout the life course (Robins et al., 1991). Finally, depressive moods early in life are an indicator of one's potential for developing serious depressive disorders later in life (Gotlib et al., 1995).

This research will make three contributions to the existing research. First, the majority of researchers investigating the effects of family structure on children's psychological well-being have based their findings on mothers' reports of their children's psychological well-being. This research will use mothers' reports on the level of parental conflict, but children's reports on the quality of their relationship with both parents and their psychological well-being.

Children's reports are important for several reasons. Parents may make inaccurate reports about their children's psychological well-being. For example, mothers may report lower levels of psychological well-being for their children than their own children would report about themselves. Divorced mothers may feel distress over their children having to experience a parental divorce and may internalize the social disapproval of divorce. As a result, these mothers may become overly pessimistic about the well-being of their children (Kitson, 1992). In addition, divorced mothers have higher levels of depression than mothers in other family types (Acock and Demo, 1994; Lorenz, Simons and Chao, 1996), and depressed individuals are more likely to perceive events and the people around them in a cynical and pessimistic manner (Abramson, et al., 1978). For these reasons, divorced mothers' appraisals of their relationship with their children and their children's psychological well-being may be inaccurate. Therefore, the perception children have of their own well-being would seem most important (Kurdek, 1993).

Second, quality of parent-child relationships are often measured by mothers' reports on the level of involvement, supervision, control, discipline and enjoyable times

with their children. In this study, children assess the quality of the parent-child relationship by rating the degree of closeness they feel to each parent. And, third, children from a variety of family structures will be studied. The six different family structures are intact families, never-married families, divorced families, separated families, stepfamilies and mother-partner families. Mother-partner families and separated families are rarely included as separate categories in analyses of this sort.

This research is important because it has social policy implications. Within the political world, there is a constant discussion about the state of the family in America. New legislation is being introduced that will make divorce harder to obtain, and make the process of divorce more difficult in general. This legislation is based on the belief that traditional nuclear families are the best family structure for children's well-being. Changes in the structure of American families, however, are linked to broad social forces and are unlikely to be reversed (Skolnick, 1991). Thus, changes in family structures are inevitable for the majority of adults in the United States and their children. Instead of forcing traditional values on families, legislation should address the differential needs of families based on the family processes and socioeconomic characteristics within each family structure.

### Theoretical Foundations

Two theoretical perspectives have dominated the study of family structure and children's development. The family composition perspective emphasizes family structure, and the family process perspective emphasizes family processes. In this section, both perspectives will be described in more detail and the theoretical model for this research will be presented.

#### ***The Family Composition Perspective***

Theorists who take the family composition perspective argue that two-parent

intact families are the best family structure for children. They claim that children who are not raised by both of their biological parents will suffer lower levels of well-being than children from intact families. Children who grow up in single-parent families or reconstituted families have lower levels of well-being because they lose social capital (Coleman, 1988; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Social capital refers to the emotional, economic and educational support that parents provide their children. According to Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur (1994):

The decision of parents to live apart - whether a result of divorce or an initial decision not to marry- damages, and sometimes destroys, the social capital that might have been available to children had the parents lived together (p.3).

When biological parents do not live in the same household, children lose a close connection to the nonresidential parent. When the nonresidential parent does not feel emotionally involved in their children's lives they are less likely to feel financially responsible for their children. As a result, many children from non-intact families are likely to receive lower levels of emotional, educational and economic support (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).

Theorists who favor the family composition perspective see this loss of social capital for children from single-parent and non-intact families as inevitable. Thus, they argue that family structure has a direct connection to the well-being of children. They fail to realize that the loss of social capital from one parent can be replaced by another individual or that the residential parent can compensate for the absent one (Acock and Demo, 1994). Thus, family processes are not theorized to mediate the effects of family structure on children's well-being.

### ***The Family Process Perspective***

Researchers who take the family process perspective argue that family processes influence children's well-being, and these processes mediate the effects of family structure

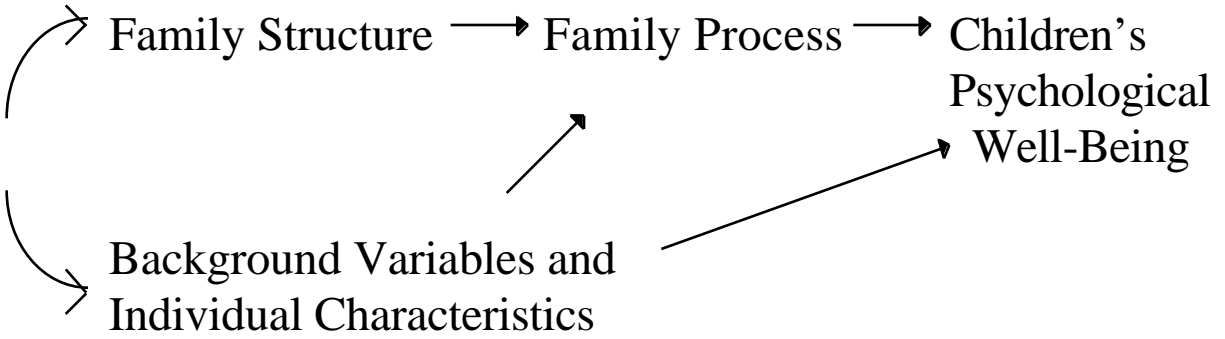
(Acock and Demo, 1994; Demo and Acock, 1988). Two family processes important for children are the quality of the parent-child relationship and the quality of the relationship between parents. Theorists who favor the family process perspective argue that if children have good family processes, such as high quality parent-child relationships and low parental conflict, then their well-being will be high regardless of their family structure.

Family structure, however, can have an impact on family processes. For example, in family structures where biological parents are separated from their children, the parent-child relationship can be more difficult to maintain (Furstenberg, 1984; Hetherington, 1989; Wallerstein, 1980). However, maintaining ties with nonresidential parents is possible, and parent-child emotional ties are more important than the physical presence of a parent in the household (Amato, 1987; Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan and Blair, 1994).

Different family structures are also likely to have different scores on various background variables and individual characteristics. The most important variation in resources across family structures is income. Single-parent families typically have the lowest household incomes (Acock and Demo, 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Another important variable is mother's psychological well-being. Married adults have been found to have higher levels of psychological well-being than divorced adults (Acock and Demo, 1994; Lorenz, Simons, and Chao, 1996). Theorists from the family process perspective argue that the differences in family processes and other variables across family structures cause the different levels of children's well-being.

### The General Theoretical Model

The theoretical model developed for this research draws from the family process perspective. Notice that the direction of the relationship between family structure and background variables is not considered in this model. The model, however, does recognize the socioeconomic and demographic variables differ across family structures.



This model was developed from a number of research findings. The next chapter will review past research on family structure, family processes, background variables, individual characteristics and children's psychological well-being. First, the relationship between family structure and children's psychological well-being will be reviewed. Then, the influence of family structure on family processes and background variables will be assessed. Lastly, the impact of family processes and background characteristics on children's psychological well-being will be discussed.

## CHAPTER TWO: PAST RESEARCH

### Children's Psychological Well-Being

Overall, children from intact families have been shown to have the highest levels of psychological well-being (Acock and Demo, 1994; Amato and Keith, 1991; Conger and Chao, 1996; Furstenberg, 1983). Interestingly, children from never-married families score higher on emotional well-being than children from divorced families and stepfamilies. Children from divorced families score the lowest on emotional well-being (Acock and Demo, 1994). The studies which support these findings mainly used mother's reports of their children's psychological well-being based on one measure of global well-being. One study used a combination of mothers' and children's report, and a scale of children's psychological well-being (Conger and Chao, 1996).

The differences in children's psychological well-being across family structures, however, is not completely clear. Several factors have been shown to reduce the effects of family structure on children's psychological well-being (Acock and Demo, 1994; Furstenberg, 1991; Hetherington, 1989). The parent-child relationship appears to be the most important of factor. Most of these studies, however, have relied on mother's reports for children's psychological well-being and the quality of parent-child relations (Acock and Demo, 1994; Furstenberg, 1991; Hetherington, 1989). Children's reports on these variables may completely eliminate the effects of family structure on children's psychological well-being. Children's reports might show that the differences across family structures, in family processes and other variables, create the relationship between family structure and children's psychological well-being. Many of the differences across family structures in family processes, such as parent-child relations and levels of parental conflict, and background characteristics, such as the mother's psychological well-being and household income, influence children's psychological well-being.

## Process and Background Differences Across Family Structures

Family processes, such as the parent-child relationship and parental conflict, and socioeconomic variables, such as income and mother's psychological well-being, vary across family structures. In an attempt to show how family structure influences family processes and socioeconomic variables, this section reviews the differences in these variables across family structures.

### ***Intact Families***

The majority of children in intact families have never experienced a marital disruption and live with both biological parents. This family structure has been theorized to have several benefits for children. First, children have easy access to both biological parents. One study based on mothers' reports found higher parental involvement, more enjoyable parent-child interactions, and the fewest disagreements between children and parents among intact families (Acock and Demo, 1994). Intact families, however, may not be free of parental conflict (Simons et al., 1996), and the physical presence of parents does not ensure emotional presence (LaRossa, 1988). In other words, more time together does not necessarily mean high-quality time together (Acock and Demo, 1994).

McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) argue that intact two-parent families create a system of checks and balances for parents to act in appropriate ways. Parents can put pressure on each other to spend time with the children, have a good relationship with their children, and monitor each other's discipline of the children. Thus, having two biological parents in the household, who care about their children, makes each parent more likely to be involved with their children.

Second, parents in intact families are likely to have higher levels of psychological well-being when compared to parents in other family structures (Acock and Demo, 1994; Gove, 1972). Married parents have also been shown to be less antisocial. For example, substance abuse, delinquent and deviant acts are less prevalent among parents within

intact families (Simons, Johnson, and Lorenz, 1996). And third, two-parent families generally have higher household incomes. The average family income for intact households is \$49,491, as compared to \$10,512 for never-married families and \$20,262 for divorced families (Acock and Demo, 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).

### *Divorced and Separated*

Children from divorced and separated families have obviously experienced or are experiencing a marital disruption. For the purpose of this research, these children live in a single-parent household with their biological mother, which is the most common custody arrangement. I have combined divorced and separated family structures in this section of the literature review for two reasons. First, research specifically on separated families is limited, and second, the family processes and socioeconomic characteristics within these structures are very similar. However, based on the crisis model of divorce, I imagine that individuals in separated families experience more difficulties with family processes and more socioeconomic problems than divorced families. Separated individuals are likely to be in the initial phase of a marital breakup. According to the crisis model of divorce, the effects of marital disruption are most influential during the divorcing years and the years immediately following divorce. The effects, however, decrease and eventually disappear over time (Amato and Booth, 1991).

Divorced families have several disadvantages and difficulties to overcome. First, conflict is more likely to occur between parents going through a divorce (Emery, 1982; Mechanic and Hansell, 1989). One study, based on parents' responses, reported that 50% of divorcing spouses engaged in frequent verbal fighting, an additional 30% reported occasional verbal fighting, and one in five reported physical abuse (Furstenberg, 1991). In another study, 51% of children whose parents had recently divorced reported that frequent verbal fighting occurred in their home. The differences in conflict between intact and divorced families, however, are small and conflict within divorced families typically

subsides over time. Thirty-six percent of children from intact families report frequent verbal fighting between their parents, and only 40% of children whose parents divorced over a year ago report frequent verbal fighting (Mechanic and Hansell, 1989).

Although some conflict subsides over time, conflict can be a continuing problem. Former partners may have old anger based on the reasons for the divorce and are likely to develop new anger from the divorce, especially over settlement issues (Wallerstein, 1989). For example, men think they pay too much support, while women find payments to be very inadequate (Wallerstein, 1980). Disagreements such as these can create lasting conflict between parents (Furstenberg, 1991).

Second, divorce can lower the quality of parent-child relationships, especially for the non-custodial parent. Parents adopt a different image of parenting after divorce, and some find it difficult to maintain their parental role (Furstenberg, 1984). In addition, adults who are absorbed in their own problems may be less affectionate and communicate poorly with their children (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1982; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Divorced parents sometimes have lower levels of parent-child interactions than parents in intact families (Acock and Demo, 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994), and are more likely to engage in inept parenting. Inept parenting consists of inconsistent and harsh punishment, less monitoring and more hostility toward children (Simons and Johnson, 1996). Poor parenting practices, however, are usually only temporary (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1982; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980), and many parents are able to maintain proper parenting practices after marital disruption.

In some cases, divorce may result in a closer relationship between custodial parents and children. Divorced mothers report having more private talks with their children (Acock and Demo, 1994; McLanahan, 1994). In addition, divorce may separate children from an abusive parent. Interactions with nonresidential parents may be advantageous only if these interactions are positive, supportive and nurturant (Barber &

Thomas, 1986; Rollins and Thomas, 1979). If they are strained, sporadic, or conflicted, they may hurt children's well-being (Cooper, Holman, and Braithnaile, 1983; Demo et al., 1987). Some researchers suggest that diminished parental involvement of the nonresidential parent has no affect on children's well-being (Clingempeel, & Segal, 1986; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985).

The non-residential parent-child relationship is more difficult to maintain than the custodial parent-child relationship. Two-thirds of non-residential fathers have no contact with their children over a one-year period, and the more time that elapses since the divorce, the less involved fathers become. Many aspects of the visiting relationship make it difficult for a quality parent-child relationship to be sustained after the physical separation of divorce. One important factor is fathers' emotional state and attitude. Many fathers feel unappreciated, rejected and isolated from their families (Furstenberg, 1991). In addition, they are apprehensive about their abilities as fathers (Hetherington, 1989), because mothers usually provide a mediating link between fathers and their children. When this link is severed by divorce, fathers find it difficult to relate to their children (Furstenberg, 1991).

As a result, for some fathers visiting can become emotionally difficult (Hetherington, 1989). Gradual disengagement is the frequent consequence of the visiting situation. Since fathers are outsiders, it is very easy for them to fade away (Furstenberg, 1991). Another important factor is how close geographically fathers live to their children. With divorce, however, residential moves are likely and on average, fathers live about 400 miles away from their children (Acock and Demo, 1994).

Non-residential fathers, however, can maintain close relations with their children if they were close to their children before the divorce and if they make the effort to maintain the relationship. Empirical evidence suggests that even parents who infrequently see their children can maintain close relations with their children. For example, only a moderate

correlation exists between children feeling close to their father and the amount of time fathers spent with their children (Furstenberg, Morgan and Allison, 1987). Marital disruption alone does not lead to less closeness between non-residential fathers and their children. Children's perceptions of their father's not making an effort to be a part of their life or providing for them financially perpetuates these feelings (Arditti, unpublished paper; Stevenson and Black, 1995). Thus, closeness can be maintained between nonresidential fathers and their children. In fact, 21% of children in one-parent families reported higher levels of paternal emotional support than children from intact families (Amato, 1987).

A third disadvantage faced by divorced families is that adults from these families typically have lower levels of psychological well-being (Acock and Demo, 1994; Gove, 1972). Divorced individuals experience more accidents, depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, and psychological and physical dysfunction (Heatherington, 1989; Weitzman, 1985). However, the overall difference in depressive symptoms is small and disappears when variables such as antisocial traits, economic pressure, work stress, education, employment, and age are controlled (Acock and Demo, 1994; Lorenz, Simons and Chao, 1996). Furthermore, the well-being of divorced mothers is generally higher than what it was during their marriage. In other words, mothers report that they are happier being divorced than they were when they were married (Acock and Demo, 1994). In addition, unhappily married persons have lower levels of well-being than divorced, widowed or single individuals (Gove, Hughes and Style, 1983; Williams, 1988). These findings show that being married does not guarantee high psychological well-being, and leaving an intact family structure can sometimes help the emotional well-being of the adults involved.

Finally, divorced households have lower levels of income (Acock and Demo, 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Low income among divorced families is a complex issue, because low income individuals are more likely to divorce (White, 1990). This has

lead some researchers to ask whether divorced mothers are poor to begin with or if low income for divorced families is a result of marital disruption (Simons et al., 1996). Other researchers believe that single-parent families are disadvantaged economically because the parents divorced or decided not to get married and gave up economies of scale and the possibility of a dual earning household (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). From either viewpoint, divorced families are likely to have lower household income than two-parent families.

### ***Never-Married Family***

A never-married family is created when mothers do not marry the biological father of their children. This family structure faces many of the same difficulties as divorced mothers in terms of lower levels of parental involvement, inconsistent discipline of children, lower levels of psychological well-being, and low income, but to a higher degree (Acock and Demo, 1994; Lempers, 1989; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). For example, they are the poorest and have the lowest levels of psychological well-being. In addition, continuously single mothers are often young, have little education (Acock and Demo, 1994), and their children may never have established relations with their biological father.

### ***Stepfamilies and Mother-Partner Families***

Mother-partner families have rarely been included in comparisons of family structures, but I hypothesize that the family processes and socioeconomic characteristics of these families are very similar to stepfamilies. Stepfamilies and mother-partner families are very complex family structures. Children in these families could have previously been in an intact family or a continuously single family before entering into the stepfamily. Thus, they would be exposed to all the possible problems and benefits of these family forms prior to forming their new stepfamily.

Stepfamilies and mother-partner families face unique difficulties, but they also

have some benefits over divorced and single families. First, remarriage affects the parent-child relationship in many ways and the effects depend on which parent is remarried: the custodial or the non-custodial parent. When the custodial parent remarries, children sometimes feel like an outsider in their own home (Hetherington, 1989). The more positive the marital relationship between the newlywed couple, the worse the parent-child relationship will be (Hetherington, 1989). Remarriage may make children feel rejected, because the newlywed couple wants time alone (Wallerstein, 1989). Children in stepfamilies spend less time with their biological parents and stepparents, and the time they do spend with their parents is less enjoyable than children from homes (Acock and Demo, 1994). In addition, the remarriage of a custodial parent may cause a residential move (Furstenberg, 1984; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). As a result, relations with the non-custodial parent can become strained because geographical proximity is important in maintaining the non-custodial parent-child relationship (Hetherington, 1989).

