



# NEWS

## Study: The American Family Is No More

Researchers say the most 'troubling' finding is the economic polarization between families

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It is becoming increasingly difficult to identify what a "traditional" American family looks like. Once that meant a married couple, a father who worked, kids in school and a relatively stable lifestyle.

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But due to a whirlwind of economic and social changes that took place during the last decade, young people are delaying marriage longer, permanent singlehood has increased, and the "marriage-go-round" of divorce and remarriage continues to rise. Those are the findings of a new study from a researcher at Ohio State University.

The study's author, Sociology Professor Zhenchao Qian, studied data from the 2000 Census and the 2008 to 2010 American Community Survey, concluding that in the 2000s, "there is no longer any such thing as a typical American family."

But the most troubling finding, Qian said, is the large disparity that has grown between families of different races and socioeconomic classes. Race, education, the economy and immigration status weigh heavily on how well families fare financially, he said.

Despite the negative changes in American families, one group has remained stable and most closely resembles what was once considered the American norm and that is the immigrant community. Qian found that immigrants tend to be married at a higher rate, and divorce and remarry at a lower rate when compared to those born in the United States.

Qian said the Great Recession of the late 2000s can account for many of the changes - across the board, regardless of race, young people born in the United States have delayed getting married, moved back in with their parents, and those who do marry get divorced at a higher rate.

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"There is no doubt that the gap between America's haves and have-nots grew larger than ever during the 2000s," Qian said in a statement. "This gap has shaped American families in multiple ways. It influences the kind of families we live in and the kind of family environment in which we raise our children."

From 2008 to 2010, nearly half of young adults between the ages of 20 and 24 lived with their parents. During the same time, the percentage of U.S.-born women of that age who had ever been married declined from 31 percent in 2000 to 19 percent in 2008 to 2010. The decline for men was similar, dropping from 21 percent to 11 percent.

Not only are young people putting off getting married, but when they do, they are more likely to get divorced and remarried, a cycle Qian calls the "marriage-go-round." Among currently married men, Qian found the percentage of those who were married more than once increased from 17 percent in 1980 to 25 percent in 2008 to 2010.

Outcomes were even worse for African-Americans: they had the lowest percentage of people who had ever been married, at every age group, the highest proportion of permanent singlehood by the age of 50 and the highest divorce-to-marriage ratios.

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The "typical" American family no longer looks like it once did, researchers say.

One bright spot in the study, however, is that the decade appeared to give greater stability in terms of the living arrangements among American-born children. The percentage of children living with two married, working parents increased from 41 percent in 2000 to 43 percent in 2008 to 2010.

"Economic inequality is key to the polarization of American families, and the disadvantages of children living in single and unstable families will just worsen the racial and ethnic inequalities we already have in this country," Qian said.

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