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The Success Sequence:

How are education, work, and marriage linked with Millennials' financial well-being?

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THE MILLENNIAL SUCCESS SEQUENCE

Marriage, Kids, and the “Success Sequence” among Young Adults

Wendy Wang and W. Bradford Wilcox

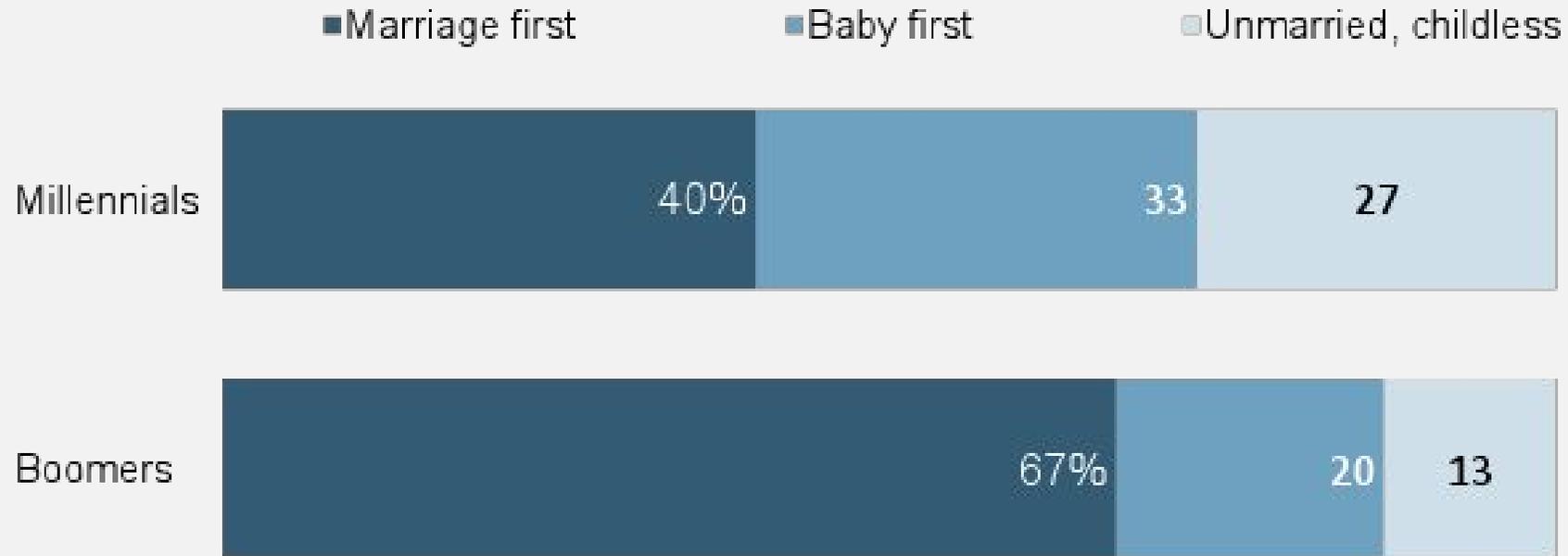


Young adults on the road to adulthood



- Millennials are taking divergent paths to adulthood.
- Particular paths linked to better economic status?
 - How relevant is Haskins & Sawhill’s “Success Sequence” (2009) for Millennials?
 - How relevant is marriage for Millennials?
 - How does marriage matter for communities & states?

First comes marriage or the baby carriage? Millennials vs. Baby Boomers at ages 28 to 34



Notes: Millennials refer to those who were born in 1980 to 1984. Boomers refer to those who were born in 1957 to 1963, the younger Baby Boomers. "Marriage first" includes those who had children after marriage, regardless of their current marital status or who are currently married but do not have children. "Baby first" refers to those who had children before marriage or without marriage, regardless of their current marital status.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97 and NLSY79)

Does the “success sequence” still work?

