



PRELIMINARY RESEARCH ON FAMILY STRENGTHS

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A KIDS COUNT Working Paper

November 2002

Prepared by Child Trends, Inc. for the

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Baltimore, Maryland

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Foreword

Everyone is in favor of strong families. Researchers, politicians, and social commentators frequently use the terms “strong families” and “family strengthening” to refer to positive aspects of family life and the interactions of families that lead to successful outcomes for their children.

But how do we know a strong family when we see it? Despite widespread use, however, the terms “strong families” and “family strengthening” are seldom defined and almost never measured. People across the political spectrum and from a variety of scholarly disciplines use these terms to refer to multiple constructs that mean different things to different people.

Efforts to promote strong families have become a central part of the Casey Foundation work. This work is premised on the idea that children do better when their families do better. To help develop a more systematic and rigorous examination of the concept of “a strong family,” the Casey Foundation commissioned this paper from a group of scholars at Child Trends. It is important to note that this work on family strengths draws on research and writing from a wide array of perspectives in hopes of developing a definition of the term that is widely accepted. Authors draw on previous scholarly research and theoretical writings to identify key dimensions within family processes and family relationships that are associated with positive child outcomes. They also examine how selected components of family strengths can be measured in two national data sources.

We hope this preliminary work will serve as a first step in developing an operational definition of strong families. It will serve as an important point of departure for the Casey Foundation as we follow up the work presented here with an expanded look at what scholars mean when they use the term “strong families, what dimensions of the concept can be assessed through current measures, and where are new measures needed?

Until we acquire a common understanding of what constitutes a strong family, it is doubtful that a meaningful dialogue can occur in policy and service settings. Building the capacity to describe and measure the multiple dimensions of strong families will provide a foundation for developing regular reporting that tells us how the country is doing on this crucial aspect of social well-being.

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Introduction

The heroism, altruism, and civic pride evident in the United States during the past several weeks have drawn attention to the strengths and virtues of the American people. Indeed, even before recent events, the persistent attention to indicators of doom and gloom within American families led some observers to comment on the unbalanced depiction of troubled families—especially families of color—in the media and in social science literature (Hill, 1999; Moore and Halle, forthcoming). Researchers and policymakers frequently call attention to the multiple problems that affect American families: poverty, unemployment, violence, divorce, young unmarried mothers, the growing number of single-parent households, and other economic and social stresses that affect parenting today. And research does indicate that these factors contribute to negative child outcomes, such as behavior problems, delinquency, teen pregnancy, risky behaviors, or dropping out of school (Seccombe, 2000; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000; Maynard, 1996).

Yet other studies have pointed out that many families are prospering and strong and that even many families facing challenges are doing an excellent job of raising their children and supporting one another (National Commission on Children, 1991). Despite the stresses within individual families that struggle with conditions of poverty and social adversity, many children in low-income families succeed in life. It is not uncommon for families who live under difficult conditions to instill a strong sense of pride, identity, achievement, and civic engagement, even when parents work long hours, are absent for extended periods, or family members suffer from chronic illness.

By focusing solely on problem behaviors, research studies and governmental reports routinely overlook the successful coping strategies that families use to manage multiple stressors in daily life. And the lack of attention to the positive attributes of family life has created a significant gap in our knowledge base: a lack of an understanding of basic trends and indicators of change in the behaviors and relationships associated with successful parenting, family cohesion, and family support, especially during difficult times.

In this paper we will review what is currently known about the constructs associated with “family strengths.” In Section 1, we will identify specific approaches and measures that capture these positive dimensions in family life, highlighting differences in the definitions and descriptions of “strong families”: family processes and family relationships. These diverse approaches have produced a broad array of constructs that appear to influence child outcomes.

In Section 2, we review the research literature associated with constructs that have been tested in several recent national surveys, including the National Survey of American Families (NSAF), the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), and the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS). In Section 3, we suggest next steps that could be taken to strengthen our understanding of family strengths, including new studies as well as the development of selected measures that could be incorporated into ongoing surveys.

Section 1: What are “family strengths”?

What are *family strengths*? While no official or formal definition exists, we define family strengths as the set of relationships and processes that support and protect families and family members, especially during times of adversity and change. Family strengths help to maintain family cohesion while also supporting the development and well-being of individual family members. Some researchers focus on family strengths that cause certain families to rise above the norm. Others study the characteristics of healthy or normal families that differentiate them from their dysfunctional counterparts (Krysan et al., 1990). Both components are important.

Research indicates that the social environment, including stress and harsh conditions such as violence, unemployment, single-parent households, or crowded housing, often affect families indirectly rather than directly. That is, many environmental influences are distal factors that affect families *through* proximal factors such the behaviors that families use to raise their children or the relationships that support individual family members (McLoyd, 1991; Child Trends, 1999). For example, the stress of crime or unemployment can undermine a parent’s ability to provide warmth and emotional support.

Moreover, the lack of positive family processes can be as problematic as the presence of negative influences. As Mash suggests in his study of families with problem children: “From a preventive standpoint, we must be cognizant that the things that do not happen in disturbed families are a source of stress and potentially as damaging as those things that do happen (1982:69).”

Why Is It Important to Understand Family Strengths?

Documenting family strengths is important for a number of reasons. The ultimate goal of studies in this field is to identify family processes that serve as positive resources for families regardless of their socioeconomic assets (Moore, 1993). This knowledge can guide policy makers and service providers in developing programs to promote families' capacities to deal with stressful circumstances. For example, family strengths research can point to characteristics of healthy families that clinicians and counselors should consider as they plan intervention programs to help troubled families. In addition, these characteristics can be incorporated into evaluation studies, to provide evidence on whether and to what extent the program or policy enhanced the strengths of families.

Family strengths research can also help identify characteristics that should be included in social indicators series such as Healthy People 2010 that set national goals for public policy. Tracking indicators of family strengths would enable citizens and policy makers to monitor the development of our nation's social assets and well-being, not simply our ups and downs in problems and perils.

Not to be overlooked is the effect that family strengths research could have on the public dialogue. Rather than unremitting discussions of everything that is wrong with the nation, we can discuss what is right with our country and how we can build upon and expand these strengths.

In sum, by monitoring the intensity, scope, and quality of positive family processes, family strengths indicators can help policy makers, service providers, and community leaders better understand family life. Studies revealing the routine presence or absence of strengths

among households with children can provide information that is equal in importance to the studies examining economic and social problems. Specifically, family strengths research will support progress in public policy, including the development of approaches for creating strong families, the development of indicators to track family well-being and progress toward national goals, the development of measures for the monitoring of intervention programs, and the development of a national dialogue that will balance attention to bad news with evidence of positive outcomes.

How Are Strong Families Identified?

What characteristics distinguish healthy or successful families? Clearly no single attribute makes a family strong. Indeed, it may be that a cluster of characteristics is crucial. To date, researchers have considered a variety of approaches for defining strong or successful families, focusing on the social, economic, and psychological functions that families need to perform.

Some researchers have identified family strengths through single characteristics, such as kindness (Day, forthcoming). Stinnet and DeFrain (1985) selected strong families based on three characteristics: 1) a high degree of marital happiness; 2) satisfying parent-child relationships; and 3) family members who do a good job of meeting each other's needs.

The "strong families" literature has suggested that successful families have many features similar to those described by Baumrind (1971) in her studies of authoritative families, namely warm and caring parents who discuss issues and reason with their children. This early literature, which developed in the 1970s and 1980s, identified nine key constructs associated with successful family life: (1) communication, (2) encouragement of individuals, (3) appreciation, (4) religiosity or spirituality, (5) time together, (6) adaptability, (7) clear roles, (8) commitment

to family, and (9) social connectedness (Moore, 1993). Krysan and her colleagues (1990) offered a similar list of seven component constructs of family strengths (which combined encouragement, appreciation, and commitment to family into a single construct titled “cohesion”).

Early studies of family strengths focused on characteristics of “strong families.” These families tended to be white and middle class and were often identified by nominations from community representatives, frequently local clergy members (Moore, 1993). Over the past decade, additional efforts have been made to study family strengths within broader, more representative samples that included minority groups. More recent studies also consider a broader range of family processes—defined as the behavioral strategies that families use to meet collective goals and/or sustain family ideologies (Day, 2000). These include 1) parenting strategies, 2) communication processes, 3) problem-solving techniques, 4) time use, 5) household routines, 6) quality of the family environment, 7) decision-making roles, 8) strategies for recreation and entertainment, 9) the use of authority and power, 10) differentiation and the regulation of emotion, 11) identity formation, 12) the organization of work and family relationships, 13) spirituality and religiosity, and 14) adaptation to crisis and change.

