

# Facts on Kids in South Dakota Families & Fathers



Issue No. 2 Qtr 02

## Introduction

*This is the ninth in a series of Facts on Kids in South Dakota. Each issue takes a look at a specific indicator of child well being.*

To grow up safe and healthy, children today need support from the schools, the community, and most importantly from the family. Families provide the core ingredients for healthy development both physically and emotionally. Both mothers and fathers have important roles to play in children's lives. Parents provide economic, emotional, and intellectual support to their children as well as moral guidance.

South Dakota families mirror the nation in their changing composition. Increasingly, many children are growing up without the presence of one of their parents. While the importance of mothers has long been recognized, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of fathers in the lives of children. This monograph explores the changes in South Dakota families with children and reports on research relevant to these changes.

## Family Profile for South Dakota

The US Census for the year 2000 reports the total number of family households in South Dakota was 194,330 but the number of female- or male-headed households is increasing more rapidly than the traditional married couple households.

Before discussing these changes it may help to define family. The U. S. Census Bureau definitions of households and families is as follows:

*A **family household** has at least two members related by blood, marriage, or adoption, one of whom is the householder. Family households are maintained by married couples or by a man or woman living with other relatives — children may or may not be present.*

***Children** are defined as sons and daughters by birth, stepchildren, and adopted children of the householder regardless of the child's age or marital status.<sup>1</sup>*

The following chart shows the profile for families with children from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census and the percent change from the 1980 Census to the 2000 Census.

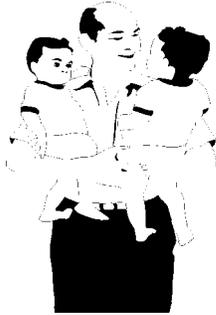
While married couple families have decreased, they still constitute the greatest percentage of families with children in the state. The chart shows that married couples with children decreased from 1980 to 2000 by 12%. Female-headed families with children grew by 62% from 1980 to 2000. The greatest percent increase occurred in male-headed families with children, who increased 200% from 1980 to 2000.

<u>Family Profile</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>Percent Change 1980-2000</u>
<b>Married Couple Families with children</b>	80,819	74,213	71,148	<b>-12%</b>
<b>Female Headed Families with children</b>	10,869	13,891	17,645	<b>62.3%</b>
<b>Male Headed Families with children</b>	2,130	3,586	6,387	<b>199.9%</b>

Source: 2001  
South Dakota KIDS  
COUNT Factbook

## Changing family structure

The changing structure of families in South Dakota may alter the way many family issues are perceived and addressed socially, legislatively and judicially.



In an effort to learn more about unmarried parents and their children, a study that follows a group of 5,000 children and their parents (*The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study Baseline Report<sup>2)</sup>* was developed. The report summarizes findings from early data analysis noting three main themes:

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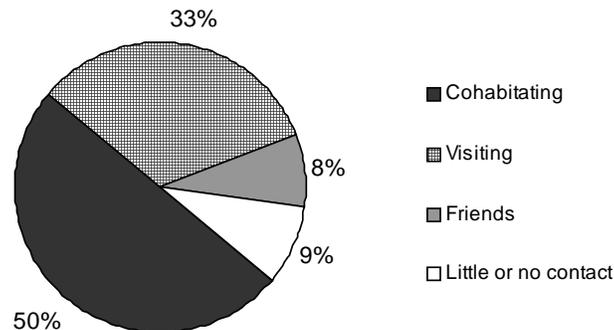
- Unwed parents are committed to each other and to their children at the time of the birth. The overwhelming majority of mothers want the father to be involved in raising the child;
- Although they have high hopes for their families, most unmarried parents are poorly equipped to support themselves and their children. While employment history is fairly high, the parents often lack the education or earnings that are likely to play critical roles in the success or failure in maintaining stable families;

▪ Most unmarried mothers are healthy and bear healthy children. Two-thirds of the mothers report they are in very good or excellent health. However, over one-fifth of the mothers do not receive prenatal care and eleven percent have babies born below normal weight.

The report also focuses on parents' access to and use of public and private resources. Unmarried parents rely on multiple sources of income and in-kind support to help raise their children. According to the study, the majority of unmarried new parents live either below or just barely above the poverty line. Unmarried parents rely on extended family, community support, the faith community and government support for help.