- 1) Getting at least a HS degree by mid-20s
- 2) Working full-time in mid-20s (or pursuing college/graduate school education or married, home with children)
- 3) Marrying before having any children

Almost no Millennials who follow the “success sequence” are in poverty

% of adults ages 28 to 34 in poverty after completing each step

Graduated from high school

Or married first
And had full-time job

And on track

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)

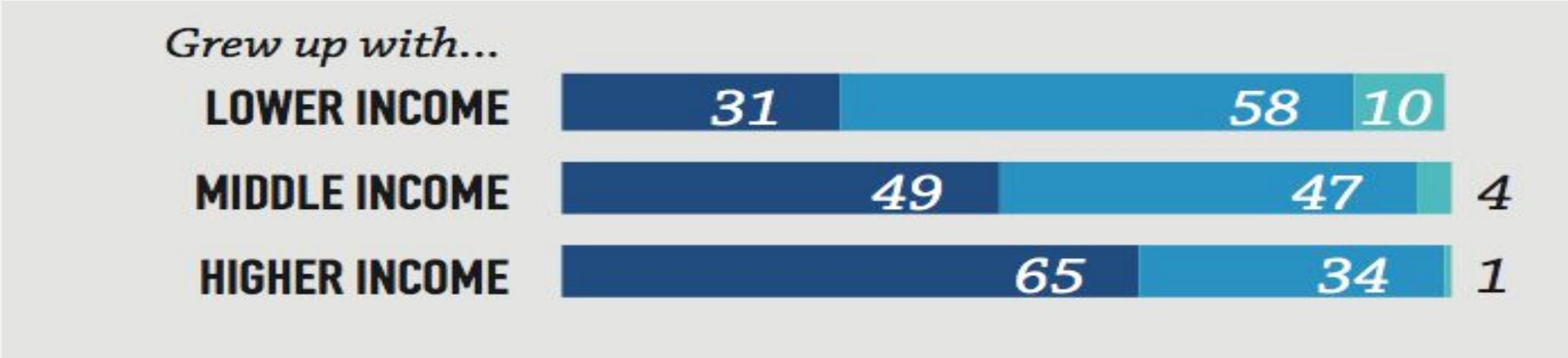
Is it the “success sequence” or structure?

- “social structure matters in predicting which types of young adults live according to the success sequence norms”

Better neighborhoods, good schools, highly-educated parents, and more income growing up all make it easier for young adults to graduate from high school, find a job, and forge a stable marriage; in contrast, young adults from poor neighborhoods, bad schools, and less-educated families are going to have fewer opportunities to flourish in school, work, and the marriage market.¹⁰ Indeed, this report shows that young adults from families in the top third

Which young adults more likely to have followed “success sequence” or “on track”?

% of adults ages 28-34



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)

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Does Success Sequence Apply to Minorities & the Poor?