On a very basic level, successful families are ones that can reproduce themselves by raising children who establish stable and harmonious families themselves (Krysan et al., 1990). Lewis and Looney (1983), for example, have stated that a family is successful to the extent that it provides an environment that supports the development of child and parent alike: “A family ought to raise children who become autonomous, and it should provide sufficient emotional support for stabilizing the parents’ personalities and continuing their emotional maturation” (Lewis and Looney, 1983).

Some researchers have highlighted the importance of satisfaction with family life itself, in addition to the achievement of positive individual outcomes. Stinnett, for example, proposes that a family “creates a sense of positive family identity, promotes satisfying and fulfilling interaction among members, encourages the development of family group and individual members, and is able to deal with stress” (Stinnett et al., 1979).

Others have focused on the family’s ability to adjust to change or crisis, with an emphasis on the changes across the family life cycle. Olson (1986), for example, notes that strong families not only cope with stress but end up being more cohesive and more satisfied in overcoming stress and problems. This finding is comparable to the results of other studies of stressful life events suggesting that when individuals are able to control or deal with such events satisfactorily, they emerge as more competent and resilient than those who have either been overwhelmed by traumatic experiences or who have encountered little stress in the course of their development (Hetherington, 1984).

Despite the differences in approaches, studies of family strengths have reached a broad range of agreement. First, research studies tend to support the idea that both the *quality of family relationships* and the *nature of family behaviors* are important in the consideration of family strengths. Relationships and processes represent a combination of structural, behavioral, and emotional attributes within the family unit, each of which makes important contributions to family life.

Second, researchers generally agree that *multiple measures* are necessary to provide a complete picture of the status of a specific family or groups of households. No single measure can serve as a unilateral indicator to distinguish dysfunctional families from others who can thrive, even under stressful conditions.

Third, measures of the quality of family relationships and behaviors need to incorporate the *different developmental periods* of family life. Families experience important transitions with the arrival and departure of adults and children, and the various developmental stages through which children and adults move. Temporary disruptions need to be distinguished from chronic deficiencies, especially among families that are characterized by turbulence and must frequently rearrange their relationship to specific locations and services.

Fourth, researchers generally agree that the nature of family strengths is influenced by *the social and economic context of the family's community*. Important sources of external support and assistance within extended families or communities are often taken for granted among families that are endowed with economic resources and social capital. Yet, their family relationships and processes may differ in important ways from families that are isolated from their kin or who must guard against threats and deprivation within their neighborhoods. But these differences may be driven by differences in context and structure rather than differences in the nature of the interactions themselves.

Finally, *the role of culture* affects family processes and relationships in ways that we don't currently understand or assess well. The African-American family, for example, has had cultural experiences that differ from those of other Americans, shaped not only by adaptation to their American historical and contemporary social experiences, but also by their African heritage (Ladner, 1998; Wilson, 1991). For example, the African-American family can differ from the European-American family in its relationships to non-immediate family members, which can include non-kin as well as kin in a tangible family unit (Martin and Martin, 1978). More kinship terms exist in African languages than in English, and the African culture places a stronger emphasis on collective or communal identity rather than individual identity. These cultural

processes lead to frequent socializing among African American family members, including a strong emphasis on participation in family occasions, especially funerals, holiday celebrations, and birthdays (Aschenbrenner, 1978; Ladner, 1998). Other studies of African-American, European-American, and Hispanic parents have found significant variations in these families' emphasis on parental control, support, permissiveness, strictness, egalitarianism, accelerated development, and the child's use of time (Bartz and Levine, 1978; Taylor, 1991). Yet these ethnic differences are often matters of degree rather than reflections of opposing viewpoints (Sugland et al., 1995).

The emphasis on values to be achieved through child socialization may also differ by class as well as ethnic status: low-income parents frequently stress the importance of characteristics that are necessary for survival in a context of severely restricted communal resources, while middle-income parents aspire to inculcate attributes consistent with success and mobility in the larger society (persistence and self-control, for example) (Allen 1985; Spencer 1985). In fact, no single parenting style may be the best for all children, and the most effective parenting style may vary by racial and ethnic groups (McGroder, 2000).

Section 2: Measures and Prevalence of Family Strengths and the Association Between Family Strengths and Child Outcomes

The measurement of family relationships and processes has blossomed over the last century. *The Handbook of Family Measurement Techniques* (Touliatos et al., 2000) cites abstracts of over 1,300 scales or individual items intended to assess family relationships and processes between 1929 and 1996. The majority of these scales or items have focused on the nature and quality of family relationships, both within and outside the household. But more recent work has concentrated on describing and assessing family processes in areas such as parenting, communication, and time use (Thornton, forthcoming). In Appendix Table 1, we present a comprehensive array of family behavior and relationship constructs. These constructs have emerged from a broad range of studies in the family research literature; not all of them have actually been operationalized with measurement instruments.

Researchers have studied the relationships between family strengths and youth outcomes for only a small subset of the constructs within this rich and complex array. Clearly, many children experiencing otherwise adverse situations, such as poverty and disability, succeed in life, and positive family processes likely contribute to this success, yet we currently do not have much empirical evidence identifying the pathways by which this success is achieved. As we look for ways to improve the lives of children, it will be important to know not only what influences result in poor outcomes, but also the circumstances under which children thrive and the factors that contribute to this flourishing.

Few family strengths constructs have been tested in national studies with families that represent the complex mix of American households, particularly households that are vulnerable

to social and economic stress. The limited data that do exist come from studies that were not designed to examine family strengths, but included family process or family relationship measures as part of some other research effort. These studies include, for example, surveys designed to track the well-being of children and families in an era of policy devolution (National Survey of America's Families), the labor and educational experiences of youth in their transition to adulthood, (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997, or NLSY97), and the demographic change among American families (National Survey of Families and Households, or NSFH). This new generation of surveys provides the initial building blocks for understanding the family processes and relationships that help buffer and strengthen families during difficult circumstances.

Which constructs of family strengths have been measured, and what do we know about them?

In this section, we review constructs that have been included in two recent national surveys, namely the National Survey of America's Families and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. We also consider a few constructs from the older National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 1988. The nationally representative NSAF focuses on the economic, health, and social characteristics of children and adults under age 65. The first wave took place in 1997. Here, we report analyses from the second wave, in which interviews of almost 46,000 households yielded information on 35,938 children under 18. In each household, one child under age 6 and one child between the ages of 6 and 17 were randomly selected, and the adult most knowledgeable about these children answered questions about them. The most knowledgeable adult was a parent of the child in 95 percent of cases, so we refer to this adult as the parent.

For the NLSY97, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) interviewed 9,022 adolescents (ages 12 to 16) from 6, 844 different households. The NLSY97 is representative of the non-institutionalized U.S. population born during 1980 through 1984. BLS intends to track longitudinally individuals' transition from school to work, and currently three waves of data are available (1997, 1998, and 1999). Many family process questions were only asked only of children ages 12 through 14, limiting the sample used for this paper to 5,444 adolescents. Also, children answered these questions only in 1997, so we report data for that year, rather than 1999, here.

Although not as current as the NSAF or NLSY97, another survey that includes family process measures is the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. NELS:88 is a nationally representative, longitudinal survey of an eighth-grade cohort in 1988 that collected data in four waves: eighth grade, tenth grade, twelfth grade or the equivalent, and two years out of high school. NELS:88 provides information about youth outcomes in the transition to adulthood, providing an opportunity to examine relationships between youth outcomes and individual characteristics, family background, and school and peer influences.

For each family strengths construct, we provide examples of questions from the NSAF, NLSY97, or NELS and note the prevalence of the family strength based on analyses of survey data (see Appendix Tables 2 and 4). We also describe how each measure is associated with positive outcomes in child and adult development, family functioning, satisfaction of family members, and adaptation to stress and change (see Appendix Tables 3 and 5). It is important to note that these are correlational associations only, and they cannot demonstrate causality. Nevertheless, they are suggestive of construct and measurement validity.

These variables, along with other constructs that have never appeared in national surveys (see our comprehensive list of family constructs in Appendix Table 1), should be considered for inclusion in new survey instruments to assess patterns, trends, and disparities in family strengths in different types of family environments.

Parental Positive Mental Health

How much of the time during the past month have you felt calm and peaceful? (asked of parents of children ages 0-17, NSAF)

How much of the time during the past month have you been a happy person? (asked of parents of children ages 0-17, NSAF)

Most research on parental mental health has focused on poor mental health, so the relationship between positive mental health in parents is not as richly documented as comparable negative measures. We know that poor parental mental health—particularly maternal depression—is related to poorer child adjustment (Downey and Coyne, 1990). A parent’s mental health affects the environment in which a child grows up. If the parent’s mental health is compromised, that parent’s ability to provide nurturing, love, care, and attention may be lessened, with negative consequences for the child (Ehrle and Moore, 1999). Research has found that parents with such symptoms tend to provide less emotional support and are more likely to employ harsh disciplinary practices (Puckering, 1989; Richters and Pellegrini, 1989; Moore et al., 1995).

