

Caucasian teenagers more damaged by family change than African-American peers

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A new study from the *Journal of Marriage and Family* reveals that teenagers who have experienced several family changes are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour, become sexually active early, or become parents outside of marriage, than kids who have always lived in the same family arrangement (whether with married parents or a single parent). The findings show that white adolescents, compared to their African-American peers, are more likely to become sexually active earlier, and experience a nonmarital birth.

In turn, adolescents who engage in delinquent behaviour or become unmarried parents are more likely to leave school earlier, have less success in the workplace, and are less likely to form stable [romantic relationships](#) than their peers.

The researchers weigh these familial pressures with outside factors, seeing how both work to form the teen's long-term identity. The absence of quality relationships with other adults and a lack of connection to one's neighbourhood, school, or community can directly affect the teen's social choices and consequences.

For African-American adolescents, there is evidence that [economic hardship](#) can dampen the trauma caused by changes in the family.

Study author Paula Fomby says, "We were interested in what distinguished white [teenagers](#) from black teenagers, and entertained various explanations offered by other research and theories. Our study

reveals two findings. One, the sheer number of adults that are around to give teenagers or their parents support varies by ethnic or [racial group](#). Additionally, adjustment to economic hardship trumps the growing pains introduced by other family changes such as divorce or remarriage."

The researchers followed the lives of approximately 8,000 American teenagers from their adolescence in the mid-90s to young adulthood (over the course of seven years). The teenagers answered questions about their school activities, illegal behaviour, and romantic lives. Their [parents](#) provided information about their own relationship histories.

Provided by Wiley

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