

Children of divorced parents face economic barriers, study finds

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Family structure affects a child's economic mobility prospects, according to a new study co-authored by professor Thomas DeLeire of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's La Follette School of Public Affairs for the Pew Economic Policy Group's report, "Family Structure and the Economic Mobility of Children."

The group's Economic Mobility Project found that 26 percent of children of divorced [parents](#) who start in the bottom third of the income ladder move to the middle or top third as adults. This share compares to 42 percent of children who are born to unmarried mothers and 50 percent of children with continuously married parents in the same income category.

The impact of divorce also is seen when analyzing families by race. The vast majority — 85 percent — of African-American children and nearly two-thirds — 63 percent — of white children born into the bottom third of the income ladder remain in the bottom third as adults if their parents divorce. Fewer children — 62 percent of African-Americans and 45 percent of whites — remain in the bottom if their parents are continuously married.

"By separating the effects of income and family structure, this report's findings suggest that divorce is a meaningful barrier to a child's economic mobility," says John E. Morton, managing director of the Pew Economic Policy Group, a division of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Parental marital status, however, explains only some of the previously identified racial gap in economic mobility. Fifty-six percent of African-American children born to middle-income parents fall to the bottom of the income ladder as adults, compared with 30 percent of white children. This reflects a racial gap of 26 percentage points. When analyzing just middle-income African-American and white [children](#) whose parents are continuously married, this gap shrinks but remains substantial at 12 percentage points.

"While these findings add to our understanding of the wide racial gap in economic mobility, our report confirms that [family structure](#) is only one of a number of factors that determine a child's chances of moving up the ladder," says DeLeire, who wrote the report with Leonard M. Lopoo of Syracuse University.

More information: For more information, please visit economicmobility.org/newsroom/...ressreleases?id=0019

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

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