In surveys, researchers typically use scales that include a number of items designed to get at symptoms such as depression or poor mental health. Such scales may include some survey questions that are worded in negative ways (for example, “how much of the time have you felt downhearted and blue”), but other items are worded in positive ways. In the NSAF, five items

are used to assess symptoms of poor parental mental health. Here, we focus on two of these items that ask parents specifically about positive experiences.

Most children do live with a parent who reported that he or she felt calm or peaceful all or most of the past month (58 percent; see figure 1) and that her or she was a happy person all or most of the past month (71 percent; see figure 2), according to the 1999 NSAF.

The NSAF also provides preliminary evidence that positive mental health is related to child well-being. Children whose parents report that they feel calm or peaceful, or who report that they are a happy person, are more likely than other children to be positively engaged in school and are less likely than other children to have a high level of behavioral and emotional problems, to have health problems, or to have been suspended or expelled from school (see Appendix Table 4).

Household routines

*In a typical week, how many days from 0 to 7 do you eat dinner with your family?
(asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)*

*In a typical week, how many days from 0 to 7 does house work get done when it's
supposed to, for example cleaning up after dinner, doing dishes, and taking out the
trash? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14 NLSY97)*

Maintenance of family routines (such as grooming, meals, chores, and errands) is positively linked to multiple child outcomes, including academic achievement, self-esteem, and both behavioral and psychosocial adjustment (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992). Everyday activities that are performed regularly predict to better child outcomes than do other random, irregular household tasks, even when those other tasks may be more stimulating (Gallimore et al., 1989). Such routines also enhance a sense of belonging within the family, another important predictor of future youth success. Families that are organized and in which members adhere to

regular roles tend to produce children who are more motivated towards achievement at school than do families that don't carry out regularized routines (Fontaine, 1994). In addition, self-control and other positive outcomes are associated with home environments in which family members' behavior is repetitive and predictable (Brody and Flor, 1997; Gallimore et al., 1989).

The majority of children live in families that do adhere to regular routines. For example, data from the NLSY97 show that 72 percent of adolescents eat dinner with their families at least five days per week (see figure 3), and 81 percent of adolescents live in households where routine household tasks are performed at least five days per week (see figure 4). Additionally, both of these routines are associated with positive outcomes for adolescents: families that eat meals together regularly and that do household tasks routinely have adolescents who are more likely to avoid delinquent behaviors, to avoid substance use, and to avoid being suspended from school. These adolescents are also less likely to have a high level of problem behaviors than are other adolescents. Additionally, adolescents in households where housework gets done five or more days per week are less likely than other adolescents to have limiting physical, emotional, or learning problems (see Appendix Table 5). We repeat that these are cross-sectional data, so the data show correlations only; causality may run in both directions.

Time Use

How often in the past month have you or any family member taken the child on any kind of outing, such as to the park, grocery store, a church, or a playground? (Asked of parents of children ages 0-5, NSAF)

In a typical week, how many days from 0 to 7 do you do something fun as a family such as play a game, go to a sporting event, go swimming and so forth? (Asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

Shared parent-child activities are important both because they are intrinsically satisfying and because they can help educate and socialize children. For example, research has found that

children whose homes emphasize learning opportunities and cognitively stimulating activities are more academically motivated than other children (Gottfried et al., 1998). In addition, this type of positive and enriching family environment can help prevent behavior problems in youth, including delinquent behavior (Cowen and Work, 1988; Garmezy, 1985; Zitzow 1990). Sufficient quality time together may be a prerequisite for well-being in family relationships (Greeff and LeRoux, 1999).

About a quarter of all young children under age 5 (26 percent) go on outings with family members about once a day, according to the NSAF, while the NLSY97 indicates that about half of adolescents ages 12 to 14 (48 percent) “do something fun” with their families three or more days per week. The NSAF has few measures of outcomes appropriate for young children, but the NLSY97 provides some evidence that reports of having fun with one’s family are associated with better outcomes for adolescents: These adolescents are more likely than others to avoid delinquent behaviors, substance use, suspension from school, and high levels of behavior and emotional problems (see Appendix Table 5).

Reading to Children

How many days in the past week did you or any family member read stories or tell stories to the child? (asked of parents of children ages 0-5, NSAF)

Adults can profoundly influence the quality and quantity of children’s literacy experiences (Snow et al., 1998). Reading to young children helps develop linguistic, cognitive, and literacy skills (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). One study (Perez-Granados and Callanan, 1997) explored the ways in which both parents and older siblings are resources for young children’s learning in the home, indicating that, among other outcomes, children learn skills from one another, mostly through observation and imitation. The value that parents place

on literacy, pressure for achievement, the availability and use of reading materials, and reading with children may all promote the development of children's literacy (Snow et al., 1998).

The NSAF indicates that half of children under age 5 are read to or told stories at least 6 days per week (see figure 7). Since the NSAF does not include few outcome measures for young children, the data do not speak to the relationship between reading/telling stories to young children and children's outcomes. (The outcome measure that is included in the NSAF—parents' reports of whether children are in fair or poor health—is not related to the construct of reading and telling stories to young children).

Participation in Activities

In the last year, has the child been on a sports team either in or out of school? (asked of parents of children ages 6-17, NSAF)

In the last year, has the child taken lessons after school or on weekends in subjects like music, dance, language, or computers? (asked of parents of children ages 6-17, NSAF)

In the last year, has the child participated in any clubs or organizations after school, or on weekends, such as scouts, a religious group or Boys or Girls club? (asked of parents of children ages 6-11, NSAF)

In the last year, has the child participated in any clubs or organizations after school, or on weekends, such as a youth group or student government, drama, band or chorus, or a religious or community group? (asked of parents of children ages 12-17, NSAF)

Has the child participated in any other organized activities during the past year? (asked of parents of children ages 12-17, if the responses to the above questions are all "no", NSAF)

Participation in extracurricular activities such as clubs, sports, or lessons stimulates cognitive development and promotes prosocial behavior (Bradley and Caldwell 1980; Bradley et al., 1988; Eccles and Barber, 1999). Research indicates that participation in organized activities is related to reduced rates of school dropout (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1995),

criminal offenses (Mahoney, 1997), sexual activity (Miller et al., 1998), and substance use (Youniss et al., 1997). Research has also shown that participation in extracurricular activities is associated with improvements in self-concept, educational aspirations, school engagement (Eccles and Barber, 1999), high school grade point average (Cooper et al., 1999; Eccles and Barber, 1999), and political and civic involvement in young adulthood (Hart et al., 1998 and 1999; Smith, 1999; Youniss et al., 1999). For example, a study based on the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 has found that students who consistently participated in extracurricular activities are more likely to vote, volunteer, and attend college than those who never participated (Zaff et al., 2001).

Analyses of the NSAF reveal that over half of children ages 6 to 17 participated in clubs or organizations (51 percent of 6- to 11-year-olds and 62 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds), a third (33 percent) took lessons outside of school, and over half (54 percent) were on a sports team (see figure 8). In total, the vast majority—82 percent—of children ages 6 to 17 participated in at least one extracurricular activity of some kind. As expected, these children are more likely to experience all the positive outcomes measured in the NSAF than are children who do not participate in any organized activities (see Appendix Table 4).

Religiosity

In the past 12 months, how often have you attended a religious service? (asked of parents of children ages 0-17, NSAF)

In the past 12 months, how often have you attended a worship service (like church or synagogue service or mass)? (asked of adolescents' responding parents, NLSY97)

In a typical week, how many days from 0 to 7 do you do something religious as a family such as go to church, pray or read the scriptures together? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

In the past year, about how often have you attended religious services? (asked of 10th- and 12th-graders, NELS:88)

Do you think of yourself as a religious person? (asked of 12th-graders, NELS:88)

Parental involvement in religious activities has been linked with positive outcomes among children, including cognitive and social competence, avoidance of early sexual activity, avoidance of delinquent behaviors, adolescent social responsibility, and a reduced incidence of depression (Brody et al., 1996; Gunnoe et al., 1999; Miller et al., 1997; Sherkat and Ellison, 1999; Amoateng and Bahr, 1986; Hundleby and Mercer, 1987). Parental religiosity is also related to parental support and control of youth (Gunnoe et al., 1999; Weigert and Thomas, 1972).

Adolescents' own religiosity can be an influential part of adolescent development, affecting the way they deal with issues of autonomy and the development of their individual beliefs (Wilcox et al., 2000). Adolescents who attend religious services are more likely to volunteer than are those who never attend religious services, according to the NELS:88 data (Zaff et al., 2001).