Remarriage of the non-custodial parent can cause these parents to become less involved in their children's life. Remarried non-custodial parents are likely to spend more time with their stepchildren, whom they live with, than with their biological children from a previous marriage. As a result, non-custodial parents may begin to emotionally care for their stepchildren more than their biological children (Furstenberg, 1984; Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988).

When stepfamilies are formed, a new relationship between a stepparent and a stepchild needs to be negotiated. The age of the child when the stepfamily is formed seems to be the most important factor in determining whether or not a stepparent will have a parent-like relationship with the stepchild. When children are under the age of five, a parent-like relationship is likely to form (Parkes and Hinde, 1982). For example, young children reported receiving the same level of discipline from their stepfathers as children from intact families did from their biological fathers (Amato, 1987). A second

factor is how frequently children see their nonresidential father. The less interaction with the nonresidential father, the more likely the stepparent will take on a parent-like role (Marsiglio, 1982).

Finally, the attitudes and expectations stepparents and stepchildren have about each other play an important role in determining what their relationship will be like. For example, some children may welcome the new parent while others may not (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). Additionally, some stepparents may want to play a parental role to their stepchildren while others may wish to keep their distance and let the biological mother do the parenting. How close the relationship between a stepparent and a stepchild becomes depends on how much effort both of these individuals put into the relationship (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994).

Despite these potential problems within stepfamilies, stepfamilies have three possible benefits. First, the level of psychological well-being of stepparents is higher than divorced parents and single mothers. Second, stepfamilies have higher household incomes than single parent families (Acock and Demo, 1994). And third, another adult in the household may mean more supervision and guidance for children. In some cases, stepfathers may fill the parental role of the absent biological father. The longer the stepfamily has been together, the more likely stepfathers are to take on a parental role in the family. For girls, family cohesion within stepfamilies increases with time (Amato, 1987).

The previous section has reviewed research findings which show the relationship between family structure and family processes and socioeconomic characteristics. The next step is to show how these family processes and socioeconomic characteristics influence children's psychological well-being. Many of the differences across family structures in family processes, such as parent-child relations and levels of parental conflict, and socioeconomic characteristics, such as the mother's psychological well-being,

influence children's psychological well-being.

### Family Process and Psychological Well-Being of Children

Two family processes that seem especially important for children's emotional development are the quality of parent-child relationships and the quality of the parent's relationship with each other. Studies of divorced families show that low family cohesion and high parental conflict harms children in these families more than marital disruption (Emery, 1982; Heatherington, Cox and Cox, 1981; Mechanic and Hansell, 1989). In fact, the parent-child relationship is the most important factor in a child's adjustment to divorce (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Furstenberg, 1991; Hetherington, 1989). The next section will discuss the link between parent-child relationships and children's psychological well-being and the possible differential impact of mother-child versus father-child relations on children's psychological well-being. Then the relationship between parental conflict and children's psychological well-being will be discussed in further detail.

#### ***The Parent-Child Relationship***

Children's psychological well-being is most likely developed through interaction with their parents. Interaction in general and role playing in particular are the basis of an individual's psychological well-being (Rosenberg, 1979). The most salient and central role for children is being a daughter or son to their parents. Salient role identities have the potential to make the greatest impact on psychological well-being (Thoits, 1991). Thus, children's interaction with their parents probably establish the foundation for their psychological well-being, which may have implications for the children's psychological well-being throughout life. Some empirical evidence supports this notion. Children whose parents show high amounts of affection, acceptance, and support report lower levels of anxiety and depression (Goodyer, 1990; Mechanic and Hansell, 1989).

Furthermore, children's perceptions of closeness to their parents has an impact on children's psychological well-being (Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan and Blair, 1994).

Research has also suggested that the mother-child relationship has more of an impact on child's well-being than the father-child relationship (Furstenberg, Morgan and Allison, 1987; Simons et al, 1996). Across all family structures, fathers have lower levels of involvement in parenting than mothers (Parke and Stern, 1993; Simons and Beaman, 1996). Simons and Beaman (1996) found that fathers focus on playful interactions with their children, such as joking and roughhousing. This suggests that the role of a "recreational pal" father thought to be a consequence of a nonresidential father-child relationship (Furstenberg, 1984), may actually reflect what the father-child relationship was like prior to marital disruption.

The prevalence of low paternal involvement may make the mother-child relationship more influential for children's psychological well-being than the father-child relationship. The greater impact of mother-child versus father-child relationships, however, is probably not inherent to these relationships. In families where fathers are emotionally bonded to their children, father's impact on their children's psychological well-being may be as important as the mother's influence.

### ***Parental Conflict***

Parental conflict has repeatedly been shown to influence the psychological well-being of children (Emery, 1982; Hetherington, 1989; Mechanic and Hansell, 1989). Conflict is harmful to children for two reasons. First, children have an intense need to see their parents get along with each other (Wallerstein and Blackeslee, 1989). And according to mother's reports, marital happiness is associated with higher levels of psychological well-being for children (Acock and Demo, 1994). Second, children are often drawn into parental conflicts (Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbush, 1991). Thus, parental conflict places both physical and emotional stress on children.

Several findings support the notion that parental conflict influences children's psychological well-being more than family structure. For example, family conflict has more direct effects on children's long-term psychological well-being than divorce (Mechanic and Hansell, 1989). In addition, when children are asked about the desirability of life events, they report parental conflict to be more unpleasant than parents' divorce. And finally, children from intact, conflict-ridden homes have lower levels of well-being than children from divorced homes with little conflict (Mechanic and Hansell, 1989).

The relationship between parental conflict and children's psychological well-being, however, is more complex. When divorce ends the conflict between parents, children's psychological well-being increases. However, parents' divorce may lower children's psychological well-being, when parental conflict was low prior to divorce (Amato, Loomis and Booth, 1995). When divorce disrupts what children see as a happy household, children's psychological well-being may decrease due to the marital disruption; however, it is unknown if children's well-being would be higher if parents from these families had chosen to stay together (Amato, Loomis and Booth, 1995).

#### Background Variables, Mother's Psychological Well-Being, and Children's Well-Being

The previous section shows the possible impact that family processes have on children's psychological well-being. This section will address the impact of socioeconomic and demographic variables, and mother's psychological well-being on children's psychological well-being.

#### ***Maternal Psychological Well-Being***

Mother's psychological well-being is an important influence on children's psychological well-being. High maternal well-being is thought to lead to higher psychological well-being for children, because maternal psychological well-being has an impact on parenting (Grossman, Eicher and Winickoff, 1980; Simons and Johnson,

1996). In addition, children can sense their mother's unhappiness and may become unhappy themselves. Several researchers have suggested that there is a reciprocal relationship between the psychological well-being of parents and their children (Demo et al., 1987; Greenberger and O'Neil 1990; Kidwell, Fisher, Durham, and Baranowski, 1983). In other words, parents have higher levels of psychological well-being if they think their children are doing well emotionally, and children, in turn, have higher levels of well-being if their parents' well-being is high. While data constraints will not allow for the testing of a reciprocal relationship, the direct influence of mother's psychological well-being on children's psychological well-being will be assessed.

### ***Income***

Low income plays a major role in explaining why children from single-parent families have lower levels of educational attainment and higher rates of teenage childbirth than children from intact families. When one study controlled for the impact of income, about fifty percent of the variation in teenage childbirth and high school dropout rates between children from two-parent families versus children from single-parent families was explained (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Whether income will have a direct effect on the psychological well-being of children is another question. Economic pressure, on the other hand, has a direct effect on the psychological well-being of mothers, and probably indirectly effects children's psychological well-being by lowering the psychological well-being of their mother (Conger and Chao, 1996).

### ***Other Socioeconomic Variables***

Two socioeconomic variables that have a positive relationship with the psychological well-being of children are maternal employment and mother's education (Acock and Demo, 1994). Maternal employment is beneficial up to a point. Excessive work hours and work stress can take away the positive aspects of maternal employment. Maternal work stress can be brought into the home environment and lower a mother's

psychological well-being (Lorenz, Simons and Chao, 1996; Menaghan, 1991).

### ***Demographic Variables***

Some factors that affect children's emotional well-being have nothing to do with family structure, such as the age, gender and race of children. Across all families structures, older children and boys, generally, have lower levels of psychological well-being (Acock and Demo, 1994). The gender and age of a child, however, does become important for how children deal with family disruption. Younger children tend to be less influenced by parental disruption than older children (Wojtkiewicz, 1993).

Race is also an important predictor of psychological well-being. Black adults score lower on measures of psychological well-being, such as happiness and life satisfaction (Cambell, 1981; Herzog et al., 1982; Thomas and Hughes, 1986; Veroff, Donovan and Kulka, 1981). The same findings may be relevant for children, especially considering that parents' psychological well-being impacts the child's psychological well-being.

### **Hypotheses**

Based on the past research discussed in the above literature review, the following hypotheses have been developed.

- 1) When family process and background variables, and mother's psychological well-being are not controlled, the level of children's psychological well-being will differ significantly across family structure.
  
- 2) Family processes and background variables, and mother's psychological well-being will vary across family structures. Mothers from intact homes will have the highest levels of psychological well-being, income and education. Children from intact homes

will have the closest relationships to their mother and father.

