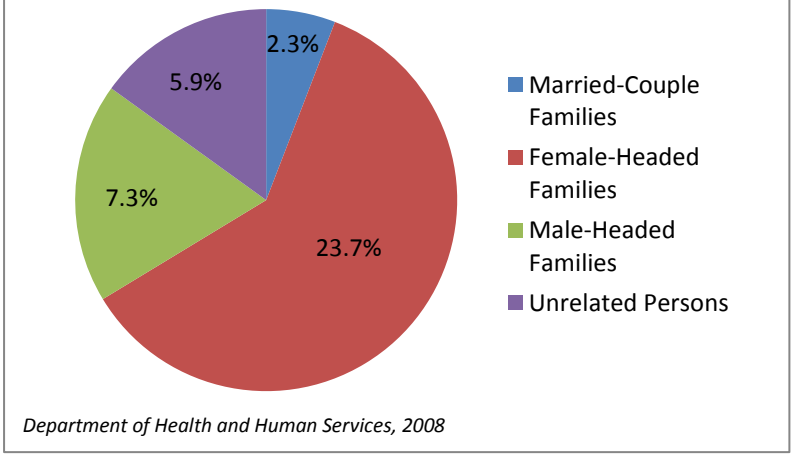
Family Structure and Welfare Dependency

Issue: Intact, married families are the least likely to depend on welfare, and children raised in a home headed by their married biological mother and father are dramatically less likely to end up on welfare as adults.[1] However, current welfare policies impede individuals from breaking their welfare dependence by discouraging two efficient escape routes: marriage and employment.

Broken Families Receive Most of Welfare

- In 2011, federal and state governments spent over $450 billion on means-tested welfare for low-income families with children. Roughly three-quarters of this welfare assistance, or $330 billion, went to single-parent families.[2]
- Three-fourths of all women applying for welfare benefits do so because of a disruption of marriage.[3]
- Over 75 percent of mothers who give birth out-of-wedlock will be on welfare within five years.[4]
- Daughters from families that had received welfare were three times more likely to receive benefits themselves within three years of their first child's birth.[5]

Persons receiving >25% of their Total Income from Means-Tested Assistance Programs, by Family Category



Department of Health and Human Services, 2008

Welfare Discourages Marriage

- Many welfare programs impose a "marriage penalty" that makes married couples ineligible for assistance. This penalty especially falls most heavily on low or moderate income families with children.[6]
- Couples who receive government assistance have drastically lower levels of overall marital satisfaction and commitment.[7]
- Marriage promotes employment. The income of married adults significantly exceeds the income of unmarried adults at every education level.[8]

Welfare Discourages Work

- Welfare currently pays more than a minimum-wage job in 35 states, and in 13 states it pays more than $15 per hour.[9]

Conclusion: Welfare, as presently structured, has had a predictable and pernicious effect on the overall response of recipients to marriage as well as to work.[10] As shown by MARRI research available online[11], encouraging the formation of intact, married families is a natural and efficient means for reducing welfare dependence. As the saying goes, "You get more of what you pay for."[12]

[1] Patrick F. Fagan, Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., and America Peterson, *The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, April 2002), at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/Features/Marriage/index.cfm*

[2] http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/09/marriage-americas-greatest-weapon-against-child-poverty

[3] OECD, *Factors Affecting the Labor Force Participation of Lone Mothers in the United States*. 1993

[4] J. Jacobson and R. Maynard, "Unwed Mothers and Long-Term Dependency," Paper presented at American Enterprise Institute Conference on Welfare Reform, September 1995.
Why It Matters: Teen Pregnancy. Poverty, and Income Disparity. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2010. Available at http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/library/2010/why-it-matters-teen-pregnancy-poverty-and-income-disparity. Accessed 1 August 2014.

[5] Molly A. Martin, "The Role of Family Income in the Intergenerational Association of AFDC Receipt," Journal of Marriage and Family 65 (May 2003): 326-340.As cited in *Family Facts* available at http://www.familyfacts.org/briefs/3/a-closer-look-at-welfare

6 Carasso A, Steuerle CE, "The hefty penalty on marriage facing many households with children," *The Future of Children* (2005), 15:2, 157-75 available at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1615873

[7] David G. Schramm, V. William Harris. "Marital Quality and Income: An Examination of the Influence of Government Assistance." *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 2010; 32 (3): 437 DOI: 10.1007/s10834-010-9212-5

[8] Fry, Richard Allen, and D'Vera Cohn. *Women, men and the new economics of marriage*. Pew Research Center, 2010.

[9] Michael Tanner and Charles Hughes, "The Work versus Welfare Trade-Off: 2013." (Washington, DC: *Cato Institute,* 2013). Available at http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/the_work_versus_welfare_trade-off_2013_wp.pdf

[10] Duncan et al., "Welfare Dependence Within and Across Generations," and Ann M. Hill and June O'Neill, *Underclass Behaviors in the United States: Measurement and Analysis of Determinants*, Baruch College, City University of New York, August 1993.

[11] For example, "U.S. Social Policy Dependence on the Family Derived from the Index of Belonging" available at http://marri.us/policy-2013

Chart: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Indicators of Welfare Dependence* (Table IND 1c). By Gil Crouse, Susan Hauan, Annette Waters Rogers, and Melissa Pardue. Washington, D.C.: 2008. 157. Available at http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/indicators08/report.pdf

[12] Robert Rector of The Heritage Foundation.