Although the frequency of attending religious activities is the most common measure of religiosity, recent research suggests that more than more than one measure is necessary to capture the multiple dimensions of religiosity (Brody et al., 1996). Even if adolescents attend religious services less frequently as they get older, religion may continue to play an important role in their development through, for example, participation in youth groups or choirs, or through their inward beliefs (Wilcox et al., 2000). Nevertheless, attendance at services is a clear behavioral marker of devotion that works for all of the major faiths and denominations.

Looking at the NSAF, we find that among children under 18, 40 percent have a parent who attends religious service once a week or more, 19 percent have a parent who attends a few

times a month, and 41 percent have a parent who never attends or attends a few times a year (see figure 9). The NLSY97 yields similar results: 37 percent of adolescents have a parent who attends worship services once a week or more, 12 percent have a parent who attends twice a month, and 51 percent have a parent who attends once a month or less often (see figure 11).

Religious involvement as assessed in these surveys is associated with positive child outcomes on most measures. Children ages 6 to 17 who have a parent who attends at least a few times a month are more likely than other children to be highly engaged in school and are less likely to have a high level of behavior problems or to have been suspended, expelled, and skipped school. Similarly in the NLSY97, adolescents whose parents attend twice a month or more are less likely than other adolescents to have been suspended, to have engaged in any delinquent behaviors, to have used any substances. Also, these adolescents are less likely than others to have a high level of behavioral and emotional problems or to have a learning or emotional condition that limits their schoolwork.

Turning to the NLSY97, we see that almost a fifth of adolescents ages 12 to 14 (19 percent) do something religious with their families three or more days per week (see figure 10). These adolescents are more likely than others to avoid delinquent behaviors and substance use.

According to NELS:88, almost half (46 percent) of high school students attend religious services at least weekly, over a third (36 percent) attend occasionally, and the remainder (18 percent) do not attend at all. Thirteen percent of students consider themselves to be a very religious person, while 61 percent say they are somewhat religious and 26 percent are not at all religious (see figure 12).

Thus, it is clear both that many families are actively religious and that being more active is related to better outcomes for children.

Volunteering

About how often in the past year have you participated in volunteer activities through a religious, school, or community group? (asked of parents of children ages 0-17, NSAF)

How often do you spend time on the following activities outside of school: Perform community service? (asked of 10th- and 12th-graders and young adults 2 years after 12th grade, NELS:88)

Parents serve as children's first and primary role models. Parents who volunteer are providing role models of civic involvement and compassion for others (Vandivere et al., 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994). One study (Jessor et al., 1998) showed that by modeling such positive health and social behaviors, parents promote positive health behaviors in adolescents. Parent volunteering activities are also linked with higher educational attainment among children (Buechel and Duncan, 1998).

About a fifth (21 percent) of children under 18 have a parent who volunteers once a week or more and 17 percent have a parent who volunteers a few times a month, while almost two-thirds (62 percent) have a parent who never volunteers or who volunteers just a few times per year (see figure 13). In the NSAF, parental volunteering is associated with positive outcomes among 6- to 17-year-olds, including positive school engagement, a lower likelihood of a high level of behavioral and emotional problems and of suspension, expulsion, and skipping school. And 12- to 17-year-olds who have a parent who volunteers are less likely than other adolescents to be in fair or poor health or to have a limiting health condition.

The NELS:88 includes a question about youth volunteering; analyses of NELS:88 data show that, two years after high school, 61 percent of youth volunteer (see figure 14; Zaff et al., 2001).

Communication processes

How often does [adolescent's mother/adolescent's father] praise you for doing well? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

If you had an emotional problem or personal relationship problem, who would you first turn to for help? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

Positive communication includes being warm, respectful, and interested in the child's opinion, while still maintaining reasonable control over the child (Carlson et al., 1992). Not only is such communication generally enjoyable and satisfying to both the parent and child, but it also is associated with well-being among children. For example, two-way communication in a trusting atmosphere can reduce myths and misinformation about health and can encourage healthy behavior among adolescents (Friedman, 1989). Often, communication between parent and child regarding the adolescent's behaviors, specifically adolescent sexual behavior, may be significantly influenced by parental attitudes towards such behavior, and this can affect the adolescent's behavior (Miller et al., 1998).

The NLSY97 asks adolescents about both their parents, and results of the survey indicate that the majority adolescents have mothers (76 percent) and fathers (70 percent) who usually or always praise them for doing well (see figure 15). These adolescents are more likely than others to avoid suspension from school, delinquency, substance use, and they are less likely to have a high level of behavior and emotional problems or to have a limiting learning or emotional problem. Over half of adolescents (54 percent) turn to one of their parents, rather than to another relative, friend, or to no one, when they have problems (see figure 16), and these adolescents are also less likely than others to be suspended from school, to be delinquent, to use substances, or to have a high level of behavioral and emotional problems.

Monitoring, supervision, and involvement

How much does [adolescent's mother/adolescent's father] know about your close friends, that is, who they are? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

How much does [adolescent's mother/adolescent's father] know about your close friends' parents, that is, who they are? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

How much does [adolescent's mother/adolescent's father] know about who you are with when you are not at home? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

How much does [adolescent's mother/adolescent's father] know about who your teachers are and what you are doing in school? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

Parents know the names of 8th grader's friends (asked of parents regarding 8th-graders and 12th-graders, NELS:88)

Supervision by parents that is perceived as too strict may make youth feel that they are not trusted (Miller et al., 1998). But when combined with encouragement and praise, monitoring of adolescents' schoolwork and social life can promote better grades, socially acceptable behaviors, and prosocial actions (Eisenberg, forthcoming). Children whose parents encourage their school performance tend to be more highly motivated toward their schoolwork (Ginsburg and Bronstein, 1993). Similarly, young adolescents whose parents are involved with their education both at school and at home tend to have a better orientation toward school, better grades, and higher overall academic success than other adolescents (Shumow and Miller, 2001). Adolescents who report relatively high levels of parental supervision tend to score higher on measures of psychosocial competence than do other adolescents (Lamborn et al., 1991). This kind of strict yet nurturing parenting is related to adolescents' motivation and engagement (Rueter and Conger, 1998). Families where adolescents are closely supervised are also less likely to engage in risky behaviors, including sexual intercourse (Miller et al., 1998).

In the NELS:88, parental involvement in school was measured in eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades. The NELS:88 involvement index includes items such as discussing with parents school programs, activities, and things studied in class and whether the parent has volunteered at the school. The NELS:88 also includes a composite measure of monitoring, which was also assessed in eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades. The monitoring index consists of questions on whether the student spends time alone after school, whether parents monitor time spent with friends on school nights, whether parents monitor television viewing, and whether parents check that homework is completed.

The analysis of the NELS:88 data indicated that although parents were generally diligent about monitoring their children's activities, only one quarter of parents were involved throughout middle and high school in adolescents' life as students (Zaff et al., forthcoming). On the other hand, only about one-eighth of parents were reported to exhibit low involvement across the three school-aged waves of the study. Consistently high parental involvement across the first three waves of data increased odds that adolescents would attend college, vote, and volunteer (Zaff et al., forthcoming). Zaff and his colleagues (forthcoming) also found that those adolescents whose parents were low on monitoring volunteered less than those whose parents monitored more.

Looking at data from the NLSY97, we find that adolescents' residential parents typically do know their friends, their friends' parents, their teachers and school activities, and where adolescents spend their time, though mothers seem more likely to know these things than fathers. For example, 78 percent of adolescents' mothers and 35 percent of adolescents' fathers know most or everything about the adolescents' friends (see figure 17); 41 percent of adolescents' mothers and 29 percent of their fathers know their friends' parents (see figure 18); 73 percent of mothers and 55 percent of fathers know who adolescents are with when they are not home (see

figure 20); 70 percent of mothers and 49 percent of fathers know the adolescents' teachers and school activities (see figure 21). Some additional information comes from NELS:88: 94 percent of parents report that they know the names of their eighth-grade adolescents' friends, and 97 percent of parents report that they know their twelfth-graders' friends (see figure 19; Zaff et al., forthcoming).

Measures of monitoring are related to adolescent outcomes in the NLSY97. All the NLSY97 monitoring measures for both parents are associated with avoidance of suspension from school, delinquent behaviors, and substance use and with a decreased likelihood of having a high level of behavioral and emotional problems.

Family Relationships

Researchers attempt to assess the quality of family relationships by looking at levels of family cohesion, affect, or feelings of connectedness among family members. Positive family relationships involve feelings of closeness, love, doing things together, supportive arrangements, and bonding (Ketsetzis et al., 1998; Tseng and Fuligni, 2000; Barber and Buehler, 1996). The degree of positive sentiment that family members hold about each other, as well as their perceived closeness to one another, represent family strengths (Silverstein and Bengston, 1997).

The research literature on family relationships clusters around specific types of relationships, including marital, parent-child, sibling, multi-generational, and relationships between the family and the community. Researchers have studied the functions that various types of relationships fulfill, both in terms of emotional content (such as nurturing, support,

affection, and intimacy) and instrumental value (providing access to material resources and services).