Strong Families. Sustainable Societies

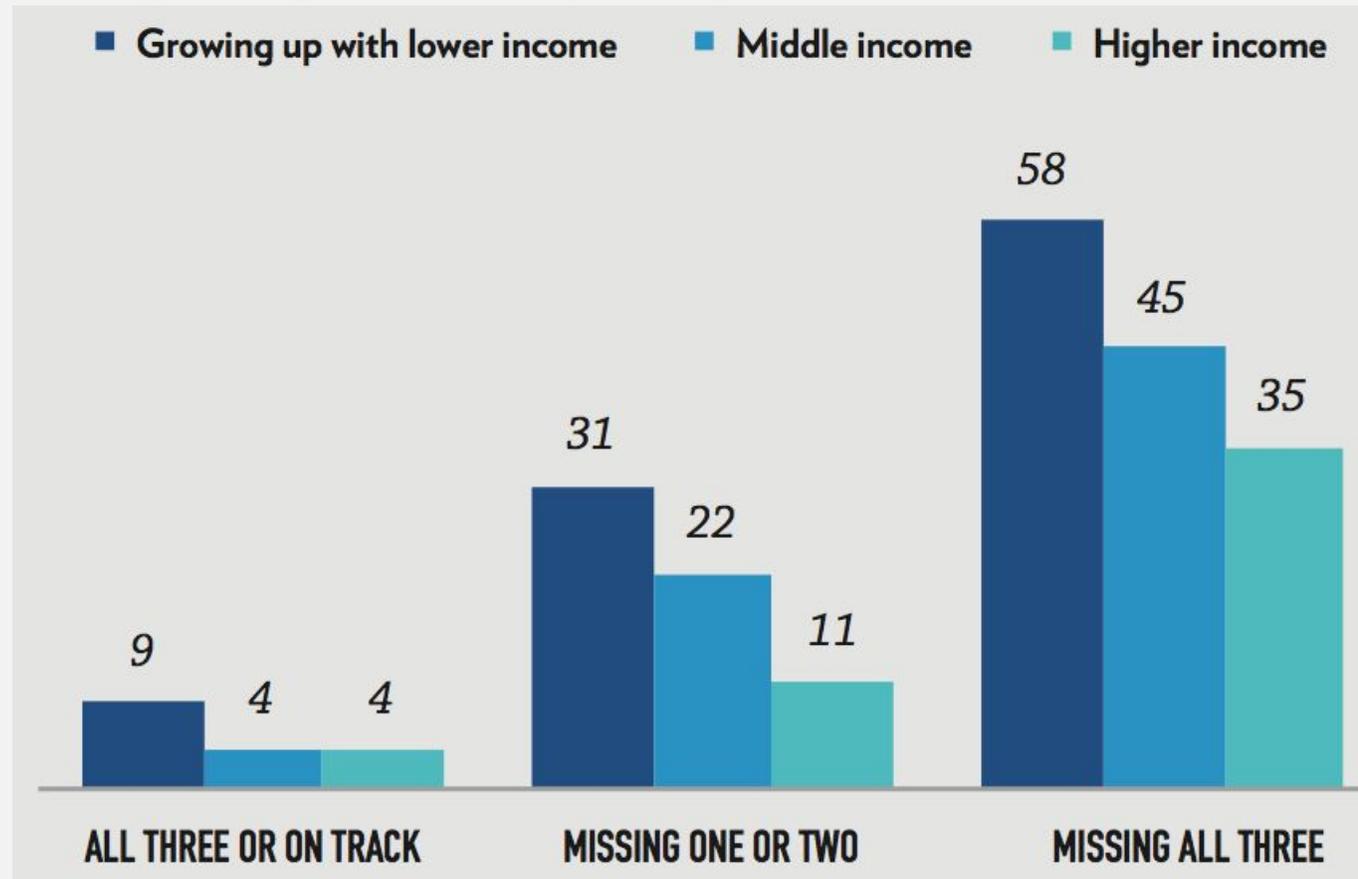


“Success sequence” also applies...

- To
 - Millennials from low-income families
 - Black & Hispanic Millennials

Success sequence linked to lower odds of poverty for young adults from lower-income families