The pie-chart shows the living arrangements and relationship status of unmarried parents participating in the study. The largest percentage (50%) of unmarried mothers live with the father of their child or children. Another third are romantically involved with the father but live apart (represented as "visiting" on the chart). About 8% report being "just friends" with their child's father while 9% have little or no contact with the child's father.

**Relationship Status of Unmarried Parents**





Family context and adolescent sexual behavior

Harry Freeman, PhD  
Craig Coenen, and  
Dennis Russell

The University of South Dakota

A recent series of studies at The University of South Dakota by Harry Freeman, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Division of Counseling & Psychology at the School of Education, reveals how different family contexts shape the emotional and sexual lives of adolescents<sup>3 4 5</sup>. Family context is defined as the quality of emotional support and companionship experienced between parents and their children.

The USD studies explored how family context may explain adolescent closeness, intimacy, and sexual activity with boy/girlfriends. To uncover this information, adolescents participated in interviews and surveys about the nature of their close relationships with mothers, fathers, best friends and boy/girlfriends. In addition, parent interviews were conducted. The survey findings indicated the following connections between adolescent parent and peer social worlds.

- Companionship to fathers is the strongest protective factor against adolescent risky sexual behavior.
- Closeness to mothers and fathers reduced the strength of romantic commitment. Adolescent girls who maintain emotionally close relationships to their parents are unlikely to show a high level of emotional commitment to boyfriends.

- ♦ Commitment and companionship to romantic partners is the most salient predictor of adolescent sexual activity. Based upon findings from this study as well as earlier studies, one of the strongest predictors of adolescent sexual activity is the level of emotional commitment and companionship with the romantic partner.

- When closeness and companionship with fathers is missing.
  - ♦ Girls are at-risk for early and elevated levels of emotional commitment to boyfriends.
  - ♦ Girls and boys are at-risk for negative peer conformity.
  - ♦ Girls and boys are less likely to rely on parents or morals when making decisions about having sex.

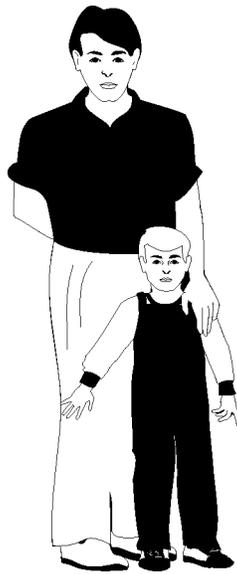
Based upon the interview portion, adolescents were classified into two primary groups, *securely* attached and *insecurely* attached to parents. Findings indicated the following patterns of social adjustment among secure and insecure adolescents.

- Among adolescents with insecure parental attachments
  - ♦ Best friends and romantic partners are five times more likely than parents to be turned to in times of distress.
  - ♦ Girls are likely to look to boyfriends for primary emotional and social support.
  - ♦ Girls self perceptions are strongly tied to romantic relationships.

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- Among adolescents with secure parental attachments
  - ♦Parents, especially mothers, are 10 times more likely to be relied upon in times of distress through the high school years.
  - ♦Girls self perceptions are tied to parental relationships and less so to friend or romantic relationships.
  - ♦Girls report a higher respect for self.
- Less than half of the adolescents population can be classified as securely attached.

The general pattern of findings reinforces the axiom, *"It's not what you say, but what you do"*. Developing a close relationship and spending time with your child, versus talking to or directing your child, is likely to result in the best outcomes for adolescent sexual development. Although the USD parent interviews indicated that 'sex talks' were the most often used strategy to influence the course of their sons and daughters' romantic experiences, such parenting methods were unrelated to adolescent sexual behavior. Unbeknown to parents, they are most effective when influencing their child is not their goal. Companionship, mutuality in conversation, and emotional closeness were the strongest predictors of teen sexual activity and closeness to romantic partners, even stronger than time spend with boy/girlfriends. Parent-adolescent closeness, especially between fathers and daughters, acted as a critical protective factor against over-involvement with romantic partners and risky sexual behavior. In fact, all the parental relationship quality variables were negatively



related to the sexual activity variables, suggesting that girls and boys are more likely to have intercourse and engage in unsafe sexual practices if they are emotionally disconnected from parents. Adolescent girls who lack a sense of closeness and security in the family context may begin to seek stronger emotional commitments from best friends and boyfriends. Said another way, the road to romantic commitment is short if paved with weak parent-daughter ties. A focus on what parents **say** to impact the dating life of their son or daughter is misguided given the subtler but more powerful indirect influences of the way parents **are** with their children.