Family cohesion and social support are related to the health and well being of children, reducing the likelihood of problems like depression in adolescents (Cumsille and Epstein, 1994). Not only are positive family relationships inherently satisfying, but they predict outcomes such as depression, delinquency, and substance use among adolescents (Cumsille and Epstein, 1994; Moore, Hair, and Kinukawa, 2000).

Parent-child warmth and supportiveness

I think highly of [my mother/my father] (adolescents ages 12-14 report their level of agreement, NLSY97)

[My mother/My father] is a person I want to be like (adolescents ages 12-14 report their level of agreement, NLSY97)

I really enjoy spending time with [my mother/my father] (adolescents ages 12-14 report their level of agreement, NLSY97)

How often does [your mother/your father] help you do things that are important to you? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

Parent-child interactions can affect children's behavior over and above the influence of socioeconomic and demographic factors, such as income, family structure, race, and parent education (Moore et al., 2001). The quality of parents' and children's attachment to each other can hinder or aid parents' efforts to socializing their children—for example, promoting independence or empathy for others. Positive parent-child interactions, in which parents respond in developmentally appropriate ways to children, can teach children how to interact socially in a positive way (Cox, forthcoming). Additionally, strong parent-child attachment enhances parent-child communication and facilitates parents' monitoring of their children (Kerns et al., 2001). Characteristics of relationships between parents and young children, such as attachment,

sensitivity and responsiveness, likely promote positive development of children (Bridges et al., 2001). Similarly for older children, some work reveals that close and supportive parent-adolescent relationships can protect youth against multiple negative outcomes down the road (Blum and Rinehart, 1997). However, not much research examines how strong relationships between parents and young children affect these children's well-being as they grow into adults.

Researchers have focused on warmth and supportiveness as an important area of positive parent-child interactions. High parental warmth and supportiveness contribute to healthy development, particularly when they are combined with high expectations for maturity. Baumrind's research (1971, 1989), for example, has demonstrated that parents who are warm and place high demands on their children for appropriate behavior have children who tend to be content, self-reliant, self-controlled, and open to exploration in the school context. Warm and positive mother-child reciprocal relationships can buffer children from stress, and maternal sensitivity to children's needs is a strong predictor of positive cognitive and social outcomes (NICHD Study of Early Childcare, 1997, 1998, 1999).

Analyses of the NLSY97 suggest that adolescents in general have warm and supportive relationships with their parents. The majority of adolescents think highly of their parent (85 percent for mothers and 81 percent for fathers; see figure 22). Also most agree that their parent is a person they want to be like (59 percent for mothers and 58 percent for fathers; see figure 23), and enjoy spending time with their parent (81 percent for mothers and 77 percent for fathers; see figure 24). Moreover, 79 percent of adolescents report that their mother usually or always helps with what is important to them, and 67 percent report that their fathers help them (see figure 25).

Such warm and supportive relationships are consistently associated with good adolescent outcomes in the NSFY97. Each of the indicators of warmth in the NLSY97 are related to a

decreased likelihood of suspension from school, high behavioral and emotional problems, delinquent behavior, and substance use (see Appendix Table 5).

Parents' relationships with each other

Overall, would you say the behavior of your biological [mother/father] toward your biological [father/mother] is... (adolescents ages 12-14 are asked to reply according to a scale ranging from "very friendly" to "as hostile as you can imagine" regarding their parents if they have a non-residential biological parent, NLSY97)

Is [your mother/your father] fair and willing to compromise [with your father/with your mother] when they disagree? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

Does [your mother/your father] express affection or love for [your father/your mother]? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

Does [your mother/your father] encourage or help him do things that are important to [your father/your mother]? (asked of adolescents ages 12-14, NLSY97)

The quality of marriages and couples' satisfaction with their marriages are central to both individual and family well-being. Research on marital relationships focuses on conflict and on problem solving, but it also examines the patterns and effects of behaviors within marriages (Bradbury et al., 2000). Numerous studies indicate that the marital relationship of children's parents can affect children's outcomes (Conger and Elder, 1994; Emery and O'Leary, 1984; Hetherington et al., 1998; Shaw and Emery, 1987).

When adolescents' biological parents do not live together the relationship may not be so positive: in these relationships, 41 percent of adolescents' mothers are friendly or very friendly to the father, while 46 percent of fathers are friendly or very friendly to the mother (see figure 26). However, neither of these measures is correlated with any of the adolescent outcomes we examined in the NLSY97.

The NLSY97 asks adolescents questions about their mothers' behavior toward their fathers and vice versa. Also, the NLSY97 asks questions both about adolescents who have two

residential parents and about adolescents who have a biological parent living elsewhere. Most adolescents report that their residential parents do have positive relationships. For example, 82 percent report that their mother usually or always expresses love and affection for their father, 74 percent that their mother usually or always compromises with their father when the pair disagrees, and 78 percent report that their mother usually or always encourages what is important to their father (see figures 27-29). The percentages are comparable when adolescents respond regarding their father's behavior toward their mother (79 percent, 69 percent, and 75 percent respectively for the three measures; see figures 27-29). Evidence from the NLSY97 suggests that positive relationships between parents are associated with good outcomes among adolescents, including avoidance of delinquency and substance use, and a decreased likelihood of having a high level of behavioral and emotional problems.

In summary, our review of the literature and analyses of data from the NSAF, NLSY97, and NELS88 show that most children do live in families that possess important strengths and that these family strengths are related to good outcomes across a range of child well-being measures.

Section 3: What is missing from current family strengths research?

What should our next steps be?

Despite bad news and negative trends, there is much that is good about America. Even that much maligned institution, the American family, enjoys many strengths. Unfortunately, the important but one-sided chronicling of negative trends tends to ignore these strengths. Indeed, the U.S. statistical system places little emphasis on the assessment of strengths among families or children.

This report defines the concept of family strengths, explains their importance, and examines a sampling of family strengths measures. Family strengths are the set of relationships and behaviors that support and protect families and family members, that sustain families during periods of change and adversity, and that support the well-being and development of individuals within a family while also maintaining the cohesion of the family as a whole.

The measures of family strengths explored here represent only a small portion of the full set of potential family strengths constructs (outlined in Appendix Table 1). These include constructs within family relationships that range from measures of warmth and support to parents' knowledge of their children's close friends, and constructs within family processes that range from family routines and parental monitoring and supervision to conflict resolution strategies.

In this brief report, we have focused on a set of variables that have been measured in several contemporary national databases. These include parental mental health, household routines, time use, reading to young children, participation in extracurricular activities,

volunteering, religiosity, communication, monitoring and supervision, parent-child warmth and supportiveness, and parents' relationships with each other.

Our review of data from recent, national surveys indicates that levels of important family strengths are quite high in contemporary families. We find considerable evidence of closeness, concern, caring and interaction. For example, the majority of adolescents (72 percent) eat dinner with their families five or more days per week, and the majority report that they enjoy spending time with their parents (81 percent for mothers and 77 percent for fathers).

This overview is not intended to overlook problems that also exist in contemporary families or children. Most families and children have at least some problems, and some experience very difficult problems. Rather, our goal is to balance the common emphasis on problems with a perspective that points out high levels of important positive characteristics.

We note, however, that as yet only a sub-set of these important constructs has been measured and included in nationally representative surveys. Many constructs have not been measured at all, while others are included only in small, local surveys. Also, many samples have not been diverse, much less representative, precluding examination of how family strengths occur in various demographic groups and in various geographic regions. What is of special interest is the extent to which low-income and disadvantaged families have unrecognized strengths that enable their families to withstand adversity and their children to succeed in life.

Moreover, many studies lack outcome measures that would enable researchers to ascertain whether family strengths are associated with other measures of well-being either at the present time or in the future. Clearly we need to develop new and better measures to assess family strengths and to collect new data. Such efforts would increase our understanding of how

to support America's families by allowing researchers to examine a comprehensive set of family strengths within a single study, with a single sample, and with consistent measures.

Nevertheless, our summaries of the research literatures available on family strengths suggest that these constructs are important for well-being and development. Moreover, the data presented here, while only an initial analysis of family strengths constructs and data, clearly indicate that many U.S. families enjoy quite high levels of these important characteristics and that family strengths are related to child outcomes. Given the relentless reporting of negative news, this positive message is an important research result to be shared with the American public.

