

**CENSUS BRIEF  
CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURES IN KENTUCKY**

A Census Research Brief

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## Increasing Number of Kentucky's Children Living in Single-Parent Families

The most significant change in Kentucky's family structures over the past two decades has been the increasing number of children living in single-parent homes.

Since 1980, two-parent married couple households in Kentucky dropped from 84 percent of families with children to 73 percent. During the same period, single parent families rose from 16 percent of families to 26 percent, an increase of 63 percent, making single parent families the fastest growing segment of Kentucky's families.

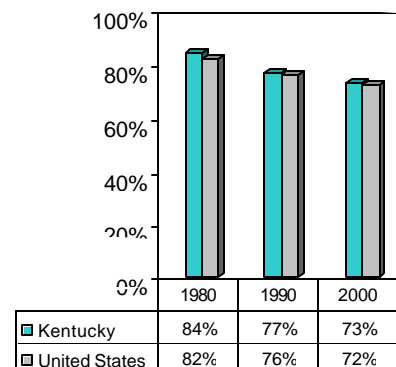
According to the 2000 Census, only 67 percent of Kentucky's children (under 18) live in two-parent married couple families. More children in Kentucky are living in single-parent homes than ever before.

Between 1990 and 2000, the rate of children living in single-parent families rose in all but two Kentucky counties, Elliott and Oldham Counties.

Asian children are much more likely to live in married-couple families than are children in other racial groups, followed by White children. While 12.5 percent of Asian children live in single-parent families, nearly 1 in 4 (22 percent) White children live in single-parent families.

In contrast, 63.7 percent of African American children in Kentucky live with a single parent. In Jefferson County, 7 out of 10 African American children live in single-parent families.

**Percent of Families with Children Headed by Married Couples, 1980-2000**



Source: U.S. Census 2000

### Effects on Children

Single-parent families often lack the resources and parental involvement available in two-parent families. Because of this disparity in family resources, children of single parents face an increased risk of living in poverty compared to children in two-parent families.

In 1999, 43 percent of Kentucky's female headed single-parent families with children were living below the poverty level, compared to 18 percent of all families.

Children growing up in single-parent households are also more likely to participate in risk-taking behaviors, to drop out of high school, and become teen parents, than children in low-conflict two-parent families.<sup>1</sup>

While many children of single parents overcome the odds and thrive,

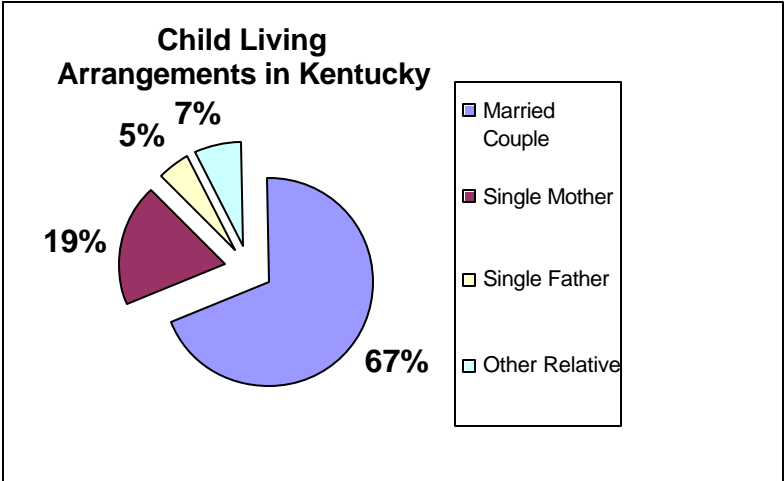
Data in brief:

- More than 70,000 KY children under age 6 live in single parent homes;
- More than 160,000 school-age children and youth in KY live in single parent homes;
- Most single parent families (78%) are headed by single mothers;
- In KY, almost one-third of all births occur to unmarried women, a rate that has nearly doubled since 1980; and
- Divorces in KY declined during the last decade, but were inching upward in the late 1990's.



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*“In Kentucky, median family income for a married couple with children is \$49,851; for a single father, it is \$24,350, and for a single mother, it is \$15,713”<sup>2</sup>*



**Why has the number of children in single-parent families risen?**

The two primary reasons Kentucky has seen an increase in the number of children living with single parents are the increase in births to unmarried women and the steady in-

Source: U.S. Census 2000

too many are unable to reach their full potential because of the social and economic barriers that they and their families face.

**Support for Families**

Throughout Kentucky, thousands of single parents are providing their children with the love, support, and guidance that they need to thrive. But, as the number of single parents who are working increases, time pressures on these families mount.