- 3) Family processes and background variables, and mother's psychological well-being will have a direct influence on the psychological well-being of children. Closer parent-child relations, higher marital happiness, and lower parental conflict will lead to higher levels of psychological well-being in children. The higher education and psychological well-being of the mother, the higher the psychological well-being of the children. Younger children, boys and white children will have higher levels of psychological well-being.
- 4) When family processes and background variables, and mother's psychological well-being are controlled, the effect of family structures on children's psychological well-being will disappear.
- 5) Family process variables will explain more of the variation in children's well-being than background variables, mother's psychological well-being and family structure.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Sample

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth consists of face-to-face in home interviews with a nationally-representative sample of over 12,600 men and women. The respondents were first interviewed in 1979, when they were between the ages of 14 and 22, and they have been interviewed every year since 1979. Starting in 1986, all of the children born to the women from the original survey were interviewed and have been re-interviewed every two years. The most recent survey of both the women and their children was conducted in 1992. Of the 4941 eligible<sup>1</sup> women, 4535 were interviewed in 1993. At that time, 3326 were mothers. This is a response rate of over 91%. The response rate for the children was also very high. In 1992 there were 2029 children over the age of ten born to the cohort of women in the original survey, and most sections of the questionnaire pertaining to children this age had a response rate of over 90%.

This data set has three advantages. First, data were collected directly from mothers and their children. The mothers' data are useful in understanding some aspects of the children's home environment, such as family structure and the level of parental conflict, and characteristics of mothers, such as psychological well-being. The children's data include measures of the quality of the parent-child relationship and the level of psychological well-being.

Second, the data are longitudinal. Information on changes in marital status was collected in every year of the survey. This enables the assignment of family structure for children to be very accurate. And third, the data set is large. A total of six family structures can be included in the analysis with at least 100 cases in each family structure.

The sample for the data set has three limitations. First, the cohort of women who

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<sup>1</sup> The total sample was reduced in 1990 when the oversample of poor and military persons were dropped due to financial reasons.

were first interviewed is not a nationally representative sample of mothers. In 1992, the women in the cohort were between the ages of 27 and 35. Approximately 70% of the children who will probably be born to this cohort of women were born before the 1992 survey (Center for Human Resource Research, 1995). As a result, the mothers in the sample are disproportionately young, of minority status and less educated, and the children are more likely to be first-born and born to young mothers. This is especially a problem for older children in the sample. Second, data were collected from all children born to the mothers, thus siblings are included in this analysis. And, third, children's father were not interviewed. However, both the mother and the children report on some behaviors and attitudes of the father.

### Variables and Measures

An ample number of questions asked in the NLSY will enable the hypotheses to be tested. The dependent variable is children's psychological well-being. The independent variables can be broken down into two groups. First, the demographic and socioeconomic variables are family structure, race, household income, age of child, gender of child, mother's education, age of mother at birth of child, maternal employment (hours works) and maternal psychological well-being. Second, the family process variables are emotional closeness to mother and father, level of parental conflict and quality of marital relations. The latter two process variables were only asked of two-parent households.

### ***Dependent Variable***

Children over the age of ten were given a self-administered questionnaire which included a nine-item scale of psychological well-being. The questions asked how often children felt: sad, tense, happy, bored, lonely, tired, excited, busy and pressured. The response choices were often, sometimes and never. Based on factor analysis, six-items from the scale were included in the index for children's psychological well-being

( $\alpha=.63$ ). The six-items are sad, tense, happy, bored, lonely, and pressured. The scale was constructed by adding the variables together, creating a range of values from one to eighteen with a high score indicating a high level of well-being. In an attempt to regain missing data, when four values in the six-item index had valid responses, they were averaged. Then, this average was substituted for the two missing values.

### ***Independent Variables***

Several socioeconomic variables were collected on mothers: total household income, total years of education, marital status and level of psychological well-being. Income was recorded in increments of \$10 and education was recorded as the total number of completed years of schooling. The household income variable had several missing values. In an attempt to save cases, the variable was standardized and missing values were assigned the mean value of zero. A dummy variable was created this variable where one indicates a missing value on the variable and zero indicates a valid case. The dummy variable is included in the bivariate correlation matrix in Table One.

The variables marital status, residence of a biological father and whether or not there was a live in partner were used to categorize children into one of six family structures. The six family structures are: intact families, divorced families, separated families, stepfamilies, never-married families and mother-partner families. If children were living with both biological parents, then they were categorized as living in an intact family ( $n=641$ ). Twenty of the children in this category did not have parents that were legally married. If the mother was married to someone other than the father of the child, then the child was categorized as living in a stepfamily ( $n=297$ ). If the mother reported a marital status of divorced, separated or never married and did not have a live in partner, then the children were, respectively, categorized as living-in a divorced family ( $n=212$ ), separated family ( $n=165$ ) or never-married family ( $n=269$ ). If the mother had a live-in partner, then children were categorized as living in a mother-partner family ( $n=108$ ). The

family structure variables are included in the regression analysis as a set of dummy variables, with the intact family structure being the omitted category.

The NLSY contains two separate scales that measure maternal psychological well-being. First, the Pearlin Mastery scale measures the amount of control mother's feel they have over their life. A series of statements such as "Sometimes I feel that I'm being pushed around in life" and "I feel hopeless in dealing with the problems in life" were listed and mothers had a response range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A total of seven statements were included in the questionnaire, which are listed in Appendix A. Factor analysis produced an index with five of these statements ( $\alpha=.786$ ). The index was created by adding the variables together. Higher scores on this index indicate higher levels of control.

The second scale for maternal psychological well-being has twenty-items which measure the frequency of mothers' feelings and behaviors. Some of the items in this scale include shaking the blues, being restless, and feelings of loneliness and fearfulness (all items are listed in Appendix A). Factor analysis produced an eleven-item index of mothers psychological well-being ( $\alpha=.875$ ). This index was created by adding the variables together. A high score on this index indicates a high level of maternal psychological well-being.

Two family processes are measured in this analysis: the quality of the parent-child relationship and the quality of the marital relationship. Measures on the quality of the marital relationship were only collected from married or cohabiting women. As a result, when including this variable in analysis, only three family structures will be compared: first-married, remarried and mother-partner.

The quality of parent-child relationships is based on children's reports which asked children how close they feel to each parent. All children, regardless of their family structure, were asked how close they felt to each parent. A total of four response

categories were available, which ranged from extremely close to not very close. An additional question was asked about the fathers, to determine if the children were referring to their biological father, stepfather or someone else. For the latter response children were asked to write in how their father-figure was related to them.

The quality of the marital relationship is broken down into two scales based on mother's responses. One scale measures the level of parental conflict, and the other scale measures marital happiness and communication. The first scale asked mothers how often they argued with their husband/partner about several issues, such as money, religion, and children (all items are listed in Appendix A). A total of ten items were included in the parental conflict index ( $\alpha=.786$ ). The index was created by adding the variables together, with higher scores indicating more parental conflict. The second index of marital quality included measures of the degree of marital happiness, how often the couple laughed together, how often the couple told each other about their day, and how often the couple calmly discussed issues ( $\alpha=.767$ ). The marital quality index was created by adding the variables together, with high scores indicating high marital quality.

### ***Control Variables***

Mothers also reported on some demographic variables of their children which are used as control variables in this analysis. These variables include age, gender and race. Age is coded in years. Gender is a dummy variable, with one being the value for girls and zero the value for boys. Race is also a dummy variable with one being the value for white and zero representing all minorities. Finally, because the mothers in the sample are disproportionately young, the mother's age at child's birth is included as a variable during analysis to see what effects mother's age might have on the analysis in question.

Table 1: Bivariate Correlations

All Family Structures	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
(1) CHILDPYSY	--																		
(2) CLOSEMOM	.268*	--																	
(3) MRCLOSE	.173*	.246*	--																
(4) CLOSEDAD	.191*	.284*	.129*	--															
(5) MOMPSY	.133*	.009	.095*	.057***	--														
(6) CONTROL	.111*	-.015	.097*	.012	.420*	--													
(7) AGE	-.099*	-.0148*	-.155*	-.227*	-.101*	-.106*	--												
(8) BIRTHAGE	.108*	.089*	.088*	.212*	.104*	.082**	-.583*	--											
(9) EDUC	.04	.009	.049	-.013	.083**	.218*	-.126*	.212*	--										
(10) HRJOB92	.035	-.043	.026	.021	.067	.163	.038	.039	.164*	--									
(11) INCOME92	.059***	-.021	.028	.063***	.088*	.121*	-.011	.066**	.048	.036	--								
(12) WHITEDUM	-.06***	-.009	-.008	-.183*	-.015	-.07	.134*	-.183*	.123*	.052***	-.079**	--							
(13) GIRLDUM	-.027	-.076**	-.008	-.103*	-.012	-.016	.007	-.024	-.011	-.023	.062***	-.015	--						
(14) STEP	-.074**	-.075**	-.06***	.009	-.005	-.001	.080**	-.081	.030	.111*	.069**	-.089*	.019	--					
(15) PARTNER	-.038	-.031	-.030	-.024	-.06***	-.004	-.005	-.026	-.003	-.017	-.066**	.054***	-.013	-.121*	--				
(16) SINGLE	-.019	.059***	.031	-.175*	-.006	-.033	.043	-.181*	.000	-.147*	-.081**	.391*	-.049	-.202*	-.112*	--			
(17) DIVORCED	.013	.007	.002	-.145*	-.050	-.01	.016	.011	.066**	.072**	-.044	-.043	.053***	-.175*	-.097*	-.162*	--		
(18) SEPARATED	-.06***	-.044	-.082**	-.132*	-.06***	-.06***	.046	-.05***	-.098*	-.014	-.071**	.132*	.020	-.152*	-.084*	-.141*	-.122*	--	
(19) INTACT	.116*	.053***	.088*	.315*	.105*	.070**	-.132*	.235*	-.007	-.009	.112*	.264*	-.019	-.367*	-.203*	-.340*	.295*	--	
(20) INCDUM	-.012	-.05***	-.027	-.071	-.033	-.093*	.056***	-.024	.015	.089*	-.002	.050***	-.001	.069***	-.087*	.024	-.028	.044	

