

Researcher: Kids Do Best With Married Parents

by CAN/EWTN News

Three new pieces of scholarship released in recent weeks suggests that children do best with married parents and are more likely to face a host of challenges in other situations. W. Brad Wilcox, a sociologist at the University of Virginia, writing in *National Review* Oct. 23, said "study after study" shows that children and families benefit from "strong and stable married families." He said there are "family structure denialists" who "seek to deny the scientific evidence that family change is having a major impact on our social environment and – in particular – our boys."

Wilcox is a co-author of the study "*Strong Families, Prosperous States: Do Healthy Families Affect the Wealth of States?*" The study was released October 19 by the Washington-based American Enterprise Institute and the Virginia-based Institute for Family Studies. States with higher levels of marriage, especially with higher levels of families with married parents, are "strongly associated" with more economic growth, economic mobility, less child poverty and higher median family income at the state level in the United States, the researchers found. Violent crime is "much less common" in states with a greater proportion of families headed by married parents, the report summary said. The researchers used models that control for factors including states education levels, racial compositions, tax policies, education spending and other state characteristics.

Another recent study on the family comes from MIT economics professor David Autor and colleagues, who co-authored a working paper published by Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research. They found that boys from less advantaged backgrounds show more problems growing up than girls from similar backgrounds when they are born to unmarried mothers. These problems include a higher rate of truancy, dropping out of high school, behavior problems and juvenile crime. These boys show higher rates of behavioral and cognitive disability, and they perform more poorly on standardized tests. Autor's research indicates that family structure plays a major role in child and family welfare, in addition to factors such as race and class.

Wilcox said the scientific consensus on the importance of a family with married parents is also reflected in the introduction to the Fall 2015 edition of the *journal Marriage and Child Well-Being Revisited*. The journal is produced by The Future of Children project, run by the Brookings Institution think tank and Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

In the journal's introduction, Princeton University sociology professor Sara McLanahan and Brookings Institute senior fellow Isabel Sawhill write that "most scholars now agree that children raised by two biological parents in a stable marriage do better than children in other family forms across a wide range of outcomes." However, McLanahan and Sawhill said that there is less consensus about why this is the case. Wilcox summarized: "In other words. Although scholars are not exactly sure why marriage matters for children, they know that marriage does matter for them."

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