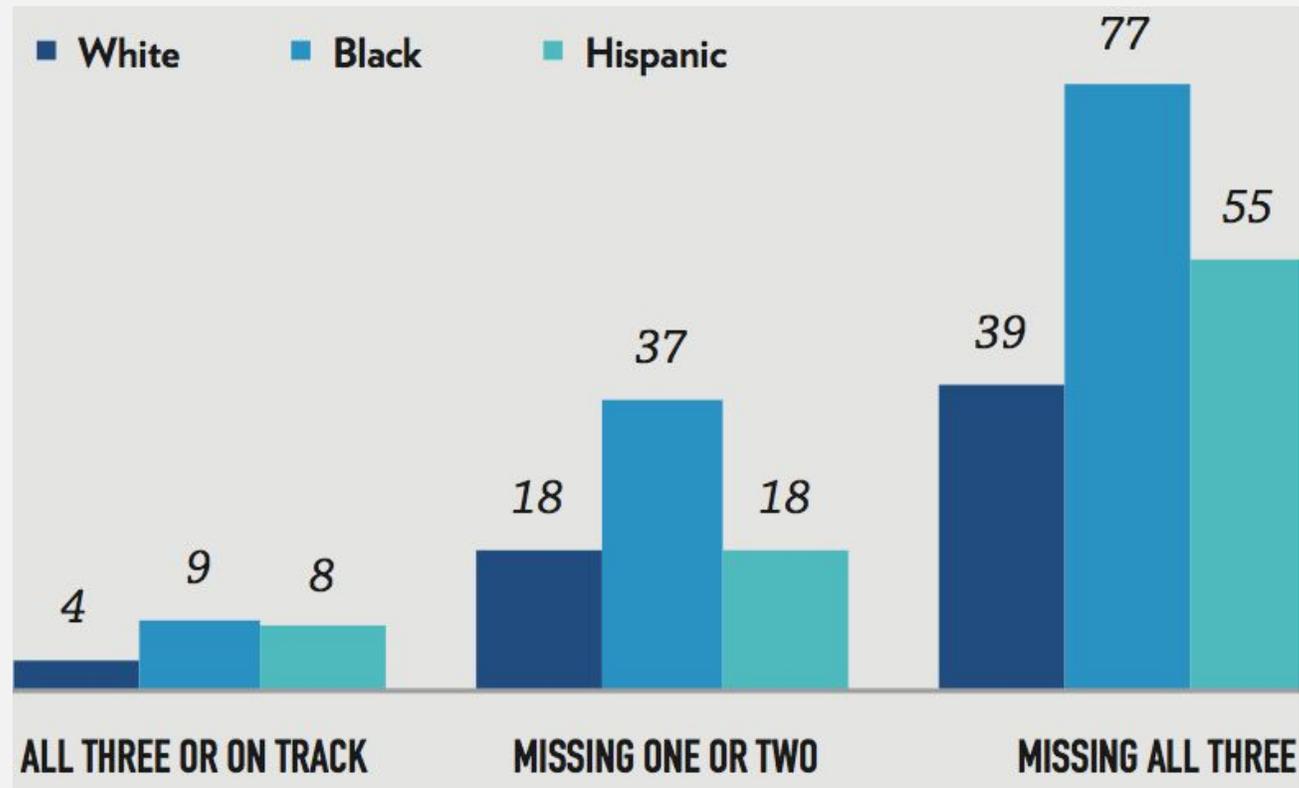
% of adults ages 28-34 in poverty



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)

Missing the success sequence is linked to poverty, especially among African American young adults

% of adults ages 28-34 in poverty



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)

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Does Marriage Per Se Matter?

Strong Families. Sustainable Societies



Critics: “Work Does All the Work”

- Matt Bruenig (2017): “full-time work is responsible for the low-poverty results of the various Success Sequences.”

