

# The Impact of Family Structure, Mobility, and Employment on Children's Well-Being

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## Background

Research has found that children fare best in stable family environments where parents have stable relations, continuous employment, and limited residential mobility.

## Research questions

This study uses dynamic measures of family transitions to shed light on how transitions and the cumulative number of disruptions can impact children.

- How often do children experience a change in parental relationship status, parental employment, or residential address?
- How are changes in parental relationship status, parental employment, or residential address associated with selected measures of child well-being?
- Does the relationship between household and economic transitions and child well being outcomes disappear when differences in poverty are controlled for?

## Data & Methods

2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

- Wave 10 Child Well-Being Topical Module
- Waves 1 – 10 (or 40 months) are used to measure if there was a change in the child's living arrangement, residential address, or a change in either parent's employment status.
- Final sample includes children 0 to 17 years old who were in sample for at least 12 months.
- Analysis includes 3 regression models for each child well-being measure. The first model estimates the effect of household and economic transitions on selected measures of child well-being with no other controls. The second model estimates these effects with controls for household poverty status. A third model (not shown here) adds controls for selected social and economic characteristics of the child and reference parent.

## Child Well-Being Measures

**Activity Engagement** – Measures the number of activities that the child participate in on a regular basis. Activities include lessons, clubs, sports, and gifted classes. Higher values on the scale indicate greater involvement in activities. Limited to children 6 to 17 years old. Range 0 - 4

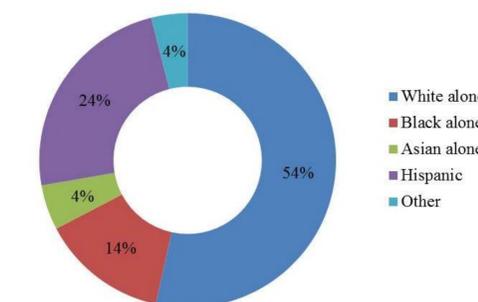
**School Engagement** – Assesses the degree to which a child likes school, is interested in school, and works hard. Higher values on the scale indicate greater engagement in school. Limited to children 6 to 17 years old. Range 0-6

**Meals with parent** – Measures number of weekly meals (breakfast and dinner) child had with reference parent. Higher values on the scale indicate more meals shared with parent. Includes all children. Range 1-8

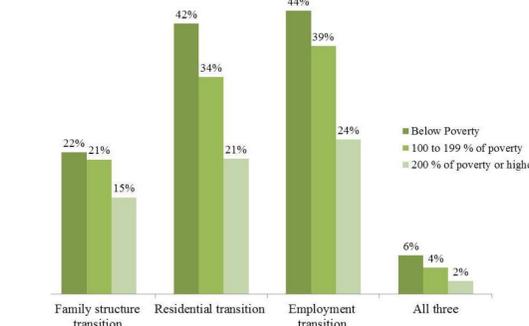
**Parental Engagement** – Assesses the degree to which the reference parent praises, talks, or plays with a child. Higher values on the scale indicate greater level of parental engagement. Includes all children. Range 1-8

## Characteristics

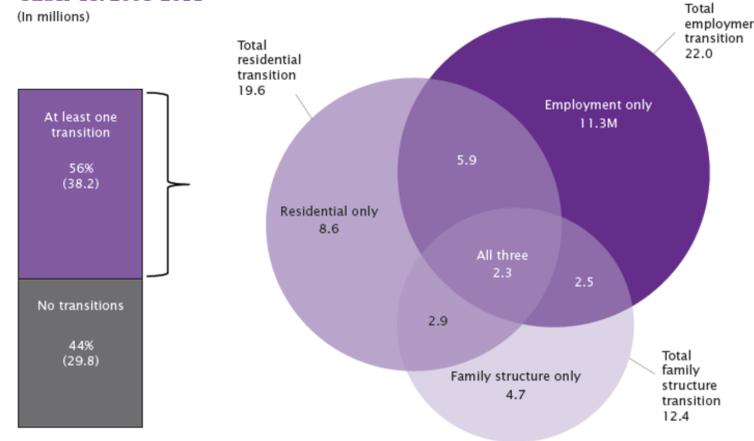
Race and Hispanic Origin for Children Under 18



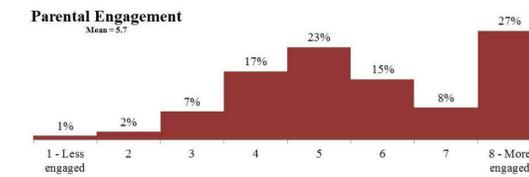
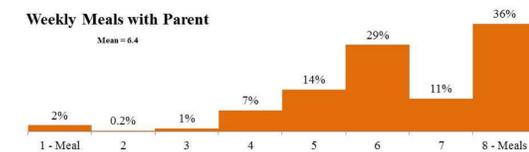
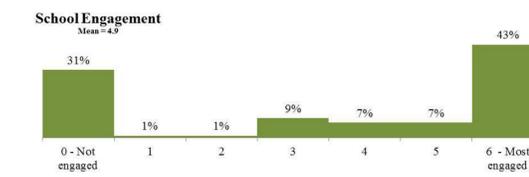
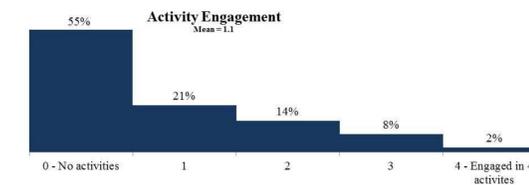
Poverty Status by Type of Transition



Relationship between Family, Residential, and Employment Transitions for Children Under 18: 2008-2011 (in millions)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 panel, Waves 1-10.



	Activity Engagement		School Engagement		Meals		Parental Engagement	
	Transitions	Transitions + Poverty	Transitions	Transitions + Poverty	Transitions	Transitions + Poverty	Transitions	Transitions + Poverty
Family structure transition only	↓	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	↑	↑	n.s.	n.s.
Residential transition only	↓	↓	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	↓	↓
Employment transition only	↓	↓	n.s.	n.s.	↑	↑	n.s.	↑
Family + Move transitions	↓	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	↓	↓
Family + Employment transitions	↓	↓	n.s.	n.s.	↑	↑	↓	n.s.
Move + Employment transitions	↓	↓	↓	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	↓	n.s.
All three transitions	↓	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	↑	↑	↓	↓
Below 100 percent poverty		↓		↓		n.s.		↓
200 percent or higher		↑		↑		↑		↑

Omitted categories: No transitions and 100 to 199 percent of poverty. Significant at 95 percent confidence level or higher.

## Summary

Over half (56%) of children experienced at least one type of transition between 2008 and 2011.

### Transitions and Child Well-Being:

- Overall, household and economic transitions are mostly negatively associated with school activities and parental engagement, but not school engagement. Transitions were positively associated with meals.

### The Role of poverty and socio-economic characteristics:

- When controlling for poverty status, household and economic transitions generally remained statistically significant. Children living in economically well off families are more likely to have positive outcomes related to school and parental engagement.
- In regression models with additional controls for social and economic characteristics, the effect of various transition measures were statistically insignificant, with the exception of meals.
- Net of the controls, children living in households with income 200 percent of poverty or higher were more active or engaged in school.