Parents with job stress, particularly those with limited incomes and few benefits, are finding it difficult to have the time and energy necessary to parent. Time to prepare young children for school, to help with homework, and to teach good decision-making is becoming increasingly scarce. Target policy areas that would strengthen single-parent families are:

**Child Support Collection:** The responsibility and cost of raising children must be shared by both parents.

**Quality Child Care and After-School Programs:** While a single parent works, no child should be left in low quality care or at home alone.

**Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):** A Kentucky EITC would benefit approximately 309,000 working families with children, many of them in single-parent homes.

crease in divorce.

Kentucky’s non-marital birth rate increased 33 percent from the early eighties to the early nineties. However, since 1990, the rate of increase in the non-marital birth rate, though still climbing, has slowed.

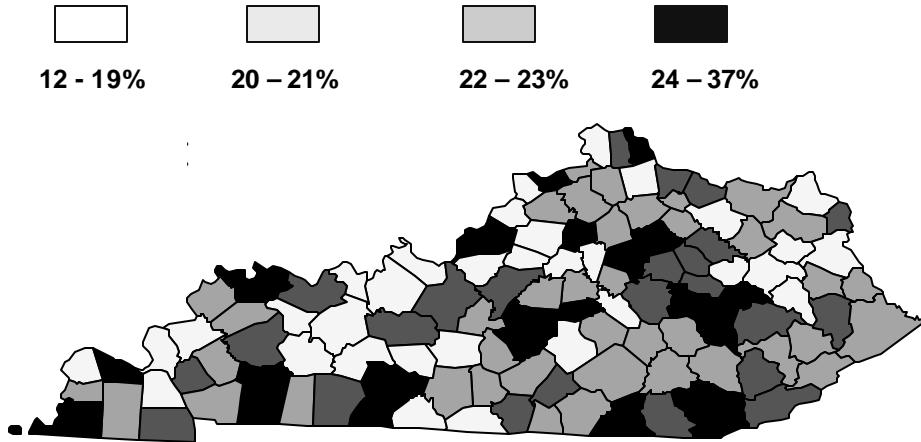
Kentucky’s divorce rate rose steadily from 1982-1992, but leveled off in the late 1990’s. Recently, the rate has begun to inch upward again. As these parents remarry and begin new families, family resources become more scarce, leading to an increase in the number of children living in low-income families.

According to the Joint Center for Poverty Research, to reduce the number of children in single parent homes, communities must both educate couples on preventing unintended pregnancies and strengthen married couples’ relationships.<sup>3</sup>

However, there are tremendous barriers to these efforts. While there has been public focus on reducing non-marital teen pregnancies, with much success, little is known about how to prevent non-marital births among young women (ages 20-29). In Kentucky, 54 percent of births to unmarried women are to women ages 20-29.

Also, while there are significant findings on methods to strengthen marriages, few methods are applicable to strengthen marriages in which the couple faces both relationship problems and living at or near poverty.

**Percent of all children living with a single parent, 2000**



Highest %				Lowest %			
<b>Fulton</b>	37	Fayette	26	Oldham	12	Edmonson	17
<b>Jefferson</b>	30	Hickman	26	Spencer	13	Livingston	17
<b>McCracken</b>	28	Wolfe	26	Hancock	16	Woodford	17
<b>Bell</b>	27	Lee	25	Boone	17	Ohio	18
<b>Franklin</b>	26	Estill	25	Morgan	17	Garrard	18

*“A healthy marriage, not just any marriage, is optimal for child well-being.”<sup>5</sup>*

**Healthy Families**

Research supports the conclusion that the family structure that is most beneficial to children is a low-conflict marriage between two biological parents.<sup>4</sup> However, many of the elements that contribute to making such a family structure optimal are present in other family structures:

- A loving, low-conflict environment in which children feel safe and secure;
- Resources such as stable and sufficient income, housing, health insurance, and transportation;
- Dedication to children’s educations; and
- Networks of supportive non-parent caregivers, including quality child care, relatives, neighbors, school per-

1. *Marriage from a Child’s Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do About It?* (2002, June) Child Trends Research Brief.  
 2. U.S. Census Bureau (2000).  
 3. Moore, Kristin Anderson & Jekielek, S. *How Family Structure and Living Arrangements Affect Children*. Joint Center for Poverty Research (May-June 2002 Vol.6 No. 3).  
 4. *Marriage from a Child’s Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do About It?* (2002, June) Child Trends Research Brief.  
 5. Ibid.