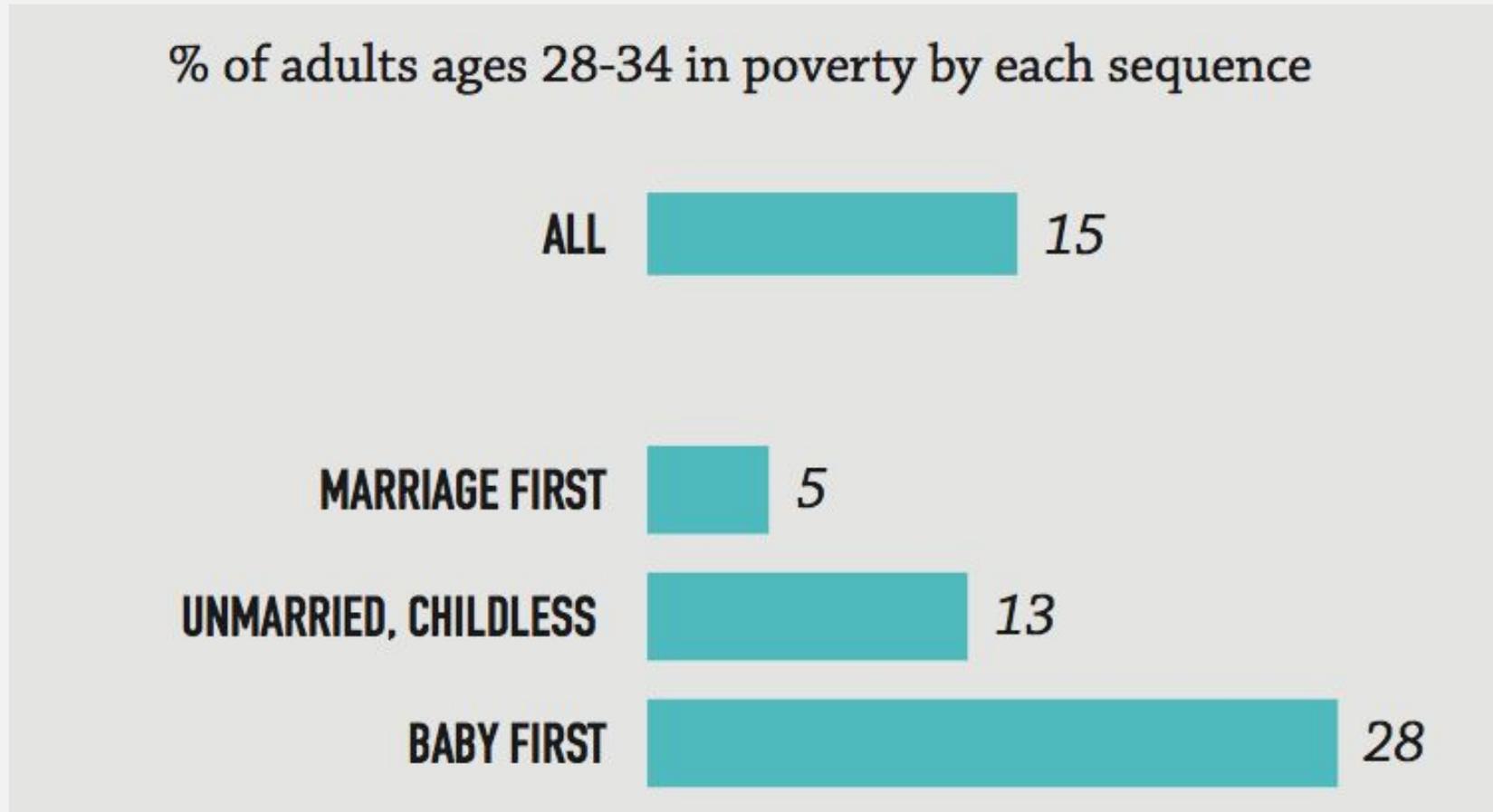


Is it just education & work?

- Or does marriage matter too?



Marriage, Parenthood, & Poverty



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)

Marriage, Parenthood, & Poverty

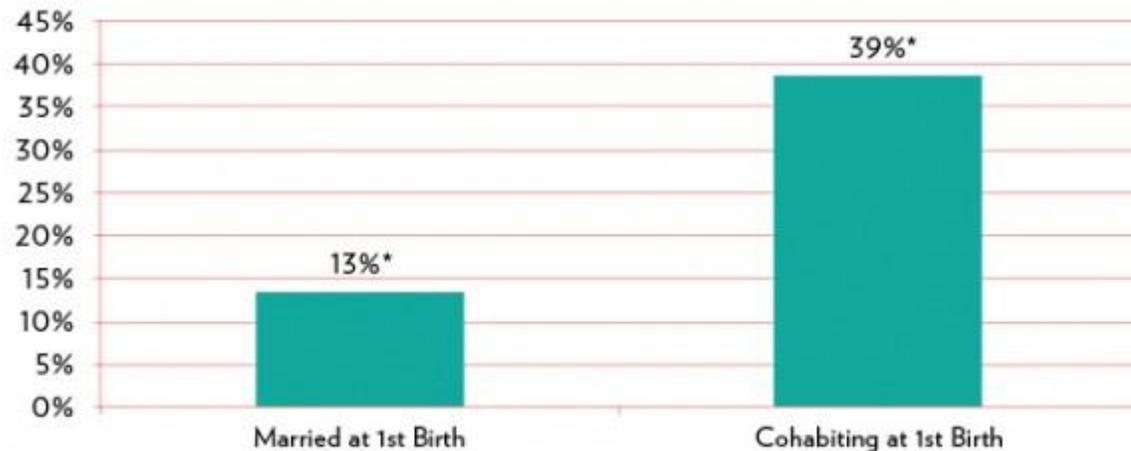
	Middle/Higher Income		Poverty	
	Odds ratio	s.e.	Odds ratio	s.e.
MARRIAGE & PARENTHOOD SEQUENCE (<i>vs. Baby first</i>)				
Marrying first	2.39***	0.09	0.40***	0.12
Unmarried, childless	1.35***	0.09	0.73**	0.10
WORKING FULLTIME	2.50***	0.07	0.34***	0.08
EDUCATION (<i>vs. less than HS</i>)				
HS or GED	1.34**	0.10	0.62***	0.10
Associate degree	2.58***	0.16	0.24***	0.23
Bachelor's or higher	5.14***	0.14	0.18***	0.19
RACE/ETHNICITY (<i>vs. white</i>)				
Black	0.65***	0.09	1.85***	0.10
Hispanic	1.10	0.09	0.88	0.12
Asian	0.99	0.31	0.77	0.49
ABOVE MEDIAN AFQT SCORE	1.62***	0.08	0.54***	0.11
FAMILY INCOME GROWING UP (<i>vs. lower income</i>)				
Middle income	1.12	0.08	0.77**	0.10
Higher income	1.77***	0.10	0.53***	0.13

Why education, work & marriage?