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APPENDIX TABLE 1: FAMILY STRENGTHS CONSTRUCTS

A. Family Processes

- 1) **Development of children's skills (differentiated by age)**
 - a) Cognitive skills and stimulation
 - Stimulating early language, word recognition, pronunciation ability
 - Creativity, art, and music appreciation
 - Reading at home with discussion
 - Fostering education, including literacy and math skills
 - Supervising homework
 - Enrichment opportunities
 - b) Economic skills
 - Expectations about child's contribution to family economy
 - Use of allowances
 - Teaching budgetary practices (including use of credit)
 - Budgeting for child health and education expenses
 - Future job training
 - Problem-solving competence
 - Entrepreneurial socialization
 - c) Health, diet, and safety behaviors
 - Encouraging responsible sexual/child-bearing behaviors
 - Maintaining healthy diets
 - Regular exercise
 - Use of helmets and protective sports equipment
 - d) Independence, risk-taking, and protective behaviors
 - Identifying signals of potential danger
 - Gate-keeping behaviors
 - Exposure to new situations and experiences
 - Exposure to new adults and other children
 - "Landscaping" skills, learning about the neighborhood and community
 - e) Communication and navigation skills
 - Developing self-respect and respect for adults
 - Atmosphere of mutual trust in the home
 - Listening to children, learning how to express needs and preferences
 - Directing children toward opportunities, services, and networks
 - Fostering independence and ability to handle strange situations
- 2) **Spirituality/religiosity**
 - a) Moral training
 - Teaching obedience, discipline, loyalty
 - Fostering respect for self and tolerance of others
 - Teaching responsibility and honesty
 - b) Behaviors and time use
 - Family rituals and holidays
 - Family participation in spiritual/religious programs
 - Family membership in religious institution or group

3) Enjoyment, appreciation, and support within the family

- a) Expressing pleasure with each other's company
 - Having fun together
- b) Creating opportunities for family get togethers
 - Doing things together (mutual involvement in joint activities)
 - Doing things alone together
- c) Providing assistance to family members with a problem (health, school, relationship, work)
 - Showing kindness and generosity towards family members
- d) Differentiation
 - Tolerance for individuality within the family
 - Level of intimacy

4) Formation of positive group/collective identity for the family

- a) Sense of history and connectedness
- b) Sense of vision and common purpose
- c) Fostering loyalty to members of family and ethnic groups

5) Order and routines in the family

- a) Assignment of household chores
- b) Adulthood of children in household routines; overburdening children
- c) Use of bedtime, eating, recreational, childcare, etc routines and schedules
- d) Level of differentiation in response to individual needs and preferences
- e) Flexibility in daily routines, adaptability of roles
- f) Adaptable to developmental changes

6) Monitoring and supervision: setting limits and boundaries

- a) Negotiating transitions from external to self-control; guiding towards "right choices"
 - Entertainment (time and content) (TV, movies, computers, videos)
 - Recreation (place and time)
 - Communication (use of phone, email)
 - Transportation (use of cars and public transportation)
- b) Monitoring peer interactions
 - Playgroups and time with friends
 - Curfews and dating practices
 - Use of structured vs unstructured time
 - Levels of monitoring and supervision
- c) Responses to rule violations (discipline)
- d) Setting positive role model; mentorship; guidance

7) Adaptability/ Response to crisis and change (both gradual and acute)

- a) Sensitivity to needs and strengths of each other
- b) Tolerance and respect for individual differences
- c) Ability to adapt to new circumstances (change in employment, health, new family members, etc)

- d) Ability to negotiate change within the family
 - Coping strategies (implicit and explicit; appropriateness)
- e) Cultural adaptation
 - Ability to retain original language and customs but participate in mainstream
 - Continuation of cultural practices

8) Time use

- a) Quantity of time together
- b) Quality of time together
- c) Clear, consistent roles that are mutually acceptable
- d) *Mutual involvement in joint activities*

9) Balance of power /decision making (legitimacy/acceptability of decision-making strategies)

- a) Negotiating time use (within and outside the home)
 - Allocation of household chores
 - Caregiver support
 - Attributes of selected roles
- b) Allocating economic resources
- c) Resolving boundary disputes and ambiguity

10) Resolving family conflict (parent/parent and parent/child)

- a) Timing, level, and extent of irritability and argument
 - Duration and severity
 - Individual or collective (including extended family members)
 - General or specific issues (parenting, time use, curfew issues, etc)
- b) Methods of resolving disagreement and conflict
 - Use of negotiation and discussion tactics
 - Use of isolation and separation strategies (“time outs”, “cooling down”)
 - Use of objects in resolving conflict
- c) Disciplining children
 - Consistency of discipline
 - Reasoning behind discipline
 - Use of force and violence

B. Family Relationships

1) Parent to Parent relationships (dyadic)

- a) Instrumental relationships (money, housing, material support)
 - Economic dependence
 - Does your spouse rely on you?
- b) Affective relationships (sharing of values, traditions, nurturance)
 - Expressed emotion/criticism
 - Sense of “marriage in trouble”
 - Truth-telling
- f) Marital cohesion/commitment/quality

2) Parent to Child Relationships (dyadic)

- a) Attachment; quality of relationship
 - b) Engagement and active involvement (support and communication)
 - Focus
 - Dependability
 - Interest
 - Responsibility
 - Accessibility
 - c) Child perception of mother/father acceptance
 - d) Authoritative parenting – cross between communication/limit setting & warmth
 - e) Parental mentoring/advisory role

3) Other Family Relationships

- a) Other family/fictive kin relationships – siblings, extended family living in/outside household
 - Instrumental relationships
 - Affective relationships
 - Family support/criticism
 - Honesty and dependability
- b) Community relationships
 - Formal participation in external institutions (employment, school, health, etc)
 - Parental involvement in school
 - Informal participation in social networks (volunteerism, neighborhood interactions, childcare, adult respite care, etc)
- c) Connectedness and cohesion– degree of consistency and shared values across institutions and networks
 - Within family networks (“do you disagree on...”)
 - Across different social and community networks
 - Time together/time apart/time alone together

4) Stability, Change, and Predictability

- a) Stability and turbulence
 - Duration and frequency of change in residential location, school, child care, household composition, employment, and changes in other proximal relationships
- b) Family Stress (low or high)
 - Hassles vs stressors
 - Single vs. multiple stressors
 - Acute vs. chronic stress
 - Intensity, severity
- c) Breakdown of regulatory systems or mechanisms (rule violations go unpunished)

APPENDIX TABLE 2: Percentage of children under age 18 experiencing various family characteristics, by age group by age group, 1997 and 1999 (National Survey of America's Families, weighted estimates)

		1997				1999			
		Age 0-5	Age 6-11	Age 12-17	All Ages	Age 0-5	Age 6-11	Age 12-17	All Ages
MKA felt calm or peaceful all or most of the time in past month	Percent	59.8	58.9	58.9	59.2	59.1	58.8	57.0	58.3
	St. Error	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.5
MKA was a happy person all or most of the time in past month	Percent	71.9	70.2	69.5	70.6	73.1	70.7	69.5	71.1
	St. Error	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.4
MKA's attendance at religious services in past year									
Never/a few times per year	Percent	43.1	39.7	40.4	41.1	44.3	39.3	40.0	41.2
	St. Error	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.6
A few times a month	Percent	20.1	18.3	17.7	18.7	20.2	19.1	17.0	18.8
	St. Error	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.4
Once a week or more	Percent	36.9	42.0	41.9	40.2	35.5	41.6	43.0	40.0
	St. Error	0.9	0.9	1.1	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.5
MKA's volunteering in the past year									
Never/a few times per year	Percent	70.4	56.5	59.8	62.2	70.3	57.0	59.4	62.2
	St. Error	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.5
A few times a month	Percent	15.0	18.6	17.4	17.0	14.7	18.7	17.8	17.1
	St. Error	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.4
Once a week or more	Percent	14.6	24.9	22.8	20.8	15.0	24.3	22.8	20.8
	St. Error	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.5
MKA or family member read or told stories to child at least 6 days in past week	Percent	47.5	--	--	--	49.5	--	--	--
	St. Error	1.0	--	--	--	0.7	--	--	--
MKA or family member took child on outing about once a day	Percent	24.4	--	--	--	25.9	--	--	--
	St. Error	0.8	--	--	--	0.7	--	--	--
Child participated in clubs or organizations after school or on weekends ^a	Percent	--	52.5	60.0	--	--	51.0	61.7	--
	St. Error	--	1.1	1.1	--	--	1.0	0.9	--
Child participated in lessons after school or on weekends ^b	Percent	--	28.9	29.1	29.0	--	33.8	31.6	32.7
	St. Error	--	0.9	1.0	0.6	--	0.8	0.9	0.6
Child was on a sports team in or out of school ^b	Percent	--	54.0	56.4	55.2	--	53.1	55.1	54.1
	St. Error	--	0.9	1.1	0.7	--	0.9	0.9	0.6
Other activity participation ^b									
Child did not participate in any organized activity	Percent	--	17.6	16.2	16.9	--	18.8	17.0	17.9
	St. Error	--	0.7	0.8	0.5	--	0.9	0.6	0.6
Child participated in some activity but not lessons, clubs, or sports	Percent	--	3.9	2.5	3.2	--	3.3	2.6	3.0
	St. Error	--	0.3	0.3	0.2	--	0.3	0.2	0.2
Child participated in lessons, clubs, or sports	Percent	--	78.5	81.3	79.9	--	77.9	80.5	79.2
	St. Error	--	0.8	0.9	0.6	--	0.9	0.7	0.5
Child participated in at least one activity ^b	Percent	--	82.2	83.7	83.0	--	81.1	83.0	82.0
	St. Error	--	0.7	0.8	0.5	--	0.9	0.6	0.5
Total Sample Sizes:		12,615	11,196	10,628	34,439	12,515	11,614	11,809	35,938

^a Separate, age-appropriate questions were asked for children of different age groups, so a total for ages 6-17 is not provided here. 6- to 11-year-olds were asked whether they participated in clubs or organizations such as scouts, a religious group, or Girls or Boys club, while 12- to 17-year olds were asked about organizations such as a youth group or student government, drama, band, or chorus, or a religious or community group.

