

# Effects of Family Structure on Poverty

*Original Research:* [U.S. Social Policy Dependence on the Family](#)

To assess the role of family structure on policy outcomes, Dr. Henry Potrykus and Dr. Patrick Fagan of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute developed empirical models determining the influence of explanatory variables on various outcomes across the geographic-demographic areas of the U.S. These geographic-demographic areas are the Super Public Use Microdata Areas constructed by the U.S. Census. Potrykus and Fagan conclude that family structure *always* has a beneficial influence on policy outcomes. Family structure is a key factor in poverty levels.

## 1. Poverty in the Total Population

The fraction of high school graduates has the largest attenuating influence on the fraction of the total population living below the poverty line. This influence is precisely determinable under controls for demographics, education, and earnings.

The fraction of intact families in the geographic area has the next-largest attenuating influence; it, too, is precisely determinable even after controls for demographics, education, and earnings are applied.

The fraction of college graduates has a small attenuating influence on the fraction of the total population below the poverty line when controlling only for demographics and education, but the influence becomes large, enhancing, and precisely determinable when controls for earnings are added. Presumably, once the human and social capital effects of higher education are absorbed and accounted for by earned income itself, college degrees actually increase the potential for putting oneself in a poor area.<sup>30</sup>

The black fraction of the population has a small precisely determinable enhancing influence on overall poverty levels when controlling for demographics, education, and earnings. The fraction of the population that is Hispanic has no determinable influence on an area's poverty.

Income earned in prime age has a precisely determinable influence on the proportion of the total population below the poverty line, as expected.

## 2. Women

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