N=1549

## Two-Parent Families (includes first-married, stepfamilies, and mother-partner)

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	19	20
QUALITY	.067***	.041	.062	.146*	.226*	.246*	-.145*	.115*	.055	-.018	.090**	-.141*	-.035	.016	-.006	-.058	.067***
CONFLICT	-.045	-.019	-.052	-.029	-.339*	-.285*	.051	-.059	.056	.029	-.028	.126*	.064***	.024	.056	.036	-.017

N=959

## Non-Intact Families (includes stepfamilies, mother-partner, never-married, divorced and separated)

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	20
VISIT	-.043	-.026	-.005	-.203*	.079***	.090***	.040	-.08***	.005	.035	-.056	.030	.004	.203*	-.019	-.07***	-.035	-.111**	.026
DISTANCE	-.059	.037	-.001	-.08***	.064	.084***	.067	-.056	.007	.071	-.031	-.07***	-.052	.168*	-.017	-.10**	-.026	-.044	-.011

N=748

Remaining correlations				
	QUALITY	CONFLICT	VISIT	DISTANCE
QUALITY	----			
CONFLICT	.352* (n=959)	----		
VISIT	.065 (n=298)	-.129*** (n=298)	----	
DISTANCE	.032 (n=298)	-.175** (n=298)	.591* (n=748)	----

*Comparison Variables: Mother's Reports Versus Children's Reports*

Two variables from the NLSY allow for a direct comparison of children's reports to mother's reports. Children were asked to report how close they felt to their mother. The four responses ranged from extremely close to not very close. Mothers were asked to report on several aspects of their children's life. One of those aspects was the quality of the mother-child relationship. The four responses ranged from excellent to poor. Children were more likely to report poor relations with their mother. Seventeen percent of children reported having relations that were not very close to their mother, but only 6% of mothers reported having poor relations with their children.

Some of the differences in reporting were extreme. Among the 66 children who reported not feeling very close to their mother, 21% of these mothers thought they had an excellent relationship with their child. Furthermore, among the 948 children who said they felt extremely close to their mother, only 584 (62%) of these mothers said they had an excellent relationship with their child. In addition, the bivariate correlation between the two variables is not as strong as one would expect it to be ( $r = 0.246, p < .001$ ), and children's reports of the mother-child relationship ( $r = 0.268$ ) is more strongly correlated with children's psychological well-being than mother's reports of the mother-child relationship ( $r = 0.173$ ).

Table Two compares children's reports and mothers' reports on the mother-child relationship across family structures. When looking at children's reports, children from mother-partner families do not have significantly different degree of closeness to their

mothers from intact families. The reports of mothers from mother-partner families, however, show a significant difference between their relationship with their children as compared to intact families. Thus, mothers from mother-partner families reported poorer mother-child relationships than their children. In this sample mothers from mother-partner families had the lowest level of psychological well-being which could explain this difference. The difference between children from separated homes as compared to intact homes becomes larger with mothers' reports, and these mothers also reported the lowest levels of psychological well-being.

Table Two: Children's Reports Versus Mother's Reports

	Child report-degree of closeness to Mom	mother report-quality of relationship with child
INTERCEPT	3.41	3.55
Stepfamily	-.196**	-.155*
Mother-Partner	-.096	-.149***
Never-married	.027	-.053
Divorced	-.071	-.067
Separated	-.157***	-.203*

The use of child reports seem very important when assessing child outcomes, because mothers perceptions may be biased and the perceptions the child have more of an impact on their developmental outcomes.

### Analysis

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlation coefficients for all of the variables were obtained. Table Three reports the means and standard deviations for each variable within family structures as well as for all respondents in the analysis. Several linear regressions and one logistic regression were run to test the hypotheses.

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for all Variables

	All Structures	Intact	Mother-Stepfather	Separated	Divorced	Never Married	Mother-Partner
children's psychological							
Mean	7.69	8.02	7.37	7.28	7.77	7.55	7.40
Std. Dev.	2.36	2.35	2.48	2.20	2.25	2.33	2.39
closeness to mother (child's report)							
Mean	3.35	3.41	3.22	3.26	3.34	3.44	3.32
Std. Dev.	.85	.78	.93	.88	.86	.85	.93
(mother's report)							
Mean	3.48	3.56	3.40	3.35	3.49	3.50	3.41
Std. Dev.	.62	.57	.62	.71	.57	.62	.70
closeness to father							
Mean	2.71	3.16	2.73	2.27	2.26	2.23	2.66
Std. Dev.	1.14	.95	1.03	1.18	1.18	1.19	1.13
parental conflict							
Mean	11.34	11.09	11.52	----	----	----	12.29
Std. Dev.	5.44	5.43	5.20	----	----	----	5.88
marital quality							
Mean	7.66	7.72	7.68	----	----	----	7.63
Std. Dev.	1.85	1.74	1.91	----	----	----	1.78
frequency of visitation							
Mean	5.72	----	6.38	5.13	5.54	5.51	5.67
Std. Dev.	2.29	----	1.98	2.3	2.08	2.54	2.37
mother's psych							
Mean	26.23	27.17	26.17	24.98	25.29	26.08	24.98
Std. Dev.	6.7	6.41	6.80	7.42	6.47	6.50	7.28
sense of control							
Mean	10.64	10.89	10.66	10.19	10.44	10.44	10.63
Std. Dev.	2.82	2.82	3.00	2.59	2.79	2.79	2.69
geographical distance							
Mean	3.25	----	3.62	3.13	3.15	3.05	3.19
Std. Dev.	1.37	----	1.34	1.27	1.29	1.45	1.43
child's age							
Mean	13.28	12.95	13.60	13.55	13.35	13.55	13.14
Std. Dev.	2.07	1.87	2.16	2.21	2.28	2.17	1.83
age of mom at birth							
Mean	19.31	19.99	18.96	18.87	19.40	18.37	19.10
Std. Dev.	2.35	2.3	2.22	2.52	2.31	2.17	2.05
mom's years of education							
Mean	11.36	11.34	11.52	10.70	11.75	11.33	11.30
Std. Dev.	2.24	2.58	1.86	2.49	1.85	2.02	1.65
hours worked							
Mean	26.16	26.17	30.33	25.70	29.87	19.63	24.39
Std. Dev.	18.64	18.57	18.06	20.76	15.55	18.53	18.48
household income							
Mean	39,127	54,031	60,166	12,806	25,985	17,155	14,125
Std. Dev.	104,062	123,114	137,412	9,233	86,512	56,680	10,364
n=	1692	641	297	165	212	269	108

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Descriptive Statistics

Table One reports the bivariate correlations for all variables. The bivariate correlations are split into four different tables. Information on some of the data were only collected for certain family types. Quality of marital relations and parental conflict was only collected for two-parent families, which include intact families, stepfamilies and mother-partner families. Frequency of father visitation and the geographical distance of a non-residential biological father from his children was only collected for non-intact families (stepfamilies, mother-partner families, never-married families, divorced families and separated families). The final correlation table presents the bivariate correlations among these four variables which were left out of the first table.

Table Three shows the means and standard deviations for all of the variables both within family structures and for all family structures combined. Most children in the study lived with both of their biological parents. Forty percent of the children were living in an intact family (n=641), 18% in a stepfamily (n=297), 10% in a separated family (n=165), 13% in a divorced family (n=212), 16% in a never-married family (n=269) and 6% in a mother-partner family (n=108). The ages of children in the sample ranged from 9 to 20 years old, but close to 90% of the sample were between the ages of 11 and 16. The sample of children over represents minorities. Fifty-two percent of the children are white, 41% are black, and the remaining 6% belong to an unknown racial minority. The sample was split evenly on gender.

### Family Structure and Children's Psychological Well-Being

Table Four displays the relationship between family structure and children's psychological well-being without controlling for family processes or the socioeconomic

variables. The intercept represents the mean value of children’s psychological well-being for children within intact families. The b coefficients represent the numerical difference between the mean for children in intact families as compared to each family structure. Standardized beta coefficients are presented for the purpose of comparison to later tables.