^b Totals for children of all ages includes only ages 6 to 17 for these variables.

Note: -- indicates that the question was not appropriate for age group
For all variables, levels of missing data are below 2%

**APPENDIX TABLE 3: Percentage of adolescents ages 12-14 experiencing various family processes, 1997
(National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997, weighted estimates)**

Adolescent eats dinner with family 5+ days per week	Percent	72.42			
	St. Error	0.61			
	N	5,355			
Housework gets done 5+ days per week	Percent	81.10			
	St. Error	0.54			
	N	5,353			
Adolescent has fun with family 3+ days per week	Percent	47.56			
	St. Error	0.68			
	N	5,356			
Adolescent does something religious with family 3+ days per week	Percent	18.88			
	St. Error	0.53			
	N	5,364			
Frequency of attending worship services for adolescent's responding parent					
Once a month or less, never	Percent	50.96			
	St. Error	0.72			
	N	4779			
Twice a month	Percent	12.26			
	St. Error	0.47			
	N	4779			
Once a week or more	Percent	36.77			
	St. Error	0.7			
	N	4779			
Mother usually/always praises adolescent for doing well ^a	Percent	76.16	Father usually/always praises adolescent for doing well ^b	Percent	69.67
	St. Error	0.59		St. Error	0.73
	N	5,213		N	3,955
Mother usually/always helps with what is important to adolescent ^a	Percent	78.62	Father usually/always helps with what is important to adolescent ^b	Percent	66.76
	St. Error	0.57		St. Error	0.75
	N	5,214		N	3,955
Mother usually/always compromises with father when they disagree ^a	Percent	74.44	Father usually/always compromises with mother when they disagree ^b	Percent	69.42
	St. Error	0.77		St. Error	0.82
	N	3,178		N	3,177
Mother usually/always expresses love and affection for father ^a	Percent	81.62	Father usually/always expresses love and affection for mother ^b	Percent	79.03
	St. Error	0.69		St. Error	0.72
	N	3,177		N	3,173

**APPENDIX TABLE 3: Percentage of adolescents ages 12-14 experiencing various family processes, 1997
(National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997, weighted estimates)**

Mother usually/always encourages what is important to father ^a	Percent	77.58	Father usually/always encourages what is important to mother ^b	Percent	74.63
	St. Error	0.74		St. Error	0.77
	N	3,184		N	3,179
Mother knows most things/everything about adolescent's close friends ^a	Percent	56.97	Father knows most things/everything about adolescent's close friends ^b	Percent	34.55
	St. Error	0.69		St. Error	0.76
	N	5,212		N	3,954
Mother knows most things/everything about adolescent's friends' parents ^a	Percent	40.91	Father knows most things/everything about adolescent's friends' parents ^b	Percent	29.10
	St. Error	0.68		St. Error	0.72
	N	5,208		N	3,954
Mother knows most things/everything about who adolescent is with when not home ^a	Percent	73.05	Father knows most things/everything about who adolescent is with when not home ^b	Percent	55.08
	St. Error	0.61		St. Error	0.79
	N	5,210		N	3,952
Mother knows most things/everything about adolescent's teachers and school activities ^a	Percent	70.39	Father knows most things/everything about adolescent's teachers and school activities ^b	Percent	48.91
	St. Error	0.64		St. Error	0.80
	N	5,157		N	3,919
Adolescent turns to biological, adoptive, or step parent with problems	Percent	54.20			
	St. Error	0.68			
	N	5,395			
Adolescent thinks highly of mother	Percent	84.83	Adolescent thinks highly of father	Percent	81.31
	St. Error	0.5		St. Error	0.62
	N	5209		N	3954
Adolescent's mother is a person s/he wants to be like	Percent	58.86	Adolescent's father is a person s/he wants to be like	Percent	58.19
	St. Error	0.68		St. Error	0.78
	N	5210		N	3950
Adolescent enjoys spending time with mother	Percent	81.07	Adolescent enjoys spending time with father	Percent	77.3
	St. Error	0.54		St. Error	0.67
	N	5212		N	3956
Biological mother is friendly or very friendly to biological father ^c	Percent	41.15	Biological father is friendly or very friendly to biological mother ^c	Percent	45.95
	St. Error	2.59		St. Error	2.63
	N	361		N	360

^a Asked regarding the adolescent's residential mother or mother figure

^b Asked regarding the adolescent's residential father or father figure

^c Asked only of adolescents with a non-residential biological parent

**APPENDIX TABLE 4: Percentage of children with various outcomes, by measures of positive family processes, 1999
(National Survey of America's Families, weighted estimates)**

Family process measure	High level of behavioral & mental health problems	High level of behavioral & mental health problems	High level of school engagement	High level of school engagement	Suspended/expelled & skipped school 2+ times last yr.	Fair or poor health	Fair or poor health	Fair or poor health	Limiting health condition	Limiting health condition	Limiting health condition
	Age 6-11	Age 12-17	Age 6-11	Age 12-17	Age 12-17	Age 0-5	Age 6-11	Age 12-17	Age 0-5	Age 6-11	Age 12-17
All children	6.3	7.4	41.7	38.3	5.2	3.9	4.0	5.8	3.9	10.1	12.7
Parent felt calm or peaceful											
Some or none of the time in past month	10.5	11.4	36.0	33.3	7.4	5.6	7.0	8.7	5.8	14.2	16.9
All or most of the time in past month	3.4	4.5	45.5	42.3	3.7	2.7	2.0	3.5	2.7	7.5	9.3
Parent was a happy person											
Some or none of the time in past month	12.4	13.2	34.0	33.2	9.1	7.4	6.7	11.0	6.5	14.9	18.8
All or most of the time in past month	3.8	4.9	44.7	40.8	3.6	2.6	2.9	3.4	3.1	8.2	9.8
Parent attended religious service											
A few times a year or never	8.0	8.7	38.0	35.2	6.7	3.8	5.5	5.1	4.1	12.3	14.7
A few times a month or more	5.3	6.6	44.0	40.5	4.3	4.0	3.1	6.3	3.9	8.9	11.1
Parent volunteered											
A few times a year or never	7.5	9.4	39.2	34.1	6.9	4.1	4.6	6.7	3.8	11.0	13.9
A few times a month or more	4.7	4.6	45.1	44.6	3.0	3.3	3.3	4.5	4.5	9.2	10.8
Parent or family member read or told stories to child											
5 or fewer days in past week	--	--	--	--	--	4.6	--	--	4.3	--	--
At least 6 days in past week	--	--	--	--	--	3.2	--	--	3.6	--	--
Parent or family member took child on outing											
Several times a week or fewer	--	--	--	--	--	4.3	--	--	4.3	--	--
About once a day	--	--	--	--	--	2.8	--	--	3.1	--	--

**APPENDIX TABLE 4: Percentage of children with various outcomes, by measures of positive family processes, 1999
(National Survey of America's Families, weighted estimates)**

Family process measure	High level of behavioral & mental health problems Age 6-11	High level of behavioral & mental health problems Age 12-17	High level of school engagement Age 6-11	High level of school engagement Age 12-17	Suspended/expelled & skipped school 2+ times last yr. Age 12-17	Fair or poor health Age 0-5	Fair or poor health Age 6-11	Fair or poor health Age 12-17	Limiting health condition Age 0-5	Limiting health condition Age 6-11	Limiting health condition Age 12-17
Child participated in clubs or organizations after school or on weekends											
No	7.0	12.0	38.2	29.7	10.3	--	5.2	9.4	--	12.7	18.1
Yes	5.6	4.6	44.9	43.7	2.5	--	2.9	3.6	--	7.8	9.2
Child participated in lessons after school or on weekends											
No	7.3	9.2	38.4	34.8	7.1	--	4.8	7.2	--	12.1	14.6
Yes	4.4	3.7	48.1	46.3	1.7	--	2.6	2.8	--	6.6	8.1
Child was on a sports team in or out of school											
No	8.5	10.6	40.9	33.8	8.4	--	6.0	7.5	--	13.0	16.3
Yes	4.4	4.9	42.4	42.3	2.9	--	2.3	4.4	--	7.7	9.6
Child participated in at least one extracurricular activity*											
No	11.4	15.4	35.7	26.3	17.5	--	7.4	11.1	--	17.7	22.3
Yes	5.1	5.8	43.0	40.8	3.1	--	3.2	4.7	--	8.5	10.6

* This variable includes sports, lessons, clubs, and "any other organized activities during the past year."