- Education →
 - skills, networks, knowledge
- Full-time work →
 - Greater income, discipline, opportunities
- Marriage →
 - Economies of scale, pooled income, less child support

Marriage = Stability; Baby First = Instability

FIGURE IIIA. Union Dissolution Within 5 Years of Birth of First Child, 20-29 year-old Mothers



NOTE: Figure depicts the percent of couples who ended their relationship within the first five years after the first birth of a child where the mother was 20-29 years old. An asterisk (*) above the bar indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the groups, controlling for maternal age at first birth, race/ethnicity, education level, and urbanicity derived from logistic regression models (not shown). The sample is of women who had a birth between 2000-2005.

- Men & women who put childbearing before marriage more likely to break up & face:
 - Child support
 - Legal costs
 - Single parenthood

When it Comes to Families, then...

- Work doesn't do all the work.
- Couples who have children in marriage more likely to remain together & avoid incurring major costs of family breakdown and family instability.

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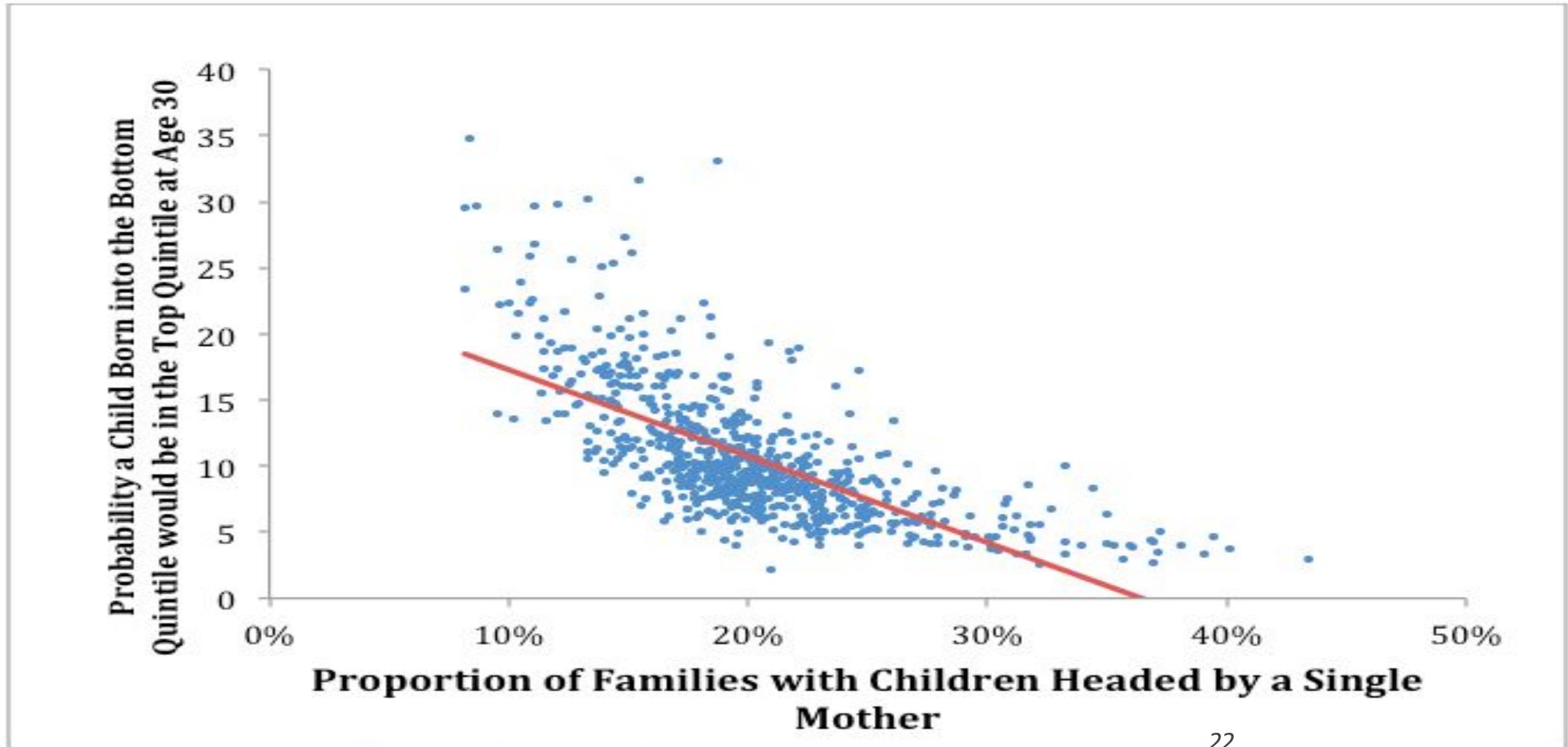
It Takes a (Married) Village