Adolescent development presents unique challenges to parents to remain involved in their child's day-to-day lives. By middle school most teens are already spending more time in the company of friends than with family members, and are more likely to disclose personal information to best friends and boy/girlfriends than parents. Adolescent romantic relationships are considered a normal and healthy part of adolescent development. Nonetheless, adolescents are dating, engaging in sexual activity, and are exposed to adult media images earlier and at a higher rate than what was reported in the 1980's and 90's<sup>6</sup>. Not surprisingly, many parents feel emotionally disconnected, under valued, and pushed away by their adolescent children<sup>7</sup>. Ironically, both parents and adolescents are seeking closer relationships under false assumptions that the other party is disinterested. From the USD interviews, both adolescents and parents expressed the need to develop closer relationships, but indicated that they felt alienated and lacked respect from the other party.

As the USD studies clearly indicate, the benefits of parent closeness and companionship appear to remain critical through late adolescence. In fact, father respect and companionship were the most salient predictors of risky sexual behaviors. Unfortunately, these variables identify the two most troubled areas of father-daughter relationships during the adolescent years. A sharp drop in father-daughter companionship from early to late adolescence also fuels emotional distancing as fathers becoming increasingly removed from their daughter's day-to-day emotional lives. Spending time together maintains previous levels of closeness while at the same serves as a form of parental control. When adolescents spend time with parents for the purpose of doing something together, parental monitoring is a natural by-product and loses it typically negative stigma.

In summary, the USD findings suggest that the lines of influence connecting adolescent relationships with parents and peers are not always drawn by intention, but rather are significantly shaped by a family context. The changing family in South Dakota has important implications on the future of parent-adolescent relationships. Although a fragile family structure may place extra constraints on parent involvement, the obstacles to close parent-adolescent relationships are not limited to single parent families. In South Dakota, three out of four mothers from two-parent families work outside the home, the highest percentage of working moms in the nation. The problem of dual-earner couples has typically been framed as a woman's problem of balancing work and family<sup>8</sup>. Yet, as we begin to understand the critical role fathers play in adolescents social and emotional adjustment, the working mom may provide some needed impetus for father involvement.

### Father's Presence Impacts Children

According to researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore, children who have fathers in their lives learn better, have higher self-esteem and show fewer signs of depression than children without fathers.

The impact of the presence of the father is substantial. For example:

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes<sup>9</sup>;
- 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes<sup>10</sup>;
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes<sup>11</sup>;
- 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes<sup>12</sup>;
- 85% of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in a fatherless home<sup>13</sup>.

For daughters, a father's presence can be especially important. A study conducted by Vanderbilt, Auburn and Indiana Universities found that:

- Girls who lived with their biological fathers throughout their lives, and whose fathers spent more time caring for them during their first five years of life had later onset of puberty [by the seventh grade];
- Girls from homes where the fathers were absent or dysfunctional experience puberty relatively early;
- Girls with highly involved, present-in-the-home fathers are more likely to begin sex and dating at a later age<sup>14</sup>.



## Top Ten Father Facts

The National Fatherhood Initiative (<http://www.fatherhood.org>) has compiled a comprehensive review of the current social science literature on fatherhood and family trends entitled Father Facts.

1. An estimated 36.3% of children live absent their biological father.
2. There are almost 25% of children living with their single mothers.
3. 32% of all births in 1995 were out-of-wedlock.
4. Today nearly 4 out of 10 first marriages end in divorce, 60% of divorcing couples have children, and over one million children each year experience the divorce of their parents.
5. One out of every six children is a stepchild.
6. There are nearly 1.9 million single fathers with children under 18.
7. 4 out of every 10 cohabiting couples have children present and of children born to cohabiting couples, only 4 out of 10 will see their parents marry. Those who do marry experience a 50% higher divorce rate.
8. 26% of absent fathers live in a different state than their children.
9. About 40% of the children who live in fatherless households haven't seen their fathers in at least a year while 50% of children who don't live with their fathers have never stepped foot in their father's home.
10. Children who live absent from their biological fathers, on average, are more likely to be poor, experience educational, health, emotional, and psychological problems, be victims of child abuse, and engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with their married, biological mother and father.