Note: numbers in bold indicate statistically significant differences at the p < .05 level.

APPENDIX TABLE 5: Percentage of adolescents ages 12-14 with various outcomes, by measures of positive family processes, 1997 (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997, weighted estimates)

Family process measure	Ever suspended from school	Physical/emotional condition limits school or work	Learning/emotional problem limits school/work	High level of behavior problems (youth report)	No delinquent behaviors ^a	No substance use ^b
All adolescents	22.11	7.51	11.03	2.81	50.14	55.47
Number of days adolescent eats dinner with family						
less than 5 days/week	26.16	8.24	11.90	5.18	43.90	45.76
five or more days/week	20.21	7.14	10.56	1.78	52.70	59.38
Number of days housework gets done						
less than 5 days/week	26.43	10.55	16.54	5.71	42.30	47.90
five or more days/week	20.78	6.78	9.70	2.04	52.06	57.45
Number of days adolescent has fun with family						
less than 3 days/week	23.23	7.10	11.28	3.47	44.44	48.98
three or more days/week	20.41	7.93	10.59	1.98	56.46	62.83
Number of days adolescent does something religious with family						
less than 3 days/week	21.98	7.69	11.00	2.89	48.84	52.64
three or more days/week	21.66	6.56	11.00	2.18	56.07	68.02
Adolescent's responding parent attends worship services						
once a month or less, or never	24.72	7.98	11.94	3.36	46.01	47.78
twice a month or more	18.50	7.05	10.08	2.12	54.50	63.07
Mother praises adolescent for doing well						
never, rarely, sometimes	30.59	7.81	13.12	5.76	36.28	43.32
usually or always	18.83	7.16	10.00	1.79	55.03	59.81
Mother helps with what is important to adolescent						
never, rarely, sometimes	28.58	8.32	12.65	4.94	37.30	44.54
usually or always	19.73	7.08	10.24	2.14	54.18	58.97
Father praises adolescent for doing well						
never, rarely, sometimes	26.43	7.94	13.45	4.82	39.26	45.63
usually or always	15.17	5.82	8.51	1.24	57.38	62.72
Father helps with what is important to adolescent						
never, rarely, sometimes	23.30	7.18	11.51	3.78	42.30	48.19
usually or always	16.24	6.09	9.23	1.60	56.68	62.21
Mother compromises with father when they disagree						
never, rarely, sometimes	23.44	6.47	10.93	4.28	43.52	50.76
usually or always	14.38	6.02	9.00	1.34	56.71	61.22
Mother expresses love and affection for father						
never, rarely, sometimes	18.78	8.40	10.23	4.04	42.94	50.66
usually or always	16.15	5.69	9.31	1.65	55.64	60.50

APPENDIX TABLE 5: Percentage of adolescents ages 12-14 with various outcomes, by measures of positive family processes, 1997 (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997, weighted estimates)

Family process measure	Ever suspended from school	Physical/emotional condition limits school or work	Learning/emotional problem limits school/work	High level of behavior problems (youth report)	No delinquent behaviors ^a	No substance use ^b
Mother encourages what is important to father						
never, rarely, sometimes	20.85	7.67	12.44	4.15	38.79	47.74
usually or always	15.44	5.72	8.58	1.49	57.56	61.88
Father compromises with mother when they disagree						
never, rarely, sometimes	23.45	6.89	9.92	3.85	43.09	47.62
usually or always	13.67	5.86	9.34	1.31	57.96	63.46
Father expresses love and affection for mother						
never, rarely, sometimes	18.65	7.40	8.40	4.12	44.42	51.52
usually or always	16.07	5.85	9.75	1.55	55.65	60.64
Father encourages what is important to mother						
never, rarely, sometimes	20.81	8.12	11.46	4.12	42.64	49.18
usually or always	15.24	5.49	8.78	1.40	57.03	61.97
Mother knows adolescent's close friends						
knows nothing, a little, some things	26.83	8.29	12.45	4.13	39.43	49.14
knows most things or everything	17.70	6.62	9.49	1.69	58.97	60.95
Mother knows adolescent's friends' parents						
knows nothing, a little, some things	26.33	7.68	11.99	3.75	44.00	51.74
knows most things or everything	14.84	6.78	8.94	1.29	60.06	61.81
Mother knows who adolescent is with when not home						
knows nothing, a little, some things	32.58	8.99	14.82	6.17	30.25	39.10
knows most things or everything	17.61	6.75	9.30	1.48	58.05	62.03
Mother knows adolescent's teachers and school activities						
knows nothing, a little, some things	28.72	7.51	11.04	5.63	37.43	43.30
knows most things or everything	18.39	7.13	10.44	1.55	56.19	61.27
Father knows adolescent's close friends						
knows nothing, a little, some things	21.16	6.38	10.55	2.83	45.74	52.39
knows most things or everything	13.65	6.59	8.81	1.37	63.55	67.33
Father knows adolescent's friends' parents						
knows nothing, a little, some things	21.03	6.64	10.62	2.94	46.09	54.09
knows most things or everything	12.66	6.00	8.46	0.84	65.93	65.90
Father knows who adolescent is with when not home						
knows nothing, a little, some things	24.36	7.31	12.00	3.86	38.93	46.09
knows most things or everything	13.92	5.77	8.37	1.08	62.54	66.94

APPENDIX TABLE 5: Percentage of adolescents ages 12-14 with various outcomes, by measures of positive family processes, 1997 (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997, weighted estimates)

Family process measure	Ever suspended from school	Physical/emotional condition limits school or work	Learning/emotional problem limits school/work	High level of behavior problems (youth report)	No delinquent behaviors ^a	No substance use ^b
Father knows adolescent's teachers and school activities						
knows nothing, a little, some things	22.75	5.56	10.08	3.37	44.17	49.49
knows most things or everything	13.90	7.07	9.61	1.27	60.08	66.24
Adolescent turns to parents with problems						
turns to someone else or no-one	23.64	7.53	11.09	4.30	41.14	44.60
turns to bio, step, or adoptive parent	20.61	7.42	10.88	1.56	57.62	64.59
Adolescent thinks highly of mother						
disagree, strongly disagree, or neutral	28.36	7.14	12.36	5.48	40.22	44.78
agree or strongly agree	20.43	7.33	10.44	2.25	52.40	57.84
Adolescent's mother is a person s/he wants to be like						
disagree, strongly disagree, or neutral	27.44	7.98	12.25	3.93	38.79	46.42
agree or strongly agree	17.59	6.90	9.72	1.91	58.82	62.49
Adolescent enjoys spending time with mother						
disagree, strongly disagree, or neutral	29.24	6.77	11.03	5.59	35.27	38.88
agree or strongly agree	19.86	7.46	10.68	2.07	54.13	59.83
Adolescent thinks highly of father						
disagree, strongly disagree, or neutral	28.43	7.21	12.51	6.52	34.90	43.00
agree or strongly agree	16.29	6.28	9.42	1.32	55.82	60.91
Adolescent's father is a person s/he wants to be like						
disagree, strongly disagree, or neutral	22.79	6.30	10.23	3.76	42.32	47.70
agree or strongly agree	15.48	6.57	9.75	1.25	58.84	64.61
Adolescent enjoys spending time with father						
disagree, strongly disagree, or neutral	26.17	5.75	9.58	5.41	37.17	43.25
agree or strongly agree	16.35	6.64	10.08	1.42	56.22	61.75
Behavior of biological mother to biological father ^c						
mixed, neutral, or unfriendly	36.14	11.19	18.49	5.52	33.13	40.87
friendly or very friendly	34.38	9.75	18.97	3.06	32.60	45.94
Behavior of biological father to biological mother ^c						
mixed, neutral, or unfriendly	37.35	9.07	17.30	6.41	31.47	39.43
friendly or very friendly	32.76	12.50	19.82	2.29	34.79	46.78

^a Delinquent behaviors include running away, carrying a hand gun, damaging property, theft under or over \$50 worth, other property crimes, attacking another person, selling drugs, or being arrested

^b Substance use includes ever smoking a cigarette, ever drinking alcohol, or ever using marijuana

^c Asked only of adolescents with a non-residential biological parent

Note: Numbers in bold indicate statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level.