**Kentucky Children Under Age 18\*  
Living in Single-Parent Households: Census 2000**

	1990 %	2000 %	Change % 1990- 2000	2000 # in single parent	2000 Total*	* Data are for "own" or related children, which means that they are related to the head of the household through birth, mar- riage, or adoption. (U.S. Census Bureau)	1990 %	2000 %	Change % 1990- 2000	2000 # in single parent	2000 Total*
<b>Kentucky</b>	21	26	24	231151	873916						
<b>Adair</b>	15	22	47	813	3506	<b>Edmonson</b>	15	19	27	466	2477
<b>Allen</b>	15	20	33	858	3577	<b>Elliott</b>	19	19	0	303	1767
<b>Anderson</b>	15	19	27	906	3585	<b>Estill</b>	21	28	33	930	3548
<b>Ballard</b>	15	20	33	344	1716	<b>Fayette</b>	26	29	12	14543	46268
<b>Barren</b>	17	21	24	1809	7864	<b>Fleming</b>	16	21	31	667	2871
<b>Bath</b>	20	24	20	580	2170	<b>Floyd</b>	18	25	39	2320	11601
<b>Bell</b>	24	30	25	1957	7723	<b>Franklin</b>	23	29	26	2845	9674
<b>Boone</b>	14	18	29	4083	15858	<b>Fulton</b>	30	43	43	722	1800
<b>Bourbon</b>	22	27	23	1196	4603	<b>Gallatin</b>	16	22	38	446	1388
<b>Boyd</b>	20	26	30	2523	11068	<b>Garrard</b>	16	19	19	630	2576
<b>Boyle</b>	21	28	33	1566	5436	<b>Grant</b>	18	24	33	1376	4170
<b>Bracken</b>	19	25	32	468	1876	<b>Graves</b>	17	23	35	1886	7570
<b>Breathitt</b>	21	27	29	959	4104	<b>Grayson</b>	17	24	41	1292	5070
<b>Breckinridge</b>	15	21	40	871	4004	<b>Green</b>	14	23	64	545	2228
<b>Bullitt</b>	14	21	50	3196	12775	<b>Greenup</b>	14	21	50	1695	8733
<b>Butler</b>	14	20	43	596	2750	<b>Hancock</b>	13	17	31	356	2165
<b>Caldwell</b>	20	23	15	604	2896	<b>Hardin</b>	17	25	47	5853	23463
<b>Calloway</b>	16	24	50	1417	5676	<b>Harlan</b>	19	25	32	1852	9538
<b>Campbell</b>	20	26	30	5398	20581	<b>Harrison</b>	19	23	21	934	3983
<b>Carlisle</b>	13	23	77	264	1178	<b>Hart</b>	17	21	24	846	3526
<b>Carroll</b>	22	28	27	643	2252	<b>Henderson</b>	21	26	24	2602	10631
<b>Carter</b>	17	22	29	1317	5979	<b>Henry</b>	19	23	21	806	2949
<b>Casey</b>	16	21	31	718	3485	<b>Hickman</b>	19	29	53	303	1167
<b>Christian</b>	21	26	24	4847	16457	<b>Hopkins</b>	20	25	25	2596	11166
<b>Clark</b>	19	25	32	1834	6928	<b>Jackson</b>	19	22	16	689	3167
<b>Clay</b>	17	23	35	1259	5957	<b>Jefferson</b>	29	34	17	51135	145325
<b>Clinton</b>	17	22	29	438	2115	<b>Jessamine</b>	16	22	38	2072	7763
<b>Crittenden</b>	14	20	43	403	2133	<b>Johnson</b>	16	22	38	1126	5889
<b>Cumberland</b>	21	25	19	380	1437	<b>Kenton</b>	20	25	25	9142	35994
<b>Daviess</b>	20	25	25	5432	22033	<b>Knott</b>	19	24	26	927	4821

