

Financial burden greater for college students with divorced or remarried parents

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College students whose parents have remained married to each other are faring better financially than their peers with divorced or remarried parents, according to new research from Rice University and the University of Wisconsin.

The study, published in the December *Journal of Family Issues*, found that divorced parents contributed about a third of what married parents contributed to their children's education even though the divorced parents' incomes are about half as much as their married peers'; remarried parents contributed about half of what married parents contributed, despite having incomes similar to those parents who have stayed married.

The researchers discovered that married parents contributed about 8 percent of their income to their child's college costs and met 77 percent of their children's financial needs; divorced parents contributed about 6 percent of their income and met only 42 percent of their children's financial needs; remarried parents contributed only 5 percent of their income and met 53 percent of their children's needs.

"What we're seeing is that the cost burden of [higher education](#) is shifted to the student in families with divorced or remarried parents," said Ruth Lopez Turley, associate professor of sociology. "Remarried parents contribute significantly less than married parents -- in absolute dollars, as a proportion of their income and as a proportion of the children's financial need -- even though they have similar incomes.

"This could be because remarried parents face a whole other set of obligations. Often, there's a whole other family to consider and stepkids. With that, resources are diluted."

Using parent and student interview data from a subsample of the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), the researchers focused on 2,400 dependent [undergraduate students](#) whose parents were married, divorced/separated or remarried.

Turley and her co-author, Matthew Desmond from the University of Wisconsin, found that [marital status](#) was a significant determinant of the amount of money parents contribute toward their children's college expenses, even after taking into account other important factors such as parents' income and education.

"The findings are troubling for college-bound students with divorced, separated or remarried parents," Turley said. "They are at a disadvantage because they need to shoulder more of the costs of their education. Their first priority becomes funding their education, not completing their education."

The researchers also investigated the financial contributions of divorced and remarried [parents](#) who lived in states that permit courts to extend child support beyond the age of 18 for college expenses. They concluded that living in those states is not associated with increased parent contributions.

More information: An abstract of the study is available at jfi.sagepub.com/content/early/.../13X10388013.abstract

Provided by Rice University

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