Table 4: Family Structure and Children’s Psychological Well-Being

	Children’s Psychological Well-Being		
	b	SE	beta
Intercept	8.017	(.095)	
Stepfamilies	-.646*	(.168)	-.105
Mother-partner	-.614***	(.251)	-.063
Never-married	-.467**	(.173)	-.073
Divorced	-.245	(.191)	-.034
Separated	-.734*	(.211)	-.092
R <sup>2</sup>	.015		
Valid Cases	1626		

\* p<.001

\*\* p<.01

\*\*\* p<.05

As expected, without controlling for family processes or socioeconomic variables, the mean value of children’s psychological well-being differs significantly across family structures. Children from first-married families had the highest levels of psychological well-being with a mean score of 8.02, followed by means of 7.77 for divorce families, 7.55 for never-married families, 7.40 for mother-partner families, 7.37 for stepfamilies, and 7.28 for separated families. All of these scores were significantly lower than the score from intact families, except for children from divorced families.

Although children from divorced families had lower levels of psychological well-being, the difference from intact families was not statistically significant. This contradicts past research and may result from the use of children’s reports. As mentioned earlier, previous research were likely to have used mothers reports of their children’s psychological well-being and may be biased. Another explanation may be the fact that children from divorced and separated families are not grouped together in this analysis.

Social researchers often combine these two groups into one category. However, grouping these groups together for this analysis would have produced very different results because children from separated families had the lowest levels of psychological well-being.

Because children in separated families had the lowest levels of psychological well-being, marital disruption seems to have an effect on children's psychological well-being; however, the effect appears to be temporary because children in divorced families did not have significantly lower levels of psychological well-being than children from intact homes. According to the crisis model, the year preceding divorce and the years immediately following divorce are the most difficult years for these families. Children from separated families are likely to be in the middle of the divorce process, which probably accounts for their having the lowest scores of psychological well-being. The majority of children from the divorced home, however, had probably been in that family structure for quite some time. After an adjustment period for these children the influence of marital disruption seemed to disappear, because children from divorced homes did not differ from children in intact homes on psychological well-being.

#### Family Structure and Background Variables

Table Five describes the mean differences across family structure on socioeconomic and demographic variables for non-intact families as compared to intact families. The intercept represents the mean value for each background variable for children within intact families. The b coefficients represent the numerical difference between the mean for intact families as compared to each family structure. Two exceptions are the geographical distance of the non-residential father and the dummy variable for race where one equals the value for whites. For geographical distance, the intercept equals the mean value for children in stepfamilies, and the b coefficient

represents the numerical difference between the mean value for stepfamilies as compared to the other non-intact family structures. Odds ratios are presented, for the race dummy variable, to describe the compositional racial differences across family structures.

All mean values of the socioeconomic and demographic variables are significantly different from values within intact families for one or more of the non-intact family structures. Intact families had the youngest children and the oldest mothers at the time of the child's birth. Divorced and separated mothers had significantly different levels of education from intact mothers, with the divorced having the highest levels of education and separated mothers having the lowest. Mothers from separated and stepfamilies worked significantly more hours per week than mothers from intact families. All family structures, except stepfamilies, had significantly lower household incomes than intact families.

Table 5: Family Structure, Socioeconomic and Demographic Variables

	Age of Child	Mom age at Birth	Mom's years of Education	Hours per week	Household Income	Race White=1	Mom's Psych	Sense of Control	Geographic Distance from father ♦
	b	b	b	b	b	odds	b	b	b
Intercept	12.95	19.99	11.34	35.09	54031	---	27.14	10.89	3.68
Stepfamily	.645*	-1.03*	.174	2.13***	6135	.728***	-1.00***	-.231	---
Mother-partner	.184	-.892*	-.048	.988	-39905*	.415*	-2.19**	-.264	-.427***
Never-married	.592*	-1.62*	-.018	-.584	-36876*	.044*	-1.10***	-.452***	-.567*
Divorced	.394***	-.598*	.401***	.485	-28047**	.618**	-1.89*	-.453***	-.467*
Separated	.591*	-1.13*	-.641*	3.81**	-41225*	.194*	-2.19*	-.706**	-.489**
n=	1692	1692	1683	1233	1427	1684	1679	1684	822

\* p<.001      \*\* p<.01      \*\*\* p<.05

♦ Because biological fathers live in first-married households this group was omitted from the analysis on distance. The intercept is the mean value for children from stepfamilies.

As expected, intact mothers had the highest levels of maternal psychological well-being and feelings of control. All mothers in the other family structures were significantly lower in psychological well-being as compared to mothers in first-married families. Mother's sense of control, however, was only significantly different for mothers in

single-parent families. Finally, children in stepfamilies live closest to their non-residential biological fathers. Children from all other non-intact family structures reported that their non-residential fathers lived a farther distance away. Non-residential fathers of children in never-married families lived the farthest away from their biological children.

### Family Structure and Family Process

Most children have close relationships with their mothers. Fifty-six percent reported having extremely close relations with their mother, and another 27% reported having quite close relations with their mother. Only 17% of children reported having a somewhat or not very close relationship with their mother. The father-child relationship, however, tells quite a different story. Only 33% of children reported having extremely close relations with their father, and 21% of children said they were not very close to their fathers. In addition, 25% of the children were not even referring to their biological fathers when reporting about closeness to their father. About 20% referred to their stepfathers, and the other 6% referenced some other father-figure.

Table Six shows the relationship between family structure and family processes. Again, the intercept refers to the mean score for children within intact families for each family process. The b coefficients represent the numerical difference between the mean for intact families as compared to each family structure. This is not the case, however, for the variable measuring the frequency of visitation by non-residential fathers. The intercept represents the mean score for children in stepfamilies, and the b coefficients are compared to that family structure.

Table 6: Family Structure and Family Process

	closeness to Mom		closeness to Dad		Parental conflict		Marital quality		Frequency of visitation with father	
	all structures $\nearrow$		all structures $\nearrow$		two-parent $\nearrow$		two-parent $\nearrow$		non-intact $\blacklozenge$	
	b	(SE)	b	(SE)	b	(SE)	b	(SE)	b	(SE)
Intercept	3.41	(.034)	3.16	(.042)	11.10	(.214)	7.65	(.073)	6.38	---
Stepfamilies	-.196**	(.060)	-.421*	(.076)	.424	(.385)	.026	(.131)	---	(.142)
Mother-partner	-.096	(.089)	-.492*	(.113)	1.19***	(.567)	-.028	(.193)	-.710***	(.286)
Never-married	.027	(.062)	-.926*	(.078)	---	---	---	---	-.871*	(.203)
Divorced	-.071	(.068)	-.894*	(.086)	---	---	---	---	-.840*	(.220)
Separated	-.157***	(.074)	-.890*	(.094)	---	---	---	---	-1.255*	(.240)
R <sub>2</sub> =	.009		.123		.005		.000		.037	
n=	1672		1658		1040		1044		893	

\* p<.001      \*\* p<.01      \*\*\* p<.05

$\nearrow$  The comparison group is intact families.

$\blacklozenge$  The comparison group is step families. The intercept is the mean score for children in stepfamilies.

Across family structures, only children from stepfamilies and separated families reported a significantly lower degree of closeness to their mother as compared to children from intact families. Interestingly, children from never-married families reported having the closest relations to their mother, although this was not significantly different from children within intact families. Children from intact families, however, did report the highest degree of closeness to their fathers, and their mean score was significantly higher than all other family structure.

When looking at closeness to fathers, children from single-parent families had a larger mean difference from intact families than children from non-intact two-parent families. In other words, children living in a single-parent family had the lowest degree of closeness to their fathers. Stepfathers and other father-figures probably influence the increased levels of closeness within non-intact two-parent families. Children in non-intact two-parent families have two potential father-figures to develop close ties with: their non-residential biological and their residential stepfathers or mother’s partner. In two-

parent non-intact families the stepfather or cohabiting father may be taking on a father-figure role, thus accounting for a higher degree of closeness to fathers in these families than children in single-parent families. However, not all stepfathers or cohabiting partners are taking on these roles because children from these families have significantly lower degrees of closeness to their father-figure than children from intact families.

Marital quality and conflict across family structures could only be analyzed for children living in intact families, stepfamilies, and mother-partner families. Only conflict within mother-partner families was significantly greater than conflict within intact families. Marital quality was not significantly different across these three family structures.

The analysis for the frequency of visiting by non-residential fathers only included children from non-intact families. Children living in stepfamilies with their mother were most frequently visited by their non-residential biological father. The mean difference for frequency of visitation children within stepfamilies was significantly higher than all other non-intact family structures. This seems logical because these children lived the closest to their non-residential fathers, as reported in Table Four.

### Background Variables and Family Process

Table Seven displays the relationship between the socioeconomic variables and family processes. Standardized beta coefficients are reported. Only two process variables (closeness to mother and father) were collected for every family structure. Only two-parent families (intact, step and partner) have information on marital quality and parental conflict, and non-intact families (step, partner, never married, divorced, and separated) have data on the frequency of visitation by the non-residential father.