A few other useful websites:

**The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF)**  
[www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu](http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu)

Established in 1994 at the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania with core support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, it is an interdisciplinary policy research center. NCOFF is dedicated to research and practice that expands the knowledge base on father involvement and family development, and that informs policy designed to improve the well-being of children.

**Nurturing Fatherhood**  
(direct link: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/CFSFForum/front.htm>)

This report summarizes the presentations and recommendations of the Conference on Fathering and Male Fertility: Improving Data and Research, sponsored by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, and the NICHD Family and Child Well-being Research network.

## Daddy Strategies: Involving Dads in Children's Lives

*Dr. Jim Levine, author and director of the Fatherhood Project at the Families Work Institute, offers the following advice to family-serving institutions regarding the involvement of fathers:*

1. Father involvement has an enormous impact on **all** dimensions of children's well being.
2. The daily activities of people working in family-serving institutions -- pre-schools, schools, hospitals, social service agencies, churches -- have a much bigger impact on father involvement than most people realize.
3. The single most powerful contributor to the effectiveness of family-serving agencies in promoting father involvement is the expectations staff members hold for fathers.
4. Programs trying to reconnect fathers to their children need to be designed with awareness of the most powerful factor for effective fathering: a good role model. Fathers need a father figure whether that is another parent, a mentor, or a guide.
5. Women are a key factor in all programs working effectively to involve fathers - as mothers of men's children, as marriage partners, and often as staff members.

*Dr. Levine will be the featured speaker at the Spring Seminar of the South Dakota Coalition for Children on Friday, April 26th, 2002 in Sioux Falls. For registration information visit [www.sdcchildren.org](http://www.sdcchildren.org) or call 605.367.9667.*



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau website, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cps/cpsdef.html>
- <sup>2</sup> The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study Baseline Report, McLanahan, S., Garfinkel, I., Reichman, N. E., Teitler, J., Carlson, M., Norland Audigier, C., August, 2001.
- <sup>3</sup> Freeman, H., & Brown, B. B. (2001). Primary attachment to parents and peers during adolescence: Differences by attachment style. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 30, 653-674.
- <sup>4</sup> Freeman, H.S, Coenen, C, Russell, D, & Sorensen, J (April, 2001). Understanding adolescent romance in the family context: A look at bi-directional influences: Paper presented at the biennial meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development, Minneapolis, MN.
- <sup>5</sup> Freeman, H.S, Newland, L. A., & Russell, D. (April, 2002) Gender Differences in Parent-Peer Connections During Adolescence. Paper to be presented at the Biennial Meetings for the Society for Research on Adolescence. New Orleans.
- <sup>6</sup> Miller, B. C., & Benson, B. (1999). Romantic and sexual relationship development during adolescence. In W. Furman, B. B. Brown, & C. Feiring (Ed.) *The Development of Romantic Relationships in Adolescence*. (pp. 99-124). Cambridge University Press.
- <sup>7</sup> Savin-Williams, R. & Berndt, T. J. (1990). Friendship and peer relations. In S. Feldman and G. Elliot (Eds.). *At the threshold: The developing adolescent*. (pp.277-307). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- <sup>8</sup> Moen, P., & Becker, P E. (1999). Scaling back: Dual-earner couples' work-family strategies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, pp. 995-1007.
- <sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of the Census.
- <sup>10</sup> Center for Disease Control
- <sup>11</sup> National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools
- <sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Special Report, 1988.
- <sup>13</sup> Fulton County, Georgia Jail populations, Texas Department of Corrections, 1992.
- <sup>14</sup> Ellis, B.J., McFadyen-Ketchum, S., Dodge, K.A., Pettit, G.S., & Bates, J.E. (1999). Quality of early family relationships and individual differences in the timing of pubertal maturation in girls: A longitudinal test of an evolutionary model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 387-401.

## Facts on Kids in South Dakota



The South Dakota KIDS COUNT Project is a national and state-by-state effort, sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to track the status of children in the United States. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for children and families. Additional funding for the state project comes from the South Dakota Departments of: Education and Cultural Affairs, Health, Human Services and Social Services. [www.usd.edu/brbinfo](http://www.usd.edu/brbinfo) then follow the KIDS COUNT link

The Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation works in partnership with donors to provide philanthropic leadership that assures the quality of life in the Sioux Falls community and surrounding region for good, for ever.

The South Dakota Coalition for Children strives to shape policies and programs to ensure the well being of all children in South Dakota. The Coalition is a member of the National Association of Child Advocates.

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