Does marriage matter for
communities & states?

Strong Families. Sustainable Societies



Community Family Structure & American Dream



Source: Data from The Equality of Opportunity Project.

Harvard Study



- Economist Raj Chetty (2014): Community family structure is the “single strongest correlate of upward mobility” for the poor.
 - Children from single and two-parent families are more likely to succeed if they live in communities dominated by 2-parent families

Strong Families, Prosperous States

(Wilcox and Lerman 2015)

By our estimates, the average state per capita GDP would be 4.2% higher if states enjoyed their 1980 levels of married parenthood. Likewise, across the states, child poverty would be 17% lower and family median income would be 10 percent higher if states enjoyed 1980 levels of married parenthood. The bottom line: Our nation's economy would be in much better shape if more families were headed by married parents.

The word "TIME" is written in a white, serif, all-caps font, centered within a solid red rectangular background.

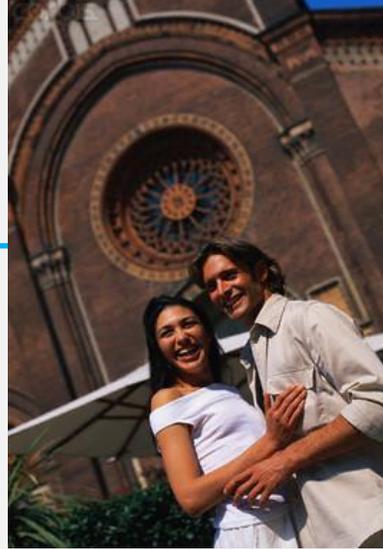
Marriage and the States

The Bottom line:

- If you care about child poverty, family income, & opportunity in the states, you should care about marriage.

Conclusion (1)

- Given importance of education, work, & marriage:
 - 1) Strengthening vocational/apprenticeship education;
 - 2) Expand wage subsidies;
 - 3) Eliminate marriage penalties in EITC, Medicaid, SNAP, childcare & other programs;
 - 4) Public campaign on behalf of the success sequence.



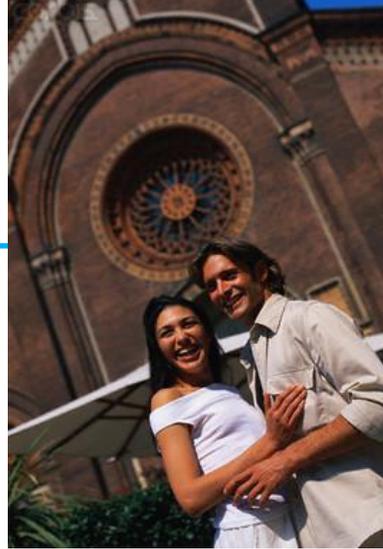
Conclusion (2)

3) Eliminate marriage penalties:

- Structure benefits so income threshold is twice as high for married parents of children under 5
- Structure benefits so that marriage doesn't disqualify you for three years after marrying
- Subject to some household income threshold (e.g., 60k)

4) Public campaign on behalf of the success sequence:

- Like National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
- Teen pregnancy down more than 50% since 1990
- Nonmarital childbearing now FALLING



More Information

www.family-studies.org



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