Table 7: Socioeconomic and Demographic Variables and Family Process

	closeness to Mom	closeness to Dad	Marital quality	Parental conflict	Frequency of visitation with father
	all structures	all structures	two-parent	two-parent	non-intact
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Age of child	-.160*	-.171*	-.122**	.019	.041
Age of mother at childbirth	-.009	.086**	.002	-.036	-.062
Years of education	-.008	-.038	.018	.062	-.002
Hours worked per week	-.059***	-.018	-.020	.025	.028
Household income	-.020	.049***	.083**	-.038	-.014
Race (white=1)	.008	-.137*	.161*	-.127*	.074
Gender (girl=1)	-.069**	-.106*	-.026	.057	.036
Mother's psychological well-being	.012	.037	---	---	.013.
Sense of control	-.033	-.027	---	---	.039
R <sub>2</sub> =	.033	.101	.054	.028	---
n=	1640	1656	1037	1033	---
Geographical distance of non-residential father♦	.047	-.071***	.022	-.165**	.588*
R <sub>2</sub> =	.042	.063	.075	.101	.356
n=	794	789	299	297	803

\* p<.001      \*\* p<.01      \*\*\* p<.05

♦ Because biological fathers live in first-married families the variable distance is not applicable to this family structure. An additional regression was run which included distance and the other socioeconomic variables.

Several background variables had a significant effect on family processes. The degree of closeness to mothers was higher among younger children, children whose mothers worked less hours per week and for girls. Surprisingly, the psychological well-being of mothers and their sense of control over life was not significantly associated with the mother-child relationship. This is contrary to past research, and may be due to the fact that past research has typically relied on mother's reports for the quality of the parent-child relationship. This research used reports from mothers for maternal psychological well-being, but children's reports were used to measure the quality of the mother-child relationship. Using mother's reports may be biased because, mother's who

have lower levels of psychological well-being are more likely to view their life and the people around them in a pessimistic manner, and mothers from divorced, step, single, separated and partner families all had lower levels of psychological well-being (see table 4).

The degree of closeness to father was significantly influenced by six socioeconomic and demographic variables: age and gender of the child, mother's age at birth of the child, household income, race and the geographical distance of non-residential fathers. The most influential of these variables was the age of the child. Older children, girls, and minorities reported having less close relations with their father. Income was positively associated with closeness to fathers, and geographical distance was negatively associated.

The quality of the marital relationship was significantly influenced by the age and race of the children, household income and mother's psychological well-being. Couples had better relations when their children were young, household income was high, and mothers had higher levels of psychological well-being. White couples reported higher quality relations and lower levels of parental conflict. Parental conflict was also associated with the geographical distance of the non-residential father. The more years of education completed by the mother, the less verbal conflict mothers reported between herself and her partner. Finally, the frequency of visitation by the non-residential father was only significantly associated with the geographical distance of non-residential fathers. The closer the non-residential father lived to his biological children, the more likely he was to visit them.

### Family Process and Children's Psychological Well-Being

Table Eight displays the relationship between family processes and children's psychological well-being. Standardized beta coefficients are reported.

Table 8: Family Process and Children’s Psychological Well-Beings

	Children’s Psychological Well-Being		
	all structures	two-parent	non-intact
	Beta	Beta	Beta
Closeness to Mom	.232*	.163*	.250*
Closeness to Dad	.123*	.209*	.052
Marital quality	---	.018	---
Parental conflict	---	-.032	---
Frequency of visitation with father	---	---	-.024
R <sup>2</sup>	.085	.103	.072
Valid cases	1601	986	845

\* p<.001      \*\* p<.01      \*\*\* p<.05

Among all of the process variables, only mother-child and father-child relations are significantly related to children’s psychological well-being. When all family structures are included in the analysis, the mother-child relationship has a stronger influence on children’s psychological well-being than the father-child relationship. However, when only two-parent families are included in the regression equation, the father-child relationship is more influential than the mother-child relationship on children’s psychological well-being. Additionally, when only non-intact families are included in the analysis the father-child relationship does not have a significant impact on children’s psychological well-being. Marital quality, parental conflict, and the frequency of visits from non-residential father did not have any significant effects on the psychological well-being of children.

### Background Variables and Children’s Psychological Well-Being

Table Nine displays the relationship between background variables and children’s psychological well-being. The only variable which does not apply to all family structures is the geographical distance of the non-residential biological father. This variable only was collected for non-intact families (step, partner, never married, divorced and separated).

Table 9: Socioeconomic Variables and Children's Psychological Well-Being

	Children's Psychological Well-Being	
	all Structures	non-intact
	Beta	Beta
Age of child	-.043	-.054
Age of mother at birth of child	.059	.006
Years of education	.004	-.022
Hours worked per week	.015	.074***
Household income	.042	.046
Race (white=1)	.034	.063
Gender (girl=1)	-.030	-.067
Mother's psychological well-being	.095*	.108**
Sense of Control	.045	.021
Geographical distance from father	---	-.072***
R <sup>2</sup>	.034	.043
Valid cases	1596	773

\* p<.001      \*\* p<.01      \*\*\* p<.05

In the first model, children's psychological well-being was only significantly affected by one background variable: mother's psychological well-being. As maternal psychological well-being increased, so did children's psychological well-being. Surprisingly, age, gender and race of the child did not have a significant impact on their psychological well-being. As expected, income did not have a direct impact on children's psychological well-being.

For the second model, the geographical distance of the non-residential father had a significant positive affect on children's psychological well-being, as did mother's psychological well-being. Interestingly, the number of hours worked by mothers became a significant influence on children's psychological well-being for the second model. The more hours worked by mothers, the higher children's psychological well-being. This is probably due to the different composition of respondents within each model. The first model includes all family structures, while the second model excludes children from intact

families. The larger percentage of single parent-families within the second model may cause the significant relationship between hours worked and children's psychological well-being. When only one parent lives in the household, the number of hours worked by that parent may have an influence on children's psychological well-being.

#### Family Structure, Family Processes, Background Variables and Children's Well-Being

Table Ten displays the relationship between family structure and children's psychological well-being, while controlling for family processes and socioeconomic and demographic variables. In order to simplify the analysis, marital quality, parental conflict and visitation were left out of these equations because these variables did not have a direct effect on children's psychological well-being.

The first model shows the relationship between family structure and children's psychological well-being when controlling only for family process variables. The second model shows the relationship between family structure and children's psychological well-being when controlling for background variables. The third model also controls for background variables, but geographical distance has been included. Only non-intact families are included in the analysis for model three, and stepfamilies are the comparison group. The fourth model includes both family process and background variables. To simplify this final analysis, the geographical distance of the non-residential father was omitted, because it was not statistically significant in the previous model.

Recall, from Table Three, that all family structures, excepted divorced, had significantly lower scores of children's psychological well-being than children from intact families. Table Ten shows what happens to this relationship when family processes and background variables are controlled. In model one, the degree of closeness to mother and father controlled for the variation in children's psychological well-being of mother-partner families, never-married families and separated families as compared to children from intact

families. What were once significant relationships disappeared. The difference in children's psychological well-being, however, remained significant between children from intact families and children from stepfamilies. In model two, background variables, mainly mother's psychological well-being, made the variation of psychological well-being for children in mother-partner families and never-married families as compared to intact disappear. Significant relationships remained when children from stepfamilies and separated families are compared to children from intact families.

Table 10 : Family Structure, Family Process and Child Psychological Well-Being

	Children's Psychological Well-Being			
	all structures	all structures	non-intact	all structures
	model 1	model 2	model 3	model 4
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Intact families	---	---	N/A	---
Stepfamilies	-.072**	-.090**	---	-.067***
Mother-partner	-.040	-.041	.002	-.020
Never-married	-.052	-.021	.061	-.006
Divorced	-.002	-.010	.090***	.015
Separated	-.048	-.057***	.022	-.020
Degree of closeness to Mom	.231*	---	---	.230*
Degree of closeness to Dad	.107*	---	---	.100*
Age of child	---	-.042	-.053	.011
Age of mother at birth of child	---	.047	.012	.043
Mom's years of Education	---	.002	-.037	.005
Hours worked per week	---	.023	.083***	.026
Household income	---	.042	.055	.043
Race (white=1)	---	.020	.023	.025
Gender (girl=1)	---	-.029	-.066	.000
Mother's psychological well-being	---	.090*	.104**	.088*
Sense of control	---	.044	.028	.055***
Geographical distance from father	---	---	-.061	---
R <sup>2</sup>	.092	.042	.046	.113
Valid cases	1601	1596	773	1571

\* p<.001

\*\* p<.01

\*\*\* p<.05

The difference between children from separated families and intact families is only significant when controlling for the background variables, and it disappears when the indicators of family process variables are controlled. The process of marital disruption is a time of upheaval and uncertainty for children. The parent-child relationship has been shown to be most influential in easing children through this transition. This is probably why the quality of the parent-child relationship mediates the variation between children from separated families as compared to children from intact families, and background variables do not.

In model three, the family structures are compared to stepfamilies. Non-intact families are not included in the analysis because children in these families have residential fathers. Children from divorced families have significantly higher levels of psychological well-being than children from stepfamilies. Not only are children from divorced homes undifferentiated from children in intact families for psychological well-being, they seem to be doing better psychologically than children from stepfamilies.

Model four includes all predictors, children's psychological well-being within stepfamilies is still significantly lower than children from intact families. In all of the models, children from step-families remained statistically different. Stepfamilies are the most complex family form, and the measures of family processes that might most influence children's psychological well-being in these families may not have been included in this analysis. As mentioned earlier, children in the NLSY had a choice of reporting on their biological father, stepfather or some other father figure when answering about the degree of closeness to their father. Thus, information was not collected on both of these father-figure relationships. Both of these relationships, however, probably have their own impact on the psychological well-being of children.

If we assume, for example, that children reported the father-figure with whom they had the best relations, then this report could potentially mask a troubled relationship

with the other father-figure. For example, children may have good relations with their nonresidential biological father, but poor relations with the stepfather with whom they live. The data from the NLSY could not tap this situation. Obviously, having poor relations with a residential stepfather must impact negatively on children's psychological well-being. Children's relationships with their stepsiblings may also impact their psychological well-being. These processes within stepfamilies may mediate the effects of this family structure on the psychological well-being of children.

Overall, the differences in children's psychological well-being were small across family structures. These small differences support other researchers findings that most children grow up fine in all family structures (Acock and Demo, 1994; Simons et al., 1996). Furthermore, family processes mediated the effects of family structure on children's psychological well-being. In addition, the degree of closeness to mother and father, and mother's psychological well-being appeared to be the most influential predictors of children's psychological well-being.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Two theoretical perspectives have dominated the study of family structure and children's development. The family composition perspective emphasizes family structure, and the family process perspective emphasizes family processes. Theorists who take the family composition perspective argue that two-parent intact families are the best family structure for children, and are necessary to raise children with high levels of well-being (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994.) Researchers who take the family process perspective argue that family processes influence children's well-being, and these family processes mediate the effects of family structure on children's well-being (Acock and Demo, 1994; Demo and Acock, 1988). The purpose of this research was to test a theoretical model drawn from the family process perspective.

Several of the hypotheses developed from this model were supported. As expected, the level of children's psychological well-being differed significantly across family structure. Children from stepfamilies, never-married families, mother-partner families and separated families had lower levels of psychological well-being than children from intact families. In addition, family processes and background variables, and mother's psychological well-being did vary across family structures. For example, mothers from intact homes had the highest levels of psychological well-being, but, contrary to my hypothesis, mothers in stepfamilies reported the highest household income and divorced mothers reported the highest levels of education.

Contradictory to my hypothesis, children from intact homes did not report feeling the closest to their mother. Children from never-married families reported having the closest relations to their mothers, although the difference between this group of children and children from intact homes was not significant. Thus children from intact homes and never-married families reported the same level of closeness to their mothers. Children in

stepfamilies and separated families, however, reported significantly lower degrees of closeness to their mother.

As expected, children from intact families reported the highest degree of closeness to their fathers, and the scores were significantly higher than all other family structures. Children from never-married families reported having the worst relations with their fathers.

Many of the family processes and background variables had a direct influence on the psychological well-being of children. Degrees of closeness to parents was correlated positively with children's psychological well-being. Mother's psychological well-being had a direct positive influence on children's psychological well-being. Contrary to my hypothesis, however, higher levels of marital happiness and lower levels of parental conflict did not lead to higher levels of psychological well-being in children. In addition, mother's education, and children's age and gender were not significantly related to children's psychological well-being.

As hypothesized, when these family processes and background variables across family structures were controlled, the direct effects of family structure on children's psychological well-being disappeared, except for stepfamilies. Stepfamilies are a very complex family form, and unique family processes which may occur within stepfamilies may not have been measured in this research. Past Research has shown that stepfamilies can be problematic for children. Children in stepfamilies are more likely to leave home at an earlier age and kin relationships are less socially integrated (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). It is possible that if all family processes within stepfamilies had been controlled, the differences in children's psychological well-being for children in stepfamilies as compared to children in intact families might have disappeared. For the most part, however, the differences in psychological well-being were small. In sum, the theoretical model did a good job of explaining the indirect influence of family structure on children's

psychological well-being. Overall, the family process perspective was supported.

Several other findings from this research provide more support for the family process perspective. For example, family process variables explained more variation in children's psychological well-being than family structure, background variables or mother's psychological well-being. The total variation in children's psychological well-being explained by family structure alone was 1.5% (Table 3), whereas family processes alone accounted for 8.5% (Table 7) of the variation. Background variables alone accounted for roughly 4% (Table 8) of the variation. The full model in Table Ten, including family structure, family process and background variables, explained 11.3% of variation in children's psychological well-being. The overall percentage of variation explained is low, because several things that impact children's psychological well-being, such as peer relations and academic performance, were not measured because this project was family influences.

Furthermore, children in single-parent divorced families did not differ significantly from children in intact families on level of psychological well-being, even without controlling for family process and background variables, and mother's psychological well-being. Thus, whether or not intact families are the best family structure for children's well-being is debatable. Family processes appear to be more influential on children's psychological well-being than family structure. When parents develop healthy family processes in their families, the family structure a child lives in seems unimportant for psychological well-being. The parent-child relationship seems to be the most important family process in developing children's well-being. However, when parents do not live with their parents this relationship may become less important.

Visitation by nonresidential biological father did not have an impact of children's psychological well-being. This finding leads many to believe that the father role is less important for children's development (Furstenberg, 1984; Furstenberg, Morgan and

Allison, 1987; Simons et al, 1996). Within intact families, however, the father-child relationship had a larger impact on children's psychological well-being than the mother-child relationship. Obviously fathers can make a difference, and they probably need more support, education and counseling to be a part of their children's life after marital disruption.

Several findings from this project are contradictory to past research and may be the result of limitations in the data. The sample of mothers in the data set is not a nationally representative sample of mothers. The mothers are disproportionately young, of minority status and less educated. This creates several limitations in the data set. First, the variation in maternal education across family structures was very small; therefore, mothers in divorced and never-married families, who typically have lower levels of education than mothers in other family structures, reported the same levels of education. Overall, the average years of education in the sample was low (less than 12 years of schooling). Since maternal education positively influences children's psychological well-being (Acock and Demo, 1994), the estimates of children's well-being in first-married families may be underestimated. Second, 47% of the sample of children are minority. Nontraditional households, such as divorced and never-married families, for children of minority status may be normative, because these family structures are more prevalent among minorities. Thus, children's perception of their family structure may be positive even when society at large has negative views of them.

Third, the children are more likely to be first-born. Research on birth order has found that first born children differ from subsequent children in a number of ways. For example, first born children are more likely to conform to norms, accept authority, be assertive and be ambitious (Sulloway, 1996). Thus, children who are more resilient and have better mental health are probably over represented in this sample. This may have resulted in some of the variability in children's psychological well-being to be attenuated.

Finally, data were collected from all children born to the mothers, thus siblings are included in this analysis. As a result, the sample is likely to have less variation. Lower standard errors within the sample makes statistically significant relationships easier to reach. The limitations of this project should be considered when interpreting findings from this research that contradict findings from past research.

Contradictory to past research, marital quality and parental conflict did not have a direct effect on children's psychological well-being. Marital quality and parental conflict were only collected for two-parent families and they pertained only to mothers' current relationship. Information on levels of parental conflict with former spouses was not collected. This type of parental conflict would probably affect children's psychological well-being more than their mother's present relationship, because it involves the children's biological parents with whom they identify and are probably more emotionally invested (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Thus, a very important family process (parental conflict) was inadequately measured in this research, but support for the family process perspective was still found.

In light of this research, social policy should not be directed toward preserving the traditional nuclear family under the myth that the nuclear family is the best family structure for children's well-being. Social policy should help families make transitions from one structure to the next, with a concentration on helping parents develop and maintain good relations with their children. Education and counseling should be provided to all parents about family processes that are most important for their children's development. The family processes that are most important for a child probably depends on what family structure the child lives in. Future research should try to pinpoint the differential needs of children within each family structure, by determining the unique socioeconomic advantages or disadvantages, individual characteristics, and family processes within each family structure.

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## APPENDIX A

The scale for mother's psychological well-being

Responses -

- 1) Rarely/none of the time/one day a week
- 2) Some/a little of the time/1-2 days a week
- 3) Occasionally /moderate amount of the time/3-4 days a week
- 4) Most/all of the time/5-7 days a week

During the past week. . .\*

- 1) I was bothered by things that usually do not bother me
- 2) I felt like I could not shake off the blues even with help from my friends and family
- 3) I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing
- 4) I felt depressed
- 5) I thought my life had been a failure
- 6) I felt fearful
- 7) My sleep was restless
- 8) I felt lonely
- 9) I had crying spells
- 10) I felt sad
- 11) I could not get going

I felt that people dislike me

People were unfriendly

I enjoyed life

I was happy

I talked less than usual

I felt that everything I did was an effort

I felt hopeful about the future

I felt that I was just as good as other people

I didn't feel like eating: my appetite was poor

\* the first 11 statements were included in the scale

The scale for mother's sense of control over life

Responses

- 1) strongly disagree
- 2) disagree
- 3) agree
- 4) strongly agree

- 1) There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have
  - 2) Sometimes I feel that I'm being pushed around in life
  - 3) I have little control over the things that happen to me
  - 4) I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life
  - 5) There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life
- I can do just about anything I really set my mind to  
What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me

\* the first 5 statements were included in the scale

The scale for parental conflict

Responses

- 1) often
- 2) sometimes
- 3) hardly ever
- 4) never

How often do you and your husband/partner have arguments about. . .

Chores and responsibilities

Your children

Money

Showing affection to each other

Religion

Leisure or free time

Drinking

Other women

His relatives

Your relatives

\* all items were included in the scale

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