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<b>Kentucky</b>	21	26	24	231151	873916						
<b>Knox</b>	24	28	17	2075	7669	<b>Nicholas</b>	18	23	28	333	1423
<b>Larue</b>	16	23	44	693	2690	<b>Ohio</b>	15	19	27	997	5214
<b>Laurel</b>	18	23	28	2803	11016	<b>Oldham</b>	13	13	0	1514	11995
<b>Lawrence</b>	14	21	50	738	3610	<b>Owen</b>	17	22	29	553	2471
<b>Lee</b>	23	28	22	457	1848	<b>Owsley</b>	23	28	22	296	1052
<b>Leslie</b>	19	24	26	665	3776	<b>Pendleton</b>	14	20	43	748	3704
<b>Letcher</b>	16	22	38	1203	7196	<b>Perry</b>	17	24	41	1537	6363
<b>Lewis</b>	15	23	53	734	3335	<b>Pike</b>	16	22	38	3305	14876
<b>Lincoln</b>	17	23	35	1277	4880	<b>Powell</b>	19	25	26	789	3113
<b>Livingston</b>	12	19	58	374	1907	<b>Pulaski</b>	18	24	33	2817	11936
<b>Logan</b>	18	24	33	1478	5861	<b>Robertson</b>	17	24	41	115	482
<b>Lyon</b>	17	23	35	275	996	<b>Rockcastle</b>	18	23	28	860	3674
<b>McCracken</b>	25	30	20	4234	14162	<b>Rowan</b>	21	23	10	953	4092
<b>McCreary</b>	23	29	26	1179	4278	<b>Russell</b>	18	26	44	858	3308
<b>McLean</b>	14	20	43	443	2244	<b>Scott</b>	20	23	15	1860	8074
<b>Madison</b>	20	25	25	3560	11916	<b>Shelby</b>	18	21	17	1612	7520
<b>Magoffin</b>	17	21	24	691	3777	<b>Simpson</b>	22	26	18	1015	3878
<b>Marion</b>	20	27	35	1137	4216	<b>Spencer</b>	14	15	7	445	2903
<b>Marshall</b>	14	20	43	1221	5959	<b>Taylor</b>	17	26	53	1270	4928
<b>Martin</b>	17	23	35	746	3671	<b>Todd</b>	18	22	22	633	2886
<b>Mason</b>	21	24	14	903	3976	<b>Trigg</b>	18	22	22	592	2672
<b>Meade</b>	11	20	82	1407	7520	<b>Trimble</b>	12	20	67	398	1953
<b>Menifee</b>	16	21	31	297	1244	<b>Union</b>	20	25	25	817	3224
<b>Mercer</b>	17	23	35	1052	4331	<b>Warren</b>	22	27	23	5112	19239
<b>Metcalfe</b>	16	22	38	489	2025	<b>Washington</b>	15	22	47	555	2489
<b>Monroe</b>	18	22	22	544	2580	<b>Wayne</b>	18	23	28	1041	4619
<b>Montgomery</b>	19	25	32	1250	4713	<b>Webster</b>	17	23	35	706	3061
<b>Morgan</b>	16	19	19	528	2939	<b>Whitley</b>	23	26	13	2167	8324
<b>Muhlenberg</b>	16	21	31	1331	7371	<b>Wolfe</b>	23	29	26	468	1619
<b>Nelson</b>	19	25	32	2399	8068	<b>Woodford</b>	15	19	27	1018	5471

\* Data are for "own" or related children, which means that they are related to the head of the household through birth, marriage, or adoption. (U.S. Census Bureau)



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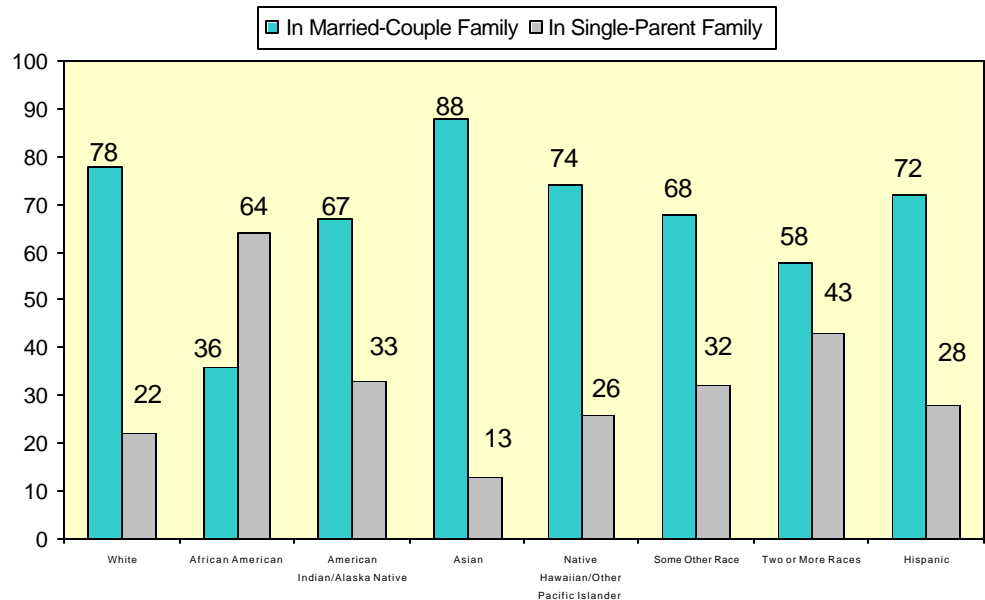
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*“An Independent Voice for Kentucky’s Children”*

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts a census of the population every ten years. The most recent was completed in April 2000. This series of KIDS COUNT reports includes information most relevant to community leaders, policy makers, advocates, and others concerned with the status of Kentucky’s children and families.

Additional information on child well-being and Census 2000 can be found on the Kentucky Youth Advocates web site at [www.kyyouth.org](http://www.kyyouth.org) and the Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Census Data Online web site at [www.aecf.org/kidscount/census](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/census).

### Child Living Arrangements by Race and Hispanic Origin



Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.  
 Source: U.S. Census 2000 ([www.aecf.org/kidscount](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount))